

Strategy formulation in Botswana's public sector

As organisations approach the end of their strategy period or decide to review their existing strategy, it is time to reflect on the journey - evaluate successes, challenges, and the lasting impact. While some goals may have been achieved, others might have remained out of reach.

The public sector in Botswana faces numerous factors that can either drive or derail successful strategy formulation and execution. Despite the numerous organizations rushing to align their strategies at the close of each strategic term, achieving real progress remains elusive for many.

Botswana's public sector is home to a diverse range of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and parastatals that play a crucial role in driving the country's development agenda, particularly in infrastructure, utilities, industrialisation and economic diversification. These organisations are mandated to align with national priorities such as Vision 2036 and the National Development Plans (NDPs), often translating these into internal strategic plans designed to improve service delivery, enhance commercial sustainability and support economic transformation. Internally, strategy implementation across the public sector reflects both strengths and persistent challenges. On the positive side, many entities have established corporate strategy units or planning departments, and some have adopted structured performance frameworks such as key performance indicators (KPIs) and balanced scorecards. Oversight by line ministries helps maintain alignment with government objectives. However, several constraints hinder consistent implementation. An article by Mmegi (Poor project

implementation: Has government finally found the cure?, 2023) suggests that poor project implementation has arguably been the most important driver of public finance wastage and continual inefficiencies. Implementation challenges have persisted in Botswana for decades, costing the country billions of pula in both direct and opportunity costs.



Business process reengineering

So where do most public sector organisations get it wrong? Firstly, research has been carried out highlighting that there is misalignment in the business process of reengineering and strategy implementation. Business process reengineering (BPR) and strategy implementation are closely linked, as BPR serves as a powerful enabler for turning strategic plans into operational reality. A well-crafted strategy often sets ambitious goals such as becoming customer centric, increasing efficiency, or expanding into new markets which is often evident in public sector businesses in Botswana. However, these goals cannot be achieved unless internal processes support them, and this is where BPR becomes a critical tool for success.

A survey carried out by Klodwig Mgaya, examining business process reengineering within the government

sector and state-owned enterprises, finds that the lack of proper change management is the most prevalent source of difficulty in processes reengineering and implementation, and occupies the centre stage in the implementation of BPR projects.

Respondents to the survey also highlighted the importance of change management for any reform to be accepted by stakeholders. One respondent believed, “sometimes it is not the process that needs more attention but the attitudes of people.” Another respondent said that “for any reengineering project to be successful it is critical to involve people who work on the job daily and thus understand the processes very well.” (Mgaya, 2016).

Business intelligence systems and meaningful KPIs

The presence of business intelligence systems is also vital for tracking and reporting on performance against strategic KPIs to improve decision-making speed and ensure better alignment between C-suite personnel involved in strategic decision making. Many public sector organisations are faced with sub-optimal utilisation of best-in-class enterprise resourcing planning systems due to resistance to change, lack of user acceptance testing and insufficient training.

Additionally, there is evident generalization of goals without clear KPIs which often creates confusion on goals and their attainment. For example, a government initiative to improve healthcare may fail if the term “improvement” lacks specific definitions whether it is reducing waiting times, expanding rural access, or improving patient outcomes. This relates with another significant barrier of the lack of data driven insights, which makes it difficult to track progress and make informed decisions. When strategies are poorly executed due to lack of clarity or over-ambitiousness, employees become overwhelmed and lose sight of the strategic direction. Often, trying to “do too many things at once” which leads to confusion and failure to deliver on the most critical goals.



Culture and mindset change

Another key challenge faced in Botswana, as highlighted by various studies on public sector reforms, is the resistance to change ingrained in Botswana's traditional bureaucratic culture. Aligning individual views, challenges and motivations across complex organisations is no easy task and this alignment needs to permeate the rest of the organisation. The reluctance in Botswana's public sector often creates a delicate balance between driving progress and preserving the status quo, a comfortable yet ineffective place, and creates a lack of integration between strategic planning and change management processes leading to misaligned objectives and ineffective execution.

In addition, organisations also face a significant culture misalignment. Organisational culture shapes the company, influencing how employees interact, make decisions and ultimately work towards common goals. A strong, positive culture fosters employee engagement, motivation and a sense of belonging, leading to higher productivity and innovation. Aligning organisational culture with strategy helps to form a clear understanding of the organisation's mission, values and long-term goals. Botswana's public sector organisational culture is characterised by a hierarchical framework where decision making authority is concentrated at higher levels, significantly influencing the success of reforms and the implementation of strategic initiatives by hindering employee engagement and ownership of change efforts (Masale, Barkhuizen, & Schutte, 2021). Research also indicates that the bureaucratic cultures in Botswana's public sector can impede knowledge sharing and innovation which are catalysts for adapting, refining and sustaining the strategy in dynamic environments (Kakale Osupile, 2021).

So, how can we overcome these obstacles and ensure that strategies are effectively implemented? While textbook definitions provide guidance, the answer lies in taking small but strategic steps. Botswana's 'Mindset Change' initiative was a critical first step, designed to align national development goals with public sector transformation, entrepreneurship, and innovation. It called for the “reset” of mindsets of Botswana and residents to be the key driver of economic transformation. The campaign also sought to encourage Botswana to adopt a high-performance culture, promoting innovation, self-worth, and entrepreneurship. A concept that is also significant in successful strategy implementation. In essence, the campaign demonstrates that strategy implementation in the public sector can be more effective when it is

culturally grounded, leadership-driven, participatory, and communicated as a shared organisational endeavor.

In today's fast-moving world, resisting change is no longer an option. To ensure effective strategy execution in Botswana's public sector, there are key actions to focus on. First, it is essential to clearly outline strategic goals and ensure they align with the long-term mission of the organisation. The strategy should then be broken down into actionable steps, with clear responsibilities assigned and KPIs in place to track progress. Engaging stakeholders early and communicating the benefits of the strategy will help foster buy-in and ease the transition. Leadership involvement is also critical - top leaders must actively support and guide the process, providing the necessary resources and direction. Finally, strategies must be grounded in realistic budgeting and sound financial planning to ensure they are achievable and sustainable.

Although long-term strategies, whether spanning five or ten years, are common, it is essential to also factor in macroeconomic dynamics when formulating future plans. Global demand shifts, such as changes in international trade, technological advancements, and environmental concerns, can have a significant impact on your organisation. Therefore, it is crucial to create a strategy that is flexible enough to adapt to these external forces, ensuring long-term resilience and success. Cultivating an organizational culture that values knowledge sharing and innovation, enhances employee engagement. When employees feel that their insights and creativity matter, they are more likely to take ownership of the strategy, contribute ideas for improvement and commit to the organization's long-term goals.

By focusing on these steps, Botswana's public sector can overcome hurdles to effective strategy formulation, ultimately achieving its developmental goals while remaining adaptable in an ever-changing world.



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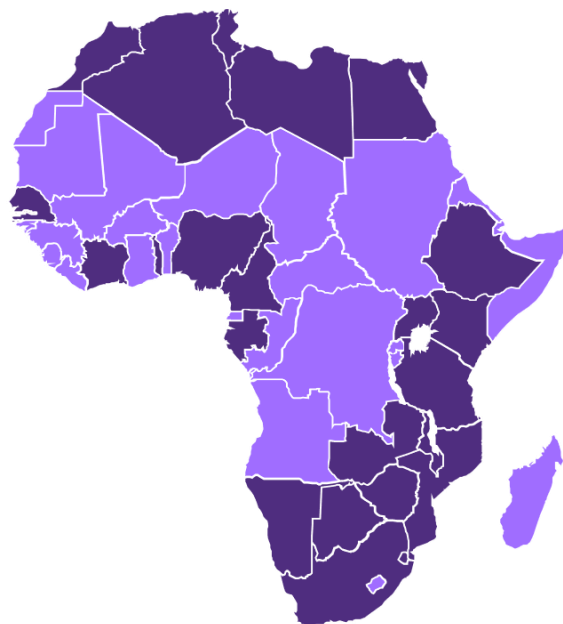
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