

Somerset West

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TRANSPARENCY: THE KEY TO SOUTH AFRICA'S GOVERNANCE REVOLUTION

Could one MP spark the change?

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South Africans recently witnessed a rare display of strong parliamentary oversight with teeth. Democratic Alliance MP Liam Jacobs, in public hearings, grilled the CEOs of Boxing South Africa and Netball South Africa with pointed questions: *Where is the money going? How do you know? Are you unprepared for this inquiry?* Their evasive, inadequate responses left them exposed, sparking widespread attention. These moments were more than a critique of leadership - they revealed the fragility of governance systems in state-funded organisations.

Could this moment be the catalyst for a governance revolution?

Just as Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web revolutionised information sharing, Jacobs' incisive oversight could inspire a shift toward digitised and transparent governance.

A systemic failure - a digital solution

The SA parliamentary hearings underlined a stark reality; many public entities lack robust oversight mechanisms, leaving executives unprepared for scrutiny. While X posts laud Jacobs' tenacity, with thousands praising his exposure of financial mismanagement, and unaccounted consulting fees [reportedly at R2 million] at Netball SA, some South Africans call his approach "*rude*" or "*embarrassing*" - yet such scrutiny, enabled by transparent data, is the essence of oversight.

Imagine if MPs like Jacobs -- or shareholders globally -- had access to real-time governance data before committee meetings. Digitised governance frameworks, such as CGF Research Institute's Praefectus™, demonstrate this potential, offering instant insights into performance, compliance, risks, and ethical conduct. Such tools replace unsubstantiated reports with auditable data, supporting boards, regulators, and parliaments in their mandates to demand accountability.

Had Boxing SA or Netball SA adopted digitised oversight systems, Jacobs' questions might have prompted solutions, not embarrassment. Besides untold losses in South Africa's state-run organisations, the **Auditor-General reports R12.41 billion (\$656.47 million) in annual municipal losses** from wasteful expenditure and material irregularities. Globally, OECD data estimates \$2 trillion in public sector losses due to poor governance, with South Africa as a significant contributor, gaps that digital oversight could address.

Raising the bar

Jacobs' razor-like questioning catapulted governance into the spotlight and resonated with a public hungry for accountability. His approach redefines oversight in three ways:

1. **Consequences for complacency:** Executives now face reputational risks for unpreparedness, incentivising proactive transparency.

ARTICLE

2. **A broader governance lens:** Beyond finances, Jacobs' successors can probe strategy, risk management, and sustainability - core pillars of modern governance.
3. **A global ripple effect:** From Westminster to corporate boardrooms, MPs and shareholders could emulate Jacobs, using digital tools to ensure real-time accountability. Australia's recent parliamentary inquiries into banking misconduct, for instance, show how data-driven oversight can reshape industries.

South Africans, frustrated by governance failures, increasingly see transparency as the foundation of trust, which could shape future votes. In Botswana, the late President Sir Seretse Khama's principled leadership built a governance model that has made the country a beacon of integrity in Africa for decades. Estonia, by contrast, shows how leaders can harness digital tools to create a transparent e-governance system, setting a global standard. South Africa could follow this dual path, with courageous leaders using modern governance oversight tools to drive accountability.

A new era of accountability

Jacobs' performance is a wake-up call. Accountability should not start with a public grilling. Institutionalising real-time governance -- through digital governance frameworks accessible to parliaments and boards -- can help to prevent failures before they escalate. The "Liam effect" could mark a turning point for South Africa, inspiring a generation of new, young leaders to demand uncompromising accountability. South Africa stands at a crossroads - embracing transparency through digital governance could redefine its future.

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