

How a major municipal utility cut call response rates from 36 to 16 hours in six months

In a major turnaround for South Africa's power sector, one of the country's largest municipal electricity utilities has boosted efficiency by 55% in just six months.

By [Dzingira Matenga](#) 12 Nov 2025



Source: Pexels.

Through data-driven management, the R18bn-a-year service resolved duplicate calls, tightened dispatch protocols, and enhanced customer communication via automated SMS updates — transforming crisis into performance.

Serving a population of more than five-million people it's instructive that reducing the utility's response rate from 36 to 16 hours was brought about by automating processes and introducing process discipline, not a massive injection of new capital.

Improving electricity fault resolution has a vital effect on a city or town's economy because reliable electric supports economic activity by building investor confidence that translates into more investment. It also directly contributes to a region's long-term economic objectives.

The leaders of the power utility, whose mission is to be a sustainable energy services provider, called in Ntiyiso Business Consulting in 2023 to investigate why so many of its customers were still without electricity 24 hours after logging a query.

We spent time exploring the utility's operations and established that what lay at the heart of the problem was process dysfunction. It's a challenge encountered across many municipality-owned entities (MOEs): the good work done by dedicated staff and capable leaders is frustrated by fragmented systems, inconsistent accountability and a lack of overall project management.

Duplicate queries surge

In the case of this particular utility, of the 501,000 queries it handled in the 2023/24 financial year, 56% were

resolved within the target of 24 hours. That meant 44% took longer than a day to sort out, leaving customer frustrated. Our research showed that 50% of all queries were duplicates or repeat calls, indicating massive systemic inefficiency that created a huge redundant workload.

Adding to this, the call-centre answering rate was just around 52% and the centre was severely under-resourced, with only four of 34 agents available when we visited it.



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This set of circumstances eroded customer trust, leading to exasperation and repeated calls, especially as there was no automated, SMS-based customer update system. Staff were overwhelmed and demoralised, field teams overstretched and fault log queues backed up.

Taking the view that service delivery is an industrial process to be managed with precision, the utility, working with Ntiyiso Business Consulting, piloted a results management office (RMO) that acts as a "control tower" ensuring every process has an owner, every issue a tracker and every action a measurable result.

The RMO's success came from uniting six key operational workstreams that were previously fragmented:

- **Inventory management:** ensuring field teams have the necessary materials, preventing delays from items being out of stock.
- **Scheduling and dispatch:** moving from manual to technology-based assignment and routing to match the right team to the right job and optimise logistics.
- **Field operations and monitoring:** providing real-time oversight of technician progress and job status.
- **Fault lifecycle management:** formally closing the loop on every issue and actively identifying and learning from repeat faults.
- **Workforce enablement:** building the capacity, skills and accountability of frontline staff.
- **Performance and insights:** using technology such as real-time dashboards to drive data-led decisions.

Access to accurate, real-time data makes it possible to manage performance, allocate resources effectively and hold staff accountable. The benefits were quickly realised and the improved turnaround time resulted in significant financial and socio-economic value to the utility and its customers, directly supporting its vision of providing prompt and efficient customer service.

The new, structured approach is projected to yield a 93% return on investment over five years by driving down controllable expenses such as overtime, repeat site visits and fleet costs.

This disciplined approach to governance and risk is helping the utility become a more sustainable, reliable and governance-conscious organisation, aligning with its vision to be an employer of choice.

The turnaround of this major utility proves a fundamental truth for all South African MOEs: our service-delivery crisis is primarily a process problem rather than a resource problem. Like the private sector, which thrives on execution excellence and measurable processes, public institutions can achieve transformation institutionalising accountability and data-driven performance management.

The message for municipal leaders is straightforward: you don't need another isolated initiative, you need structured engine room like the one set up by the power utility mentioned here.

When process discipline becomes the operating culture, predictable performance follows, and with it, trust — the true currency of good governance — is restored.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dzingira Matenga is the managing director of Niyiso Consulting Group.

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