

Mind Your Monitoring

Publicly funded organisations deliver vital services for the public and are responsible for the outcomes those services achieve. This includes responsibility for monitoring effort and adjusting where necessary to deliver results, often through routine reporting and frequent meetings. These routine monitoring and reporting cycles often take up a lot of time and, unless handled with care, can easily become a mindless distraction.

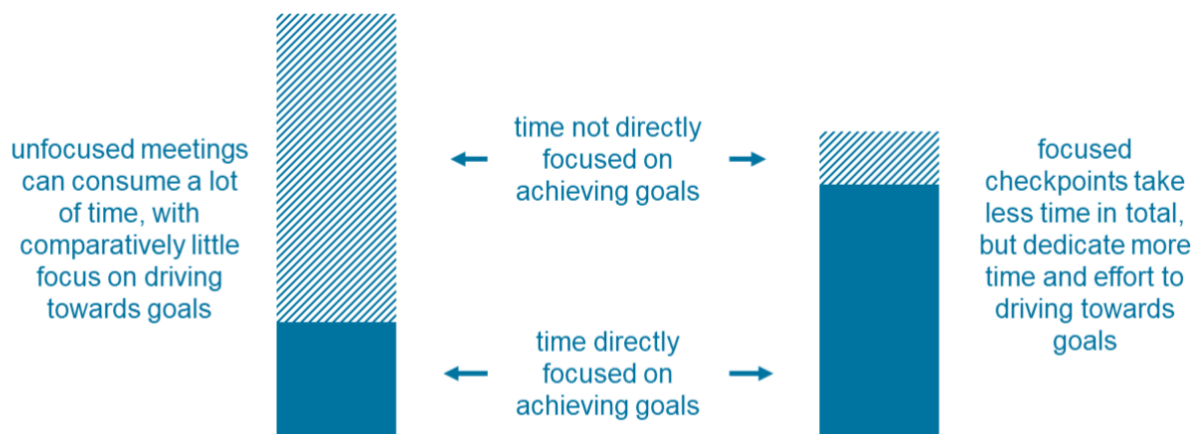
People working in publicly funded organisations need to juggle many, often competing, demands on their time and attention. Deciding how best to deploy their limited resources is a challenge every day. Regular progress and performance check-ins, often through meetings, are a cultural mainstay. Attendance is often understood to demonstrate commitment and accountability, regardless of the value of the meeting.

Many organisations do not have established ways of sharing the most important information efficiently, so progress checkpoints can focus more on sharing news about recent events than actions required to achieve results. When reporting is more about sharing good news than actively monitoring progress and prospects for success, it can feel hard for people to raise issues.

Managing effort is essential, but poorly structured progress checkpoints can be a huge waste of time. Time is wasted directly in unproductive meetings, and indirectly when issues are not identified, and effort is not redirected.

When progress monitoring is unstructured, unfocused, or inefficient, the culture and expectations of the workforce can suffer. People who mistake meetings for management, and attendance for accountability, are not encouraged to actively pursue public value. Compliance with routines is not a substitute for accountability for results.

Over time, ineffective processes and disengaged participants reinforce each other in a vicious cycle.



Successful delivery relies on effective management routines that are focused on assessing whether delivery is on track to reach a defined goal, and adjusting effort as required to achieve that goal. Effective checkpoints need clear structures, applied consistently. That means a regular, predictable schedule that logically aligns with the work. It also means focusing primarily on past and projected performance, with clear actions to drive improvement.

Checkpoints should facilitate accountability for delivery of results. This is not about a 'blame game,' but rather objective ownership of actions and progress towards goals that matter, and celebrations of success. Preparation, communication, and repetition are vital elements, training participants to solve problems and identify the next steps required to achieve goals.

It is easy to assume that an organisation that does something a lot must do that thing well. Monitoring progress towards goals is an important activity that is done often, but rarely well. Well-structured and well-run monitoring checkpoints that focus on the trajectory to results promote cultures focused on results and taking accountability for achieving them.

Tightly focused checkpoints save time and resources both directly and indirectly. Productive discussions that really help people to deliver are both less time consuming and more engaging for participants.

Transparent monitoring requires some vulnerability because honest appraisals are essential to deliver work that matters. But our success or failure is public, not personal. Focusing on results helps to ensure that monitoring, and delivery, have the public good in mind.