

ROADMAP SERIES: PROJECT MONITORING: WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

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Dr. Vijay Pothukuchi is a management researcher and a corporate trainer with over 36 years of engagement with organisations in the US, India and East Africa. He has been the Founder-CEO of Midas Touch Infrastructure since 2005. Although his work experience spans across a spectrum of industries, his heart lies in addressing issues of social development. As the Chairman of the Board at Verdentum Technologies, he works closely with stakeholders in the social sector, providing them comprehensive and real-time solutions to their monitoring and evaluation needs.

Dr. Vijay started the session by explaining the different areas that he would be covering in his webinar.

1. Need for Monitoring – Psychological and competitive dimensions
2. Is there a way out? – Barriers to digital technology, New generation solutions
3. Some worthy examples – Indian and International Organisations
4. Barriers to technology – Practical Dimensions

Psychological dimensions of monitoring

If you look at it historically, whether it is socialist thinking, communist thinking or trusts or governments who roll out some money for NGOs or implementing organisations, the money comes as an award. It lacks the concept of ownership. This lack of ownership for the money leads to the typical theoretical problem called the Tragedy of the Commons.

Social loafing is another attribute when it comes to implementing agencies. It is a very common problem in most organisations and social situations. A good example is that, when four people are trying to lift a bench, they are meant to be equally sharing the load. However, each person wants to be in a place where they are lifting the least amount of weight. In social loafing, when it is a common property, people do not take responsibility the way it should be taken. Therefore, when the money is from a third party, each individual does not feel accountable for the money and the organisation often does not have efficient systems in place.

Dr. Vijay used the example of Bill and Melinda Gates, amongst the world's richest people, and their Foundation to illustrate this point. The Foundation was born to ensure that every dollar they spent was accounted for, and existing organisations did not offer this quality and standard. The Gates hoped to maintain the standards of a conventional business organisation.

To understand this psychological phenomenon, there was a series of experiments called the Hawthorne Experiments in the 1920s, which sought to understand productivity. The hypothesis being tested stated that the presence of comfort and external tools will have a positive impact on productivity. When participants were exposed to comfort, there was an increase in productivity. Yet, when researchers took away these comforts, productivity still increased. The experiment concluded that the factor influencing productivity was not comfort but rather the presence of observation. When individuals are under observation, behaviour changes. Thus, this proved the role of monitoring and supervision for increased employee efficiency.

Competitive dimensions of monitoring

Technology has always created competitiveness and innovation, resulting in wealth of nations. Economists like Joseph Schumpeter and Milton Friedmansay that innovation drives everything. It increases the efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation. Dr. Vijay then touched upon Michael Porter's research that talks about competitive strategies that organisations follow. Porter's Five Forces model studies a company's competitive environment by analysing buyer power, supplier power, competitive rivalry, etc. To read more about this model, please refer [here](#).

Monitoring Challenges: Social Sector Barriers

After addressing the competitive and psychological dimensions, Dr. Vijay questioned the effectiveness of the social sector and how it can be improved. One of the greatest contributors to productivity is digitalization and information technology. However, the social sector has not been able to reflect the impact of this in the same way as corporations and individuals. The reasons for this are multi-fold:

- Availability and access of infrastructure
- Availability and migration of trained manpower
- Cost of doing business – Users/Markets are widely spread

However, in the past few years, the technological barriers in the social sector have been partially overcome because of smartphones and communication technologies. Even though social sector is late to the game, it has been able to benefit from cost effectiveness by adopting the latest technologies in digital communication.

Current situation of Digital implementation

To understand the digital implementation plan of each organisation in social sector, it is important to recognise the heterogeneity within the sector itself. The social sector can be divided into four major strata, with each being at different levels of implementing digital technologies. These strata are:

- International/ Inter-governmental organisations – UN, FAO, Commonwealth, UNESCO
- Federal and State government structures within each countries
- Funding Organisation: CSR funds and Trusts
- NGOs – People at field level who implement

Case example of International Organisation

Name of Organisation: The Commonwealth

Name of Project: IAMABLE

How was the project tracked before: The Commonwealth works in 53 countries and had to track their work on paper and accumulate the total work, which used to take 3 months at least to get the real numbers collated.

After using technology platform: Technology was able to provide the Commonwealth volunteers with a web/mobile based app using which they were able to track the work they were doing and upload data in real time.

Practical Dimension of going digital

While there are definitely practical difficulties to going digital in the sector, it is important to recognise the advantages that it brings to the table.

- Challenges in capturing data—This can be addressed through the use of smartphones
- Challenges in launching projects – The use of technology saves time at a later stage when collating reports
- Challenges in decision making – It allows for better informed decisions.
- Not enough appreciation for the need to change – Most often, the sector is faced with ignorance, inertia, and the lack of motivation. Being aware of this is the first step to addressing it.

Implementation is the key. We need a proper design, perseverance and conviction. Proper guidance in implementation makes all the difference.

Question Answer session

1. What are some the ways in which we can include good monitoring practices even when they not technologically advanced and instead depend on people?

The biggest problem is lack of processes and a certain ad-hoc attitude. Dr. Vijay stressed the need to have clear processes even in the absence of technology. Identify targets, factors being measured, how impact is measured, what the outputs and outcomes are, etc. The key is to have a clear idea of why you are doing what you are doing.