

Governments benefit from big data

The term 'big data' has been stealing the headlines lately for all the right reasons. It has been named as a game changer, a paradigm shifter, a means through which enterprises can unlock a host of new value and communication power. In almost every sector, big data has been shown to offer unlimited opportunities - healthcare, manufacturing, retail and of course, banking.

Gerald Naidoo, CEO of Logikal Consulting, says big data could be extremely beneficial to the public sector too, and can be used by policy makers, department heads and officials to improve government in areas like healthcare, utilities, transportation, emergency response, social programmes, big event planning and telecommunications.



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Developing smart cities

"By harnessing the power of big data, government can make better decisions, streamline operations, boost efficiencies and be more transparent to its citizens. This is particularly relevant when considering data security and privacy."

Ravi Bhat, COO of Logikal Consulting, says big data will also spur the development of smart cities. "Today's world is highly connected and digitised, almost to a point where the boundaries between the physical and the cyber worlds blur. This connectivity has birthed a vast amount of data about cities, from their physical infrastructure, to their people, to services, interactions and so on. Cities are becoming smarter, and are leveraging big data to better their planning and management, infrastructure and services, to make cities better to live in, more user friendly and of course more green and sustainable."

He says, however, that these innovations are in their infancy, and a lot more can be done by government to drive successes in this area. "What is needed is more investment in data infrastructure and analytics. This will allow government to offer better value and improved services to all its citizens. Government, like other organisations, needs which can drive significant efficiencies in a relatively short space of time. Long gone are the days where projects can afford to take a year or more."

Managing resources

For example, Naidoo says power plants and electricity providers can manage their resources better using data analytics. "This will help prevent blackouts, and load shedding which most South Africans are only too familiar with."



Gerald Naidoo

In terms of agriculture and produce, he says big data can be used to track crops, shortages, and food safety. "There are numerous ways healthcare can benefit too. Health officials can identify and track any outbreaks. Pharmacological drugs can be better screened using data analytics. Hospitals and healthcare institutions can have a better, single view of the patient, and can track his or her history, and share information easier."

Other benefits include law enforcement having the ability to harness data to identify crime hotspots, emergency personnel can use improved communications to better co-ordinate rescue efforts, and transport departments can use data to reduce traffic congestion, identify where maintenance is most urgent, and better utilise their limited resources, he says.

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