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HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES ARE PERFORMING?

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Summary

There are many different sources of information about the performance of public sector agencies. But are we getting enough information and is it of the right type? The presentation analyses these information sources in light of factors that contribute to good and poor performance. It also considers what is known about the use of performance information and identifies opportunities for improvement.

Sources of information

People we know tell us about their experiences, the media report and at times investigate performance issues, questions are asked and answered in Parliament, budget papers and annual reports tabled in Parliament, enquiries are held and reports released and agency websites provide additional information.

Factors contributing to performance

It is useful to consider the information we receive on agency performance in the context of the factors that affect that performance. The factors include: Leadership and Leaders; Clarity of policy objectives; Incentives & disincentives Information; Continuous learning; Organisational capacity; Systems; Understanding of cause and effect; and Collaborative ability.

Understanding the users' perspective

Drawing on a 2006 WA AG report "Providing Information on the Timeliness of Services" the presentation draws lessons around the questions "What can the individual expect?", "How useful are reported targets?" and "How accessible is the information?". Factors that will affect usage are presented, including: Characteristics of the information; Characteristics of the policy political and management environment; and types of activity being reported.

Improving usefulness

This is addressed in WA by having KPIs address the question:

Q1. What are the indications that the agency has been effective, cost-effective; and efficient?

A second question not addressed is:

Q2. How well equipped is it to continue to perform?

Elements that could most usefully be addressed include the extent to which performance is: On target; Getting better; Better than others; Links logically observed trends and the agency's service(s) and that information limitations are made clear?

Discussion Points

These include:

- who are the intended users of the KPIs and what are the intended uses?
- one size fits all approach
- pitching KPIs between the stratosphere (not as high as the “Strategic Outcomes”) and the coal-face (not as low as “workload”).
- guidance on “key”, as seen in the volume (numbers of indicators or pages of text etc)
- any sense of proportionality identified
- setting targets into the future.

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