

Report Back on OPSC's Strategic Planning Session - 2007

The management of the OPSC held a Strategic Planning Session at Roode Vallei Country Lodge to chart the way forward for the 2008/2009 financial year. Also referred to as the Strat Plan or End of Year Review and Planning, the Strategic Planning Session was held over three days, starting on Monday, 10 December 2007 and ending on Wednesday, 12 December 2007.



Just as those held in the past, this Strategic Planning Session was intended as a platform for management to review the year that was as well as to outline objectives, projects and focus areas for the next financial year. It is a forum for shaping the PSC's work plan.

This year's Strat Plan, which was followed by MANCO and then the Information Session for all staff, was attended by Deputy Directors, Directors, Chief Directors, Deputy Directors-General as well as the Director-General.

Setting the tone...

The Director-General (DG) opened the Session and gave welcoming remarks which set the tone for discussions. In her welcoming address and among others, the DG emphasised the need to agree on a realistic and sustainable work plan.

"At the end of this session, we must be able to contract ourselves realistically. Most importantly, we must ensure that we do not over commit ourselves. I also expect all of us to take ownership of the work plan that will result from the discussions. Moreover, we should ideally work towards fewer projects, but those projects must have a formidable impact on public administration in general," the DG explained.

Looking back at 2007...

In what was a first for the OPSC, all attendees were given a platform and encouraged to reflect on 2007; focusing on what made them 'sad or glad'. This approach provided all participants to voice their appreciation and frustration about, among others, the processes employed in the organisation.

Key amid the 'frustrations', particularly among Deputy Directors, was the apparent lack of communication and feedback on projects/submissions. It was mostly felt that in many occasions they are not made aware of the 'bigger picture', and are just requested to churn submissions without any explanation on how they fit in into the organisation's objectives.

'Last minute' or 'eleventh-hour' requests for input / assistance was also cited by Deputy Directors as one of the most frustrating matters experienced during 2007. Lack of (re)orientation was also

pointed out as one of the sad moments for the year that was.

Another point that was raised as a challenge by Regional Offices was that of correspondence with Departments during projects. It was highlighted that in many instances, when Regional Offices do follow ups with Departments, they are often told that submissions were made and sent either directly to Head Office or to consultants. This invariably depicts lack of communication within the OPSC.



The Deputy Directors were grateful to management for the job evaluation and subsequent upgrading of posts in terms of the outcome to Level 12.

Overall, it was agreed that this form of open and honest discussions was necessary. The meeting also agreed that better communication and closer working relations with Deputy Directors, in particular, should be instituted.

At the end of the day, there seemed to be more instances of 'glad' than 'sad'.

Tightening of the belt...

In her presentation, the Director: Financial and Procurement Management indicated that going forward there will be budgetary constraints as National Treasury has reduced the PSC's baseline by 1% over the period 2008/09 to 2010/11. This will have an impact on the PSC's capacity, particularly during the 2008/09 financial year as the PSC received no budget increase from National Treasury.

With National Treasury (NT) introducing a method of reducing the budget allocations of Departments over the medium term, Departments are now required to identify explicit efficiency savings and costs initiatives in their strategic plans for the coming years. Areas earmarked for efficiency saving according to NT include:

- unnecessary travel and subsistence costs;
- entertainment;
- poorly managed consultancy services;
- outdated administrative systems;
- misplaced marketing and communication initiatives; as well as
- weaknesses in supply-chain management.

Regardless of the envisaged constraints, the budget for the 2008/09 financial year will be done in accordance with the new organisational structure, which comprises:

- Programme 1: Administration;
- Programme 2: Leadership and Management Practices;
- Programme 3: Monitoring and Evaluation; and
- Programme 4: Integrity and Anti-Corruption

In order to accommodate the new organisational structure, there will be no new posts created, but certain staff members will be accommodated in a new Branch. It is envisaged that the OPSC's capacity will increase from the 2009/10 financial year as per the budget allocation from National Treasury. In the meantime, belt

tightening will be the order of the day.

Quality over quantity...

The meeting agreed that, going forward, the PSC will focus on undertaking fewer projects, but most importantly, those that will make a difference in public administration.



It was also agreed that all projects will need to contribute to the theme of the State of the Public Service (SOPS) Report 2009. The theme for SOPS 2009 is: *State of Readiness of the Public Service for 2010 and beyond.*

Deputy Directors-General were afforded a platform to provide an overview on the strategic thrust of their branches; indicating alignment to government's priorities, and also highlighting identified flagship projects for the coming year.

Following that, Chief Directors and Corporate Services Directors were afforded an opportunity to present proposed projects for 2008/2009.

Regional Directors presented a provincial perspective, outlining current challenges facing public administration in their respective provinces. They also presented their proposed solutions and projects.

Overall, presentations by the Regional Directors had to answer two key questions:
Is the PSC effectively fulfilling its mandate in the respective provinces?

Which projects should be included in the work plan to further strengthen the value of the PSC's oversight work in the province?

The meeting agreed on most of the proposed projects, while a few had to be revised / withdrawn. The next step will involve presenting proposed workplans to Plenary early in 2008. It is only after the workplans been ratified by Plenary that projects can be implemented.

It was noted that some of the projects cut across some Chief Directorates. As a result, it was agreed that Chief Directorates need to work closer and look into the possibility of introducing a 'Multi Disciplinary Approach' to projects. This will eliminate duplication and multiple requests / correspondence with Departments. Nonetheless, Chief Directorates will still be expected to produce separate reports.

All presentations are available on the Intranet (under Documents / Strategic Planning Session)

Going forward...

The most important decision that came out of the meeting was that due to capacity constraints, going forward, the OPSC would

now focus on undertaking fewer projects, which would inherently have a significant impact on Public Administration

Marketing of projects

Following comments around marketing communication, it was agreed that more effort should be made to market PSC projects; more so now that there will be fewer. It was agreed that Chief Directorates and Directorate: Communication and Information Services should work closer in planning marketing around projects. The need to produce a 'Project Marketing Template' during the planning phase was also noted.

Advocacy

The meeting also agreed that, going forward, the PSC will augment its efforts around advocacy work or stakeholder outreach. This was noted as even more pertinent in the provinces. It was also emphasised that Regional Offices should play a greater role in identifying opportunities for as well as planning and co-ordinating presentations to regional stakeholders / Provincial Legislatures.



It was also suggested that Directorate: Communication and Information Services should engage Branches and then come up with a plan around advocacy work.

Matching skills with demand...

Training or the lack thereof was pointed out as one of the discouraging aspects of 2007. In addition to (re)orientation, the meeting emphasised the need to ensure adequate training that is aligned to the needs of the organisation. It was noted that a process is underway to realign and strategise the training needs of the organisation.

Keeping an eye on the due date...

The importance of always meeting the agreed project deadlines was reiterated. It was emphasised that the deadlines on the work plan refers to a complete project / printed report that is ready to be published. Everyone was reminded to 'work backwards' and factor in personal / internal deadlines / inputs that are necessary to complete a project.

Working hard and playing hard...

The lack of balance between work and personal life was highlighted as one of the sour points of 2007. The meeting concurred that 2007 took a toll on all, due to an immense work load.

Hence it was felt that fewer projects with realistic deadlines will eventually afford staff a chance to strike a balance between work and personal life.