

Summary

Key words: public service quality, South Africa, management performance, self-assessment

The field study is part of the European Studies Bachelor degree at the University of Twente. The minor “Sustainable Development in Developing Countries”, entailed in this programme, aims to give students insight into development studies. Part of the experience students shall make is the field study that they conduct in a developing or emerging country they have never been to before.

This study was supervised by the “Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit“ (GIZ) in Pretoria, South Africa. The author was for six months part of the Public Service Reform Programme, getting familiar with the field and conducting research locally.

The aim of this study is to determine the utility of the Management Performance Assessment Tool that has been introduced two years ago in South Africa in order to measure the performance of departments. The implementation of MPAT is based on the assumption that it will over time improve management processes which again will lead to well-performing institutions and a good service delivery.

The key aim of this study is to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the tool as it currently is. This is done by analyzing internal background information and interviews that were conducted with three high level experts in the field. Besides the model of the performance management cycle serves to further define the utility of MPAT.

Overall, it is found that for a tool of such a young stage, the MPAT is well developed. There might be minor weaknesses or potential threats in the future but all of a kind that can be managed.

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List of abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
DCOG	Department of Cooperative Governance
DED	“Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst”
DPME	Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation
DPSA	South African Department of Public Service and Administration
GIZ	“Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH”
HOD	Head of Department
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
InWent	“Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung GmbH”
KPA	Key Performance Area
MPAT	Management Performance Assessment Tool
NPM	New Public Management
KRA	Key Result Area
OoP	Office of the Premier
PALAMA	Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSRP	Public Service Reform Programme

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1. Introduction

This study is about the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) that was introduced two years ago in South Africa. The core aim of MPAT is to improve management performance of the South African departments. In order to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats and potential of the tool this study was conducted.

The field study was supervised by the “Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH” (GIZ) office in Pretoria, South Africa. I started the field study on the 1st of September 2012 and ended at the 28th of February 2013.

The GIZ is an organization in the field of development cooperation. Founded on the 1st of January 2011, it resulted from the merger of the former “Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit” (GTZ) with the „Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst” (DED) and the “Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung GmbH”(InWEnt). As a national organisation, the GIZ is mainly commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in order to reach the development goals of the German international cooperation.

A general overview over the areas of the GIZ I will be active in can be found in the Annex II, Table 3.

1.1. Relevance of Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP)

The public service sector of South Africa has been reformed in the last 20 years. According to the South African Constitution, Chapter 10, section 195, 1.

d) “Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias”

and

h) “Good human-resource management and career-development practices, to maximize human potential, must be cultivated.”

Hence, all citizens of South Africa shall have access to public services and shall be encouraged to have their potential fulfilled. However, reality looks different. The social service policies that have been adopted could not be implemented smoothly. According to the “Progress report on a TC measure carried out as an individual TC measure” written by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany (AA 2012) the core problem is that due to “structural and systemic deficiencies, the public service is not able to perform its tasks efficiently and effectively”.

In order to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of the public sector the GIZ in South Africa implemented the PSRP. This programme includes five components (see Annex 2, Table 1 & 2), also called Key Result Areas (KRAs). The first KRA specifically focussed on capacity building of coordinating departments. Cooperation includes formulating policies,

supporting procedures, systems and the inclusion of M&E systems both on national and on provincial level (PSRP 2011).

1.2. Relevance of the study

The topic was selected because in the course of history many assessment frameworks have been developed. It is useful to document for countries that will implement such tools in the future, what went well and where obstacles were found. Also it helps to further develop and improve the tool in the context it is applied in.

This tool is being administered and managed by various different stakeholders. Exchange is crucial in order to learn and advance with the effectiveness in the tool. This study shall serve as a basis to identify areas that should be maintained as they are and areas that could be further improved.

2. Problem definition

Outcome 12 of South Africa's constitution aims for "an Efficient, Effective and Development Orientated Public Service" (Africa 1996). It is one of the priority results of the South African government that were set for 2009-2014. Considering a larger scale, outcome 12 and outcome 8 are "essential to achieving all the other outcomes" (The Presidency 2011) as determined in the priority results set by the SA government

In order to support the achievement of Outcome 12, departments need to perform well. However, departments, so far, are found to be "underperforming" (The Presidency 2012). In the poorly performing departments little focus has been given to management performance. As a consequence, the MPAT (Management Performance Assessment Tool) was developed in 2011. Based on departmental self-assessments, secondary data and moderation the quality of departmental management performance is assessed to monitor improvements and to identify existing gaps (The Presidency 2012) with this tool.

Management practices are linked to good service delivery:

"The quality of management practices [...] has a significant influence on the quality of the outputs our department produces, the outcomes achieved, and ultimately, the impact our services have on society. Therefore, to improve the performance of a department, it is essential that the management practices of a department are assessed and strengthened. Good management practice is a precondition for effective, sustainable service delivery. (The Presidency 2012) p. 8

The key hypothesis of this field study is hence that good management practice makes a contribution to good service delivery and as a consequence, to an effective and efficient public service in South Africa. Case studies of other performance assessment methodologies (Russia, UK, Canada, New Zealand, Kenya, Turkey, India etc) show that "management performance assessments can make a significant contribution to improving the performance of government" (Pot 2011; The Presidency 2011) p.5).

3. Research question

The overall research topic I tackled is:

“The utility of MPAT-

An analysis based on the performance management cycle and the SWOT analysis”

As described above, with this study the utility of the current MPAT model shall be analysed. The desktop study conducted for this proposal identified some areas which the MPAT is claimed to be very strong in or where there might be potential in improvement. The aim is to gather and analyse evidence for the following assumptions and questions.

The overall **hypothesis** is that MPAT is a useful tool for departmental performance management (H1).

The hypothesis will be investigated, using the following research sub-questions:

- 1) Does MPAT contribute to greater competition between departments?
- 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the MPAT?
 - a. Is MPAT perceived to be user-friendly?
 - b. Does MPAT set incentives for departments?
 - c. Does MPAT foster reflection of the departments?
 - d. Is MPAT a participatory approach?
- 3) Which elements of the management performance cycle are included in the MPAT?
- 4) Can the MPAT overcome the principal-agent problem?

Those are approaches that are part of the MPAT methodology. Their potentials and challenges, according to public choice theory, will be elaborated and linked to the potential of improving management performance.

The objective of this study is to assess first results of MPAT implementation and to learn from experiences made so far. Also, factors to be improved or to be focused on should be identified and explored.

4. Methodology

4.1. Possible approaches

As in any research project, the first step is to consult all related information already reported, in social sciences, that refers to secondary source information. For the seek of this topic, the author has studied documents internally provided by GIZ. Additionally, relevant documents by the Auditor General, annual reports, presentations to parliament, discussions on the presentations and further available documented literature were also analysed. The MPAT results that are available at the point of time were utilised for the assessment of utility of the MPAT. Also, the above mentioned theories and models were tested. Interviews with the DG of DPME and PSRP experts in the field were conducted as well.

4.2. Operationalization

The above mentioned research sub-questions are operationalized as shown in table 2.

Table 1: Hypotheses, variables and operationalisation			
Hypothesis: MPAT is a useful tool for departmental performance management			
Question	Sub-question	Indicator	Source of information (research method)
Does MPAT contribute to (greater) competition between departments?		Public results, report cards to Cabinet, case studies	Literature, interviews
Which elements of the management performance cycle are included in the MPAT?		See management performance cycle: different steps	Management performance cycle, literature; For incentives and review: interviews
What are the strengths and weaknesses of the MPAT?	Is MPAT perceived to be user-friendly?	technical requirements, time effort, deadlines, process guidelines, transparency	Literature, interviews, documentation
	Does MPAT set incentives for departments?	Analysis of rewarding mechanisms in the methodology	Literature, interviews
	Does MPAT foster reflection?	Changed performance results/efforts put into the performance	Departmental annual reports, interviews
	Is MPAT a participatory approach?	Criteria of participatory approaches: external and local agencies collaborate, mutual learning is taking place, the result is social change	Literature, interviews
	→ The answers of the sub-questions will help answering the overall question		

4.3. Sample description and data collection

The above mentioned hypotheses have been mainly examined by using literature review and interviews with experts on MPAT. It is intended to conduct interviews with PSRP staff, DPME staff and departmental representatives. Since GIZ is strongly involved with the MPAT roll-out in the province Mpumalanga, departments and results of this province will mainly be used for analysis.

In order to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the MPAT, interviews with available representatives of PSRP, DPME and departments that participated in the MPAT were conducted. Findings were compared to the available documentation on MPAT challenges, improvements and reflections. Methodology for the generation of the interview guidelines was based on guidelines for expert interviews, such as the one of (Bogner, Littig et al. 2002).

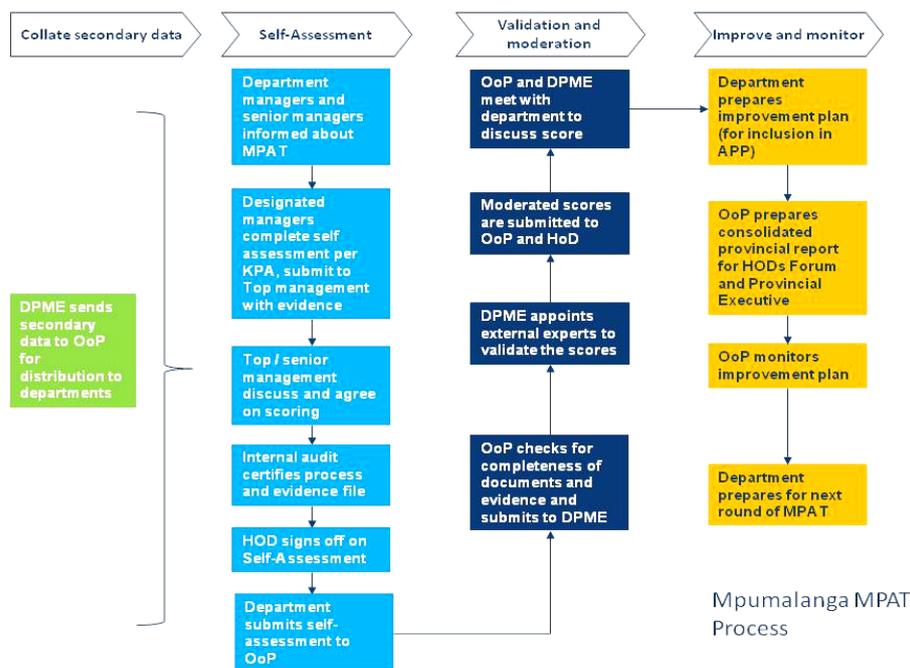
4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis will be done using the concepts of document analysis and interview analysis as described in the literature (e.g. Bogner, Littig et al. 2001). Furthermore, SWOT analysis will help identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the MPAT. Particularly this analysis shall be helpful in the further utilisation of the MPAT.

4.5. The process of MPAT data collection

The following figure captures the process of MPAT data collection, including both direct as well as secondary sources.

Figure 1: Generic MPAT provincial process (PSRP 2011)



5. Findings

5.1. Definition of the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT)

The MPAT is an instrument to measure standards of good management practice. It is a self-assessment tool that measures quality of departmental performance. Existing monitoring and auditing results are taken into account for the assessment of the management practice as secondary data. MPAT focuses on for management Key Performance Areas (KPA's):

Figure 2: Management Performance Areas (The Presidency 2012), p. 12



Those four KPA's are made up of 17 Management Performance Areas (see Figure 1)

All in all, MPAT assesses the compliance of the departments with 31 standards. The assessment identifies areas that need more attention and potentially where rulings and structures can be improved (The Presidency 2012).

The aims of MPAT are the following:

- To create benchmarks for departmental management performance;
- found the baseline performance of departments
- to provide managers with information that allows improvements;
- Catalyse upgrading of management practices;
- Develop agreed improvement plans and offer targeted assistance to departments
- Follow up on improvements compared to the baseline performance (n.A. 2012)

Figure 3: MPAT Model (The Presidency 2012), p.13)



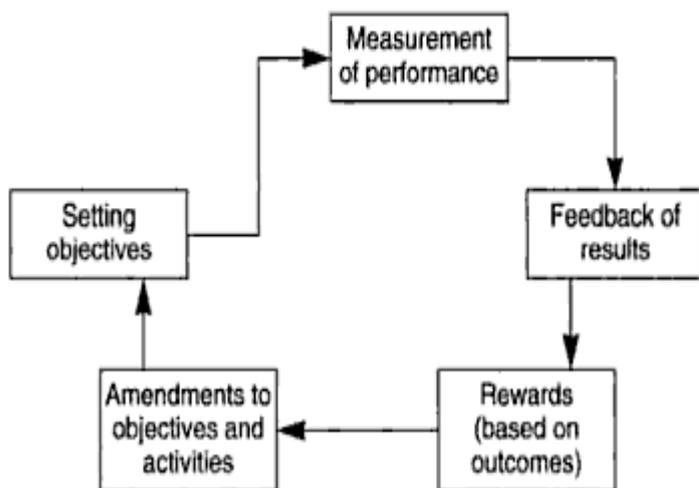
Figure 2 shows the process of a department according to the MPAT model. The department supplies with public services, the resources mentioned (second column) serve to implement activities, the outputs (third column) serve to achieve the outcomes, the outcomes (fourth column) affect the lives of citizens.

5.2. Theories and models

5.2.1. Performance management and the management performance cycle

A Performance management system (PMS) is a concept in the field of human resources. It “recognises institutional performance relationships between individuals’, teams’ and departments’ performance contributions for attaining government performance targets”. Resulting from poor performance in the South African public service, the institutionalisation of PMS in South Africa happened after the transition in 1994. The system provides tools to set objectives, measure performance, giving feedback on results, providing rewards and making, if necessary, amendments to objectives and activities. Consequently, the management performance cycle can serve for monitoring purposes.

Figure 4: The performance management cycle (Agarwal 2011)



Since MPAT serves to assess performance the performance management cycle seems a good model to investigate the MPAT. This study will identify the steps of the performance cycle that are integrated in the MPAT approach and where potential improvements/additions could be made in the MPAT process.

5.2.2. The “principal-agent theory”

The “principal-agent theory” is a concept included in the public choice theory (MacLean 2011). It describes the relationship between an agent and a principal. Transferred to the MPAT, the departments would be the agents and the public and/or the DPME would be the principals. One of the problems found in the “principal-agent theory” is that there is usually a strong asymmetry in information: while the agent knows everything the principal struggles for access to information. Since in this case there are various principals and agents, the relationship between the two alone is not enough to overcome problems. To make the agent accountable is one of the major challenges: control is needed. One of the major prerequisites is a well-working information system, such as MPAT. That is why this theory was chosen for analysis. The relationship between departments and the DPME/the public can be compared to a “principal-agent relationship”. The problems evolving from this relationship must be tried to overcome. It will be analysed which elements of the “principal-agent problem” can be identified in the MPAT process as well and how they can be overcome (Nyman, Nilsson et al. 2005).

5.3. Review of the hypothesis

The following section shall review the hypothesis created above.

5.3.1. Does MPAT contribute to greater competition between departments?

DPME decided that the final MPAT scores get published each year. One hypothesis that came out of this was that this publishing of results might lead to pressure and competition of departments. This could encourage departments that have not participated so far to do so in the future. Additionally, it could motivate departments to improve their scores.

A further aspect of competition that is entailed in the MPAT is the publishing of case studies. Departments that performed very well can publish case studies which show other departments how to reach the same success. This could also trigger pressure and competition amongst departments in order to be the department that can show how to properly do things. By using competition more information will be provided to DPME by the department. This will also lead to overcoming the above described principal-agent theory.

In order to identify whether MPAT contributes to greater competition between departments, three experts that have worked on MPAT for at least one year, were interviewed.

According to the experts that were interviewed “departments that weren’t in the process (in the first phase” [...] wanted to come into the progress when it was finished” (2013). Indeed, in the second cycle all 155 national and provincial departments participated as compared to 103 departments in the first cycle (The Presidency 2012; 2013b). Once the MPAT results of cycle one (2011) were published departments that had not participated, became aware of the tool and how it works. Willing to contribute their own data in order to be able to compete, might have been one reason why many more departments participated in the MPAT cycle two.

The case studies that were written down on good examples of departments also encourage departments to firstly, reach good scores, and secondly, if they performed badly, to improve their scores over time. The case studies also rely on the fact that departments want to show how well they perform in comparison to others.

It was said that indeed “the level of, of, of competition between departments and between provinces in itself inspires people to, to improve” (2013)

Another expert explicitly stressed that “competition is a big (stressed) thing” (2013b).

5.3.2. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the MPAT?

MPAT has been introduced in 2011 and is consequently a relatively new tool. In order to further develop it but also to document for countries that will implement such tools in the future, it can be helpful to identify strengths and weaknesses in the tool and to find ways to overcome obstacles.

5.3.2.1. Is MPAT perceived to be user-friendly?

In order to answer this question, the three experts were asked for their opinion. User-friendliness of the tool was measured via the following indicators: departments are sufficiently informed to use the tool, participation rate, the data is easy to upload, there are clear deadlines that are kept and there are guidelines on the process.

All that interviewees claimed that departments are sufficiently informed to use the tool by now. It was stressed that in the beginning of the MPAT implementation the level of user-friendliness was lower (2013b) but that a lot of efforts happened to increase the user-friendliness. Internal documents, however, indicated that timeframes that were set to complete the self-assessment were perceived to be “very tight” (Bester 2012), p.4).

It was stressed that the increasing level of participating departments indicates that the tool is more user-friendly today. (2013b)

Interviewees mentioned that departments had problems understanding the system that serves to upload the data. It is intended to train departments better in the future to avoid this. (2013b). Also, the system was overloaded in the MPAT cycle 1.2., so that there were challenges for departments uploading information.

The deadlines were, according to one interviewee (2013c), shifted several times in the first MPAT cycle. This may hamper a sound process, leading to a less user-friendly tool. However, nobody mentioned challenges in this area in the MPAT cycle 1.2., so that it is possible that improvements happened.

The internal documentation shows that departments are provided with guidelines how to follow the process. Particularly in the province Mpumalanga, where even minimum requirements for the meetings of the departmental senior management were created, the procedures to participate in the MPAT should be transparent.

5.3.2.2. Does MPAT set incentives for departments?

The question about incentives included in the MPAT was a focus in the conducted interviews.

One interviewee mentioned the report card on departmental performance that is going to Cabinet as an incentive (2013). The report card indicates how departments performed according to MPAT. The high status of the Cabinet leads to pressure and to an incentive for departments to perform well.

All the interviewees mentioned that the case studies that are written down on departments that performed well¹.

One interviewee clearly stated that in his opinion there should not be monetary related incentives linked to MPAT (2013). The interviewee stated in general: "I don't think you should have MPAT specific incentives" (2013).

Another interviewee said that recognition, so far, has not been done to the extent it could be. According to that interviewee, an idea to change that could be awards for those departments that improve their scores the best (2013b).

From the financial year 2013/2014 performance bonuses will link MPAT to the performance of Heads of Departments (HODs). While one interviewee was optimistic about it and perceived it as an incentive the other two interviewees raised concerns that compliance could be fostered instead of improvement, that there is "gonna be a greater pressure" (2013c) in a negative sense.

All the three interviewees perceive the results being public as an incentive. They also named competition as an incentive. According to one expert "competition between departments and between provinces in itself inspires people to [...] improve" (2013).

All interviewees were however not fully convinced incentives are needed at all. At the moment departments seem to be motivated. For example the fact that MPAT is informative and provides an "opportunity to sit together and discuss" seems to be motivating for departments as well (2013c) so that only in long- term if departments lose their view of MPAT as a benefit, incentives might play a bigger role.

One idea that was presented in the interviews was for example to "lift the bar" (2013c) at a later stage, meaning that the criteria to reach a certain score will be changed in a more challenging way.

5.3.2.3. Does MPAT foster reflection of the departments?

There are indicators that MPAT fosters reflection of two kinds in departments. Firstly, in the second cycle of MPAT many more departments participated. This higher response rate shows that more departments became aware of the tool, wanted to participate and got familiar with it. Hence, they must have thought about the tool.

Secondly, the majority of departments improved their scores (2013b). Apparently, departments thought about their low scores and came up with ideas and concrete measures to improve their scores. Consequently, in this regard there must have been reflections taking place as well.

¹ See: <http://www.goodxample.org/>

5.3.2.4. Is MPAT a participatory approach?

If a participatory approach is defined as “external and local agencies working together on a project basis, [...] mutual learning [...] and [...] social change” (Desai and Potter 2008), p. 46). In the MPAT both external (e.g. the GIZ) and local agencies (e.g. the DPME) collaborate. One could also see the departments as internal bodies and the DPME or moderators as external bodies. Mutual learning, advice and feedback is constantly given (2013c) with the intention of changing something. Also, the fact that senior management comes together internally and discusses the scores indicates a certain level of ownership of the process from departmental sides. Except for moderation where externals discuss the results the process is therefore in departmental power. Also the follow up and improvement for the following cycle is only steered externally but done by the departments themselves. This ownership was considered to be important by the interviewees.

5.3.2.5. The SWOT analysis

The experts that were interviewed named different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of MPAT. The following section shall summarize those aspects.

In sum, it shows that the current MPAT, particularly in comparison to its young age, is a very strong tool. There are mainly weaknesses in the area of having a sound process in place, being rigorous, the degree to which feedback is given back to departments, the stakeholders involved in the process and the degree to which the process is standardised.

The tool is particularly strong when it comes to participation of departments. In the second cycle of MPAT, meaning in 2012/2013, all national and provincial departments participated in the self-assessment. The MPAT is a tool that will monitor on an annual basis how departments perform- providing information needed for improvement in departmental performance. The process is characterised by the participatory approach and the intent to improve by learning from good practices.

Since there are still mistakes, e.g. in the area of data collection via electronic systems, in the future opportunities lie in testing the process before handing it over to departments. Guidelines and minimum requirements could make the process sounder and easier for departments than it currently is in order to make the tool more user-friendly. Also, to help departments getting familiar with the process training and facilitation could be intensified. One of the interviewees stated that “MPAT will contribute towards professionalization of staff in indicator areas” (2013). Due to the creation of standards that must be reached a “standard for professional conduct” (2013) will be created.

At the current state of MPAT there are no major threats. However, in the future the support from important departments such as DPSA and The Treasury, the focus on change rather than compliance with the regulations and the rigorous utilisation of methodology will become crucial aspects to improve the utility of the tool.

Figure 5: SWOT analysis of the MPAT

<p style="text-align: center;">Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "better management discussions on common problems" (2013) - "better awareness" (2013) - "process of [...] exchange" (2013) - "greater cohesion" (2013) - Good relationship with DPME (2013; 2013b) - Having a "public checklist" (2013; 2013c) of what departments have to do - "a continuous process" (2013) - "peer review element" (2013) - "successfully [...] select(ed) areas that really make a difference" (KPA's) (2013) - "the strength of it lies in the process" (2013) - Learning, sharing, encouragement and feedback (2013; 2013b; 2013c) - "monitoring taking place at the national level" (2013) - Column for provision of evidence (2013c) - Departments are very honest (2013; 2013b; 2013c) - Ownership of departments - Case studies as incentives - Departments are motivated 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "the participation of key departments (DPSA, The Treasury)" (2013; 2013b) is not given; especially in the moderation, otherwise "weakens the tool" (2013) - Moderation: same methodology and approach should be followed by DPME coordinators, "some of the moderation is more rigorous than some of the moderation in other areas" (2013; 2013c), also from year to year - "it is not ensured that there is "sufficient feedback given to departments as to why they got a certain score" in the moderation (2013c) - Process should be standardised more over time (2013c)
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MPAT gets a "better use and credibility if some of this MPAT information starts moving into the domains of the legislators" (2013) - test the system to upload data first (2013) - have a detailed process map how to get from one level to the next (2013) - might become a compliance tool over time if change process is not supported (2013c) - using existing forums, platforms and initiatives for exchange (2013) - in order to initiate change and improvement: exchange of experts between departments to teach and learn (2013) - develop minimum requirements for self-assessment as in Mpumalanga - more training and guidance in the MPAT process (Bester 2012) - departments should have access to the secondary data before moderation takes place (Bester 2012) - MPAT will contribute towards professionalization of staff in indicator areas (2013) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key departments (DPSA, The Treasury) not showing enough commitment for the joint project - Insufficient focus on change rather than on compliance - Loss of departmental motivation over time to improve - Conclusions about progress are not valid if the methodology is not rigorous in all areas and throughout the years

5.3.2.6. Which elements of the performance management cycle are included in the MPAT?

According to the performance management cycle step one is the measurement of performance. MPAT measures departmental performance by 1) considering the self-assessment scores departments gave themselves, 2) using secondary data in order to validate the results 3) moderating the scores with external experts in the field. Criteria that serve to determine which level a department is on in a particular area are predetermined and known to departments. The measurement of performance, thus, takes place.

The second step is the feedback of results. According to the interviews and the studied literature after the scores have been given the departments are getting informed about them. However, one interviewee mentioned that it is not being reasoned why a certain score was given to a department in a particular area (2013c). Consequently, one could improve on that step by giving more detailed feedback to the departments and their individual scorings in order to make them understand and to motivate them to improve their results.

The third step consists of rewards. According to the interviewees, the case studies are seen as a reward. Also good reporting cards to Cabinet set incentives for departments that perform well. Competition and pressure, however, do not fulfill the criteria of rewards. It was noted by one interviewee that so far recognition has not taken place (2013b). It was suggested to implement awards. While the interviewees claimed that there is motivation of departments so far to participate and to improve on long-term it might prove valuable to have a reward system in place. One interviewee raised the concern that linking monetary incentives to MPAT might lead to compliance, another interview said it would lead to personal benefit rather than the purpose itself. An idea could be, therefore to think of non-monetary incentives. An award or public events, e.g., where departments that performed well, are acknowledged. Also, not only departments that performed well overall but departments that improved significantly should get rewarded in order to keep them motivated.

The fourth step of the cycle is the “amendments to objectives and activities”. The purpose and hope behind MPAT is that departments will improve their practices over time. In order to do so an analysis of what is not going well must happen (2013c). The annual performance plan should ideally contain goals and objectives that specifically tackle the weaknesses the department faced in the last MPAT cycle. While this is happening in some departments so far (2013b) there is still more potential for others. This step is important in order to change scores over time and to really improve departmental performance.

The fourth step of the cycle is to set the objectives. Having amended them in the fourth step they now need to be set, preferably in a binding way. This means that mentioning amended objectives itself does not help yet. Indeed, it is important to also implement them. Interviewees (2013; 2013c) suggested to, for example, send departmental representatives of one province where performance was good to another province where the same kind of department struggled. This exchange should enable them to learn directly from each other.

Once this amendment and setting of objectives has happened the crucial part would be the actual change. Afterwards the next round of measurement can take place in order to monitor improvements, scores that remained at the same level or scores that decreased.

5.3.2.7. Can the MPAT overcome the principal-agent problem?

One of the core problems of the principal-agent problem is the asymmetry between the agent and the principal. MPAT helps overcoming this asymmetry by annually assessing departmental performance. For this purpose not only are scores given by the departments themselves utilised but also evidence provided and secondary data. This increases the amount of information DPME can access to a high level: the access to information DPME gets via MPAT is improved.

Another core problem is that usually the principal has a lack of control of the agent. While some stakeholders perceive this as strength of MPAT because it promotes a participatory approach and ownership others fear that over time more incentives might be needed to get departments to really improve. A control mechanism or a system that rewards and potentially is even punitive could be of use. However, one of the basic ideas behind MPAT is to not act in a punitive way and to reinforce positive developments.

At the moment it seems that the relationship between the principal, the DPME and the agent, the departments, is a really good and trustworthy one (2013; 2013b). It remains to be seen whether this good relationship can be upheld on long-term.

5.3.2.8. How to increase the MPAT success

In sum, three main ideas were provided by the interviewees that seem crucial to maintain and potentially even increase the success of MPAT:

- 1) To be rigorous in the methodology. This means that methodology should be the applied the same way in all KPAs and throughout the years. This is the only way results of MPAT really can be compared.
- 2) To set guidelines on minimum requirements. In order to have a simple, sound and routine system in place that allows for more user-friendliness, set guidelines and procedures should be communicated to departments and followed strictly.
- 3) To maintain and build on good relationship building. In order to learn from each other, further develop the tool and get it to be successful, relationship building is crucial. This concerns the relationship between DPME and departments, particularly the relationship to DPSA and The Treasury, legislators and departments amongst each others.

If those crucial elements are in place, MPAT will continue a story of good achievements.

6. Discussion

The findings above result from the analysis of internal documents, observations in the field and three interviews with experts from the field.

It should be noted that all interviews were conducted in settings the respective interviewee was familiar with. Prior to the interview the researcher announced that the interviewees should take their time to reflect on questions, ask in case of uncertainties and should provide as much information as possible. Indeed, all interviewees did so and helped raising the quality of the answers greatly.

The researcher tried to not show any particular reactions to answers or to comment on them in order to not influence the answers. In case of long pauses or insecurity that aroused the interviewer said “ok” or “thank you” only in order to show the satisfaction with the way the answer was given. (Loosveldt 2008) All interviewees appeared to be very honest and frank and willing to share their insights on the tool. It should be noted that all interviewees had met the researcher at least once before. Also, the topic and the intention of defining strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats was announced to the interviewees prior to the interview itself in order to allow reflection on the topic. Conducting the research in the mandate of GIZ enabled the researcher to also interview a high level expert from the DPME. Those conditions allowed for a basis of respect, knowledge and trust that was mutual and led to satisfying results. Answers that seemed to arouse from misunderstandings were not included in the analysis in order to maintain validity.

The interviews were half-structured in order to allow the author of this study to add questions where they aroused and to get a more in depth insight into the topic. Also, all interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. As a next step the interviews were transcribed to allow in –depth analysis (see Annex I-III).

It must, however, be noted that all three experts participated in the implementation of MPAT. Consequently, there is the assumption that they stressed the strengths of the tool more than its weaknesses and potential threats.

Due to the fact that not every step of the MPAT implementation was documented or accessible the main sources are the expert interviews.

All in all, it is assumed that the data provided for this study is valid and relies on true perceptions and facts provided in the background information.

7. Conclusion

The MPAT is a tool that is still in its starting phase. Considering the fact that it has only been implemented two years ago it is remarkable that it is such a strong tool already. Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the tool the strengths outweigh risks and weaknesses. While there are smaller challenges like the degree of user-friendliness, a sound process overall and routine that could still be improved the process itself was well-started and focuses on crucial performance areas.

On long-term it should be kept in mind to not only assess the departmental performance on an annual base but also to improve departmental performance over time. Exchange, learning and feedback systems that are even already in place can play a big role here. However, there must be rewards or interventions to further foster improvement of departmental performance. Active learning from each other should at some point not be voluntarily anymore but a necessity. This way the utility of MPAT can be strengthened a lot: to move beyond compliance to actual change.

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