

Public sector

Summary

Performance breakthroughs

Improving performance in public sector organisations

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, health and criminal justice services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

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Managing performance is about improving how you do things in your organisation...but managers find it difficult and frustrating.

- they feel they are being pulled in several directions
- they feel overwhelmed with 'urgent' priorities and the pace of change
- they feel under constant pressure to deliver both national agendas and the local service

We found six underlying reasons for this frustration...

- leaders don't show enough interest in managing and improving performance, and staff can feel unsupported
- there is little time to learn, and people find learning difficult. 'Review' is often the step in the 'plan – do – review' cycle of performance management that is left out
- there are too many priorities, which is confusing for staff. Organisations need to make clear which are most important
- people don't understand that what they *do* has to change. The task is about change management as well as performance management, and managers must be willing to make tough decisions
- sometimes the performance management system doesn't help, its objectives are not necessarily clear, and it may not fit the organisation
- some people don't perform, and managers find that dealing with under performance is highly challenging

...and eight breakthroughs people make to turn those situations around.

- leaders show their staff that performance matters by what they *do*
- they take time to join-up their thinking and learn about whether things are improving, and if not why
- they take action on what matters the most, to ensure that change happens
- they translate national agendas into something that is more meaningful for their organisation
- they sign up their staff so that everyone feels that they are on the same side
- they find their own framework that is simple, focused, and fits the organisation
- they measure what matters to encourage effort around what is most important
- they help people perform and are prepared to deal with situations where people are not performing

People told us that they wanted insights into why managing performance can be so difficult, why some of the best attempts at improvement can fail, and how other people have begun to tackle common problems. *Performance Breakthroughs* sheds light on these problems, and gives examples of good practice. We have also developed a model for managing performance to help you to assess where your organisation is and what you still need to do to improve the way you manage performance.