



# Redefining Performance Evaluation in the Public Sector in GCC:

From Accountability to Impact



## Executive Summary:

Every year, governments across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allocate billions of dollars to ambitious national transformation programs, aiming to diversify economies and elevate the quality of life for their citizens and residents. Yet, a persistent question looms over these massive investments: Are they delivering the intended outcomes, or merely generating outputs?

For decades, public sector performance evaluation in the GCC region was largely an exercise in financial auditing—checking boxes to ensure budgets were spent and projects were built. Today, that paradigm is shifting. Driven by mandates such as Saudi Vision 2030 and the Qatar National Vision 2030, the focus has moved from “Did we build the school?” to “Are students learning skills for the future economy?”

This article explores the transition from accountability-based evaluation to impact-based performance management. Drawing on insights from global development banks and strategic consultancies, we analyze how GCC nations are redefining success. We highlight two transformative success stories—one in Qatar and one in Saudi Arabia—that demonstrate how rigorous performance frameworks are turning national visions into tangible realities.

## The Paradigm Shift: From Inputs to Outcomes:

**Modern performance evaluation in the public sector has shifted significantly from rigid, compliance-based systems to results-oriented frameworks** that prioritize

public value. The goal is no longer merely tracking hours or inputs, but measuring the tangible impact of policies on citizens. Modern public sector evaluation aims to align individual performance with national strategic goals, transforming civil servants from administrators into active drivers of social and economic development.

Historically, public sector management in the Middle East has struggled with bureaucracy and inefficiency, often lagging behind advanced economies in government effectiveness indicators (Adra & Zaki, 2017). The traditional model focused on inputs (budget, staff, resources) and outputs (number of services delivered). While necessary for basic accountability, this approach often fails to capture the true value created for society. The modern imperative is to adopt outcome-based performance management. This approach shifts the lens to impact—the long-term changes in behavior, economic status, or well-being that result from government intervention.

According to recent bibliometric studies on local government performance, effective management requires integrating «New Public Management» (NPM) principles with a relentless focus on citizen satisfaction (Supriyono et al., 2025). **It is no longer sufficient to be busy; governments must be effective.**

### **The Architecture of Impact: How to Measure What Matters:**

To make this shift, public sector entities must adopt rigorous evaluation methodologies. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) outlines a “Criteria-Based Assessment” framework that is becoming the gold standard for sovereign evaluation. This framework moves beyond simple checklists to evaluate the following four core dimensions:

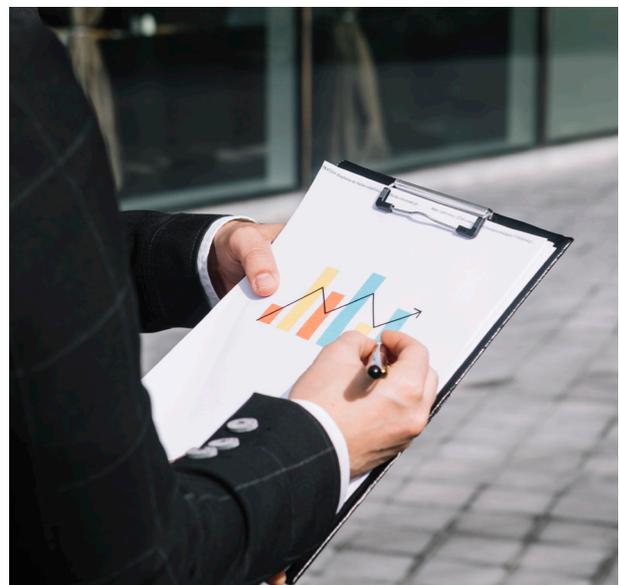
**1-Relevance:** Is the project consistent with beneficiary needs and the country’s strategic priorities? In a rapidly changing region, a project conceived five years ago may no longer be relevant today (IsDB, 2021).

**2- Effectiveness:** To what extent did the intervention achieve its stated objectives? This requires moving beyond vague goals to measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

**3- Efficiency:** Were resources (funds, expertise, time) converted economically into results? This measures whether the government is achieving “value for money” (IsDB, 2021).

**4- Sustainability:** What is the likelihood that benefits will continue after the project concludes? This is critical for the GCC, where long-term reliance on oil revenue is being replaced by sustainable economic diversification.

Implementing these criteria requires more than just new metrics; it requires a cultural transformation. As noted by the World Bank, performance management must “start from the top,” with **leaders visibly demonstrating commitment to evaluation not as a punitive tool, but as a mechanism for learning and improvement** (Schnell et al., 2021).



## Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) in Public Sector Performance Evaluation:

Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) offer a powerful alternative to traditional, compliance-heavy evaluation methods in the public sector. Unlike standard KPIs, which often measure activity (e.g., “hours spent patrolling”), OKRs measure impact (e.g., “15% reduction in petty crime”).

**The Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) transform performance evaluation in public sector from “busy work” to “public value”.** Public sector evaluations often suffer from the “activity trap,” where employees are rated on how busy they seem. OKRs shift this to outcomes. In traditional evaluation: processed 500 housing applications is the target (output) while the target of OKR approach is: reduced average waiting time for housing from 60 to 45 days (outcome). OKRs create a visible link between a civil servant’s daily tasks and national strategy. This is often called the “Golden Thread” in which, for example, government mission is to improve digital infrastructure, the department objective is to digitize 100% of citizen services and the individual key result is to launch the new mobile permit app by Q3 with a 4.5/5 user satisfaction score.

National plans often span years, but performance needs faster feedback. OKRs gives governments agility in policy execution and break long-term policy goals into quarterly or monthly sprints. This allows government agencies to pivot quickly if a policy isn’t working, rather than waiting for an annual review to discover failure.

### Success Story 1: Qatar’s Third National Development Strategy (2024–2030)

Qatar offers a distinct example of how performance evaluation evolves over time. The Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) is built on four pillars: Human, Social, Economic, and Environmental development. During the first two National Development Strategies (NDS-1 and NDS-2), the focus was largely on infrastructure—building the physical backbone of the nation (roads, metro, stadiums). Evaluation during this phase was relatively straightforward: Was the project built on time and on budget? However, with the launch of the Third National Development Strategy (NDS-3), Qatar has pivoted toward human capital and bureaucratic efficiency. The performance metrics have fundamentally changed. The goal is now to digitize 90% of government services and achieve customer satisfaction rates exceeding 85%.

This shift represents a sophisticated application of «Institutional Development» principles (Public Sector GPS, 2012). Qatar is no longer just evaluating construction; it is evaluating experience from inputs (spending budget on IT systems) to outcomes (reducing the time a citizen spends renewing a license to under 5 minutes).

This transition requires what Supriyono et al. (2025) describe as “managerial performance that quantifies public satisfaction.” By rigorously tracking these “soft” metrics with hard data, Qatar is setting a benchmark for how resource-rich nations can transition to knowledge-based economies.

## **Success Story 2: Saudi Arabia's MODON**

The Gulf region has seen a surge in “Center of Government” strategies, where centralized bodies oversee the execution of national visions (Adra & Zaki, 2017). A prime example of this maturation is evident in Saudi Arabia, particularly within entities like the Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones (MODON).

Tasked with a critical role in Saudi Vision 2030—diversifying the industrial base—MODON recognized that standard bureaucratic metrics were insufficient.

They needed a system that could align disparate industrial projects with high-level national goals. By adopting an integrated performance management system, MODON moved to a “Level IV Maturity” in performance management—a standard rarely achieved in the public sector. This transformation involved strategic alignment where every industrial project was directly mapped to Saudi Vision 2030 objectives, ensuring a “clear line of sight” from the warehouse floor to the national agenda (Schnell et al., 2021). The transformation involved also digitized monitoring which is moving away from manual reporting, the entity utilized automated dashboards to track KPIs in real-time, reducing the “lag” between data collection and decision-making. The transformation involved also sustainability integration where performance wasn’t just about economic output; it incorporated environmental sustainability metrics, ensuring that industrial growth did not come at the cost of environmental degradation. The result of this transformation is better decisions, not just better data. Through a rigorous assessment of efficiency and suitability, the Authority has been able to improve resource allocation and contribute directly to the Kingdom’s non-oil GDP growth in record time.

## The Road Ahead: Embedding Excellence:

While these two success stories are encouraging, challenges remain. Many public entities in GCC region still struggle with “data poverty,” where the lack of reliable baseline data makes it impossible to measure progress (Adra & Zaki, 2017). Furthermore, the cultural resistance to evaluation—often seen as a “report card” rather than a strategic tool—persists in many ministries.

To overcome this, governments in the Gulf states must view performance management as an ongoing cycle of planning, monitoring, and enabling. This requires an independent assessment free from political pressure to ensure genuine transparency and accountability.



## Conclusion: Partnering for Impact:

The era of passive government administration in the GCC is over. The new era is defined by agility, sustainability, and an unyielding focus on results. For public sector leaders, the challenge is no longer just having a strategy, but executing it with precision. Implementing these complex performance frameworks—bridging the gap between high-level vision and on-the-ground reality—often requires specialized external expertise. GCC governments need partners who understand the local context while bringing global best practices in business excellence.

Badael stands at the forefront of this transformation. Specializing in sustainability, innovation, and business excellence, Badael empowers government agencies and organizations to navigate the complexities of modern performance management. Whether it is designing bespoke evaluation frameworks, driving innovation strategies, or embedding sustainability into the core of business operations, Badael provides the strategic tools necessary to turn ambitious visions into measurable impact.

Learn more about how Badael can transform your organizational performance by visiting our website: [badaelbs.com](http://badaelbs.com)

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