

HICD FORWARD IN PRACTICE

Reform Is Approved, but Implementation Is Fragmented

An institutional case study showing how shared outcomes, clear ownership, connected decisions, disciplined implementation, and learning turned reform ambition into coordinated action.

Resource type	Institutional Case Study
Intended users	Public sector leaders, reform sponsors, program teams, donor partners, and implementation advisers
HICD Forward movement	All four movements
Related pillars	Performance, Human Architecture, Workflow, Alignment, Capability, Leadership, and Learning
Estimated use time	10 minutes

WHY THIS CASE MATTERS

Reform approval creates permission to act, but results emerge only when workstreams, decisions, capabilities, and leadership routines function as one implementation system.

The Case at a Glance

A national ministry had approved a major modernization program spanning eleven workstreams. The program had senior sponsorship, funding, technical advisers, and a steering committee, but each workstream used its own plans, decisions, and reporting. Technology design moved ahead of process decisions, new roles were drafted before authority was clear, and training began before managers knew what employees would need to do differently.

Leaders initially described the problem as weak communication, uneven reporting, and resistance from middle management. The HICD Forward lens reframed it as a fragmented implementation system. The institution needed shared outcomes, visible dependencies, clear decision rights, and one discipline for moving reform into daily operations.

The Operating Context

The reform was intended to improve service delivery, accountability, digital administration, workforce capability, and operating efficiency. Eleven technical workstreams covered structure, human resources, finance, procurement, technology, service standards, data, leadership, policy, performance management, and communication. Several partners supported different parts of the program, increasing the need for coordination.

Eleven Workstreams, No Shared Delivery System

Each workstream could demonstrate activity, but no one owned the connections between them. The digital team configured systems before revised workflows were agreed. Human resources prepared role descriptions before the future structure and decision rights were settled. Steering meetings received extensive presentations, while cross workstream decisions and unresolved dependencies accumulated.

What Leaders Initially Assumed

Senior leaders believed that tighter reporting, a stronger communication campaign, and more project management discipline would restore momentum. These actions could improve visibility, but they would not create common outcomes, resolve competing decisions, connect implementation steps, or ensure that completed outputs entered normal operations.

KEY INSIGHT

The institution had created eleven reform projects without creating one reform operating system.

What This Meant in Practice

The work began by agreeing on the results that mattered: faster service, clearer accountability, more consistent processes, better use of data, and stronger institutional capability to sustain change. This shifted the inquiry from whether activities were complete to whether the reform was changing performance and daily work.

The Visible Performance Problem

Eighteen months into the program, the baseline showed extensive reform activity but limited coordinated implementation. Six measures defined the starting point.

39 PERCENT

Major reform milestones completed on schedule.

3 OF 11

Workstreams progressing according to plan.

27 PERCENT

Reform actions with one clearly accountable owner.

68

Unresolved dependencies between workstreams.

21 DAYS

Average decision time for issues affecting several workstreams.

22 PERCENT

Employees reporting meaningful change in daily operations.

CENTRAL MESSAGE

The pattern could not be explained by weak reporting or resistance alone. Activity measures, fragmented ownership, delayed decisions, unmanaged dependencies, and inconsistent implementation disciplines were preventing reform outputs from becoming operating change.

What the HICD Forward Lens Revealed

The diagnosis focused on the conditions most likely to explain the performance gap. The pillars were used as one connected lens, not as separate assessments.

ALIGNMENT

Individual workstreams had formal leads, but no one owned the dependencies between structure, workflow, technology, staffing, capability, and performance. Important decisions crossed several committees.

WORKFLOW

There was no common pathway for analysis, design, approval, testing, implementation, and review. Some workstreams moved directly to full implementation while others remained in consultation.

LEADERSHIP

Senior leaders endorsed the reform but used steering meetings mainly to receive presentations. Reviews did not consistently focus on unresolved dependencies, adoption barriers, or decisions required.

PERFORMANCE

Most indicators counted workshops, policies, systems, and committees. Few measures showed whether services, accountability, consistency, data use, or operating capability were improving.

Additional Conditions

- **Capability:** Technical teams were strong in their specialties but needed applied support in sequencing, dependency management, piloting, stakeholder engagement, and course correction.
- **Human Architecture:** Managers received overlapping instructions from several workstreams and were still held accountable through legacy routines, measures, and approval expectations.
- **Learning:** Lessons were recorded within individual workstreams but rarely changed the design or sequence of work elsewhere in the reform program.
- **Performance and value:** Leaders agreed that success would be judged through operational adoption, service improvement, clearer accountability, decision speed, and the institution ability to sustain change.

DIAGNOSTIC CONCLUSION

The reform was fragmented because the institution had multiple technical projects but no shared operating architecture connecting outcomes, decisions, dependencies, implementation, adoption, and learning.

The Coordinated Response

The institution designed one integrated reform delivery architecture. Each component connected technical workstreams to common outcomes, operating decisions, adoption evidence, and leadership action.

Intervention component	What changed	Implementation evidence
Results architecture	The eleven workstreams were connected to five institution wide outcomes and required to show their operating purpose, dependencies, and adoption evidence.	Outcome progress, dependency status, adoption signals, and performance movement.
Common pathway	All workstreams used one sequence for defining the gap, confirming evidence, designing, testing, reviewing readiness, expanding, and embedding change.	Stage readiness, pilot evidence, implementation decisions, and embedded changes.
Decision rights	Named executives owned complete reform results while workstream leads retained responsibility for technical delivery.	Decision time, ownership gaps, escalations, and actions completed.
Dependency reviews	Twice monthly reviews focused on cross workstream dependencies, delayed decisions, resources, risks, and outputs waiting to enter operations.	Dependencies resolved, blocked actions, risk movement, and leadership decisions.
Leadership routine	Steering meetings replaced lengthy presentations with one dashboard focused on outcomes, adoption, risks, and required decisions.	Decisions made, barriers removed, follow through, and recurring issues.
Capability and pilots	Teams received applied implementation support while five priority changes were tested in two departments before wider expansion.	Pilot results, manager feedback, capability needs, and scale readiness.

Measurable Outcomes

Twelve months after the integrated approach was introduced, the institution recorded stronger delivery, ownership, decision speed, manager clarity, and operational adoption.

What Changed

- Technical workstreams remained distinct but operated through one results framework, one implementation discipline, and visible dependencies.
- Steering meetings became decision forums where leaders assigned ownership, removed barriers, and reviewed adoption rather than activity alone.
- Managers received clearer expectations because process, technology, roles, capability, and measures were introduced as connected operating changes.

How to Interpret the Results

- The outcomes came from creating a reform operating system, not from adding another reporting layer.
- Common pathways and pilots allowed different workstreams to move at appropriate speeds without becoming disconnected.
- Leadership attention to adoption and dependencies helped prevent technically completed outputs from remaining outside daily operations.

Before and After

The figures below demonstrate the scale and range of results that a connected institutional response could reasonably target.

Performance measure	Before	After 12 months
Major milestones completed on schedule	39 percent	78 percent
Workstreams progressing to plan	3 of 11	9 of 11
Actions with one accountable owner	27 percent	96 percent
Unresolved cross workstream dependencies	68	17
Decision time across workstreams	21 days	8 days
Managers clear about unit level change	34 percent	76 percent
Employees seeing meaningful operating change	22 percent	63 percent
Reform outputs embedded in formal operations	60 percent	89 percent

What This Case Demonstrates

Formal approval creates authority to begin reform. It does not create implementation capability. Progress accelerated when the institution stopped managing eleven separate projects and began managing one connected institutional change through shared outcomes, clear ownership, disciplined implementation, and learning.

HICD FORWARD CONNECTION

Movement 1 aligned leaders around institution wide reform outcomes. Movement 2 revealed fragmented ownership, workflow, measures, and leadership routines. Movement 3 translated those findings into one integrated delivery architecture. Movement 4 used adoption evidence, pilots, and dependency reviews to guide adjustment and wider implementation.

Questions for Your Institution

- Which reform workstreams depend on decisions or outputs from one another?
- Who owns the complete institutional result beyond individual technical deliverables?
- What evidence shows that completed reform outputs have entered daily operations?
- Which leadership routine resolves dependencies, adoption barriers, and delayed decisions?

About This Case

This case study presents realistic institutional conditions, decisions, interventions, and illustrative outcomes. It demonstrates how the HICD Forward approach can be applied to a common reform implementation challenge and is not presented as a verified account of a specific client engagement.

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