In his 2004 State of the Nation Address, President Thabo Mbeki said: “We must be impatient with those in the public service who see themselves as pen-pushers and guardians of rubber stamps, thieves intent on self-enrichment, bureaucrats who think they have a right to ignore the vision of Batho Pele, who come to work as late as possible, work as little as possible and knock off as early as possible.”

Since 1994 the democratic government has targeted the acceleration of service delivery to communities. This is seen as necessary to eradicate inequalities that are a result of our past. The major policy instrument in this regard has been the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service published in 1995.

This policy sets out eight transformation priorities, among which transforming service delivery is regarded as key. From this transformation priority the White Paper on the Transformation of Service Delivery published in 1997 (Batho Pele) was developed to provide a policy framework and practical implementation strategy for the improvement of service delivery.

The White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery recognises that our service delivery machinery of the past was:

- Inefficient and ineffective;
- Self-serving, inward looking, bureaucratic, fragmented and over-centralised;
- Inequitable, discriminatory, lacking diversity and demographic representation;
- Prescriptive, rule-bound, too compliance oriented, top-down (and top-heavy); and
- Corruption infested.

In countering these negative legacies, the White Paper therefore declared that the public service should be people-centric. It set out our responsibility in the social contract of giving effect to a developmental state through fostering transformation of the public service for “a better life for all.”

This would require the re-engineer-
ing of both the back and front office; and fostering an external and internal culture of communication which would ensure effective, efficient service delivery - thus making Batho Pele a reality.

Service delivery improvement dimensions

There are two dimensions of service delivery improvement. The first is institutional performance. The focus here is improved performance in the application of policies, efficient systems, processes, organisation, technology, infrastructure (including way finding and signage) and resources.

The second dimension is at the individual performance level. Here, there has to be accountability that is linked to job descriptions and delegation of authority, education and training, commitment to delivering services, ethical conduct, effective placement in both back and front office, and appropriate performance management in areas of rewards and discipline.

Service Delivery Improvement Programme

Service Delivery Improvement Programme (SDIP) should be seen as part of strategic planning. It is a continuous process that runs in cycles, similar to strategic planning. It focuses on the strategies to bring the Batho Pele principles to life and make improved service delivery a reality.

It is a requirement in terms of Part C of the Public Service Regulations of 2001. The programme must be implemented, monitored and reported upon.

There is no prescribed format to SDIP. It can be an integral part of a department’s strategic and operational plans, or it can be a separate document. The contents of the SDIP are prescribed by the Public Service Regulations.

The SDIP has a range of objectives. Amongst these objectives, the SDIP aims to facilitate service delivery according to measurable standards. It also seeks to ensure that we treat service recipients as customers.

In this sense, it seeks to protect customer’s rights and enhance the relationship between the public service and its customers. Furthermore, it seeks to transform the public service from bureaucracy to a results-driven organisation delivering on the government’s social contract with the people.

The SDIP should contain the different types of actual and existing customers that are identified. It should also contain the main services to be provided to the above customers. Also to be included is the consultation arrangement with the customers specified, with the means of access to services and the barriers to access specified, as well as the strategies to remove the barriers specified.

Moreover, the existing and future service standards for the services to be delivered must be specified together with arrangements on how information about the department’s services is provided. Lastly, the SDIP should contain a system or mechanisms for managing the complaints of customers.
The SDIP must identify the types of existing and future customers for each service which might include internal, external, individual, institutional customers, and customers in terms of geographical boundaries.

Services to be provided to the above customers need to be identified. The main services provide the justification for the existence of the department and are normally contained in legislative mandates.

The main services can be divided into core and support services. Core services are generally delivered to external customers through the front office. Support services are generally delivered to assist the front office and are provided by the back office.

Although front office service delivery represents the face of the department to the customer, back office services are not less important.

The SDIP should specify the consultation arrangements with the customers. It should devise different means of consultation with customers. Workshops, imbizos and customer surveys are examples.

Instances of consultation should be done at local levels. There should be a brief description of the consultation agenda - focusing on whether it is consultation on service delivery needs, standards, or feedback from previous consultation. It should also provide a consultation schedule.

It should specify the means of access to services and the barriers to access, as well as the strategies to remove the barriers. Also specified should be physical access to service delivery service points - stating geographical location, address of own service points and partner service points.

It should identify virtual service points whether it is websites or cell-phones and mobile service points stating the service area and schedule of stops. Barriers to access, such as distance, computer literacy, poverty and so forth, should be identified and strategies to remove these barriers identified.

These strategies could include expansion of service points, improved use of e-government, mobile services, outsourcing, partnering and so forth.

The SDIP should further specify existing and future service standards. This is very important. We must remember that “if it cannot be measured, it cannot be improved”. In this area, there is a need to start with achievable standards and targets for improvement.

Although services may be diverse, they all conform to generic, measurable criteria in terms of quantity, quality, access, cost or value for money and timelines - referring here to waiting periods for services from application to conclusion, and providing the service on time.

It should also specify the existing and future arrangements on how information about the department’s services is provided. The objective here is to provide an indication of how these arrangements will be improved on an annual basis.

The following arrangements are optional:

- directory of services through booklets or brochures;
- websites;
- call centres;
- information and help desks at service points; and
- advertisement in the media.

Lastly, the SDIP should specify the system or mechanisms for managing the complaints of customers. There is no sense in having a system or mechanism for lodging complaints if complaints are not managed in a speedy and objective manner.

Effective management of complaints is key to the quality criterion of setting service standards. On-line complaints lodging systems, free hot lines, dedicated customer relations staff, and help desks are some of the effective ways of managing complaints.

Service delivery improvement tools

Service delivery improvement tools comprise service delivery review; process analysis and improvement; benchmarking with best practice; performance management; training, learning and knowledge management; empowerment or delegation of authority; diligent complaints management; and information management.

On the strategic review of government services and functions, there has to be a process of examination to determine if a service is still required; if there is scope for rationalisation; and if there is scope for scaling down, whether functions are correctly placed, which might include transferring work between institutions.

The process also determines if there is scope for partnering, sharing service delivery, outsourcing, commercialisation or even privatisation.

On process and analysis improvement, there is a need for an analysis of the value chain in order to determine the nature of the different activities comprising the value chain from input to output. The analysis is also necessary to determine the possibilities for eliminating bottlenecks and inefficiencies. Furthermore, it determines the possibilities of improving the turnaround time of the process cycle and the timeliness thereof. I may also add that it determines the possibilities of improving the quality of the service and value for money by achieving the same or better result with fewer resources.

Process improvement ensures that we design less hierarchical organisations that are supportive of service delivery processes.

As stated above, service delivery tools also include benchmarking with best practice. Here an in-house activity is compared with service delivery of leading industry service providers.

It serves to determine if there is a gap between the standard of in-house delivery and that of industry leaders. It helps in the identification of differences in processes followed in the delivery of services, mode of communication, and the technology and infrastructure utilised to deliver services.

Lastly, it determines if there is a dif-
Skills development’s primary focus must narrow to enhancing skills needed for the job at hand, with multi-skilling as a secondary aim.

Continuous learning helps staff keep abreast of new developments in the industry and best practices that may be applied in their work environment.

In relation to empowerment and delegation of authority, best management practice dictates that decision-making authority should be as close to the point of service delivery as possible.

The objective of delegation of authority is to shorten decision-making processes as much as possible to ensure efficient, effective and economic service delivery. Reverting to a HQ decision maker when the processes are taking place at the coalface defeats effective service delivery.

Delegation of authority to act must be accompanied by the necessary resources (funding, information, etc) to ensure that the authorised official is able to perform the responsibility he or she has been entrusted with.

Delegation is not abdication of responsibility. Monitoring and evaluation must still take place in order to determine if the objectives of delegation of authority have been attached, and to determine how to fix possible problems.

The other important tool is diligent complaints management. A complaint provides an opportunity to learn and improve service delivery. A learning organisation learns from its mistakes.

Analysis of complaints provides information on service delivery trends and areas requiring attention for improvement. All complaints must be attended to as quickly as possible because it provides in-depth feedback on service delivery issues for purposes of diagnoses as well as remedial action.

This in turn supports trends analysis for purposes of planning. Accessible complaints management systems ensure that the full spectrum of service delivery issues, in both front and back offices, can be tested.

The last tool is information management. Relevant planning relies on appropriate, correct and up-to-date information. It is important to use as much information as possible from as many information sources as possible to determine service delivery trends, shortfalls and gaps.

The integrity level of information in databases must be as high as possible. Information should be validated, measured and GIGO eliminated. Information management is the cornerstone of monitoring service delivery progress against targets. There has to be a manipulation of information to develop exception reports key in this process.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by stating some important service delivery improvement slogans. He who fails to plan, plans to fail. And if it cannot be measured, it cannot be improved. If we only plan to comply with regulations, we are not managers, we are robots.

What we plan we must implement. What we implement, we must monitor. We should not be afraid to ask the customer. They really do know best what they need and what they get. It is not always the same thing.

We should always remember that we are also customers.