

WILL ISO 55000 SOLVE SOUTH AFRICA'S SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES?

"The current state of our physical infrastructure assets has a direct effect on service delivery to the nation", says Alan Tait, President of SAAMA (Southern African Asset Management Association).

It therefore remains to be said that one of the root causes of South African's current service delivery issues is the state of its assets. We have all experienced potholes, power outages and water contamination, all of which are affected by the maintenance strategies and standards employed by our metros and municipalities. There are many other factors that affect service delivery, however, the focus of this article will be to look at the effect of proper asset management practices.

"If I mention ISO 9000, it elicits visions of quality management. Similarly ISO 14000 elicits visions of environment management, ISO 55000 will be the vision for asset management." says Alan Tait.

There is an international drive by ISO to develop a new standard for asset management. This process was started in 2010 by ISO when they were approached by the British Standards Institute with their comprehensive vision for Asset Management called PAS 55 (Public Available Specification). PAS 55 was developed in collaboration between numerous associations, the Institute for Asset Management UK being the driver, and numerous UK state and private businesses.

There are now 23 countries involved in this ISO process, whereby PAS 55 is evaluated for applicability in each country. In South Africa, as in the others, a Technical Working Committee is established. SABS represents the local ISO co-ordination with SAAMA (Southern African Asset Management Association), IMESA (Institute of Municipal Engineering of Southern Africa), Anglo, Pragma, TIDASA as members of the working group. The expected date for ISO accreditation is 2012.

So how will ISO 55000 improve service delivery to the nation?

First of all, it must be noted that a standard on its own means nothing without execution. It's the same with exercise. We might have a training programme but if we do not go to the gym and follow the programme, we will not see results. The same can be said for ISO 55000 (the training programme) and the execution (doing proper maintenance).

Secondly, it is human nature to want to know where we are going and how to get there. There are the visionaries amongst us yes, but generally, humans like to follow a step by step process to get somewhere. ISO 55000 will do just this. From giving guidance on Asset Management Strategies Enablers and Continuous Improvement, the standard will form the roadmap for asset management practitioners to follow.

Thirdly and most importantly, there will be a standard according to which asset management can be measured. Each metro, municipality, mine, manufacturer etc, can now be measured in terms of compliance to the standard, making it easier to ensure they improve their asset performance, reduce their maintenance costs and manage their risks. There are centres of excellence already following the principles of PAS 55, with great results. eThekweni and Ekurhuleni Electricity have shown vast improvements through proper strategy and enablers. The shining light is still the City of Cape Town Electrical Support Services division, who won the 2010 National Productivity Award, the first public sector organisation to do so.

So will ISO 55000 solve our service delivery issues?

Yes and No. Yes there will be a standard according to which to work, do maintenance, strategise, spend the budget and be measured. It will also provide a degree of consistency around which service delivery activities are executed. Perhaps more importantly it defines responsibilities very clearly, where organisations who adopt PAS 55, place specific responsibilities on top management, meaning if you wish to be PAS 55 compliant you have to take responsibility at top management level for service delivery. Just this simple definition of where responsibility lies may assist in coordinating service delivery execution.

No it will not help service delivery if there is no execution of these plans, spending of budget in the right places and most importantly, focusing on the long term sustainability of our assets.