

HICD FORWARD IN PRACTICE

From Reform Mandate to Reliable Public Service

An institutional case study showing how workflow, decision rights, risk, capability, leadership, and measurement turned a reform mandate into faster and more transparent licensing services.

Resource type	Institutional Case Study
Intended users	Public sector leaders, reform teams, service delivery managers, and OD practitioners
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

Public sector reform becomes visible only when mandates, technology, authority, staff behavior, and leadership routines combine to improve the service citizens actually receive.

The Case at a Glance

A national licensing agency had an approved reform strategy, donor funding, senior government support, and a new digital case management system. Yet applications still moved slowly between regional offices, technical reviewers, legal staff, finance officers, and senior approvers. Employees maintained paper files beside the digital record, applicants rarely knew the status of their cases, and complaints about delay and transparency continued to rise.

Leaders initially believed the agency needed more staff training. The HICD Forward lens reframed the challenge as a service performance problem. The agency needed to change the conditions governing how cases entered, moved, were reviewed, were decided, and were explained to applicants.

The Operating Context

The reform program required the agency to reduce processing time, improve access, strengthen transparency, and use digital case management. The formal process appeared clear, but the real workflow contained repeated reviews, informal approvals, uncertain ownership, and long periods when no one actively moved a case forward.

Reform Activity Without Reliable Service

Applications could pass through fourteen review and approval steps. A routine case often returned to an earlier stage because reviewers interpreted requirements differently. Regional offices were responsible for the applicant experience but lacked authority to resolve many issues. Central officials approved cases they had not technically reviewed, while applicants contacted several offices to find out what was happening.

What Leaders Initially Assumed

Senior leaders believed weak performance resulted mainly from inconsistent staff capability and limited use of the new system. A broad training program was proposed. Training could improve some tasks, but it would not remove duplicate approvals, unclear standards, centralized decisions, defensive behavior, or management reviews focused only on how many applications were received and completed.

KEY INSIGHT

The agency had not failed to launch reform activities. It had failed to translate those activities into a service system that moved cases predictably from application to decision.

What This Meant in Practice

The work began by agreeing on the result that mattered: a predictable, transparent, and evidence based licensing service. This shifted attention away from activity completion and toward processing time, first time quality, case aging, applicant communication, and the ability of regional teams to resolve routine work.

The Visible Performance Problem

The baseline showed that the reform had not yet produced a reliable applicant experience. Six measures defined the starting point.

70 DAYS Average time required to complete an application.	31 PERCENT Applications completed within the official 45 day standard.
28 PERCENT Open applications that had remained unresolved for more than 90 days.	46 PERCENT Applications returned at least once for missing or inconsistent information.
4 CONTACTS Average number of applicant follow up contacts before a final decision.	41 PERCENT Increase in public complaints about delay and lack of transparency over two years.

CENTRAL MESSAGE
The agency had a reform plan, technology, funding, and political support, but its operating conditions still produced delay, repeated work, defensive decisions, and weak service accountability.

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.

WORKFLOW

Applications moved through as many as fourteen steps. Several reviews repeated checks already completed elsewhere, and cases could move backward without a clear reason or time limit.

ALIGNMENT

Authority remained highly centralized. Regional and technical managers were responsible for service delivery but could not resolve many routine cases or remove barriers.

HUMAN ARCHITECTURE

Employees faced greater risk for approving a case that later attracted criticism than for delaying a decision. Requesting more information or passing the case onward became the safest behavior.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership meetings focused on volumes received and completed. Leaders rarely reviewed aging cases, repeated returns, bottlenecks, or the reasons cases remained unresolved.

Additional Conditions

- **Capability:** Some employees needed technical support, but many errors came from unclear standards, inconsistent interpretations, and missing decision guides rather than lack of training.
- **Performance:** The agency measured activity but lacked trusted measures for time by stage, first time quality, case aging, service predictability, and applicant communication.
- **Learning:** Complaints were handled one at a time and closed. Their patterns were not used to correct process rules, guidance, system configuration, or leadership decisions.
- **Performance and value:** Leaders agreed that success would be judged through faster decisions, more predictable service, fewer returns, clearer communication, and greater regional resolution.

DIAGNOSTIC CONCLUSION

The visible capability problem was being produced by workflow, authority, risk, standards, leadership review, and measurement that made delay safer than timely resolution.

The Coordinated Response

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

Intervention component	What changed	Implementation evidence
Service workflow	Application requirements were simplified, a completeness check was added at entry, and duplicate reviews were removed.	Time by stage, first time completeness, returns, and unresolved handoffs.
Decision rights	Routine approvals were delegated to qualified regional and technical managers, with clear boundaries for high risk cases.	Regional resolution rate, escalations, exceptions, and decision quality.
Case ownership	One named case owner remained responsible for movement, communication, and resolution from receipt to decision.	Case aging, applicant contacts, owner actions, and stalled cases.
Standards and capability	Decision guides, examples, and case based practice replaced broad training alone.	Review consistency, observed decisions, errors, and coaching needs.
Digital visibility	The system showed current stage, responsible role, time in stage, and the reason for any return.	Complete records, stage delays, data quality, and user adoption.
Review and learning	Weekly operational reviews and monthly leadership reviews examined aging, returns, bottlenecks, and policy barriers.	Decisions completed, barriers removed, repeated issues, and process changes.

Measurable Outcomes

Nine months after national implementation, the agency recorded improvement across processing time, service reliability, applicant experience, productivity, and regional authority.

What Changed

- Applications entered a clearer process and moved with one visible owner, fewer repeated checks, and consistent decision guidance.
- Regional and technical managers resolved routine work while senior leaders focused on exceptions, policy barriers, and service performance.
- Operational reviews used case evidence to correct bottlenecks, standards, system rules, and recurring sources of delay.

How to Interpret the Results

- The results came from changes to workflow, authority, behavior, capability, technology use, and leadership routines, not from training alone.
- The pilot in two regional offices created evidence before national implementation and revealed where guidance and system configuration needed adjustment.
- Common service measures helped leaders distinguish activity completion from reliable public service.

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 9 months
Average application processing time	70 days	34 days
Completed within the service standard	31 percent	72 percent
Open cases older than 90 days	28 percent	12 percent
Applications returned for correction	46 percent	19 percent
Average applicant follow up contacts	4 contacts	1.7 contacts
Complaints about unexplained delay	Baseline	37 percent lower
Staff productivity	Baseline	24 percent higher
Routine cases resolved regionally	36 percent	81 percent

What This Case Demonstrates

The agency did not need another reform plan or training program alone. It needed an operating environment in which cases could move predictably, decisions could be made at the right level, standards were usable, and leaders reviewed the evidence that explained delay. Reform became real when those conditions began producing more reliable public service.

HICD FORWARD CONNECTION

Movement 1 aligned leaders around the licensing service gap. Movement 2 revealed the workflow, authority, risk, capability, and measurement conditions producing delay. Movement 3 converted those findings into one service improvement package. Movement 4 used pilot results, case reviews, applicant feedback, and leadership decisions to adjust and sustain the new model.

Questions for Your Institution

- Where does your formal service process differ from how cases actually move?
- Which decisions remain centralized even though qualified staff could resolve them closer to the work?
- What behaviors are made safer by your current accountability and risk environment?
- Which measures would show citizens that reform is improving the service they receive?

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 public service performance challenge and is not presented as a verified account of a specific client engagement.

EXPLORE MORE HICD FORWARD TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Visit the HICD Forward website and Resource Library