

The Seven Performance Pillars of HICD Forward

A practical guide to the institutional conditions that shape performance, adoption, and sustained value.

Resource type	Open resource guide
Intended users	Institutional leaders, reform teams, OD and HICD practitioners, donors, sector specialists, and technology partners
HICD Forward movement	Cross movement resource
Related pillars	All Seven Performance Pillars
Estimated reading time	12 minutes

WHY THIS RESOURCE MATTERS

The pillars help leaders and practitioners look beyond visible activity and examine the connected conditions that shape performance, adoption, and sustained value.

The Performance System Behind the Result

Institutions are rarely short on reform activity. Plans are approved, systems are launched, training is delivered, dashboards are built, and new tools are introduced. Yet service, reliability, accountability, adoption, or stakeholder value may remain weak. The gap often persists because the conditions that shape performance have not changed together.

HICD Forward begins with the performance gap rather than the preferred solution. It asks what must improve, who is affected, what value is at stake, what evidence confirms the gap, and what must change for improvement to hold. The Seven Performance Pillars provide the lens for examining those conditions.

The pillars do not divide an institution into seven isolated topics. They keep attention on one performance system: the result, the human architecture and incentives that shape behavior, the workflow that produces the result, the organizational alignment and operating reality around the work, the capability required, the leadership that reinforces change, and the evidence used to learn and adjust.

What the Seven Performance Pillars Are

The Seven Performance Pillars define what HICD Forward examines. They help leaders and practitioners move beyond symptoms and test the wider institutional conditions producing current performance. Each pillar offers a distinct way of seeing the same problem, while the complete lens prevents a team from mistaking one visible weakness for the whole explanation.

The pillars are intentionally connected. A workflow problem may be sustained by unclear decision rights. A capability problem may actually be a lack of authority, job support, or manager reinforcement. Weak measurement may hide whether a reform is improving performance at all. The value of the lens is in seeing these relationships early enough to design a response that fits the operating reality.

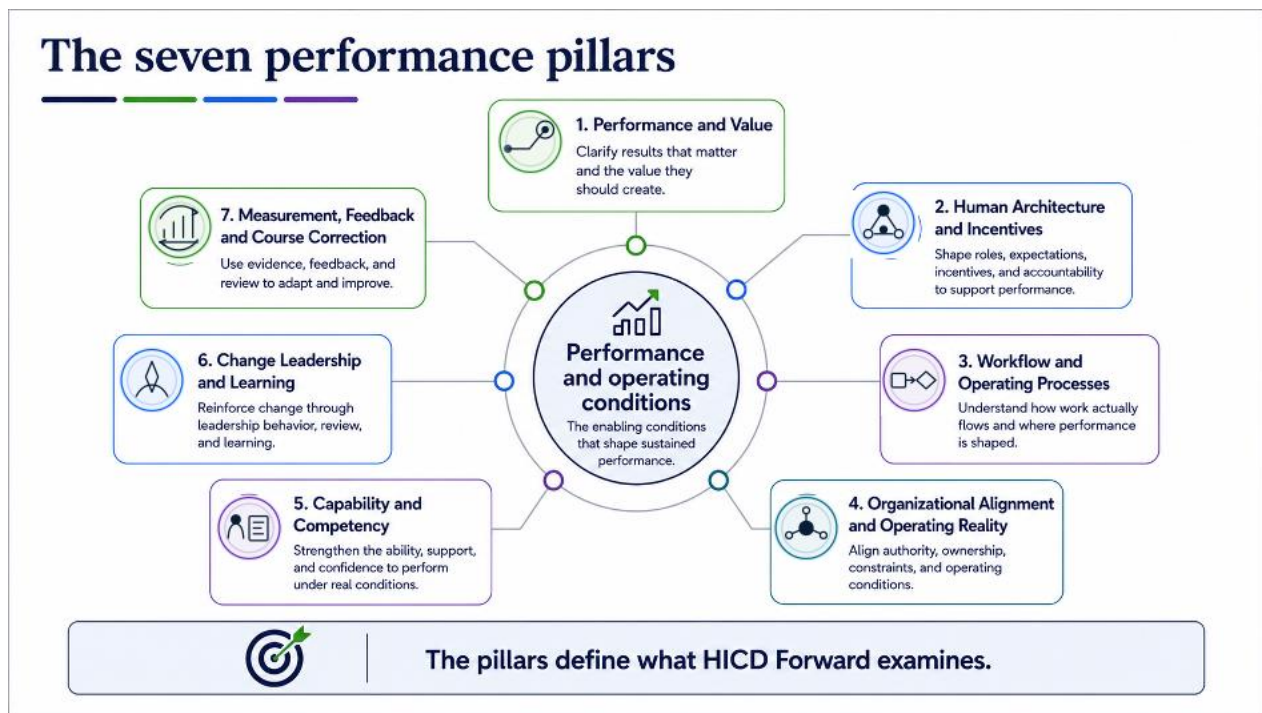


Figure 1. The seven performance pillars define what HICD Forward examines.

USE THE PILLARS TOGETHER, SELECTIVELY

Start with the performance gap. Focus first on the pillars most likely to explain it. Gather enough evidence to see the pattern, then widen or narrow the inquiry as the evidence requires.

What Each Pillar Helps Reveal

1. Performance and Value

What result must improve, for whom, and why does it matter?

This pillar anchors the method in a defined performance gap. It clarifies current performance, required performance, stakeholder value, and the evidence that will show whether improvement has occurred. Without this anchor, the work can drift toward activities, preferences, or outputs that are only loosely connected to the result.

It also protects leaders from confusing delivery with value. A completed training program, installed system, revised structure, or published plan is not yet evidence that the institution is performing differently.

2. Human Architecture and Incentives

What conditions around people encourage or discourage the required behavior?

This pillar examines roles, expectations, motivation, informal norms, accountability, trust, and the incentives that shape day to day behavior. It asks what the institution formally requests and what it actually rewards, tolerates, or makes difficult.

The lens helps avoid the assumption that weak performance means weak people. Staff may understand the change but still lack role clarity, information, supervision, confidence, authority, or a credible reason to work differently.

3. Workflow and Operating Processes

How does work actually move, and where is performance created or lost?

Performance is produced through real workflow. This pillar examines handoffs, bottlenecks, approvals, decision points, rework, workarounds, system touchpoints, and the sequence through which value is produced.

Formal procedures may describe the intended process, while daily work follows a different path. The pillar reveals where a reform, system, or tool must enter the real operating process if it is to change results.

4. Organizational Alignment and Operating Reality

Are authority, ownership, mandates, resources, and constraints aligned enough to act?

Institutions operate through more than formal charts. This pillar examines decision rights, governance, ownership, mandates, stakeholder interests, power, resources, risk, and the constraints surrounding implementation.

It is especially important when several functions, partners, or levels of authority must coordinate. Apparent agreement may still conceal fragmented ownership, unresolved escalation, or competing incentives that prevent action.

What Each Pillar Helps Reveal

5. Capability and Competency

Can leaders, managers, teams, and staff perform the required work under real conditions?

Capability is not the same as training. This pillar examines task knowledge, skill, judgment, confidence, practice, tools, support, authority, and the routines required to perform consistently. It asks what people must be able to do differently and whether the work environment enables them to do it.

The distinction matters because more training will not solve a problem caused by unclear workflow, missing data, weak job support, limited authority, or manager practices that reinforce the old way of working.

6. Change Leadership and Learning

How do leaders reinforce the change and keep the institution learning while it acts?

Leadership is expressed through what leaders ask, review, decide, resource, reinforce, tolerate, escalate, and protect. This pillar examines the leadership behaviors and review routines that keep an improvement effort alive after launch.

It also looks at whether leaders create space to learn from implementation. Public endorsement is not enough when leadership questions, measures, or decisions continue to reward the previous operating model.

7. Measurement, Feedback and Course Correction

Are useful signals visible, trusted, reviewed, and used to adjust action?

Sustained improvement requires evidence and adaptation. This pillar examines performance signals, feedback loops, review routines, data quality, and the mechanisms used to make course corrections when implementation reveals new constraints.

Reporting becomes learning only when evidence changes a decision. The pillar helps distinguish activity measures from signals of adoption, operating capability, stakeholder value, and improved performance.

Why the Pillars Are Examined Together

One visible performance problem can be produced by several connected conditions. Slow service may involve a broken workflow, unclear decision rights, weak role support, leadership review focused on activity, and data that is not used to remove recurring barriers. Treating only one condition may create motion without improvement.

HICD Forward therefore uses the pillars as a shared lens, not as seven separate assessments. The inquiry should be as broad as necessary to understand the pattern, and no heavier than the problem requires. The purpose is not to diagnose everything. It is to identify the combination of conditions most responsible for the current result.

How the Pillars Support the Four Movements

The Seven Performance Pillars define what HICD Forward examines. The Four Movements define how HICD Forward works. Together, they connect diagnosis to action without turning the work into a mechanical checklist.

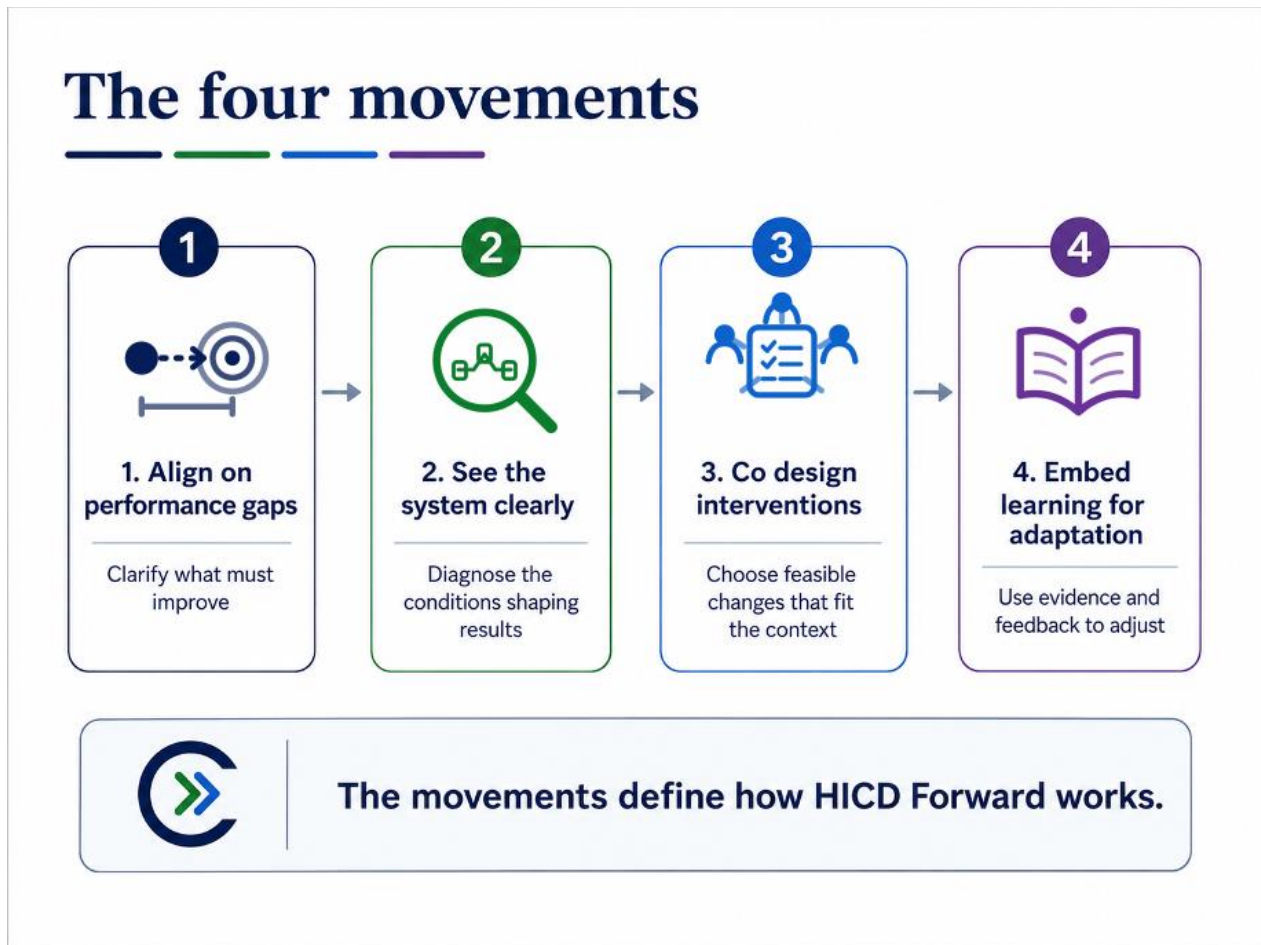


Figure 2. The four movements define how HICD Forward works.

Movement 1, Align on performance gaps: The pillars act as a framing lens. They help clarify the result, value, scope, and likely areas of inquiry without prematurely declaring a cause or solution.

Movement 2, See the system clearly: The pillars act as a diagnostic lens. They guide evidence gathering across the conditions most likely to explain current performance and help the team test assumptions against operating reality.

Movement 3, Co design interventions: The pillars become design requirements. Findings are translated with institutional stakeholders into a focused package of feasible changes to workflow, governance, capability, leadership routines, evidence use, and other conditions that must move together.

Movement 4, Embed learning for adaptation: The pillars become performance and learning signals. The institution reviews whether the targeted conditions are improving, whether adoption is becoming changed work, and what must be adjusted as implementation continues.

METHOD ARCHITECTURE

The pillars show what to examine. The movements show how to proceed.

One Performance Problem, Several Pillar Conditions

Consider an institution that introduces a digital case management system to improve service speed and accountability. The system is technically live and staff have been trained, but service time and decision speed do not improve. Managers continue to request information through informal channels, staff duplicate entries in spreadsheets, and the same adoption concerns recur.

Method architecture: lens plus pathway

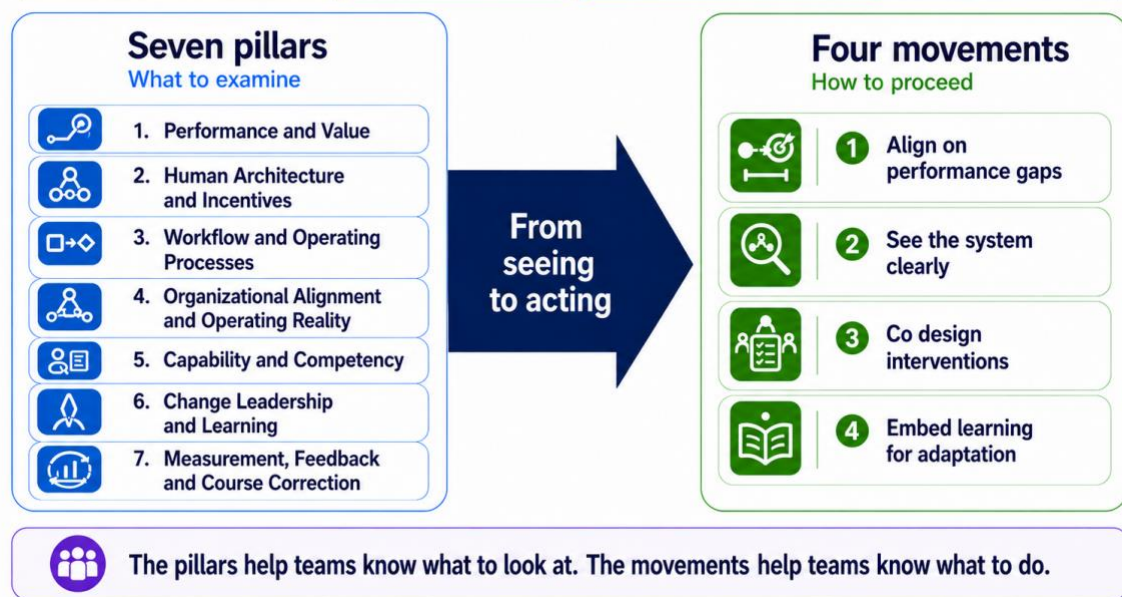


Figure 3. The seven performance pillars provide the lens for inquiry, while the four movements provide the pathway from insight to action.

A response centered only on additional training would miss the deeper institutional pattern. Workflow still depends on informal approvals. Decision rights and data ownership are unclear. Staff roles and job support do not match the new process. Leaders continue to review old activity measures, and user feedback is not converted into decisions.

A more complete intervention would redesign the real workflow, clarify decisions and ownership, retire duplicate practices, provide role based support, align leadership review questions, and establish a routine for resolving adoption barriers. The technology matters, but sustained value depends on the institutional conditions through which the technology becomes real work.

PRACTICAL STARTING POINT

Name one performance gap. Identify the two or three pillars most likely to be shaping it. Then decide what evidence would help test that assumption before selecting a solution.

Using This Public Resource

This guide is designed to make the Seven Performance Pillars understandable and usable as an open orientation resource. It explains the method architecture, the role of each pillar, and the way the pillars support the Four Movements. Detailed diagnostic questions, evidence tests, facilitation guidance, and maturity criteria remain part of the protected HICD Forward practice system.

Related HICD Forward resources

- HICD Forward Executive Overview
- HICD Forward White Paper
- The Four Movements of HICD Forward
- HICD Forward Field Guide and Diagnostic

Primary source foundation: HICD Forward White Paper. Supporting practice resources include the HICD Forward Executive Overview and HICD Forward Field Guide and Diagnostic.