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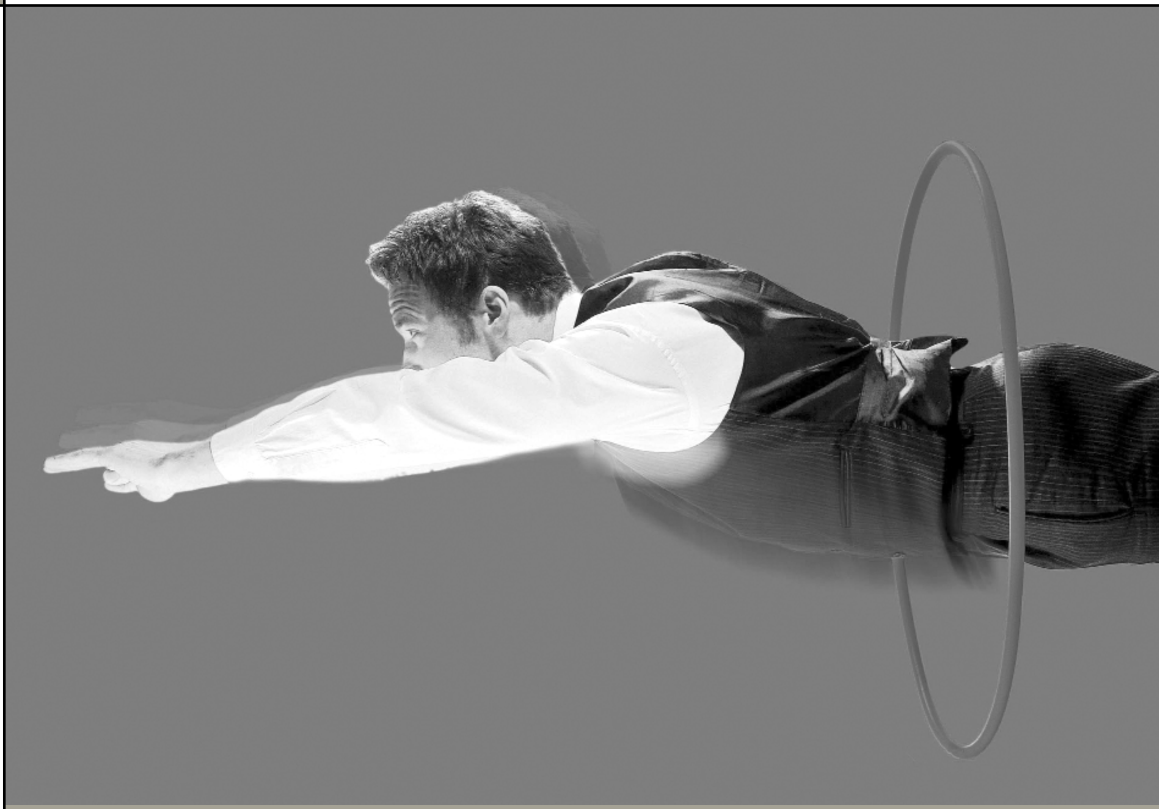
Performance Leadership:
11 Better Practices That Can Ratchet Up Performance



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IBM Center for
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Managing for Performance and Results Series

MANAGING FOR PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS SERIES

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On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report, "Performance Leadership: 11 Better Practices That Can Ratchet Up Performance," by Robert D. Behn.

Dr. Behn is a wizened and wise analyst whose writing is entertaining, clear, and insightful. He offers a simple, direct bottom line: Good performance cannot be compelled, commanded, or coerced. He concludes that performance systems created in law or by central management agencies are attempts to compel good performance, and they basically don't work. He writes, "public employees are required to follow so many processes that devotion to these processes often displaces their devotion to results."

In the report, Dr. Behn moves away from the two conventional tenets of the new public management to either "make the managers manage" or "let the managers manage." Instead, he suggests that we "help the managers manage." His approach to performance leadership encompasses 11 "better practices" that he has observed in use by successful public managers over the years. This approach focuses not on individual attributes and virtues, but rather on leadership activities or practices that can spur improvements in program performance.

We think the practices suggested by Dr. Behn are clearly worth following. We trust that this report will be helpful and informative to all public managers attempting to ratchet up their program's performance.

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Helping the Managers Manage

How can the leaders of a public agency improve its performance? What can the leaders of a governmental organization possibly do that might have a positive effect on the results that their agency produces? This is an important question. This is a leadership question.

The Futile Search for a Performance System

This *leadership question* is not, however, the question about government performance that is usually asked. Traditionally, we have asked the *systems question*. Rather than develop public managers with the leadership capacity to improve the performance of their agencies, we have sought to create performance systems that will impose such improvements. We have sought to create government-wide schemes that will somehow require performance from all departments, agencies, and bureaus. Thus, we have tended (if only implicitly) to ignore the leadership question and, instead, have focused on the systems question: How can we compel, command, or coerce public agencies into improving their performance?[1]

This systems approach is unlikely to prove very effective.[2] Yes, it is possible for a legislature, a budget office, or a central administrative agency to force public agencies to do things that—if done with genuine enthusiasm and subtle intelligence—could contribute to improved performance. Those upon whom such requirements are imposed, however, are not likely to view them as helpful. They will see these requirements as another complex confusion of administrative regulations with which they must dutifully comply—not as a coherent collection of supportive principles that, if deployed discernibly and employed adaptively, might actually help. Administrative requirements (for performance or anything else) are not designed to elicit discernment and adaptation. They are created to impose obedience and conformity.

Moreover, the senior managers upon whom such compliance is imposed have seen all this before. They have learned how to cope. Indeed, they became senior managers precisely because they learned how to cope. They learned that administrative requirements are hoops through which they must jump. And, as they moved up the organizational hierarchy, they learned to become very good hoop jumpers. They can now jump nimbly through big hoops and small hoops, red hoops and green hoops; they can even jump through flaming hoops without getting the least bit singed.

Make, Let, or Help the Managers Manage

Still, some of those who have become master hoop-jumpers may desire to do more. They may seek to progress from complying with the requirements of the latest performance-management system to doing something that might help improve the performance of their agency. What should they do? What could they do? How might they exercise leadership so as to ratchet up their organization's performance? If we can provide public-sector executives with a proven strategy—or even with just a few helpful suggestions—we would be doing a useful service.

Over the last two decades, "new public management" has come to represent a collection of managerial philosophies, ideas, and practices designed to improve the performance of government.[3] Donald Kettl and others have organized these various ideas and practices into two basic strategies: (1) make the managers manage, and (2) let the managers manage. Based on the assumption that public managers lacked clear incentives to improve performance, the make-the-managers-manage strategy was designed to induce public-sector executives to concentrate on improving performance in specific ways. In contrast, the let-the-managers-manage strategy reflected the assumption that these officials knew how to improve performance but were constrained from doing so by the multitude of rules and regulations. Thus, this strategy was designed to ensure that public-sector executives possessed the flexibility necessary to do what was required to improve performance.[4]

Both of these approaches, however, are based on one additional assumption: The people who manage public agencies do know how to improve performance. That is, they possess the capacity—the leadership and managerial skills—necessary to produce real results. Thus, all that is required is to give them either the correct incentives or the necessary flexibility, and they will do it—they will just know what managerial actions will most effectively improve performance.

Whether these public officials have inherited this managerial talent from their ancestral genes or have absorbed it from their organizational and political environment is never stated. The assumption is strictly implicit. Nevertheless, it lurks behind both new-public-management strategies. If we change the condition within which public managers must work—by creating either better incentives or more flexibility—the existing managers will significantly improve organizational performance.

Perhaps, however, the managers do not know what to do. Perhaps managerial talent is difficult to acquire, either from one's parents or one's environment. Perhaps changing the rules is not enough. After all, the private sector devotes significant resources to developing the managerial skills and leadership talents of individuals whom it expects to assume significant responsibilities in the future. And the private sector, it is assumed, has better incentives and more flexibility than government has. Businesses do not assume that managerial talent is acquired genetically or absorbed experientially. Businesses assume that managerial talent can—and should—be learned. In comparison, government significantly underinvests in developing its own managerial capacity.[5]

Maybe we should do more than make or let public managers manage. Maybe we also need a help-the-managers-manage strategy. Maybe we should help officials in the executive branches of our governments advance from administrators to managers to leaders. If we wish to improve the performance of public agencies, maybe we should find a way to help them learn how to exercise performance leadership.[6]

The Search for Better Practice

The following approach to performance leadership makes no claim to be a *best practice*. It might be, however, in Eugene Bardach's phrase, a "smart practice."[7] If employed with thoughtful discernment of the underlying principles and deployed with intelligent adaptation to the characteristics and needs of the particular organization and its environment, this approach might help some public managers improve their agency's performance, marginally or even significantly.

After all, to ratchet up performance a notch or two, most public managers do not require a best practice. All they need is a *better practice*—a set of operational principles, or just one good idea, that is an improvement over what they are currently doing.

This approach is just that—an approach. It is not a rule. It is not a requirement. It is not a prescription. It is certainly not a system.[8] I make no claim that it is the *only* way for public managers to improve the performance of their organization—or even that it is the *best* way. It is merely *a* way—one *possible* way. It reflects my observations of a variety of efforts by managers of public agencies large and small to improve performance. Some of these observations have been my own. Some of these I have examined in detail;[9] others I have viewed only fleetingly. Still others I have "observed" strictly through the eyes of others.[10]

This approach to performance leadership contains little that is wholly novel or overwhelmingly revolutionary. Indeed, most of its 11 components[11] have been advocated by numerous scholars and practitioners. Yet, too few public managers exploit the advantages of these practices. (Perhaps they have to devote too much time, resources, and energy jumping through multiple hoops.) Fewer still exploit the advantages that may accrue from employing several of these practices simultaneously.

I make no claim that employing all 11 practices is necessary to improve a public agency's performance. Still, each practice is, if the agency manager is not already using it, a *better* practice. Moreover, the 11 do reinforce each other. (Several of these practices are based on the same underlying principles, so that employing one practice without another is often difficult.) Consequently, public managers who employ several of them will have a better opportunity to exploit their reinforcing benefits.

The 11 practices that might be better than current practices are organized into three categories:

- The leaders of the agency can employ four practices to *create a performance framework*.
- The leaders can employ four other practices to *mobilize the organization's resources* to ratchet up performance in some tangible way.
- The leaders can employ three additional practices to *learn how to improve* performance.

These 11 practices offer *one approach* to performance leadership.

One Approach to Performance Leadership: 11 Better Practices That Can Ratchet Up Performance

Creating the Performance Framework:

What would it mean to do a better job?

Practice 1: *Articulate the organization's mission.*
Proclaim—clearly and frequently—what the organization is trying to accomplish.

Practice 2: *Identify the organization's most consequential performance deficit.*
Determine what key failure is keeping the organization from achieving its mission.

Practice 3: *Establish a specific performance target.*
Specify what new level of success the organization needs to achieve next.

Practice 4: *Clarify your theoretical link between target and mission.*
Define (for yourself, at least) your mental model that explains how meeting the target will help accomplish the mission.

Driving Performance Improvement:

How can we mobilize our people?

Practice 5: *Monitor and report progress frequently, personally, and publicly.*
Publish the data so that every team knows that you know (and that everyone else knows) how well every team is doing.

Practice 6: *Build operational capacity.*
Provide your teams with what they need to achieve their targets.

Practice 7: *Take advantage of small wins to reward success.*
Find lots of reasons to dramatize that you recognize and appreciate what teams have accomplished.

Practice 8: *Create "esteem opportunities."*
Ensure that people can earn a sense of accomplishment and thus gain both self-esteem and the esteem of their peers.

Learning to Enhance Performance:

How must we change to do even better?

Practice 9: *Check for distortions and mission accomplishment.*
Verify that people are achieving their targets in a way that furthers the mission (not in a way that fails to help or actually undermines this effort).

Practice 10: *Analyze a large number and a wide variety of indicators.*
Examine many forms of data—both quantitative and qualitative—to learn how your organization can improve.

Practice 11: *Adjust mission, target, theory, monitoring and reporting, operational capacity, rewards, esteem opportunities, and/or analysis.*
Act on this learning, making the modifications necessary to ratchet up performance again.

Creating the Performance Framework

The first question that an agency's leadership team must address is: "What would it mean to do a better job?" Regardless of the level at which the organization is performing, it can still improve. So what might this improvement look like?

The answer to this question is a judgment call. Different people will make this call differently. In some circumstances, the answer may appear obvious. In others, it may be open to much debate. But this debate should not go on forever. If the organization is actually to improve performance, it cannot go on forever. Moreover, regardless of how smart the leaders are, they are unlikely to get this (or any other aspect of their performance strategy) perfectly right the first time.

They ought to accept that they will not get it perfectly right the second time or even the hundredth time, and that they will have to grope along.[12] From the very beginning, they ought to accept that their efforts will make some performance improvements, which can be improved upon further, but only later. That is what the third category of practices is all about: learning how to improve even more.

Historically, however, public-policy practitioners have followed (and public-policy theorists have advocated) some variant of the get-all-of-the-ducks-lined-up-before-you-do-anything strategy. But getting all of the ducks lined up can take a lot of time—as measured in years. To line up all of the ducks, the leaders have to create an elaborate strategic plan. They have to get all of the key stakeholders and all of the key legislators to agree to the basic approach outlined in the strategic plan, plus numerous key details. They have to get the funding approved by the budget office, the ways and means committee, and the entire legislature. They have to get the personnel office, and the procurement office, and a few other overhead agencies to sign off on the necessary waivers. And before they know it, the agency's leaders have outlived their appointing authority's tenure.

This is not, however, the only possible strategy. The leaders of public agencies can also employ the groping-along strategy. Indeed, behind my approach to performance leadership lies the assumption that, to create a performance strategy, an organization's leaders need to "get it up and running and then fix it."[13]

Practice 1: Articulate the Organization's Mission

This first practice is hardly profound. It is advocated by numerous management gurus and followed by many practicing managers. Everyone in the organization needs to understand the big picture. Thus, the leaders of the organization need to proclaim, clearly and frequently, what the organization is trying to accomplish.

When you walk into the main lobby of many business firms, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, you will find the mission statement displayed on the wall. Yet, how many people know what these words say? How many appreciate the values that these words are designed to represent? How many act daily (or even occasionally) to further the basic purposes that are proclaimed in the mission statement and that thus constitute the rationale for the organization's existence? How many public employees go about their assigned tasks completely oblivious to how these tasks contribute (or not) to their agency's mission?

For any organization, particularly for a public agency, it is not enough to form a committee or engage a consultant to write or update the mission statement. After all, in the words of Scott Adams, a mission statement is nothing more than "a long awkward sentence that demonstrates management's inability to think clearly."[14] Even if a public agency's mission statement is neither long, nor awkward, nor convoluted, posting the statement on the wall is not enough. If the agency's leaders want everyone in the organization to take the mission seriously, they need to reiterate its fundamental points at every opportunity.

Practice 2: Identify the Organization's Most Consequential Performance Deficit

The mission of any organization—public, private, or nonprofit—is necessarily vague. It may be inspirational; nevertheless, it lacks specificity. It fails to provide any useful guidance about what to do next: What specific problem does the organization need to attack now to significantly improve its performance? The words in the mission statement do not answer this operational question. Thus, the organization needs to determine what key failure is keeping it from achieving its mission: "What is our most consequential performance deficit?"

Naturally, the organization will have a variety of failures and performance deficits. Just as naturally, it cannot attack all of them at once. It must choose. This is the first challenge to the organization's leadership—to figure out, from the variety of problems inhibiting its ability to produce results, that one performance deficit (or, at most, a very few) on which the organization should now focus its intelligence and energies.

This performance deficit can be anywhere along the causal or value chain that runs from inputs to processes to outputs to outcomes:

Inputs. The big performance deficit might be in the inputs. The organization, for example, might not possess people with the necessary knowledge or skills. If the leaders of a school district believe the caliber of its teachers to be the major cause of its under-performance—i.e., why the schools are not doing a better job of educating the children—then the biggest performance deficit is at the input end of the causal chain.

Processes. Alternatively, the big performance deficit might be in the processes. The organization might not be employing the strategies, tactics, plans, structures, procedures, routines, or habits that are most effective in converting its inputs into the desired outputs. For example, the leaders of a school district might conclude that they have recruited excellent teachers but are asking them to teach the wrong curriculum—that the teachers are using textbooks or curriculum guidelines that fail to match the content covered on the statewide tests employed to define the district's performance. Or, it could be that these excellent teachers have the right curriculum, but that their allocation of time among the various items on the curriculum does not mesh with the knowledge and skills emphasized on the statewide test.

Outputs. Or the most significant deficit might be the organization's failure to focus on the desired outputs. The leaders might have obtained the necessary inputs and created effective processes. Yet, the people within the organization might be merely employing those inputs and following those processes without any dedication to the outputs they were charged with producing.

Government agencies are particularly prone to this kind of performance failure. After all, public employees are required to follow so many processes that devotion to these processes often displaces their devotion to results. Consequently, the agency's performance deficit might be that it has forgotten what it is actually trying to accomplish—that it is following all of the required standard operating procedures without thinking about how they do (or do not) contribute to the mission. A school system might have hired a staff of talented teachers, and it might have selected a truly effective curriculum. At the same time it might be so arrested by the need to follow all procedures required by the city council, the state board of education, and (now) the federal government that it fails to devote much attention to teaching its students important skills and essential knowledge.

Outcomes. Unfortunately, government agencies (like all organizations) do not produce outcomes. Organizations produce outputs. The outcomes are what happens outside the organization. Automobile manufacturers do not produce transportation; they produce cars. County health departments do not produce health; they produce measles immunizations and hypertension testings. Society takes the outputs of many organizations and converts them into outcomes. Society needs public organizations that produce good, effective outputs. Citizens might like to believe that government produces societal outcomes (so that they need not worry about their own contribution), but public agencies can produce only outputs.

When the leaders of a public agency are seeking to identify their organization's most consequential performance deficit, they have to work from a list of inputs, processes, and outputs—but not outcomes. They have to concentrate on the aspects of performance that the organization, and its collaborators, can influence.[15] They want to select a performance deficit that is significantly impairing the agency's ability to influence the outcomes to which its mission tells it to contribute. Nevertheless, this performance deficit will lie in the domains of either inputs, processes, or outputs.

The leaders have to understand the workings of their causal chain. They have to possess an idea about what causes what. They have to understand how their inputs are combined by their organizational processes—how the operations and behaviors that go on inside their organizational black box produce their outputs. They have to understand how their outputs interact with societal processes to produce outcomes.

Identifying the organization's performance deficit is clearly a subjective judgment. Every organization—no matter whether public or private; no matter how well it is performing—has multiple performance deficits. It has a variety of things that, if it did them better, would enhance its outputs, and thus the outcomes to which it contributes. Someone has to choose. This is a leadership requirement. If the individuals at the top of the organizational hierarchy fail to select the performance deficits on which their organization should focus, they have no claim to the title of leader.

The leaders of the organization can make this selection brilliantly or haphazardly. They can put some serious thought into the question, "On which performance deficit should our organization focus?" They can deliberately choose a big deficit that, when eliminated, will have a major impact on the organization's performance. Or they can just as deliberately select a small deficit that, when eliminated, will demonstrate to those working in the organization (and perhaps to multiple stakeholders) that they can accomplish even more. Of course, even if they choose deliberately, the organization's leaders can choose badly.

Still, the biggest mistake is not to choose at all—to avoid the responsibility for determining what the organization should fix next.

Practice 3: Establish a Specific Performance Target

Having made the admittedly subjective judgment about the aspect of the organization's performance deficit on which it will focus, the leaders need to make a second judgment. They need to create an explicit performance target for closing that deficit. That is, the leaders of the organization need to specify what new level of success the organization should attempt to achieve next and by when.

Does the school system need to hire 20 more highly qualified teachers before next September 1? Or does it need to hire 200 of them? Does the school system need to select a new curriculum package by June 1 (so that the teachers can study it over the summer and be ready to use it by September 1)? Or does it need to select the new curriculum by January 30 (so that the teachers can experiment with it during the spring)? Or, if the school system has suitable teachers and an appropriate curriculum, should it concentrate on ratcheting up its output—on, say, improving its average test scores in math from 75 to 85 in two years, or on reducing the percentage of students with math scores below 50 from 30 percent to 5 percent in three years?

Note that the school system need not have recruited the best teachers or have identified the ideal curriculum before deciding to declare that its most critical performance deficit is its test scores in math or writing or history. It simply needs to make the (again, admittedly subjective) judgment that the performance deficit on which it can make the biggest improvement is at the output end of the causal chain. If, in trying to improve test scores, it discovers that it needs a different mix of teachers with pedagogical skills more suited to its students or its curriculum, or a different curriculum with a pedagogical strategy that reflects the learning style of its students, it can then make the necessary adjustments.

Regardless of whether an agency's leaders choose an input, a process, or an output as their performance target, they need to ensure that it possesses two characteristics:

(1) They need to specify their target in sufficient detail to ensure that a vast majority of people will agree when it has been achieved.

(2) They need to attach to their target a specific deadline.

Unless they have constructed a target with these two characteristics, they have not created a real performance target.

An input performance target. The leaders of a health department might pick as their target the introduction, by the end of the next calendar year, of a new computer system to track obesity in children. They might recognize that the county's children have recently become significantly overweight and that they need to attack this problem. At the same time, they might have observed from the experiences of other counties that, before creating some new organizational processes for attacking the problem or before beginning to focus on specific outputs, they need to improve their operational infrastructure. Of course, while some in the department are bringing the new computer online, others can work on improving the processes they will employ or on identifying the appropriate outputs to produce. Nevertheless, the leaders have concluded (given their professional experience, recent research, and knowledge of the department's culture) that the biggest cause of their inadequate performance is this input. Thus, their first performance target is to eliminate this particular deficit.

A process performance target. Alternatively, this health department's leaders might choose as their target a complete redesign, within two months, of the strategic mechanism for conducting adult hypertension testing and education. The leaders recognize that the department is completely ineffective at convincing adults to get tested and at educating those whose results are dangerously high. Thus, it decides that it cannot begin to focus on the output of the number of individuals it tests and educates until it develops a completely new strategy and procedures for doing so.

An output performance target. Finally, the leaders of a health department might select as their target the immunization of 99.5 percent of the county's three-year-olds against measles by June 30. The county has an adequate supply of the vaccine and has developed an effective strategy for reaching parents; it simply needs to energize county employees to focus on output production. Sure, there may be some dispute about how many three-year-olds live in the county (should we count the children of migrant farm workers who move into the county in late May?), and even some (though less) dispute about how many children actually received a proper immunization. Nevertheless, a rudimentary accounting system should be able to certify, to most people's satisfaction, whether or not the target has been achieved.

Practice 4: Clarify Your Theoretical Link between Target and Mission

Unfortunately, no performance target is precisely the same as the organization's mission. By achieving the target, the organization should further its mission. Otherwise the leadership team would not have chosen to focus on the related performance deficit or have selected this as its next target. Still, the leaders need to make this connection very clear. They need to define (for themselves individually, at least, and perhaps collectively) a mental model that explains how meeting the target will help accomplish the mission.

In some circumstances, the causal connection will be obvious. If a health department delivers the proper measles immunization to a child, that child's probability of actually being immune to measles, and thus healthier, is greater than 99 percent.[16] The output of immunization is directly connected to the outcome of a healthier child. Moreover, the immunization process is relatively simple and, if followed by certified personnel, does not have a lot of defects; if a certified nurse follows the standard operating procedures for measles immunization, the immunization will take. The theoretical linkage between achieving the performance target and furthering the agency's mission is not theoretical at all. It has been well established, very empirically.

Unfortunately, most actions taken by most public agencies are not connected this closely to their mission. The causal link between the actions taken by the agency to close its performance deficit and the achievement of its mission may be indirect, vague, poorly understood, or nonexistent. Consequently, the leaders of public agencies cannot merely define a performance deficit, select a performance target, and mobilize their organization to achieve this target—all under the (implicit) assumption that this will further its mission. These leaders need first to clarify explicitly the nature of their theory that connects reaching the target and furthering the mission. Then, once they have reached the target, they need to check to see whether this effort has, indeed, produced some real improvement.

Driving Performance Improvement

Having created their performance framework, the agency's leaders must address a second question: "How can we mobilize our people?" Having created their performance target, the leaders have to convince the people in the agency to work intelligently and energetically to achieve this target.

This effort to mobilize the resources of the organization is hardly mechanical. It, too, requires leadership, but it does not require charisma. Certainly, it would help if the leaders could walk into an agency conference on a Friday afternoon and so dazzle their staff that everyone leaves determined to produce twice as much the next week. Most leaders cannot do that. Instead, they do a large number of mundane things that, collectively, can have the same kind of gripping impact on individual and organizational behavior.

Practice 5: Monitor and Report Progress Frequently, Personally, and Publicly

Again, this better practice is hardly mysterious. The leaders of the organization have to track and publish the performance data so that every team knows that the leadership knows (and that everyone else knows) how well every team is doing.[17]

This is the first step in motivating teams (and the individuals on these teams) to achieve their performance targets. The mechanism chosen to monitor and report progress depends on both the culture of the organization and the nature of the performance targets. Still, whatever mechanism the leaders choose, they need to ensure that it provides several kinds of information.

First, this practice of monitoring and reporting needs to dramatize that the organization's leaders are paying attention to its progress. The people in any organization have an easy instrument for determining what their leaders care about; they measure how much time the leaders spend on their various initiatives. If the leaders do not spend time monitoring progress toward their performance targets, the entire organization quickly realizes that the leaders do not really care.

After all, the leaders' most valuable resource is their own time. They can invent clever ways to get around budgetary limits and regulatory constraints. But they face one eternal, immutable constraint; like all other humans, they have only 168 hours in any week. They cannot squeeze 169 hours out of any week, save an hour from one week to the next, or borrow an hour from a colleague or friend. Thus, the metaphor about "spending time" is not a metaphor at all. It is reality. People "spend" time just as they spend money. Both are extremely valuable resources—and time is scarcer than money.

Performance measurement is not performance leadership. Performance measurement is a passive activity easily delegated to a few wonks in a back office. Performance leadership, however, requires the ceaseless, active engagement of the organization's leaders.

If these leaders do not spend time monitoring the organization's performance targets, everyone soon figures out that they are really not interested. If, however, these leaders do spend the time necessary to dramatize that they are carefully following progress, many in the organization will begin to take the performance targets—and their part in achieving them—seriously.

Second, this practice of monitoring and reporting needs to dramatize how well different teams or individuals are contributing to the overall target.

In many circumstances, effective reporting can be done on a single piece of paper. If the responsibility for achieving the performance target is allocated among various teams within the agency, the single piece of paper need contain only two columns: Column A lists all the teams that made their target for the last month, last quarter, or last year; Column B lists all the teams that did not make their target. I call this "The List."[18]

For example, if a state health department creates a production target for immunizations—during the fiscal year give 95 percent of the state's one-year-olds the first dose of the measles vaccine—it can allocate this target among the counties. Each county also has a production target: give 95 percent of its one-year-olds the first dose of the measles vaccine. At the end of the year, the reporting mechanism is quite simple: Column A lists every county that made its 95 percent target; Column B lists every county that did not make this target.[19] One consequence of such a reporting system is that it can motivate improved performance.

What will the members of each county team do when this report arrives? First, they will look to see whether their own county is in Column A or B. Next, they will look to see whether the counties of their closest colleagues are in Column A or B. Finally, they will realize that their colleagues are checking to see whether their own county is in Column A or B. To motivate performance, a reporting mechanism needs to provide everyone with three essential pieces of information:[20]

- It needs to tell every individual how well his or her team is doing in achieving its assigned target.
- It needs to tell every individual how well every other team is doing in achieving its assigned target.
- It needs to tell every individual that everyone else knows how well his or her team is doing in achieving its assigned target.

The performance target could be allocated among individuals rather than teams. Teams, however, have several obvious advantages. The performance of most organizations depends on cooperation among individuals (otherwise, we would not need the organization). And to foster such cooperation, leaders need to both select and assign targets to teams. In fact, they ought to create targets that can be assigned to teams.[21]

Whether the targets are allocated among teams or individuals, however, everyone in the organization must be part of a personal or collective unit with responsibility for achieving a specified target. And every individual must get the three pieces of information about progress toward all of these targets, be they for individuals or for teams.

The leader of each team, naturally, faces an extra burden and thus extra pressure, but the three pieces of information should be made available to everyone in the organization. After all, everyone wants to be a winner. Everyone wants to be in Column A. No one wants to be in Column B. Consequently, if they have an opportunity to move themselves from Column B to Column A, they may try to do so. And if they see some of their colleagues in Column A—teams composed of individuals who, they believe, are neither smarter nor more talented—making their targets, their own ego may drive them to do what is necessary to get themselves listed in Column A.

This is competition, but not of the conventional sort. When we think of the concept of competition, we typically (if only implicitly) think about athletics. At the end of the season, one team is the winner and all of the other teams are losers. Traditional competition is a zero-sum game. But the kind of competition created by The List does not necessarily have only one winner. In fact, every team can be a winner because every team can achieve its own target. These teams are not competing against each other. Each team competes against its own goal, and if it achieves its goal, it moves to Column A—it becomes a winner. Every team can be a winner (or a loser); its success is not limited by the successes of other teams.

I call this "friendly competition."[22] It is still competition. Some teams can win; some teams can lose. But neither the number of winners nor the number of losers is predetermined before the competition begins. Because everyone has the opportunity to be a winner, the competition need not be cutthroat.[23] Teams that share their secrets with their colleagues are not penalized. This is the difference between *competition against each other* and *competition against a goal*. The latter is friendly competition.[24]

Competition motivates. This belief is a fundamental component of the American ideology. But what exactly does it motivate? It does not necessarily motivate people to win. It can motivate people to simply quit. Competition will motivate people to strive to win only if they believe they have a real chance to win. If the members of a team conclude that their chances of winning are, effectively, zero, the competition will hardly motivate them to ratchet up performance. Friendly competition can motivate everyone because it gives every team—and thus everyone—a chance to win.[25]

Practice 6: Build Operational Capacity

Of course, no team can win unless the organization's leaders provide their teams with whatever they need to achieve their targets. W. Edwards Deming did not like goals or, as he often called them, "quotas." One of his reasons was that he believed most organizations set goals for individuals or teams but failed to provide them with the operational capacity to achieve the goals. "I have yet to see a quota that includes any trace of a system by which to help anyone to do a better job," wrote Deming. Personal "goals are necessary" and people should set them for themselves, he argued; "but numerical goals set for other people, without a road map to reach the goal, have effects opposite to the effects sought."[26]

Deming was, admittedly, talking about "numerical quotas for hourly workers," the classical "work standards" of scientific management.[27] Nevertheless, Deming's general point still applies. If the leaders of an organization wish to improve performance, they cannot just assign targets to individuals or teams. They have to provide everyone in the organization with the "system," the "road map"—whatever it takes to create the operational capacity necessary to achieve the targets.

This operational capacity might include money and other resources, people and training, technology and production systems, the cooperation of essential partners, and a road map of tactics and strategies that help teams achieve their targets. Leaders cannot simply demand improved performance. They cannot simply set new, demanding performance targets. The organization's leadership has to give teams the capabilities necessary for achieving these targets.

Practice 7: Take Advantage of Small Wins to Reward Success

Having established a performance target, the agency's leaders need to dramatize that they recognize and appreciate what teams (and the individuals on those teams) have accomplished. And although moving a team from Column B to Column A on a widely distributed piece of paper (or the home page on the agency's intranet) is itself a reward, the leaders can do more. When a team achieves its annual target—or even makes significant quarterly progress toward it—effective leaders understand how to celebrate the success. Some accomplishments warrant the simple recognition of a sincere thank you. Other triumphs require the leaders to kill the fatted calf. The magnitude of the ceremony should match the significance of the victory.

In public agencies, celebrating successes is undervalued.[28] So is saying "thank you." There can be a danger in over-celebrating a minor achievement. In most organizations, however, the more common mistake is to under-acknowledge achievements of all sizes. Most public executives do not say thank you enough. As William James once wrote: "I now perceive one immense omission in my Psychology, — the deepest principle of Human Nature is the *craving to be appreciated,* and I left it out altogether from the book, because I never had it gratified till now."[29]

To foster an environment in which successes will be celebrated more frequently, an agency's leaders can create more milestones. Do not just create a performance target for the year. Break that target down into quarterly and monthly targets. And when a team has an important breakthrough, the agency's leaders need to find a way to signal, both to this team and to everyone else throughout the agency, that this group of individuals has done something truly worthwhile.

This is Karl Weick's "strategy of small wins."[30] Do not try to solve the problems of the world by establishing one cosmic performance target. Do not try to bring about international peace and harmony by the end of the fiscal year. Instead, create performance targets that move the organization closer to achieving its mission. "Pick a winner," advocates Robert Schaffer.[31] Create performance targets that give the people in the organization the opportunity to win—to achieve something that they (and those whose opinions they value) recognize as consequential. Then the agency's leaders have to create a vehicle for making sure that the team's members (and, again, those whose opinions they value) understand that the leaders recognize the significance of the achievement.[32]

This addiction strategy is really quite simple. Create performance targets that people can hit. Get them hooked on success. Give them an opportunity to earn the adrenaline rush that comes from accomplishing something worthwhile, and then give them the challenge of accomplishing even more.

This is why I describe this leadership approach as a way to *ratchet up* performance. Each small win creates not just a sense of accomplishment but also a new and higher plateau—a new baseline from which future performance must be compared.

Practice 8: Create "Esteem Opportunities"

Rewarding success is one way to ensure that the members of high-performing teams can earn a sense of accomplishment and thus gain both self-esteem and the esteem of their peers. And the opportunity to earn such esteem can be an important motivational strategy for any organization's leaders.

After all, once people have satisfied their three most basic needs on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy, they come to the "esteem needs"—the needs "for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others." These needs, Maslow argues, must be "soundly based upon real capacity, achievement, and respect from others." Thus, the need for esteem includes the desire "for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world." But it also includes "the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation."[33]

The leaders of a public agency can contribute to the esteem needs of their organization's employees and collaborators. The leaders can give people an opportunity to take pride in a real achievement. They can give people an opportunity to gain a reputation for real achievement. Moreover, in doing so, the agency's leaders can contribute to their organization's ability to do even more. For, writes Maslow, "satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world."[34]

The strategy of small wins creates successes that can convince people that they possess the ability to achieve even bigger wins. Thus, one of the better practices that the leaders of public agencies can employ to ratchet up performance is to create opportunities for individuals to earn this esteem—both self-esteem and the esteem of others.

The List—the two columns of teams that did and did not achieve their targets—might be described as an effort to create peer pressure. But the phrase "peer pressure" has come to mean (both in the vernacular and in the psychological literature) the coercion that groups place on individual members to engage in some kind of antisocial or pathological behavior. Most commonly, the phrase "peer pressure" refers to the efforts of teenagers to convince their socially responsible peers to participate in the three evils of contemporary culture: sex, drugs, and rock & roll.

To distinguish this better practice from the corrupting influence normally associated with peer pressure, I am experimenting with the label "esteem opportunities." Leaders create esteem opportunities for the people in their organization by giving them a chance to shine. To do so, the leaders have to create two opportunities. First, they have to give people a chance to accomplish something worthwhile. Second, they have to give people a chance to be recognized for the accomplishment, particularly by colleagues, friends, and others whose esteem they value. By setting performance targets, the leaders give people the opportunity to do something useful and important. By saying thank you and hosting celebrations, these leaders recognize people's achievements.

Leaders have many ways to recognize accomplishment and thus to generate esteem. The List is one. Saying thank you and hosting ceremonies are others. But how can the leadership team signal that a team has done exceptionally well? If every team has the opportunity to "win," and if a team can earn only two rankings—the success of Column A or the failure of Column B—how can the leaders create extra esteem for those whose performance warrants special recognition?

One practice (that I have seen employed in a variety of public organizations) is to ask the head of a particularly successful team: "Would you please come back to next month's meeting and tell us how you did it?" In doing so, the organization's leaders thereby reward the team's head by giving him or her an esteem opportunity. At the same time, they have rewarded this individual by giving him or her more work. For now, this team leader must (1) keep up team performance during the coming month so as not to be embarrassed by having to explain why the team regressed, and (2) devote additional time to preparing a coherent presentation to somehow explain the team's success. Still, the message will be clear. Everyone will get it. This team has been asked to report on its strategy, tactics, and processes precisely because it is a high-performing team.

This esteem opportunity need not be limited to the head of the team. The agency's leaders could also ask: "Would you please bring your team to next month's meeting and tell us how you all did it?" Like saying thank you, esteem opportunities are not a scare resource that can be awarded to just a few elites. They can be created for multiple individuals and teams throughout the organization.

Moreover, this kind of esteem opportunity provides for technology transfer, and thus helps to build operational capacity. It gives those on the less successful teams—and often those on the more successful teams, too—the chance to learn new strategies, tactics, and processes. Although the explanations offered by some team members may not be as articulate or clear as ones that the agency's leaders might produce, such imperfect explanations come with one added advantage. Those listening to a convoluted explanation of what everyone accepts to be a significant success can easily conclude: "They aren't so smart. If they can do it, we certainly can do it, too."

Learning to Enhance Performance

Achieving a performance target, however, is not enough. Once a public agency has made its first performance target, it cannot stop. The leaders of the organization have to address a third question: "How must we change to do even better?"

To answer this question, they have to answer several others: "How has our performance deficit changed?" "What is our performance deficit now?" "Have we reduced our deficit but not enough, so that we need to concentrate on reducing it even more?" "Or have we eliminated it—or, at least, reduced it to such a small level—so that we ought to concentrate on a bigger and more significant performance deficit?" And finally: "What should be our new performance target?" To answer these questions, the leaders of public organizations need data and analysis.

The organization's leaders can make such adjustments at any time; but they certainly ought to think carefully about their targets before the beginning of the next fiscal year. Then, once they have created their new performance target for the next year, next quarter, next month, or next week, they have to figure out how to mobilize the people in their organization and their collaborators to achieve this new, more demanding level of performance: "What operational capacity do we need to achieve this new target?" "How can we monitor and report progress so as to create friendly competition?" "How should we reward success, and how can we create esteem opportunities?"

To answer such questions, the agency's leaders need to examine carefully what they have accomplished and why: "Does our theory about causal links between targets and mission still hold? Or must we revise it?" "What can we learn from our past successes and failures, and how can we apply these lessons to ratchet up performance even further?" Like everyone else in the organization, the leaders are hooked. Having achieved a significant success, they know people are expecting even more. They have to ask: "How do we ratchet performance up again?"

Practice 9: Check for Distortions and Mission Accomplishment

Unfortunately, achieving the performance target does not guarantee that the organization achieves its mission. Achieving the target does not even guarantee that the organization has helped to accomplish its mission. Thus, the leaders of the organization need to verify that people are pursuing their targets in ways that do, indeed, further the mission (not in ways that either fail to help or even undermine the effort). They need to check for a variety of distortions in which achieving the target may not have contributed significantly to accomplishing the mission.

After all, the leader's theoretical link between target and mission may not be perfect. Indeed, this link may not even exist. It is always difficult, in any organization, to predict cause-and-effect relationships—to understand the complex interactions that are going on inside the organizational black box. The organization's leaders can take specific actions based on the perfectly reasonable prediction (derived from established theory or personal experience) that it will create behavior that will then produce the results they desire—or, at least, something close to these results—only to discover that actual consequences of these actions are quite different. They have no guarantee that the mental model they used to create their theoretical link between target and mission is correct, or even close to correct.

The leaders need to check carefully to be sure that the agency has, by achieving its performance target, indeed helped further its true purpose. Did their organizational black box respond as they predicted? If their theoretical link does not appear to work as they predicted, they have to figure out why.

The target could have encouraged perverse behavior. Mason Haire's oft-quoted observation, "What gets measured gets done," is very specific. If an organization measures progress toward a performance target, people will do things that help achieve that target. Haire, however, makes no guarantee that they will do things that help further the organization's mission. People will focus their efforts not on the difficult-to-accomplish mission but on the easy-to-measure targets. Consequently, if the leaders have chosen the wrong targets—if they have chosen the wrong thing to measure—they will distort the behavior of people within the organization in such a way as to hit the targets but contribute little or nothing to the mission.

This can be true even if everyone in the organization is purely dedicated to the mission. Their behavior will be influenced by the visibility of the target, by the periodic monitoring and reporting, and by the recognition and esteem that come from hitting interim and final targets. (This is one reason why the leadership needs to continue to emphasize not only the specific targets but also the overall mission.)

Moreover, if people in the agency feel too much pressure to achieve their targets, they will begin to cheat. As the 20th-century American philosopher William Claude Dukenfield (a.k.a. W. C. Fields) once observed, "A thing worth having is a thing worth cheating for."[35] And, just as the 19th-century American philosopher George Washington Plunkitt distinguished between dishonest graft (which was illegal) and honest graft (which was perfectly legal, though everyone knew it was graft),[36] I want to distinguish between two types of cheating: honest cheating and dishonest cheating.[37]

Dishonest cheating is illegal. You can go to jail for it (though you may only lose your job). In recent years, in response to the pressure to improve student test scores, some educators have engaged in dishonest cheating. After an exam, some teachers have driven up individual student scores, and thus school scores, by erasing wrong answers and replacing them with correct answers. Some district officials have driven up district scores by doctoring the data that they report. And, of course, during a test, a teacher can help improve an individual student's score by leaning over and saying, "Johnny, you might want to recheck your answer to question five."[38]

Honest cheating, however, is perfectly legal. Yet, we think of it as cheating. Honest cheating involves focusing strictly on achieving the target while ignoring the mission. Honest cheaters do not care about the mission, only about the target (and its associated rewards). Of course, by emphasizing the importance of the target—and by rewarding teams that reach their targets—the organization's leaders are simultaneously encouraging this honest cheating. They should not be surprised that people and teams, in their rush to achieve their performance targets, will tend to neglect (or even subvert) the mission.

In education, honest cheating is called "teaching to the test." It is perfectly legal to teach to the test. Indeed, in many ways, we want our teachers to do so; we want them to help their students learn the knowledge and capabilities necessary to pass the test. At the same time, we do not want teachers to devote so much effort to teaching their students precisely what will be tested in the annual, standardized exam that they fail to cover other kinds of knowledge and capabilities that are important but will not, and perhaps cannot, be on the standardized test. As one education expert often notes, "The challenge in educational testing is designing a test worth teaching to."

The same is true for other performance targets. The challenge of performance leadership is to create a target that we really want people to achieve—a target that it would be worth cheating *honestly* to achieve. The leaders of a public agency need to establish a performance target such that when people adjust their behavior to achieve it, they are simultaneously adjusting their behavior in ways that further the agency's mission.

Practice 10: Analyze a Large Number and a Wide Variety of Indicators

The leaders of the organization need to learn not only whether they have created any distortions, whether their agency has engaged in any cheating, and whether their agency is making progress toward achieving its mission. Regardless of how well the agency has done, they also need to learn how to improve. For all of these purposes, the leaders need to examine many forms of data—both quantitative and qualitative.

Some of this learning will be quantitatively sophisticated. After all, doing a conscientious evaluation of a public agency's impact is a complex undertaking. It requires a sophisticated analysis of a multitude of potential influences as well as some subtle judgments about how to measure progress toward the mission.[39] It also requires a lot of very clean, quantitative data.[40]

Some of this learning, however, will rely on data that are significantly less quantitative and significantly less verifiable. It will come in the form of anecdotes and casual observations that may, however, be no less helpful. Particularly when the challenge is to uncover distortions and to develop ways to improve for next year, the organization's leaders may find that examining such qualitative data analytically (though not mathematically) can be of significant help.

The leaders can employ quantitative analysis to determine whether their agency is accomplishing its mission. But what they really want to know is whether they are moving their organization in the proper direction. A public agency's leaders need not seek to determine whether they have *achieved* their mission, for they never will. Instead, they need to learn whether or not they have done a better job recently. They need to learn whether or not their performance strategy is truly *furthering* their mission.

Once they are convinced that they are making progress, the leaders have to determine why: What are the things that they have done that have contributed significantly to their progress? It would be nice to be able to use quantitative analysis to answer this question—to determine precisely what actions contributed *most* to their progress. Their organization's data set, unfortunately, will rarely be robust enough to answer this question. But, then, the leaders do not need to determine *the best practice.* They need to uncover only *a better practice*—or two. Then they can employ these better practices in a way that ratchets up performance some more.

Thus, the analytical task of determining what has worked, what has not worked, and what needs to be done to improve performance requires examining a diversity of indicators. Some indicators will be found in formal data sets collected by the agency or by other organizations. Additional indicators will be found in careful, if serendipitous, observations in the reports from the heads of successful teams about how (they think) they achieved their targets, and in the complaints about inadequate resources, perverse incentives, or distortions.

Practice 11: Adjust Mission, Target, Theory, Monitoring and Reporting, Operational Capacity, Rewards, Esteem Opportunities, and/or Analysis

The learning that results from checking for distortions, from evaluating mission accomplishment, and from analyzing numerous indicators, itself, accomplishes very little. The leaders of the agency need to act on this learning, making the modifications necessary to ratchet performance up another notch.

The leaders may change any of the key components of their performance strategy—creating a new performance target, modifying how they monitor and report performance, reallocating resources, creating new operational capacity, revising rewards, inventing new esteem opportunities, or adjusting how they conduct their analyses. They might even decide to modify their mission. If they have significantly improved their operational capacity, they might extend their agency's operating mandate to include other authorized (but underemphasized) purposes.[41] Or, on discovering that they lack some key capability—be that essential funding or cooperative collaborators—they might contract their ambitions.

The Performance Treadmill

Thus, the cycle begins all over again. But I do not think of this as a neatly drawn, annual circle, containing 11 boxes with 11 (unidirectional) arrows connecting Box N to Box N+1 (and, at the end, Box 11 to Box 1). Rather, my operational diagram is quite messy.[42] After all, if the leaders of a public agency learn something in month three, rather than waiting until the end of the year to make the implied change, they will make the change immediately. Indeed, if they are truly trying to ratchet up performance, they are constantly making changes.[43]

Thus, this approach to performance leadership is a treadmill—a treadmill for the organization's leaders, for its employees, and for its collaborators. And once they jump on the treadmill, they cannot get off. They have to keep running—with the success on one lap requiring even more success on the next.

Business executives are accustomed to this treadmill. Shareholders do not say, "Because you did such a good job this year, you can take next year off." Instead, this year's performance becomes the baseline for measuring next year's accomplishments. In business, the expectations of the investors create the performance treadmill. Every year, the investors demand that a firm ratchet up its performance.

Although these 11 better practices reflect observations of public-sector organizations and are designed specifically for them, they can help any organization—public, private, or nonprofit—ratchet up performance. The leaders of a public-sector organization are not, however, required to jump on the performance treadmill. After all, they have a lot of other responsibilities. Citizens are not single-minded in demanding that this year's performance become the baseline for next year's improvements. They are at least as focused on demanding that the leaders of public agencies deploy their financial assets precisely as prescribed by legislation and that they treat citizens, employees and applicants, vendors and bidders very, very fairly. These demands are enough to keep any self-respecting public manager quite busy. Why not focus on meeting the accountability demands for finances and fairness, and leave the demands for improving performance to a successor?[44]

If, however, the leaders of a public agency do wish to ratchet up performance—if they choose to jump on the performance treadmill—these 11 better practices offer one approach that they can employ to exercise performance leadership.

Endnotes

1. I make a clear distinction between "performance systems" and "performance management." A performance system is a government-wide effort. One kind of performance system is performance measurement; another is performance budgeting. It is a system just like a procurement system or a personnel system. Like any system, it requires public agencies to follow rules and regulations, to publish annual reports, and to leave paper trails that permit others to audit compliance with these rules and regulations. The Government Performance and Results Act is one such system.

Performance management is not a system. Performance management is more than performance measurement. To me, performance management is the active, conscious efforts of the leadership of a public agency to produce more, or better, or more consequential results that citizens value. In both the academic and political worlds, however, the phrase "performance management" is commonly used to mean a mere performance system. Thus, to emphasize my distinction, I will use the contrasting labels of (1) performance systems, and (2) performance leadership.

Are CompStat and CitiStat performance systems? They are certainly government-wide (or, at least, agency-wide) efforts to require different units to do specific things. But, the public leaders who created these efforts hardly thought of them as systems that, once created, would continue to function on automatic pilot. Instead, Commissioner William Bratton of the New York Police Department and Mayor Martin O'Malley of Baltimore both recognized that to make their approach work to improve performance required the constant attention of top leadership. If the top leaders of the department or the city stop going to the meetings, the system will have no impact on the behavior of the managers at the next level.

2. Robert D. Behn, "Creating Leadership Capacity for the Twenty-First Century: Not Another Technical Fix," in John D. Donahue and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (eds.), *For the People: Can We Fix Public Service?* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003), pp. 191–224.

3. There are, of course, many definitions of "the new public management." For mine, see Robert D. Behn, *Rethinking Democratic Accountability* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2001), chapter 2, "Performance and the New Public Management," pp. 22–39.

4. Donald F. Kettl, "The Global Revolution in Public Management: Driving Themes, Missing Links," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 447–448.

5. *The Report of the National Commission on the Public Service, Leadership for America, Rebuilding the Public Service* (Washington, D.C.: The National Commission on the Public Service, 1999), pp. 42–44. *Task Force Reports to the National Commission on the Public Service, Leadership for America, Rebuilding the Public Service* (Washington, D.C.: The National Commission on the Public Service, 1999), pp. 140–146, 150.

6. The following does not reflect the personality-trait school of leadership. Instead of examining the individual attributes and virtues that may convert an individual into a leader, I am focusing on the leadership activities and actions that can help public managers improve the performance of their agencies.

7. Eugene Bardach, *Getting Agencies to Work Together: The Practice and Theory of Managerial Craftsmanship* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1998), pp. 35–41.

8. A note to legislators, budget officers, and other overhead regulators: Please do not attempt to impose this "approach" on all of the departments, agencies, and bureaus within your jurisdiction by requiring them to jump through 11 more hoops. Please do not demand that they file an 11-chapter annual report explaining in detail how they followed each of the 11 practices. If you really want to improve the performance of particular agencies, *help* the managers become leaders by providing them with opportunities to learn how to use these 11 (and other) leadership practices.

9. Those that I have investigated in some detail include the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, the New York City Bureau of Motor Equipment, the Washington Department of Labor and Industries, and Homestead Air Force Base. These investigations include not only the traditional after-the-fact interviews with key individuals at multiple levels in the organization, but also, for many of these organizations, in-process observations of the leaders in action at internal meetings and other settings.

10. For example, much has been written about the CompStat strategy for improving the performance of the New York City Police Department (and the police departments of other cities):

- William Bratton with Peter Knobler, *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic* (New York: Random House, 1998).
- James Lardner, "The C.E.O. Cop," *The New Yorker* (February 6, 1995), pp. 45–46, 51–57.
- Jack Maple with Chris Mitchell, *The Crime Fighter: How You Can Make Your Community Crime-Free* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).
- Paul E. O'Connell, *Using Performance Data for Accountability: The New York City Police Department's CompStat Model of Police Management* (Washington, D.C.: The IBM Center for The Business of Government, August 2001).
- Eli B. Silverman, NYPD *Battles Crime: Innovative Strategies in Policing* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001).
- Chris Smith, "The NYPD Guru," *New York* (April 1, 1996), pp. 29–34.
- Dennis C. Smith and William J. Bratton, "Performance Management in New York City: CompStat and the Revolution in Police Management," in *Quicker, Better, Cheaper? Managing Performance in American Government,* Dall Forsythe (ed.), (Albany: Rockefeller Institute Press, 2001).

For another example of performance leadership, see Burton Rosenthal, "Lead Poisoning (A)," C14-75-123.0, and "Lead Poisoning (B)," C14-75-124.0 (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1975).

11. I apologize for having 11 practices; the original version of this list had an even six practices. (See Robert D. Behn, *Leadership Counts: Lessons for Public Managers from the Massachusetts Welfare, Training, and Employment Program* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), chapter four, "Managing for Performance," pp. 49–82.) Indeed, when producing a list of almost anything, it is incumbent upon the list producer to edit the elements so that they number 10 or 12, or perhaps five, six, or eight. Lists of seven or nine or 13 have been traditionally inadmissible. David Letterman never reads a top-11 list.

Nevertheless, as I have attempted to observe and define some better practices for performance management, I have been unable to justify cutting the list to 10 or to warrant expanding it to 12. I put each item on this list because I wanted to emphasize it. For example, I could have combined Practice 9 (Check for cheating, distortions, and mission accomplishment) with Practice 10 (Analyze a large number and a wide variety of indicators). After all, Practice 10 is how you do Practice 9. But I wanted to make both of these activities stand out. Similarly, Practice 3 (Establish a performance target) is hardly more than an obvious extension of Practice 2 (Identify the organization's most consequential performance deficit). Yet, again, I wanted to distinguish the two actions and emphasize the importance of both; thus I gave them separate numbers.

Nevertheless, it would be nice to add one item (but not two) to create a list containing an even dozen practices, thus eliminating the dissonance that readers will feel when confronted with an oddball list of 11. Any suggestions?

12. For a discussion of "management by groping along," see Robert D. Behn, "Management by Groping Along," *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Fall 1988), pp. 643–663; and Behn, *Leadership Counts,* chapter seven, "Management by Groping Along," pp. 127–150.

13. See Behn, *Leadership Counts,* p. 127.

14. Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Principle: A Cubicle's-Eye View of Bosses, Meetings, Management Fads & Other Workplace Afflictions* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1996), p. 36.

15. This argument depends, of course, on my definition of *outputs* and *outcomes*. Many people use these two words as if their distinction were self-obvious, at least at the abstract level. When faced with a specific

public agency with a particular set of responsibilities, however, people will not necessarily define the agency's output or outcome in the same way. My definition of an *output* is what the agency itself produces—what it puts out the door.

For a school system, the *output* is students with diplomas, knowledge, and skills. But, of course, the *outcome* arrives only many years later when the school system's students have become adults. The outcome to which we citizens want a school system to contribute is that its graduates grow up to be *productive employees and responsible citizens.* Obviously, numerous societal influences affect what a community's children become when they grow up; the school system is only one such influence.

For a health department, the *output* might be the children immunized against measles and the adults tested for hypertension. But, of course, the *outcome* that we care about is the *health of people* in the community. And a county health department cannot control the behavior of adults who have dangerously high blood pressure even if it gives these adults the latest warnings and advice in the most persuasive of ways. Similarly, the department cannot even ensure that all of the community's parents will respond to its immunization announcements and warnings and get their children immunized (though requiring immunization for school attendance can help).

The leaders of a public agency can broaden the boundaries of their organization by recruiting collaborators to contribute to their *outputs*. A school superintendent can convince parents and civic leaders to take responsibility for contributing to the education of the district's students. A county health officer can recruit others to help convince adults with hypertension that they should eat differently and exercise more or to help convince parents to get their children immunized. Such entrepreneurship broadens the operational boundary of the "organization" and thus helps to create better outputs—and, we assume and hope, better outcomes. Still, even the most creative public managers cannot completely control (what I define as) the *outcomes*. Society simply comes with too many other influences.

16. "Studies indicate that more than 99 percent of persons who receive two doses of measles vaccine (with the first dose administered no earlier than the first birthday) develop serologic evidence of measles immunity." William L. Atkinson, Charles Wolfe, Sharon G. Humiston, Rick Nelson (eds.), *Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases,* 7th edition (Atlanta, Ga.: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002), p. 104.

17. Here I assume that responsibility for achieving the agency's performance target will be divided among several teams rather than individuals. If the target was to immunize 99.5 percent of the children in a county against measles, the county could be divided into districts; then a team could be assigned to each district and given its own target. If the target was to introduce a new computer system, that task could be broken down into subtasks; different teams could be assigned to complete each such subtask. Of course, these targets or tasks could be assigned to individuals rather than teams.

18. Robert D. Behn, "On the motivational impact of: The List," *Bob Behn's Public Management Report,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 2003): http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/TheBehnReport/October2003.pdf.

19. The creation of Column B can be considered an effort to shame those who failed to make their targets. Thus, being listed in Column B can be considered a punishment. But if the original targets were fair, if other teams made their (equally demanding) targets, and if the teams listed in Column B were not arbitrarily prevented from making their targets (and thus moving to Column A), the shame or punishment is self-inflicted.

Of course, The List needs to contain only Column A. Column B can be left off. But will the shame or punishment be any less? After all, everyone who sees Column A can immediately calculate who is in the missing Column B.

Note that for some people in some circumstances, shaming may be an effective motivational strategy. For example, King and Mathers report that "rewards, recognition, and the avoidance of negative publicity and sanctions are important to upwardly mobile [school] principals." Richard A. King and Judith K. Mathers, "Improving Schools Through Performance-Based Accountability and Financial Rewards," *Journal of Education Finance,* Vol. 23 (Fall 1997), p. 175.

20. For an example of how the leader of one public agency used a single piece of paper to convey these three pieces of information, see Behn, *Leadership Counts,* pp. 70–73. For an example of how the leader of a quite different public organization used billboards to convey the same three pieces of information, see Robert D. Behn, "Homestead Air Force Base" and "Homestead Air Force Base: Sequel."

21. I am grateful to Frederick Thompson for not letting me forget this point. Personal communication, October 23, 2003.

22. Robert D. Behn, "On the characteristics of: Friendly Competition," *Bob Behn's Public Management Report,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (November 2003): http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/TheBehnReport/November2003.pdf.

23. Several years ago, while visiting the campus of Johns Hopkins University at the beginning of the fall semester, I picked up a copy of the first issue of the student newspaper, which, as a courtesy to freshmen, included a glossary of key university slang. And perhaps the most valuable service contained in this list was an explanation of the practice of "throating." Many undergraduates have chosen to attend Johns Hopkins as a pathway to medical school. Of course, each medical school admits only a fixed number of Johns Hopkins graduates. Consequently, this is a fixed-sum game. For every Johns Hopkins undergraduate who is admitted to the medical school at Harvard, Duke, or the University of San Francisco, one other student is not. So the premed undergraduates see themselves in very unfriendly competition with each other. In fact, some see it to be in their direct interest to sabotage the laboratory experiments of their colleagues. This is "throating."

24. For an example of friendly competition, see Behn, "Homestead Air Force Base" and "Homestead Air Force Base: Sequel."

25. Note that different people can have different definitions of winning. For example, Peter Vaill observes that, even for a sports team, it is not easy to define winning:

> A former college basketball coach once told me that one of the coach's key problems is to get all the players to define "winning" in the same way. For some, winning can mean always being willing to play hurt; for others, it can mean never playing hurt. Where one player may believe in starting fast and hanging on, another will take it easy early in the game and go all out at the end. For one, each game can be an individual freestanding challenge; for another, the challenge is a series of games, or even a whole season. Some players regard all opponents equally; for others, some opponents are much more important than other opponents, and winning against one of the others isn't really "winning."

As Grady Little, former manager of the Boston Red Sox, observed, "You've got to win the World Series in Boston before it's considered winning." Gordon Edes, "Little unsure he wants job," *The Boston Globe,* October 23, 2003, p. C4.

Yet if "the definition of winning is *open*" for a sports team, how unsettled is the definition of winning—the definition of success—for a public agency? This is why setting the performance target is a responsibility of the organization's leadership. Without an explicit performance target—for the entire organization and for individual teams—each individual and unit can define winning in his, her, or its own way. This definition of winning can reflect the particular role these people have in the organization—a role that they (of necessity must) believe is important. It can reflect their own interpretation of the organization's mission. Or it can reflect simply the idiosyncrasies of personality or history.

If the organization's leaders want the employees and collaborators of the organization to strive to achieve the same purpose, they need to set an explicit performance target that defines what winning is. They need to get everyone using the same definition of winning. Leadership, Vaill writes, is "getting everybody on the same wave length regarding what winning is going to mean for the team and keeping them there." This is because, he continues, what an organization "thinks winning is drives action on a minute-to-minute basis." Peter B. Vaill, *Managing as a Performing Art: New Ideas for a World of Chaotic Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), pp. 50, 51.

26. W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Advanced Engineering Study, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1982, 1986), pp. 69, 71. Deming denounces both "numerical quotas for the work force" (pp. 70–75) and "numerical goals for people in management" (pp. 75–77). "Management by numerical goal is an attempt to manage without knowledge of what to do, and in fact is usually management by fear" (p. 76). Clearly, one of the essential components of operational capacity is the knowledge of what to do.

27. Deming, *Out of the Crisis,* p. 70.

28. Tom Peters is, perhaps, the biggest advocate for celebrating successes. Yet, he does confess that "no short-term cost/benefit analysis will provide justification" for such celebrations. And here, Peters is talking about the private sector. Instead, he argues that "you simply must believe in people and believe that people like to be around one another and share one another's successes." Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference* (New York: Random House, 1985), p. 260.

29. William James, *The Letters of William James,* Henry James (ed.), (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), p. 33. (The italics is in the original.) The book on Psychology to which he refers is: William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt, 1890).

30. Karl E. Weick, "Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems," *American Psychologist,* Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1984), pp. 40–49.

31. Robert H. Schaffer, *The Breakthrough Strategy: Using Short-Term Successes to Build the High Performance Organization* (New York: Harper Business, 1988), p. 74.

32. Note that I have focused on rewards for success, not punishments for failure. Punishment might motivate people to do better; but that is not the only response punishment can motivate. Punishment might be an effective motivator for conscripts. After all, they have few alternatives. But if people are volunteers, punishment can simply motivate them to quit. And most of the employees of a public agency—and most of its collaborators—are volunteers. They don't have to work for the agency. They don't have to help it. They can exit. For a discussion of "Shame, Voice, Exit, and Enter," see Robert D. Behn, "Rethinking Accountability in Education," *International Public Management Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2003), pp. 53–55.

33. A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review,* Vol. 50, No. 4 (July 1943), pp. 381–382. This article has been reprinted many times. A recent reprinting can be found in Abraham H. Maslow (Deborah C. Stephens, ed.), *The Maslow Business Reader* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), pp. 251–275.

34. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," p. 382.

35. This line comes from the mouth of Larson E. Whipsnade, as played by W. C. Fields, in the 1939 film, *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man.* Mark A. R. Kleiman calls this "Dukenfield's Law of Incentive Management," http://mkpolitics.blogspot.com/2002_08_25_mkpolitics_archive.html#85399552.

36. William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), pp. 3–6. Since Plunkitt's day, we have taken many of the activities he classified as honest graft and converted them into dishonest graft by making them illegal. Nevertheless, we still have activities that could be classified as honest graft: They are called campaign contributions.

37. Robert D. Behn, "Cheating—Honest and Dishonest," *The New Public Innovator*, May/June 1998, pp. 18–19.

38. For examples of dishonest (and honest) cheating in K–12 education, see:

- Abby Goodnough, "Teachers Are Said to Aid Cheating: Answers Allegedly Supplied in Test in New York City," *The New York Times,* December 8, 1999, pp. A1, A24.
- Randal C. Archibold, "Teachers Recall How Students Got Right Answers, and School Scores Were Raised," *The New York Times,* December 8, 1999, p. A24.
- John Bohte and Kenneth J. Meier, "Goal Displacement: Assessing the Motivation for Organizational Cheating," *Public Administration Review,* Vol. 60, No. 2 (March–April, 2000), pp. 173–182.
- Behn, "Rethinking Accountability in Education," pp. 52–53, 66–67 (particularly endnote, 26).
- Behn, "Cheating—Honest and Dishonest."

39. If the performance target is highly correlated with the mission, as in the case of measles immunizations, the evaluation task will be relatively simple. In most cases, however, the first challenge is to figure out how to value progress toward the mission. The second challenge is to figure out how to attribute various factors—from the agency's work to the collection of possible outside influences—to changes in this mission value.

40. For a discussion of the kind of performance measures needed to evaluate performance, see Robert D. Behn, "Why Measure Performance? Different Purposes Require Different Measures," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 63, No. 5 (September–October 2003), pp. 586–606. Note that the kinds of measures needed to evaluate past performance are usually quite different from the kinds needed to motivate better performance in the future.

41. This suggestion—that the leaders of public agencies think of their new or improved operational capacity as a license to pursue additional purposes—strikes some as unacceptable in a democracy. Of course, this depends upon your perception of the responsibility of those who manage executive-branch agencies. Those who believe that public managers should do no more than obey the specific directions provided by legislators and elected chief executives will find this suggestion illegitimate—even illegal. Those who believe, as Mark Moore writes, that public managers "are *explorers* commissioned by society to search for public value" will not merely find this suggestion reasonable; they will think it is an imperative.

Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 299. See also Robert D. Behn, "What Right Do Public Managers Have to Lead?" *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (May/June 1998), pp. 209–224.

42. In my mental map of this approach to performance leadership, every box is connected in some way (with bidirectional arrows) with every other box. These boxes could, of course, be mapped on a single surface, but the 55 bidirectional arrows would obliterate any meaning to the diagram. And, if you decide to locate the 11 boxes not on a two-dimensional surface but in three dimensions, you can more easily follow individual arrows; but how do you diagram the collection? It is difficult to move a three-dimensional model from room to room, carry it on an airplane, or send it as an e-mail attachment; and we humans have yet to invent three-dimensional paper.

43. For an example of an agency making such changes, see Behn, *Leadership Counts,* note 2, pp. 226–227.

44. I have called this "the accountability dilemma—the trade-off between accountability for finances and fairness and accountability for performance." Behn, *Rethinking Democratic Accountability*, pp. 10–11.

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Robert D. Behn is a lecturer at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the faculty chair of the School's executive-education program on "Driving Government Performance: Leadership Strategies that Produce Results." He specializes in governance, leadership, and the management of large public agencies.

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He has led retreats for gubernatorial offices and cabinets in several states. He has conducted executive-education seminars in Berlin, Copenhagen, Reykjavik, and Sydney, as well as for the United Nations, governmental associations, federal agencies, and organizations in 22 states.

Dr. Behn publishes the monthly *Bob Behn's Public Management Report*. His latest book is *Rethinking Democratic Accountability* (Brookings, 2001), and he is also the author of *Leadership Counts: Lessons for Public Managers* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

His articles include "Why Measure Performance? Different Purposes Require Different Measures," *Public Administration Review* (2003); "Rethinking Accountability in Education," *International Public Management Journal,* (2003); "The Psychological Barriers to Performance Management: Or Why Isn't Everyone Jumping on the Performance-Management Bandwagon?" *Public Performance & Management Review* (2002); "Strategies for Avoiding the Pitfalls of Performance Contracting," *Public Productivity and Management Review* (1999, with Peter A. Kant); "Branch Rickey as a Public Manager," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (1997); and "Management By Groping Along," *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (1988).

Dr. Behn's "Cutback Budgeting" won the Raymond Vernon Prize for the article in Volume 4 (1985) of *The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* that "makes the greatest contribution to intellectual discourse on public policy and management." His "Management and the Neutrino: The Search for Meaningful Metaphors" won the Marshall E. Dimock Award for the best lead article in *Public Administration Review* in 1992.

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