



# Leading from

Interview: Ongezwa Manyathi  
 Photography: Elmond Jiyane  
 Ntswhe Mokoena

**D**r Cassius Lubisi, the new Director-General (DG) in The Presidency, is an accomplished academic, educationist, public service manager and strategist. He is no stranger to government and has many years of experience at a strategic level in the Public Service and academia. As DG in The Presidency, Dr Lubisi will also be Secretary of Cabinet and the Chairperson of the Forum of South African Directors-General.

Dr Lubisi is tasked with the challenge of ensuring that Cabinet becomes a more effective instrument of socio-economic transformation in line with the new vision and new way of doing things of the fourth democratic administration. He sat down with *Government Executive* to share some of his thoughts and insights.

*The post of DG in The Presidency will, in part, require you to make sure that the departmental DGs bring life to government's service-delivery plans. What do you think are the biggest challenges to government service delivery and how will you contribute to resolving them?*

**"What drives me is the knowledge that many of our people have no shelter over their heads, that many still lack access to quality education and health services, and that we live in an unsustainably unequal society. That is enough to keep one awake and strive always to better the lives of ordinary South Africans."**

There are several challenges that have to be addressed if we are to improve the Government's ability to provide services to our people. However, when one looks at these challenges, one would find that some are objective and some are subjective.

Our first challenge is what can be referred to as the seductiveness of policy formulation. Policy formulation becomes seductive when one elevates it to be an end itself, instead of it being a means to the end of improving the lives of our people. Differently stated, we rank highly in the sophistication of our policies, but modestly in many areas of policy implementation. Secondly, while we have in our ranks some of the best public servants in the world, we have been found wanting in the skills and abilities of many public servants in the coalface of service delivery.

Thirdly, we still have significant numbers of public servants who are not known for their diligence – those who find every excuse not to do the job which they applied for and are paid to do. Our fourth challenge is that some among us either act on their own or collude with some private-sector service-providers corruptly to benefit from money meant to provide critical services to our people.

# THE FRONT

The other issue is that some of the systems and procedures we have adopted are unwieldy and tend to frustrate and delay decision-making and the provision of public services. Sixthly, the spatial geography of apartheid, which is still dominant in our country, tends to make it difficult to provide bulk services to the poor at a reasonable cost.

There are many challenges and those that I have mentioned indicate that we still have a long way to go to improve the lives of our people. Our role in the Office of the Director-General in The Presidency is to effectively lead and coordinate the team of DGs in all departments to address these and other challenges that compromise our ability to improve the lives of all our people. The Presidency is the nerve centre of the Government, and must ensure that our programmes respond to the needs of our people.

*How will you make real the vision and approach of the new administration? Are there specific focus areas that you will pay attention to?*

We will be working closely with the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation to strengthen our ability to always keep track of the implementation of government policies. In line with the President's vision, we also aim to concentrate our efforts on changing the way in which the Government works. We need to pay close attention to the systems and procedures that frustrate decision-making and service delivery. We also aim to further consolidate collaborative work among various departments in order to break down the silos of service provision that tend to fragment service delivery.



*It has been reported that you will be tasked with ensuring that "Cabinet becomes a more effective instrument of socio-economic transformation". How will you set out to achieve this?*

It should be understood that the Executive is duly mandated to direct and lead the transformation agenda of the post-apartheid State. As Secretary of the Cabinet, our office will assist the President and the Deputy President in ensuring that the programme of Cabinet is fully aligned to the socio-economic agenda of improving the lives of our people. Key among other aspects of this agenda is the implementation of the New Growth Path, which provides a roadmap to consistent economic growth and a greater emphasis on reducing rampant inequality in our country. We will assist Cabinet, through advice to the President, to continue highlighting progress in the implementation of the five priorities of the current Medium-Term Strategic Framework.

*You are definitely not a newcomer to government. What has your background as a manager and leader in government taught you about the dynamics in the Public Service generally? Do you think managers in the Public Service face particular challenges?*

Where human beings are involved, there will always be particular dynamics that operate. Dynamics are a result of human interaction and should always be understood as such. One also finds a lot of unnecessary competition between individuals, units and departments within the Public Service. Such competition often reduces our ability to act in concert as we battle the social and economic ills that beset our country.

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Management of the Public Service, like all other management, often experiences tensions between supervisor and supervisee. This can either be between the manager and his/her subordinates or between the manager and his or her political principal. Conflict on its own is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. It is when the conflict becomes destructive and personal that it threatens the Government's ability to deliver on its mission. The latter should be avoided at all cost.

Dynamics should be mediated, as it is highly unlikely that they can be completely eliminated.



*What are your thoughts on leadership? What drives you?*

Leadership is a rather complex enterprise. It is both an art and a science. It is these fundamentally different elements that give rise to its complexity. Despite our different understandings of leadership, it is generally agreed that a leader differs from the follower by his or her ability to provide direction. As a leader, one must be at the head of an endeavour, and be prepared to take calculated risks as uncharted territories are explored. I personally have a problem with tailist approaches to leadership, where the leader leads from the back. Leadership needs courage. In some instances, a leader should be prepared to differ with the led, as long as he or she has a moral high ground on the issue at hand. The task of the leader in such circumstances, however, is not to impose his or her beliefs on the led, but to take them along through democratic engagement.

What drives me is the knowledge that many of our people have no shelter over their heads, that many still lack access to quality education and health services, and that we live in an unsustainably unequal society. That is enough to keep one awake and strive always to better the lives of ordinary South Africans.

*What do you consider to have been the highlights of your career?*

There are many highlights, but the modest roles one has played in various leadership positions in the education sector come to mind. I have led several ministerial committees that led to changes in the National Curriculum and the introduction of the National Adult Literacy Campaign.

Turning around the KwaZulu-Natal Department of

Education, the largest education department and the third-largest department in country, also deserves some mention.

Obviously, the honour of being requested by the President to serve in my current capacity is the main highlight.

*Give us some insight into your personal/family background.*

I come from a family of seven siblings, three of whom are now deceased. We were raised by our mother as a single parent who was determined to see her children being educated and succeeding in life. I went to primary school in Nelspruit, to high school at Inkamana in Vryheid, to university at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, and obtained a PhD at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom.

I am married to Lumka, and we have a son, Monde, who'll be in Grade 12 in 2011. I've also adopted my late sister's daughter, Bongiwe, who'll be doing Grade 11 in 2011.

*Who do you consider to be your role models? Why?*

Nelson Mandela is my role model. For me, he signifies perseverance, sacrifice, selflessness, political morality, Ubuntu, modesty and outstanding leadership.

*How do you spend your free time?*

Whenever I get time, I watch football either live at stadiums or on TV. I also like listening to music and reading books.

*What would you like to achieve in the future?*

I would like to see The Presidency being an administratively sleek machine that will effectively and efficiently provide support to the President, the Deputy President and Cabinet. I would like to contribute to the building of a Presidency that is a centre of excellence and a place to which all government departments look up to.

*Who is "Cassius Lubisi" in one word?*

In two words, revolutionary intelligentsia.





*Are the communication investments made by government accounted for? Are we able to measure and disentangle the effects of our communication efforts? **Vusi Mona** and **Saadia Moolla** argue for a formalised and systematic monitoring and evaluation approach to government communication.*

# Government communication in the era of accountability

The policy thrust of performance monitoring and evaluation adopted by the current Administration demonstrates the (necessary) desire to answer the questions: how effective are the things we do? Why are we allocating the resources that we do? What are the outcomes we want? And how do we measure the results?

This approach has brought every aspect of government work under the spotlight. It has resulted in the President signing performance and delivery agreements with ministers and has seen government articulate very clearly the outcomes that have to be achieved and how progress thereto will be measured. It signals the beginning of an era where government raises the accountability stakes upon itself in a manner arguably never seen before in South Africa, both pre and post the dawn of the democratic era.

As government communicators, we have to ask the question: what does this era of increased accountability mean for government communication?

## Government advertising

National government departments and provinces spend millions of rands on advertising per annum. Through bulk media buying, the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) was tasked, at its inception, to ensure that discounts are negotiated on behalf of government. However, the fragmentation of media buying by government – with some departments and provinces appointing their own media buying agencies and/or doing their own media buying – has defeated the purpose.

Central media buying, it was assumed, would result in the most cost-effective use of public money. But has it? If it has, can we tell what the exact savings have been?

Public service legend has it that these savings have not always been realised by government. Instead, discounts negotiated by media buying agencies have evaporated somewhere between them and media owners. This is what has prompted GCIS to bring media buying in-house so that it can negotiate

discounts directly with media owners and realise for government the savings that were initially intended.

There are obviously some in the industry who are aggrieved by this new approach and are lobbying uninformed journalists to fight their commercial battles. Stories about GCIS allegedly being driven by “ideology” in its adspend and the Department of Home Affairs having allegedly paid R3 million for Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to appear in the popular soapie *Generations* emanate from this context. The intention of these stories is to “demonstrate” how government cannot, on its own, manage media buying.

There is very little that government can do about journalists who choose to be mere touts for media buying agencies and their commercial interests. But with limited budgets and Parliament and the public wanting to know (and have the right to be informed) that public money is being well spent and achieving the promised returns, GCIS has no choice. In a world of less money and competing government priorities, GCIS has to be more focused than ever on achieving communication outcomes at a much lower cost for government.

Thomas Jefferson once said: “The same prudence which in private life would forbid our paying our own money for unexplained projects, forbids it in the dispensation of the public monies.” In the same spirit, the prudence we display in negotiating discounts in our private lives should apply when it comes to media buying by government.

But this accountability should not be limited to media buying. It should, of necessity, extend to a comprehensive and regular evaluation of the effectiveness of government communication.

### Evaluation of government communication

Too often, evaluation of government communication is treated as an after-thought at the end of a communication activity or campaign. Sometimes it is done erratically – for example, focusing on things that are easy to measure and ignoring those that are not but which are critical. At the very worst, evaluation of government communication is

unscientifically done and is often left to anybody who thinks they are experts in communication.

On the first one – focusing on things that are easy to measure – some government communicators would measure the effectiveness of their communication by the number of articles in which their principals were featured. However, they might not look at whether those articles appeared in the appropriate media platforms or if the target audiences took out the core messages and went on to be influenced by these.



*“The same prudence which in private life would forbid our paying our own money for unexplained projects, forbids it in the dispensation of the public monies”*

On unscientific evaluations, these abound within government. For example, it is not unusual in government to have an advert (badly designed for that matter) running in national media when it should have been confined to local or regional media. But when you ask the communicator who placed the advert, they would proffer the opinion that their communication was working or did work. On the basis of what scientific evidence?

With the festive season upon us, one would see silly adverts of mayors and MECs on national media wishing South Africans a Happy Christmas. How effective are such communication efforts? Shouldn’t such national adverts – wishing the nation a Merry Christmas – be left to the President and Deputy President? Of course, there is nothing wrong with a mayor or premier wishing the people of his or her town or province respectively a Merry Christmas in a local or provincial media outlet. But

a mayor’s Happy Christmas message to the whole nation in a national newspaper is a long stretch, and an expensive one for that matter.

All those who communicate, however poorly, are in their own eyes doing a fantastic job. All that this points out to is the need to develop a holistic approach to the evaluation of government communication, which will provide a consistent system, built into communication campaigns from the start. Such a system will need to work for all departments, communication disciplines and channels. Critically, the system will need to be able to demonstrate effectiveness and, where possible, return on investment.

### Ingredients of a communication evaluation grid

Consensus must be reached for government communication to be measured, to ensure that there is effective planning, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of the impact that its aims and objectives claim to be having. This approach pursues a result-based management approach and will empirically show how government resources are used towards a particular communication objective.

Government communication is a very dynamic social science and would require careful thought and consideration to ensure that issues/aspects that are useful are measured from a management and accountability perspective. Thus, defining good communication performance indicators requires a thorough understanding of the nature of inputs, key activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. Key performance indicators must be identified, agreed upon and signed on.

In aligning the government communication performance model to the outcomes model (from this administration), a programme of action, which is based on the logical model will facilitate the creation of a matrix of indicators that will allow government communication to then specify the level of performance it aims to achieve through target-setting.

While the baseline does assist in terms of understanding what the current situ-

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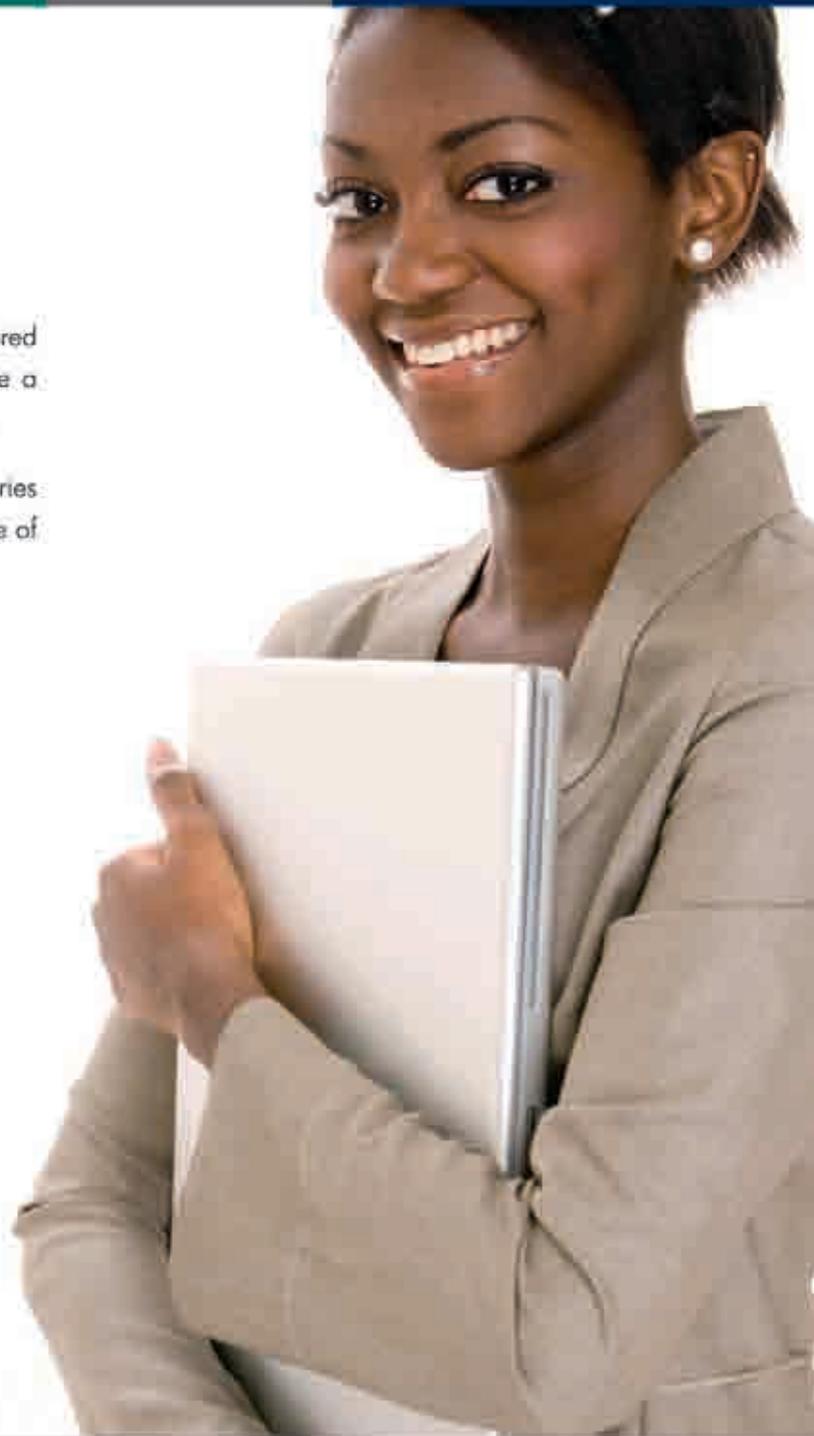
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ation is, given that this would be a new approach, the initial baseline may not be available. But that is not a problem, as one needs to start measuring in order to have a starting point.

The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation as well as National Treasury have established guidelines that deal with managing performance and monitoring and evaluation, and have built the experience in quantifying the work of all government departments through the outcomes approach and resultant programmes of action. Together with these two departments and government communication specialists, the mapping of a communication outcomes approach is definitely achievable.

If there is consensus that government communication needs to be measured, a determination must be made upfront as to what needs to be measured, tracked and analysed. To ensure that the right data is sourced from departments and performance is measured against clear benchmarks, a metric matrix of the data required must be built.

This may sound all too complicated and demanding but we have sometimes been averse to scientifically work things out in government communication because we say or think it is difficult. In the process, accountability has suffered and

taxpayers have not always received good value for money.

We need to embed evaluation in government communication processes and formalise the way we do it far more rigorously than we have done before.

#### The power of measuring results

- If you do not measure results, you cannot tell success from failure.
- If you cannot see success, you cannot reward it.
- If you cannot reward success, you are probably rewarding failure.
- If you cannot see success, you cannot learn from it.
- If you cannot recognise failure, you cannot correct it.
- If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support.

Adapted from Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, *Reinventing Government*.

#### Conclusion

The evaluation of communication in individual departments would necessarily have to feed into a report of some kind – probably an annual report on government advertising and communication, which will create a common base to compare communication and advertising activities across departments, provinces, disciplines and channels so that users can learn from past communication efforts and share knowledge and best practices.

The report will provide information on the process used to manage government advertising and communication, annual expenditures and the major campaigns undertaken in a particular year to support government priorities.

More importantly, it will go a long way towards demonstrating and improving the proactive disclosure of information so that South Africans are better able to hold Parliament, the Government and public sector officials accountable.

In the private sector, clients of marketing and communication firms insist on the monitoring and evaluation of the campaigns they run so that they can identify what is and isn't working. They then make changes to their strategies and spending accordingly. There is no reason why the same cannot be done within government communication.

Certainly, in an era of increasing demands for accountability and where there are calls for doing more with less because of the severe pressure that government budgets are under, government communication cannot remain untouched by the monitoring and evaluation policy direction.

*\* Vusi Mona is the Deputy CEO of GCIS responsible for communication and content management and Saadia Moolla coordinates content in the office of the Deputy CEO.*

