

## HICD FORWARD IN PRACTICE

# When Results Are Off Track and the Cause Is Unclear

*An institutional case study showing how clear performance definition, evidence, workflow, workload, ownership, leadership, and learning turned competing assumptions into focused action.*

|                              |                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Resource type</b>         | Institutional Case Study                                                                                            |
| <b>Intended users</b>        | Institutional leaders, performance teams, service managers, reform programs, monitoring teams, and OD practitioners |
| <b>HICD Forward movement</b> | All four movements                                                                                                  |
| <b>Related pillars</b>       | Performance, Human Architecture, Workflow, Alignment, Capability, Leadership, and Learning                          |
| <b>Estimated use time</b>    | 10 minutes                                                                                                          |

### WHY THIS CASE MATTERS

**When results decline and explanations compete, the institution needs to define the result, test assumptions with evidence, and act on the conditions that are actually shaping performance.**

## The Case at a Glance

A national employment services agency operated through twelve regional centers. Program enrollment and training participation continued to rise, but fewer participants entered suitable work and remained employed. Leaders, managers, advisers, training providers, employers, and data teams each offered a different explanation for the decline.

*Leaders initially proposed more staff training and additional employment workshops. The HICD Forward lens reframed the issue around one result: participants entering suitable employment and remaining employed for at least six months. This revealed that measures, caseloads, service workflow, employer information, ownership, capability, and leadership routines were interacting.*

## The Operating Context

The agency helped unemployed adults assess their skills, receive career guidance, access training, and connect with employers. For several years, reported job placement had improved. During the next eighteen months, placement and retention declined even as the agency expanded services, partnerships, workshops, and participant enrollment.

### More Activity, Weaker Employment Results

Regional leaders blamed labor market weakness, participant capability, frontline staff, training quality, employer engagement, or unreliable data. Each explanation contained part of the pattern. The agency risked launching several disconnected solutions before establishing what result had changed, where the service pathway was breaking, and which conditions were most influential.

### What Leaders Initially Assumed

Senior leaders believed advisers needed stronger performance management and more training. Others recommended expanding workshops or purchasing new labor market tools. These actions could support improvement, but they would not correct activity based incentives, uneven caseloads, inconsistent assessment, fragmented employer information, unclear ownership, or weak follow up.

#### KEY INSIGHT

**The decline did not have one cause. Several operating conditions were interacting to produce more activity, weaker matching, and lower sustained employment.**

### What This Meant in Practice

The work began by defining the primary result as suitable employment sustained for at least six months. Supporting results included accurate assessment, timely referral, alignment between training and employer demand, reliable employer participation, and consistent evidence. This created a clear boundary for testing competing explanations.

## The Visible Performance Problem

The baseline showed that the agency was completing more activity while achieving weaker employment value. Six measures defined the starting point.

### 38 PERCENT

Participants entering employment within six months.

### 77 DAYS

Average time from registration to employment.

### 43 PERCENT

Employers returning to participate again.

### 29 PERCENT

Referrals that did not match skills, location, schedule, or wage needs.

### 54 PERCENT

Participant records with a complete and current skills profile.

### 48 PERCENT

Placed participants remaining employed after six months.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE

**The pattern could not be explained by weak staff performance or labor market conditions alone. Activity targets, uneven workload, variable service pathways, fragmented employer data, unclear ownership, and weak learning were reducing the quality and durability of employment results.**

## 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.

### PERFORMANCE

Regional offices were rewarded for enrollment, workshops, training referrals, and initial placements. Suitable placement and sustained employment received less attention.

### HUMAN ARCHITECTURE

Adviser caseloads ranged from ninety to two hundred eighty active participants. Employees faced different workloads while being held to similar volume targets.

### WORKFLOW

Each region had developed its own service pathway. Assessment, referral, employer matching, and follow up varied, while vacancy information remained in separate local files.

### ALIGNMENT

Advisers managed participants, employer teams managed businesses, training teams managed providers, and data teams managed reporting. No one owned the complete pathway to sustained employment.

## Additional Conditions

- **Capability:** Advisers needed support in assessment, labor market interpretation, employer engagement, job matching, and complex case management, but training alone would not correct the wider conditions.
- **Leadership:** Monthly reviews concentrated on enrollment, workshop attendance, and initial placement rather than suitability, retention, failed matches, or differences in regional workload.
- **Learning:** Participant and employer feedback was collected, but failed placements were usually closed rather than examined for patterns that could improve the service.
- **Performance and value:** Leaders agreed that success would be judged through suitable placement, sustained employment, faster movement, stronger employer participation, and reliable evidence.

### DIAGNOSTIC CONCLUSION

**Results were off track because the service system rewarded volume, distributed capacity unevenly, varied by region, separated participant and employer information, fragmented ownership, and failed to learn from unsuccessful placements.**

## The Coordinated Response

The agency designed one connected employment service improvement package. Each component addressed a condition found in the diagnosis and included evidence for leadership review and adjustment.

| Intervention component          | What changed                                                                                                                                                        | Implementation evidence                                                         |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Performance hierarchy</b>    | Sustained employment became the primary result, supported by suitable placement, timely service, assessment quality, employer participation, and activity measures. | Placement suitability, six month retention, service time, and employer results. |
| <b>Participant segmentation</b> | Participants were grouped by job readiness, targeted capability needs, intensive support needs, and practical barriers.                                             | Pathway fit, time in service, referral quality, and participant progress.       |
| <b>Common service pathway</b>   | All regions used minimum standards for assessment, matching, referral, follow up, and review while retaining appropriate local flexibility.                         | Workflow completion, waiting time, failed handoffs, and regional variation.     |
| <b>Caseload and roles</b>       | Work was distributed by participant complexity, administrative steps were simplified, and specialist advisers supported more complex cases.                         | Caseload mix, adviser capacity, service quality, and suitable placements.       |
| <b>Employer integration</b>     | Advisers and employer teams used one vacancy record capturing skills, location, hours, wage, conditions, and reasons placements succeeded or failed.                | Employer participation, referral match, complaints, and repeat engagement.      |
| <b>Leadership and learning</b>  | Reviews focused on suitable work, retention, pathway breakdowns, weaker participant groups, failed placements, and actions requiring leadership support.            | Decisions, capability coaching, data quality, course corrections, and results.  |

## Measurable Outcomes

Twelve months after the approach was expanded, the agency recorded stronger placement, faster service, improved matching, better information, and higher employment retention.

### What Changed

- The agency stopped treating every participant as if the same service sequence would produce the same result.
- Advisers used clearer participant information, better employer evidence, more balanced caseloads, and one minimum service pathway.
- Leaders distinguished activity, initial placement, suitable placement, and sustained employment, while failed placements became learning evidence.

### How to Interpret the Results

- The results came from correcting several connected conditions rather than choosing one preferred explanation.
- Capability support became more effective because advisers also received clearer workflow, better information, manageable workload, and stronger employer connections.
- Common definitions and data quality checks allowed leaders to compare regional results without confusing reporting differences with performance differences.

### 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  |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| Participants employed within six months         | 38 percent | 55 percent       |
| Registration to employment time                 | 77 days    | 46 days          |
| Employers participating again                   | 43 percent | 68 percent       |
| Referrals that did not match needs              | 29 percent | 11 percent       |
| Records with a current skills profile           | 54 percent | 91 percent       |
| Training tied to documented employer demand     | 37 percent | 79 percent       |
| Participants employed after six months          | 48 percent | 64 percent       |
| Employer complaints about unsuitable candidates | Baseline   | 36 percent lower |

## What This Case Demonstrates

When results are off track and the cause is unclear, the most dangerous response is to choose a familiar solution before defining the performance gap and testing the surrounding conditions. The agency improved because it began with the result, examined the system around it, tested assumptions with evidence, and acted on the conditions actually shaping performance.

### HICD FORWARD CONNECTION

**Movement 1 clarified the difference between activity, placement, and sustained employment. Movement 2 tested competing explanations across measures, workload, workflow, ownership, capability, and leadership. Movement 3 created a connected service response. Movement 4 used participant, employer, regional, and retention evidence to adjust the service and sustain improvement.**

## Questions for Your Institution

- Are your measures rewarding activity, performance value, or both?
- Which explanations for weak results have been tested with operating evidence?
- Where does the service pathway vary, slow, break, or depend on informal workarounds?
- How are failed outcomes used to change workflow, capability, leadership decisions, or resource allocation?

## 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 when institutional results are off track and the cause is unclear, and is not presented as a verified account of a specific client engagement.*

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