The Seven Big Errors of PerformanceStat

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Maybe you've read about "CompStat." Perhaps a friend told you about "CitiStat." But who is this "PerformanceStat" — and, if he is making so many errors, why hasn't the manager taken him out of the lineup?

A Short History of PerformanceStat

It all began in 1994, when Commissioner William Bratton and his leadership team at the New York Police Department created CompStat, their leadership and management strategy designed to reduce the city's crime rate. Quickly other police departments adopted this innovation. Only five years later, a survey by the Police Foundation found that approximately a third of the 515 departments in the U.S. with 100 or more sworn police officers reported implementing a version of CompStat[1]. Today, police departments around the world employ this strategy, often giving it their own name; in Australia, numerous police organizations conduct what are often called "Operational Performance Reviews."[2]

Then other New York City agencies adapted the approach. For example, the Parks Department created ParkStat, the Human Resources Administration created JobStat, the Correction Department created T.E.A.M.S. (for Total Efficiency Accountability Management System), and the Probation Department created S.T.A.R.S (for Statistical Tracking, Analysis & Reporting).

Next came Baltimore's CitiStat, the adaptation of this innovation to improve performance in an entire jurisdiction, created in 2000 by Mayor Martin O'Malley. This prompted similar approaches in other cities — from the large, such as Atlanta (ATLStat) and San Francisco (SFStat), to the small, such as Palm Bay, Florida (PalmStat), and Somerville, Massachusetts (SomerStat). And then, as Ellen Perlman noted in *Governing*[3], "'Stat' Fever" really got hot.

After all, this management approach is not uniquely applicable to municipal government. In 2002, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services created its "Performance Center." In 2005 in Washington, Governor Christine Gregoire developed GMAP (for Government Management Accountability, and Performance), and, in 2007, when Martin O'Malley became governor of Maryland, he created StateStat.

Moreover, at least one unit of the federal government, the San Diego district of the U.S. Border Patrol, has created its own version of this

approach, which it labeled BorderStat. And overseas, several cities in Scotland, including Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Sterling, have experimented with CitiStat.[4]

As I have studied different examples of PerformanceStat, examined formal descriptions, questioned key executives about their approach, and observed many in action, I've been struck by how many don't quite appreciate (or at least employ) some of the core principles that can make the strategy effective.

All of these adaptations of the original CompStat innovation — regardless of whether their names include the ***Stat suffix — are based on the same premise: Government needs to improve its performance, and, to do so, it needs a demanding and strategic approach. To capture these various but similar performance strategies, I have chosen the name "PerformanceStat."[5]

What Is PerformanceStat?

Every one of these PerformanceStat strategies is different. They have to be. Neither the nature of the performance each seeks to improve, nor their political and organizational context, is the same. The leadership team of each jurisdiction and each agency has to adapt the basic principles of PerformanceStat to its own objectives and circumstances.

Nevertheless, effective adaptations of PerformanceStat strategy all use data — and do so in two important ways. First, they collect and analyze data to determine the type and level of results that the organization is producing, to detect its important "performance deficits,"[6] and to suggest policies and practices that might produce improvements. Second,

they also employ these data to compare how well different sub-units are doing, to set targets for future results, and thus to motivate the individuals in those units to achieve their targets.

And yet, as I have studied different examples of PerformanceStat, examined formal descriptions, questioned key executives about their approach, and observed many in action,[7] I've been struck by how many don't quite appreciate (or at least employ) some of the core principles that can make the strategy effective. Yes, they do the formal, visible things that you would associate with a PerformanceStat approach. Yet, something subtle but important is missing. Specifically, I have identified seven big mistakes.

First, however, I should provide my definition of "PerformanceStat":

> A jurisdiction or agency is employing a PerformanceStat performance strategy if it holds an ongoing series of *regular, frequent, periodic, integrated meetings* during which the chief executive and/ or the principal members of the chief executive's leadership team plus the individual director (and the top managers) of different sub-units *use data* to analyze the unit's past *performance*, to *follow-up* on previous decisions and commitments to improve *performance*, to establish its next *performance* objectives, and to examine the effectiveness of its overall *performance* strategies.

This is not very restrictive. Lots of managerial activities fit within this definition.

Thus, I'm not complaining about public executives who fail to implement the idiosyncratic technicalities of my own, narrow, eccentric doctrine. Rather, I'm concerned about jurisdictions or agencies that miss something very basic, something that should be central to any effort to improve performance (whether

or not it is a PerformanceStat approach), something that can divert a real opportunity to produce improved results into little more than an utterly simplistic, noticeably ineffective, and thus purely symbolic sham.

Error #1: No Clear Purpose

In the public sector, any undertaking has to begin with a definition of the purpose to be achieved. In New York, Commissioner Bratton began with a brash — and very explicit — purpose: to reduce the city's crime. In Baltimore, Mayor O'Malley had his own clear objective: to improve the delivery of traditional city services.

Yet, as Nietzsche once noted, "forgetting our objectives is the most frequent act of stupidity."[8] Indeed, too often PerformanceStat is nothing more than the latest government fad. Upon hearing about the approach, the manager exclaims, "Ooh, cool hammer," and goes looking for some convenient nails to pound.

As always, however, public managers need to start with a clear purpose: "What results are we trying to produce?" "What would better performance look like?" "How might we know if we have made some improvements?" Only after the members of the leadership team have agreed to some common answers to these questions can they adapt the PerformanceStat strategy to help them achieve these — now very explicit — purposes.

Error #2: No One Has Specific Responsibilities

Who will do all this? Who is responsible for what? To produce results in any organization, someone must do this producing. But who? And what?

Indeed, no one can answer the Who? question until they have first answered the What? question. This requires converting the clear purposes into specific responsibilities. These responsibilities can take on various forms.

These responsibilities could be to reach specific *output* targets: The director of the public works department (and the head of each public works district) could be given the responsibility of filling every pothole that citizens report within 48 hours. Such output responsibilities are relatively easy to achieve. Organizations actually produce outputs. So if the organization has (or can obtain) the necessary capabilities[9] — people, equipment, knowledge — it can directly produce the outputs for which it is responsible.

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These responsibilities could be to reach specific *outcome* targets: The superintendent of schools and the principal of every elementary school could be given the responsibility of ensuring that all sixth-grade students can add, subtract, multiply, and divide (as measured on some yardstick test). The police commissioner and the commander of every police precinct could be given the responsibility of reducing the number of GPS devices stolen from cars by 10 percent this year. Such outcome responsibilities are harder to achieve. Organizations produce the outputs that contribute to these outcomes — but they don't directly produce the outcomes themselves. Lots of other people — parents in particular — make a significant contribution to how much students learn. And lots of factors affect the number of GPS systems stolen, including whether GPS owners leave their devices in their cars or whether automobile owners simply purchase more of them.

Or, these responsibilities could be to develop new strategies. If a school system or a specific

school is not achieving its educational outcome targets, or if a police department or precinct is not achieving its crime reduction targets, it could be charged with developing a new strategy. This might appear more squishy — less of a target and more of a wish. Yet, if the organization charged with developing the strategy must also implement it in a way that eventually achieves an output or outcome target, the responsibility is no less real. Eventually the people who created the strategy have to demonstrate their own brilliance and their organization's competence by using the strategy to produce the real results.

The chief executive needs to delegate — officially and unequivocally — a key deputy to conduct every meeting. Otherwise, from one meeting to the next, there will be no consistency of purpose — no ability to focus on the completion of specific responsibilities.

At almost all PerformanceStat meetings, the discussion is about results. But that does not guarantee that this discussion ever touches on *who* is responsible for *what* results. Indeed, an organization can hold meeting after meeting without ever clarifying *who* specifically is supposed to accomplish *what* exactly.

Error #3: The Meetings are Held Irregularly, Infrequently, or Randomly

An important component of the PerformanceStat strategy is the ongoing series of regular, frequent, periodic, integrated meetings. They provide feedback on both achievements and failures. They seek to identify lessons for improving performance in the future. They keep the organization's leaders up-to-date on what is happening in each sub-unit. And, they keep the management leadership team of each sub-unit focused on achieving its targets.

To accomplish all this, the participants in these meetings examine performance of each sub-unit since the last meeting: Has the sub-unit done what it promised at the last meeting? Has it hit its targets? How? Why not? What are the successes? What are the problems, inadequacies, weaknesses, and shortfalls? Should the targets be changed for the next period? Do specific problems need to be fixed? If so, by whom and by when? Should the sub-unit be charged with developing a new strategy? If so, by whom should it be crafted and by when should it be implemented?

When Baltimore launched CitiStat, Jay Sakai was one of the first members of its analytic staff. A few years later, he moved to head the city's Bureau of Water and Wastewater. Thus, Sakai's relationship to CitiStat changed significantly. Originally, he had been analyzing the data of the city's operating agencies. Now he was managing one.

Moreover, Sakai's thinking about the CitiStat's routine of bi-weekly meetings for every agency changed. As a CitiStat analyst, he thought the meetings were too frequent. But when he began as a line manager, he realized that the bi-weekly schedule made sense. Why? Because if the meetings were less frequent, he could leave the meeting relieved, thinking: Thank goodness that meeting is over; I won't have to worry about that for a while. But, if the next meeting is only 14 days away, it isn't really over: I have to start to work right now on the problems that have been identified and the commitments that have been made; otherwise, in two weeks, I and my bureau will be embarrassed.

There is nothing magic about Baltimore's two-week interval. These meetings could be biweekly or monthly (or perhaps even quarterly). After all, the frequency of the meetings depends upon how frequently new

data become available. If performance data are available only monthly, it makes little sense to hold bi-weekly meetings.

Nevertheless, if an agency or jurisdiction is serious about using this strategy to improve performance, it ought to hold its PerformanceStat meetings on a regular and frequent basis. If individual managers and their units are to improve performance, they need to know three things: (a) when the next data cycle ends, (b) what specifically they need to do to demonstrate improvement by the end of that cycle, and (c) when they will report back in front of their organizational superiors, peers, and subordinates on how much they have accomplished on making these improvements.

These meetings are both substantive and symbolic. Because these meetings examine specific performance deficits, explore possible solutions, and produce specific commitments for specific actions to be completed by specific dates, they create real opportunities to produce better results. And because these meetings require the active engagement of most of the agency's or jurisdiction's key executives, they dramatize that the issues being analyzed, discussed, and debated are important.

Error #4: No One Person Authorized to Run the Meetings

For these meetings to work, however, someone has to conduct each meeting. Moreover, that someone ought to be the same someone. The PerformanceStat strategy depends upon the regular, periodic discussions of performance, but these discussions will have little impact if they are conducted by a rotating collective of random officials.

The person who conducted last month's meeting must conduct this month's meeting. Otherwise, the continuity in the analysis of performance is lost. Moreover, to do this, the person who runs the meeting needs clear authority.

Ideally, this would be the chief executive: the police commissioner, the mayor, or the agency head. In many circumstances, however, this individual has too many other responsibilities. A mayor, for example, has so many demands on his or her time — demands that cannot be conveniently scheduled around the PerformanceStat calendar.

Consequently, the chief executive needs to delegate — officially and unequivocally — a key deputy to conduct every meeting. Otherwise, from one meeting to the next, there will be no consistency of purpose — no ability to focus on the completion of specific responsibilities.

Error #5: No Dedicated Analytic Staff

PerformanceStat requires data — data that illustrates the current level of performance. Who, however, looks at the data? Who analyzes the data in an attempt to figure out whether performance is improving or not? Who examines the data and tries to figure out what new approaches should be considered?

The managers of the various sub-units need to do this. But the leadership team of the jurisdiction or agency needs a few people to do this too.

And these people can't also have ten other, higher-priority tasks. For the PerformanceStat strategy to produce meaningful results, it needs a few analytical people working on it full-time to understand — through the use of data — what kind of results are really being produced.

Error #6: No Follow-Up

What is the relationship between the issues discussed at the previous meeting and those examined at the meeting today? Did today's meeting build on the problems identified, solutions analyzed, and commitments made at the previous meeting? Or are we, yet again, starting all over? If the PerformanceStat approach is to produce real improvements in

results, it has to focus on the key results that need improvement. And it has to focus on them at meeting, after meeting, after meeting.

Of course, if there is no clear purpose or no clear responsibilities, there will be little on which to follow-up. And if there is no analytical staff, there will be no one charged with providing the briefing materials to suggest on what to follow-up. Finally, if there is no one individual authorized to run the meetings, there will be no one who can follow-up.

And, with no follow-up, the PerformanceStat will be little more than PerformanceSham.

Error #7: No Balance Between the Brutal and the Bland

Both NYPD's CompStat and Baltimore's CitiStat are known for being tough and uncompromising with poor performers. A report by the Police Foundation found that CompStat had "a reputation among line officers as brutal and punitive rather than collaborative and creative."[10] The CitiStat meetings in Baltimore and the ATLStat meetings in Atlanta have been described as "brutal, unsentimental affairs."[11] Indeed, both NYPD and Baltimore have accumulated an image of being aggressively demanding, sometimes even sarcastically demeaning.

Yet in an overreaction to NYPD's and Baltimore's reputation, some jurisdictions and agencies have consciously tried to make their meetings as harmonious as possible. As a result, their meetings have become mostly show-and-tell. The director of each subordinate unit (be that a precinct commander or an agency head) essentially runs the meeting, showing a series of PowerPoint slides and presenting yet another glowing picture of the unit's latest accomplishments.

 Unfortunately, if the leadership team has failed to specify what it is trying to accomplish, if it has failed to designate someone to run every meeting, if it has failed to create its own

analytic staff, and if it has failed to conduct any follow-up since the previous meeting, it is unable to do much more than applaud this delightful show.

Still, the leadership team can't let sub-units off the hook when they offer bland assertions of wonderful progress without offering any data as evidence. Conversely, they can't also rely purely on brutal censure without offering an opportunity to improve and earn compliments. To truly improve any sub-unit's performance, the leadership team needs to both pressure its managers and help them to succeed.

Adapting the Principles of PerformanceStat

PerformanceStat isn't a model. It can't simply be copied. It isn't a system. It can't be airlifted from one organization into another. Obtaining the benefits of this approach to performance — using this strategy to produce real improvements in results — requires more than the mindless mimicry of the most visible and most superficial elements of the approach.

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Yet this is what Eli Silverman of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice suggests many police departments have done. He reports that many of the efforts at "replication are frequently based on a superficial understanding" of the strategy.[12] PerformanceStat is more than some fancy technology and a series of meetings; yet,

when you visit any particular example, that is primarily what you will see.

PerformanceStat is a leadership and management strategy that public executives can employ to produce real results in a variety of government jurisdictions and public agencies. But to do so, they need not only to ascertain the key components of the strategy but also to develop their own complex appreciation of the cause-and-effect relationships among these components and the results to be produced. To make an intelligent adaptation of any leadership or management strategy, public executives must understand how this approach can work — what the cause-and-effect connection is between their actions and their results. Then, they need to adapt these cause-and-effect concepts to reflect their own unique circumstances as well as the purposes they are attempting to achieve.

Endnotes

[1] David Weisburd, Stephen D. Mastrofski, Rosann Greenspan, and James J. Willis, *The Growth of Compstat in American Policing*, Police Foundation Reports (Washington, D.C.: Police Foundation, April 2004), pp. 4, 6. See also: David Weisburd, Stephen Mastrofski, Ann Marie McNally and Rosann Greenspan, *Compstat and Organizational Change: Findings from a National Survey*, Report submitted to the National Institute of Justice by the Police Foundation, (Washington, D.C.: Police Foundation, 2001).

[2] Lorraine Mazerolle, Sacha Rombouts, and James McBroom, "The Impact of COMPSTAT on Reported Crime in Queensland," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2007), p. 238.

[3] Ellen Perlman, "'Stat' Fever," *Governing*, January 2007, p. 48.

[4] Cathy Sharp, Jocelyn Jones, and Alison M. Smith, *What Do We Measure and Why? An Evaluation of the Citistat Model of Performance Management and its Applicability to the Scottish Public Sector* (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research, 2006).

[5] Thus, PerformanceStat is not the latest, multi-variable statistic invented by the Sabermetricians to finally determine who really is the best baseball player. It has absolutely nothing to do with baseball, let alone Bill James, or Billy Beane, or Theo Epstein.

[6] Robert D. Behn, "On Why Public Managers Need to Focus on Their Performance Deficit," *Bob Behn's Public Management Report*, vol. 4, no. 1 (September 2006).

[7] I have observed: CompStat in Lowell and Boston, Massachusetts, and in Los Angeles; TrafficStat, JobStat, T.E.A.M.S., and S.T.A.R.S in New York City; DPSSTAT at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services; CitiStat in Baltimore, SomerStat in Somerville, Massachusetts, ProvStat in Providence Rhode Island, SyraStat in Syracuse, New York, ATLStat in Atlanta, PalmStat in Palm Bay Florida, ColumbusStat in Columbus, Ohio, SFStat in San Francisco; GMAP in Olympia, Washington and the Performance Center in Columbus Ohio.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, (online at http://www.davemckay.co.uk/philosophy/nietzsche/nietzsche.php?name=nietzsche.1878.humanalltoohuman.zimmern.12), p. 206.

[9] Another error of PerformanceStat is the failure to ensure that the organization charged with a specific responsibility has the necessary operational capacity. But this is a common failure in government, and so I have not included it on this list. See Robert D. Behn, *Performance Leadership: 11 Better Practices That Can Ratchet Up Performance* (Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2004), p. 16.

[10] James J. Willis, Stephen D. Mastrofski, and David Weisburd, *Compstat in Practice: An In-Depth Analysis of Three Cities* (Washington, D.C.: The Police Foundation, 2003), p. 21.

[11] Shirley Franklin, "After New Orleans," *Esquire*, December 2005.

[12] Eli B. Silverman, "Compstat's Innovation," in David Weisburd and Anthony A. Braga (eds.), *Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 267.

Further Reading

"What All Mayors Would Like to Know About Baltimore's CitiStat Performance Strategy," Robert D. Behn, Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2007. Online at http://www.businessofgovernment. org/pdfs/BehnReportCiti.pdf.

"Designing PerformanceStat: Or What are the Key Strategic Choices that a Jurisdiction or Agency Must Make When Adapting the CompStat/CitiStat Class of Performance Strategies?" Robert D. Behn, Presented at the Twenty-Ninth Annual Research Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, D.C., November 9, 2007

"The Theory Behind Baltimore's CitiStat," Robert D. Behn, Presented at the Twenty-Eighth Annual Research Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Madison, Wisconsin, November 4, 2006

"The Varieties of CitiStat," Robert D. Behn, *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (May-June 2006), pp. 332-340

"The Core Drivers of CitiStat: It's Not Just About the Meetings and the Maps," Robert D. Behn, *International Public Management Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2005), pp. 1-25

"Can CitiStat Work in Greater Boston?" Phineas Baxandall and Charles Euchner, Cambridge, MA: Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, 2003. Online at http://www. ksg.harvard.edu/rappaport/downloads/citistat/ final_citistat_report.pdf.

"The Baltimore CitiStat Program: Performance and Accountability," Lenneal J. Henderson, Washington, D. C: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2003. Online at: http://www.businessofgovernment. org/pdfs/HendersonReport.pdf.

"The Philadelphia SchoolStat Model," Christopher Patusky, Leigh Botwinik, and Mary Shelley, Washington, D.C.: IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2007. Online at http://www.businessofgovernment. org/pdfs/PatuskyReport.pdf.

"What Do We Measure and Why? An Evaluation of the Citistat Model of Performance Management and its Applicability to the Scottish Public Sector," Cathy Sharp, Jocelyn Jones, and Alison M. Smith, Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Executive Social Research, 2006. Online at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publica tions/2006/07/21102410/0.