



Ayanda Madyibi Insight

Data silos a barrier to digital transformation

The South African government, like many others around the world, is embarking on a digital transformation journey to improve the delivery of public services, but data silos are proving to be a significant challenge.

Digital transformation in this case refers to the use of digital technologies to transform traditional government operations and services.

By leveraging data, government agencies can gain insights into citizen needs and preferences, identify areas of inefficiency, and develop targeted solutions to address pressing challenges.

Data can be used to inform the development and implementation of digital tools and services that enable citizens to access information and services quickly and easily. Data can also be used to inform policy decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of government programmes and services.

However, to fully leverage data in the context of digital transformation, it is important to address the issue of data silos.

This refers to the practice of storing information in separate systems or departments within

an organisation, creating barriers to access and sharing of data across the government.

In SA, data silos have become a common challenge, with various departments and agencies collecting and managing their data independently.

While this may have been a practical approach in the past, it now presents a significant obstacle to the digital transformation journey and the delivery of public services.

With data silos, critical information is scattered across the government, resulting in redundancy, inconsistencies and errors. This hinders data-driven decision-making, slows down service delivery, and leads to inefficiencies.

One of the biggest issues with data silos is that they make it difficult to get a holistic view of the organisation. This can result in inefficient operations and missed opportunities.

For instance, if different departments have their own data silos, they may not be able to share information that could be used to identify and address issues that impact the public.

Another example is by analysing data on scholar performance, policymakers can

identify areas where pupils are struggling and target resources to improve outcomes.

Additionally, data on school demographics and student populations can help policymakers identify achievement gaps and develop strategies to promote equity and access to education.

In another field, Eskom load-shedding has been a persistent problem, causing disruptions to businesses and households. However, data can be utilised to combat this challenge.

By analysing data on energy consumption patterns, energy supply and weather patterns, Eskom and municipalities, including policymakers, can identify areas of strain on the grid and develop strategies to mitigate the risk of load-shedding.

The solution to the data silo challenge is to establish a comprehensive government-wide data governance framework.

This framework should define how data is captured, stored, processed and shared within the government.

By implementing a holistic data governance framework, the government can break down data silos and ensure that everyone has access to the in-

formation they need to do their jobs effectively.

To create an effective data governance framework, the government must start by establishing a governance structure that outlines the policies, procedures and standards for managing data. This includes defining the responsibilities of data stewards, data custodians, and data users.

Data stewards are responsible for defining data requirements, while data custodians are responsible for managing data quality, security and privacy. Data users are responsible for consuming and utilising data to support their business processes.

The data governance framework should also establish processes for data integration and sharing. This includes defining data models, data standards and data interfaces that support data integration across systems.

The Eastern Cape government has recognised the risks of data silos and has taken significant steps to mitigate them.

We have developed a comprehensive digital transformation strategy that includes a data governance policy aimed

at breaking down data silos and promoting collaboration across departments.

Eliminating data silos is also critical in supporting the Eastern Cape Khawuleza PMO in achieving its goals.

The Khawuleza PMO is a key initiative aimed at accelerating the delivery of public services and infrastructure to citizens in priority districts.

However, the success of this initiative is heavily dependent on the availability of accurate and timely data from across various government entities.

If data silos exist, it becomes difficult to integrate data from different entities and gain a comprehensive understanding of priority areas for development.

By eliminating data silos, government departments and entities can share data freely, enabling the Khawuleza PMO to make evidence-based decisions that address the unique challenges facing each district.

Eliminating data silos also promotes transparency, accountability and better communication among government entities.

Additionally, the Eastern Cape government has imple-

mented a cybersecurity policy to ensure that sensitive data is protected from threats.

By embracing a data governance programme and cybersecurity policy, the provincial government is fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making while simultaneously ensuring the safety and integrity of data. These initiatives will enable the government to effectively leverage data as a strategic asset and to drive better outcomes for its citizens.

To ensure the success of the data governance framework, the government must provide training and support for employees.

This includes training on data management policies and procedures, as well as training on the tools and technologies used to manage and share data.

By providing training and support, the government can ensure that employees have the skills they need to effectively manage data and utilise it to support their business processes.

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