

There Is More Than One “Public Sector Way”

**The Diversity Of Management Practices
In Ghana’s Government**

Policy Brief

November 2013



Martin J. Williams
Department of Government
London School of Economics and Political Science

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public sector organizations in Ghana do not always have to look across oceans for ideas to improve performance – sometimes the answer is just across the car park.

It is common to speak of “*the* public sector way” of doing things, but in reality different organizations in Ghana’s government function in very different ways. Understanding this diversity in management processes and practices is important, because it demonstrates that it is possible for public sector organizations to function efficiently despite the common challenges facing them.

This report describes the diversity of management practices in Ghanaian Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Based on structured interviews in 20 ministries and 20 agencies in Ghana, it describes the range of different ways in which MDAs deal with five key aspects of management. It also identifies examples of innovative ideas being used in some organizations that could also be useful for other organizations as well.

The report seeks to serve as a mirror for the public sector, to show some of the different ways – good and bad – in which things currently work in different organizations. The report does not prescribe specific international “best practices”, but rather seeks to reflect the diversity of what is already happening in Ghana so that readers can see how management systems in their organization compare to those of other MDAs. This can aid in identifying areas for improvement and innovative ideas that have already been shown to work in the Ghanaian context.

Three main lessons emerge from the research:

- 1) **Improving management means different things for different organizations**, because each organization currently functions differently and improvement must begin from where the organization currently is. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving management.
- 2) **Changing formal processes can be an effective way to improve management in some organizations, but not in others**. For organizations that do not regularly carry out their existing formal processes, changing processes “on paper” is unlikely to have any real effect since existing processes are not being executed anyway.
- 3) **Most improvements in management must originate from within the organization**. Organizations should not wait for someone else to come improve management for them, and stakeholders outside the organization should recognize what they can and cannot influence and focus their efforts accordingly.

The report also recommends that organizations should make the efficiency of internal processes a regular subject of discussion within the organization, and that these discussions should include all levels of staff – not just management.

By highlighting the creativity and dedication of so many managers in Ghana’s public sector, this report aims to spark further discussions about how all public sector organizations can push themselves to improve management and performance.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is more than one “public sector way” of management• Purpose and methodology of the report• International context• Research findings and lessons• Outline of the report	
The Diversity of Management Practices in Government	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice 1: Distributing tasks and responsibilities among officers• Practice 2: Recognizing good performers• Practice 3: Identifying problems and improving practices• Practice 4: Setting balanced targets• Practice 5: Reviewing organizational performance	
Discussion – “On Paper” and “In Practice”	24
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Common management patterns in Ghanaian organizations• Execution is as important as what’s on paper• The importance of making formal processes more than formalities	
Lessons and Recommendations	26
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving management means different things for different organizations• Changing formal processes can be an effective way to improve management in some organizations, but not in others• Most improvements in management must originate internally• Make internal processes a regular topic for discussion in the organization• Include all levels of staff in performance discussions	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document is a policy-focused report, based on independent research conducted for academic purposes.

I am very grateful to the Office of the Head of Civil Service for their kind assistance in facilitating this research, to the London School of Economics and Political Science for providing financial support, and to the African Center for Economic Transformation for hosting me in Accra. However, the contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the author, and the opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the views of these institutions and should not be attributed to them.

I am especially grateful to the many public servants who generously gave their time to be interviewed as part of this research. The anonymity under which the interviews were conducted makes it impossible to adequately acknowledge their contributions, but without their patience and frank answers this report would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

There is more than one “public sector way” of management

Public servants as well as people outside government often use phrases like “*the public sector way*” or “*the civil service way*” of working, as if every government organization in Ghana functions in exactly the same way. But reality is not so simple. **Different organizations in government often have very different ways of working.**

This is illustrated by taking the example of how the staff appraisal system – which is supposed to be the same throughout the civil service – actually functions in three ministries in Ghana:

- In the first ministry, officers sit down with their supervisors each year and complete staff appraisal forms, as they are supposed to, but the forms are treated as a mere formality. Targets are defined on the form but forgotten afterwards, and there are no rewards for officers who perform well.
- In the second ministry, the appraisal forms are not even completed annually. Instead, they are filled out once every few years when the officer is due for promotion. Even then the appraisal is basically a self-assessment; actual discussions about officers’ performance rarely happen.
- In a third ministry, appraisals are always done annually, and these reviews are treated as a real opportunity to discuss performance. Supervisors and officers reach mutual agreement on a set of targets which actually determine what work the officer will do for the year, and these are reviewed mid-year. Performance is also discussed weekly in divisional meetings, so officers are aware of how they compare to their peers. Good performers are recognized through an annual vote for the best worker in each division, and during the year the Human Resources Management division makes a point of writing letters of recognition to officers who have done exceptional work.

These three examples of actual ministries in Ghana demonstrate how much **management systems can vary across different organizations in government**, even for an area of management like staff appraisal where the system is centrally defined and should therefore be the same across the civil service.

In the first ministry, staff appraisal follows the letter of the system but not its spirit, so the appraisals do not achieve their intended goal of reviewing and rewarding individual performance. In the second ministry, staff appraisal is not conducted annually and is a formality, so it fulfills neither the letter nor the spirit of the system. These are the kind of examples that cynics often have in mind when they refer to ‘the public service way’ in a negative light.

But the example of the third ministry shows that **the system can work well**. This ministry not only carries out the appraisal system to the letter, but it goes above and beyond by implementing complementary practices (divisional meetings, annual recognition awards, letters of commendation) so that the appraisal system can achieve its overall objectives.

This is just one example of how **there is no single public service way of working**, but instead **many different ways**. Recognizing this diversity is important and useful, because it demonstrates that the public sector in Ghana has examples of excellent management as well as examples of management that needs improvement. All government organizations face many challenges, but **if some organizations can find effective ways to address these challenges and function efficiently, then it should be possible for all organizations to do the same**.

In addition, the diversity of management practices within Ghana means that it is not always necessary to look abroad for lessons on improving public sector performance. **Rather than looking across the ocean for innovative ideas, government organizations can often just look across the parking lot.**

Purpose and methodology of the report

This report describes and draws lessons from the diversity of current management practices in Ghanaian Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Based on structured interviews in 20 ministries and 20 agencies in Ghana, it describes the range of different ways in which these organizations deal with five key aspects of management:

- 1) Distributing tasks and responsibilities among individuals;
- 2) Recognizing good individual performance;
- 3) Identifying problems and adopting practice improvements;
- 4) Setting balanced targets; and
- 5) Reviewing organizational performance.

For each of these practices, the report also identifies innovative ideas currently being used in one organization that could be of wider use in the public sector.

The interviews were conducted with 60 senior officers (two in each ministry, one in each agency) between March and October 2013. The interviews aimed to use structured discussion of selected aspects of management to create a “snapshot” of management in the organization, focusing both on formal procedures and what actually happens. The research covered ministries in the economic, social, infrastructure, and administration sectors (security-sector ministries were excluded), and one randomly selected agency of each ministry. All interviews were conducted on the basis that interviewees would be anonymous and that the information from an interview would not be linked to that particular organization. This report therefore deals with aggregate patterns across the public service, and where specific examples are cited the organization in question is not named.

The goal of this report is not to present a fixed list of “best practices” that should be implemented in every organization. Public servants are the experts on their own organizations and are best placed to know what steps could be taken to improve management in their organizations. This report simply aims to serve as a ‘mirror’ to show the range of management practices in use in the public sector in order to spread

awareness about what happens in other government organizations, start conversations, and serve as an inspiration for further innovative thinking.

Table 1: List of ministries, departments, and agencies covered

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs• Ministry of Communications• Ministry of Education• Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations• Ministry of Energy and Petroleum• Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology, and Innovation• Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning• Ministry of Food and Agriculture• Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection• Ministry of Health• Ministry of Information• Ministry of Justice and Attorney-General's Department• Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources• Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development• Ministry of Roads and Highways• Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts• Ministry of Trade and Industry• Ministry of Transport• Ministry of Water Resources, Works, and Housing• Ministry of Youth and Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Children• Department of Community Development• Department of Cooperatives• Department of Rural Housing• Environmental Protection Agency• Fisheries Commission• Ghana Highway Authority• Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications• Ghana Irrigation Development Authority• Ghana Library Authority• Ghana Revenue Authority• Ghana Shippers' Authority• Ghana Standards Authority• Ghana Tourism Authority• Information Services Department• Minerals Commission• National Health Insurance Authority• National Petroleum Authority• National Youth Authority• Registrar-General's Department
---	--

National and international context

This diversity of management practices among organizations is not unique to Ghana's government. Indeed, the topic of differences in management processes and practices among government organizations in the same country is a cutting-edge topic for government-led performance initiatives as well as academic research worldwide. The United Kingdom's Department Capability Review programme conducted in-depth diagnostics of management processes in all government departments and found that not only were there differences across departments, but also that even high-performing departments had some aspects of management that needed improvement. The Government Performance and Results Act in the United States has similar aims. A growing number of academic studies also address this issue, although the literature is mainly based on case studies and there is a lack of research that looks systematically across government.

In Ghana, the newly developed Institutional Performance Assessment Tool (IPAT) for MDAs focuses on management processes and practices in central organizations. The

IPAT aims to measure MDA performance against a defined list of performance targets and mandatory deliverables. The IPAT will allow MDAs to compare themselves to their peers, thus highlighting strong performance and encouraging poor performers to catch up. For districts in Ghana, the Functional and Organizational Assessment Tool (FOAT) already performs a similar function.

Research findings and lessons

The diversity of management processes and practices across Ghana's public sector has important implications for thinking about how to improve management quality.

First, since different organizations current function differently, **improving management means different things for different organizations**. For some organizations, the first step may simply be to start carrying out a formal process regularly – completing staff appraisals every year, or making sure that monthly management meetings actually happen monthly. Other organizations may already carry out that formal process, but find that it is not achieving its intended purpose. In these organizations, the first step to improvement may be to find complementary practices or informal steps to make this formal process more than a formality – for example, using the targets on the staff appraisal form as a way to delegate tasks for the year, or changing the structure of management meetings to improve discussion quality. **There is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving management.**

Second, **changing formal processes can be an effective way to improve management in some organizations, but not in others**. For many government organizations in Ghana, the problem is not that formal processes are bad but that they are not carried out. In these cases, changing what is written on paper may have little practical effect, since what is already written is not being followed anyway. Paradoxically, **the effect of changing formal processes is weakest for those organizations that need the most help**, since these are typically the very organizations which fail to carry out existing formal processes. Changing formal processes has a stronger impact in organizations that already function relatively better, since these organizations are more likely to meaningfully implement what is written on paper. This does not mean that changing formal processes is a bad thing, particularly if these processes are not well-designed and thus difficult to implement. However, the new formal processes may have little impact without a serious effort to increase compliance, and **in some cases it may be wise to focus on achieving compliance with existing formal processes** before seeking to change the processes themselves.

Third, **most improvements in management must originate from within the organization**. Good management requires more than formal processes that can be written on paper, and stakeholders outside the organization (e.g. central management agencies, development partners) have much more influence on how processes are defined on paper than on whether those processes are carried out in the spirit they are intended. Furthermore, the most important steps to improving management happen through continually discussing internal processes and making minor adjustments within the organization, not long, comprehensive reviews led from outside the organization. Most of these steps do not cost anything and can start immediately. **Organizations should not wait for someone else to come improve management**

for them; likewise, stakeholders outside the organization should recognize what they can and cannot influence, and focus their efforts accordingly.

Outline of the report

The next section presents detailed examples of how some government organizations in Ghana deal with five different aspects of management. For each of these practices, the report also identifies innovative ideas currently being used in one organization that could be of wider use in the public sector.

These detailed examples are then used as the basis for a brief discussion section, which seeks to synthesize some common patterns that emerge from the variation in management practices.

The final section concludes and makes some recommendations based on the findings of the research. Some of these are specific suggestions that apply to many organizations in Ghana's public sector, but the most important recommendations focus more on the approach to improving public management than the specific steps to be taken. This is in keeping with the main lesson of this research: improving management means different things for different organizations.

THE DIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN GOVERNMENT

This section illustrates the range of management practices being used in Ghanaian government organizations. It does so by presenting selected examples; it does not claim to be a definitive or comprehensive statement of practice. Rather, the intention is to use these examples to **start conversations** and **spread awareness** of the diversity of management in government, so that readers can **draw inspiration** and select which ideas may be useful for their organization.

For each of the five selected management practices discussed, this section discusses some of the key issues associated with that practice and then describes the current state of the practice in three actual government organizations in Ghana:

- 1) An organization that is representative of the **average**, or most common, practice amongst the organizations studied;
- 2) An organization that is representative of management practices that are **not the best**, or fall short of agreed norms; and
- 3) An organization that is a **star performer** that goes above and beyond requirements in its drive for efficiency.

In addition to these three examples for each aspect of management, there are numerous other innovative ideas that one organization has come up with and is using, but which could be of use to other organizations as well. Some of these are presented as well, in order to highlight the role of innovation in the public service. Most of these ideas are **simple, free, and can be implemented immediately**. This shows that improving management does not always require money or long, formal review processes – it can start immediately, internally within each organization.

Practice 1: Distributing tasks and responsibilities among officers

Key questions for analysis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of tasks and targets are given to individual officers? Are there specific tasks and targets, or simply general areas of potential responsibility (e.g. as defined in the Scheme of Service)? • When an officer comes to work on Monday morning, how do they know what to do? Would they know what they should be working on and start doing it, or would they wait for something to be minuted to them? • Could everyone in the organization say what they are responsible for? • Do individuals actively refer to these tasks and targets to guide what they should be doing, or are the targets just “on paper”? • How do individual tasks and targets connect with those of the division and the organization? Would younger and mid-level officers be aware of the specific targets set for their division? For the organization as a whole? 		
What actually happens – three examples from government organizations in Ghana		
<u>Not the best</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Star performer</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers in a social-sector ministry have targets defined through the appraisal process, but in practice they wait for work to be minuted to them by a superior. • Targets are seen as a formality that don’t actually influence work. • "People set targets, but the fact is that in most situations in our parts of the world these things are only done when there is something critical that occurs, like the officer wants a promotion." • Officers are often idle because they don’t have work. "It's not like you come to work every time and there is something special that you do." • One consequence of this is that management are often overworked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one economic-sector ministry, directors apportion their division’s objectives to officers at the start of the year. This is supposed to be annual but is not always done. • The Scheme of Service provides some guidance about an individual’s responsibilities, but not enough that officers are always aware of what specific tasks they should be doing. • “It's not everyone who knows what they're responsible for and can get on with it without waiting for director's minutes...[but] some of us who have routine work know.” • Most officers below Deputy Director-level have only a general sense of how their work connects to organizational performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an infrastructure ministry, each officer sits with their boss at the start of every year and reaches mutual agreement on a set of specific tasks and targets (e.g. submitting a report within 48 hours of a workshop). • Individual tasks are derived directly from the division’s targets and areas of responsibility. For example one technical division has an officer responsible for each sub-sector within that division; these officers take charge of handling letters and issues within that sub-sector, in consultation with their director. • “People are pretty clear on what they need to be doing.” • Each officer’s performance against their targets is reviewed mid-year and then evaluated at the end of the year, as part of the standard appraisal process. Directors use these reviews as training tools to help officers improve. • Each division meets regularly to discuss the status of each officer’s work, the connections between their roles, and the organization’s targets. • “All our work connects.”

Practice 1 (continued): Distributing tasks and responsibilities among officers

Other innovative practices being used in Ghana		
<u>Assigning tasks and responsibilities</u>	<u>Helping officers see how their work connects</u>	<u>Using targets to celebrate success</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One director in a social-sector ministry has each of his officers create a list of capabilities each year. Then he sits with each officer and agrees on a set of tasks and targets with them, so for each task he has an officer he would call. Once this is finalized he gives a list of the officers responsible for each task to the Minister and Chief Director, so that work can go on even when he is not in the office. As officers complete their targets, he marks this off on the list and later uses this as input into his recommendations for promotions. • A director in an economic-sector agency writes a to-do list on the division's computer at the start of each week, with officers responsible for each item. Her officers then check this list to see what they should be doing for the week, and go off and do it. If they ever find themselves with nothing to do, they go check the list to see what is outstanding. She has also instructed them to add items to the list if she has forgotten them. At the end of the week, the division sits down together and crosses out items they've achieved. • Many divisions informally divide up their work into sub-areas (by region, sub-sector, or donor partner) and place an officer in charge of each section. Assigning roles in this way can help empower officers to keep track of outstanding issues, thus reducing the burden on their director. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A director in an administration-sector ministry meets with his officers every week immediately following the ministry's management meeting. He uses this to brief them on the meeting and what the division has to do for the week. • This ministry also tries to be open about its work so that officers see the connection between their work and the ministry's overall objectives. For example, all senior staff went to see the ministry report at the Parliamentary Select Committee recently. • An agency in the social sector has its officers very widely dispersed across Ghana. Because of funding challenges they cannot bring all officers together for annual meetings, so it is difficult to share information within the organization. To get around this, the agency has quarterly meetings in the regions, where district officers brief regional officers. Then regional officers brief headquarters staff, and headquarters also briefs the regional officers so they in turn can brief the district officers. This helps ensure that all officers work towards the agency's overall targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A director in an economic-sector ministry pointed out that assigning individual targets and connecting them to overall organizational objectives can be a useful way to celebrate positive achievements. In his opinion, however, this is not done regularly enough: "So you often don't realize your successes. For example we should have celebrated that work that we as individual officers did has led to [lists several achievements]...it came from our ideas and our work. But we don't." <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Using targets to stay focused</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mid-level officer in an economic-sector agency keeps a copy of his personal targets by his desk. "I look at it every week." This helps prevent him from overlooking key tasks, and keeps him focused.

Practice 1: Distributing tasks and responsibilities among officers

Importance and key criteria

One of the most basic aspects of management is dividing up the organization's work among individual officers. For each individual, this requires two things:

- **Clarity** on what they are supposed to be doing; and
- **Awareness** of how their work connects with that of other officers and the organization as a whole.

In the public service it is often assumed that officers know what to do by virtue of their class, scheme of service, or division. But in practice, these are often too vague to guide individuals on a day-to-day basis. Individuals are of course expected to receive instructions from their superiors and have specific tasks minuted to them as and when they occur, but **hierarchy alone is not an efficient way to manage individuals**. When direct orders are the only way to distribute information within an organization, individuals end up wasting time waiting for orders or minutes. Likewise, supervisors become overburdened because they have to be constantly giving detailed instructions to their officers, in addition to their own work. As much as possible, officers should know what they are responsible for and be able to do it without always waiting for direct orders.

In order to be effective at working autonomously, individuals need to be able to see how their work connects to the overall targets and objectives of the organization. This requires a deliberate effort on the part of management to **communicate goals, targets, and performance information downward** to officers who do not attend management meetings.

Ways it currently happens in Ghana

The table for Practice 1 gives three examples of how actual government organizations in Ghana approach this aspect of management. In one social-sector ministry, officers almost always have to wait for work to be minuted to them. Individual targets are either undefined or not meaningful. This is not the best because staff are often idle because they don't know what they should be working on; meanwhile, management are overworked because every single piece of business for the organization has to pass through them.

A slight improvement on this is an economic-sector ministry which tries to divide up objectives among the staff of each division at the start of the year. This process helps define individual roles, especially for some types of routine work. In reality, however, discussion of objectives does not always happen annually, so most staff tend to fall back on waiting for direct orders. Officers who are below Deputy Director level are not aware of the specific targets and objectives for the organization, so they only have a general sense of how their work connects to organizational performance.

But some organizations take this aspect of management very seriously. In one infrastructure ministry, annual objective-setting happens every year through a process of **mutual discussion and agreement**. This process tells individuals what specific tasks and sub-sectors they are responsible for, so on a day-to-day basis they can do their work and **only have to go to their boss when guidance or approval is really needed**.

In addition to dividing up work, this process also defines specific targets for individuals (e.g. to submit a report on a workshop within 48 hours) on which their performance can be assessed. The individual targets are derived directly from the divisional workplans, and **each division meets regularly to discuss the status of each officer's work, the connections between their roles, and overall progress on divisional and organizational targets**. The performance of each officer against their targets is reviewed mid-year with their supervisor; these are treated as opportunities for teaching and letting officers make their supervisors aware of challenges. As a result of all these mutually reinforcing management practices, **individual officers are clear on what they need to be doing and management can concentrate on high-level strategic work**.

Q: How would individual staff see the connection between their own work and overall organizational targets and objectives?

A: "Sometimes they see no connection. They're not involved in planning, or monitoring and evaluation. So if the organization doesn't make a conscious effort to educate them on our strategic plan, what you've set out to do, then 80% of the staff see no connection between what they're doing and the overall objective of the organization."

– A director in an administrative-sector agency

Innovative practices and ideas for improvement

There are many different ways to effectively distribute tasks and responsibilities among individual officers, but they all share some key characteristics:

- **Regularity**, whether annual, monthly, or weekly;
- **Clarity**, of responsibilities as well as expectations;
- **Mutual discussion and agreement** between the individual and her supervisor;
- **Periodic review** of individual performance, challenges, and connections to the work of other individuals and the organization as a whole.

For example, one common practice is to assign officers to different **areas of responsibility**, so that each individual knows that they are responsible for everything related to a particular sub-sector, region, donor partner, or function (e.g. monitoring, budget).

Alternatively, individuals can be assigned **specific tasks with defined targets** that can be reviewed. This often happens as part of an annual process, but it can also be more frequent and informal: for example, one director in an economic-sector agency writes a **to-do list on the division's computer** at the start of each week, with officers' names next to each task. Her officers then check this list to see what they should be doing for the week, and go off and do it. If they ever find themselves with nothing to

Practice 2: Recognizing good performers

Key questions for analysis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is staff appraisal done regularly (every year), or only when it is time for an officer to go for promotion? • Is appraisal used by the organization as a tool to set targets, evaluate officers, and improve performance, or does the organization depend on staff to take the initiative to have their appraisal completed? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any rewards, financial or non-financial, associated with performance? Is there a transparent process for this? • Are better performers likely to be recommended for promotion faster, or informally given improved roles and higher responsibilities? Are non-performing officers likely to be promoted more slowly, or not at all?
What actually happens – three examples from government organizations in Ghana		
<u>Not the best</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Star performer</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an economic-sector ministry, staff appraisals are only completed once every three years, when it is time for the officer to go for promotion. • The appraisal is basically a self-assessment, actual discussions about officers' performance rarely happen. • "The appraisals don't improve the system. They're a formality." • There is no link between performance and promotion. Recommendations for promotion are based solely on seniority, and out-of-turn promotion never happens. • In principle performance can be incentivized with training opportunities, but the allocation of these is viewed as subjective. "One director even says he'll send you 'if your face looks nice'." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisals in one social-sector ministry are always done annually, but there are no rewards and the process is still viewed as a formality. • Better performing officers are sometimes more likely to be recommended as a focal person for an activity and receive additional responsibilities, but this is viewed as subjective and dependent on one's director and the chief director. • In principle non-performing officers can not be recommended for promotion, but in practice this does not happen and recommendation for promotion is based entirely on years served. • The ministry gives all officers a bag of rice at Christmas as a bonus, but this is given to all staff regardless of performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one infrastructure ministry, appraisals are always done annually, and individuals' performance is also discussed weekly in divisional meetings, so officers are also aware of their peers' performance. • Each year the ministry holds an awards night. Within each division staff vote for a top performer, and then these individuals vote for an overall top performer amongst themselves. • Out-of-turn promotions are rare, but non-performing individuals tend to be recommended more slowly, for example after five years instead of three. In the long run, this means that better performers rise through the ranks faster. • The ministry also makes an effort to recognize officers for exceptional work. For example, one young officer was asked to give an important presentation on behalf of his director who had traveled. Afterward he received a written letter from the Director of Human Resources Management on behalf of the Chief Director, congratulating him on a job well done. This officer was highly motivated by this simple (and costless) gesture – he has kept the letter and even read the letter to his children.

Practice 2 (continued): Recognizing good performers

Other innovative practices being used in Ghana		
<u><i>Motivating using individual awards</i></u>	<u><i>Rewarding performance with responsibility</i></u>	<u><i>Using objective criteria to reward divisions</i></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many institutions use ‘best worker’ awards as a way to recognize and incentivize good performance. • Some institutions only give one award per year, for the overall best worker. Others give one award per division, as well as a best overall worker. Still others give awards for different categories: most hardworking officer, most punctual, etc. • In some institutions these awards are chosen by voting amongst all staff, whereas in others they are simply selected by management. Other organizations use a hybrid approach, for example having each division vote for a best worker amongst themselves, then having management interview these nominees to select an overall best worker. • Some organizations give a token financial bonus to their best worker, although in many organizations the award is simply for recognition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even though promotions and performance are not always directly linked, many institutions reward star performers by giving them additional responsibilities – ‘informal promotions’. • In one administration sector ministry, good performers do not receive individual rewards or faster promotion, but they get discussed and recognized by their peers and management. This can lead to additional responsibilities and committee memberships, which act as indirect incentives due to sitting allowances, etc. “This is one of the ministries where you are recognized based on your work, not your rank.” • In one social-sector ministry, it is common for officers to advance faster than normal through acting roles. Good performers are more likely to be appointed as ‘acting’ in a position when it becomes vacant, and if they perform well it is recommended that they be confirmed in that role. This confirmation can lead to formal promotion to a rank commensurate with the position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One economic-sector agency is instituting an award scheme for its best division. This will be assessed using transparent and mostly objective criteria, e.g. reporting timeliness, teamwork within division and with other divisions, punctuality, office cleanliness, retirement of imprest on time, annual workplan execution, departmental use of website and intranet, and quality of presentations. • These criteria will be monitored by the PPME division throughout the year, and a team will be set up to do the overall evaluation at the end of each year. • In addition to motivating staff and promoting teamwork, this scheme will have the added benefit of helping the agency track its internal processes. The same data that will be used to reward the best division can also be used by management to monitor performance and identify inefficiencies. • For example, the agency plans to introduce a biometric employee check-in system that is tied to staff ID cards (which already exist) so they can easily measure punctuality. Automating this system will improve transparency and avoid disputes – “if you don’t believe it you can go and check.”

do, they go check the list to see what is outstanding. She has also instructed them to add items to the list if she has forgotten them. At the end of the week, the division sits down together and crosses out items they've achieved.

Creating awareness of how individuals' work connects can also take various forms. The most common in Ghana are **divisional meetings**. These can be **held immediately after management meetings**, in order to brief non-management staff on feedback about the division's work, progress towards overall organizational targets, and upcoming work.

An innovative alternative that has been practiced in one agency is to **regularly post divisional and organizational performance information on a public noticeboard**. Presenting information about targets and accomplishments is an efficient way of spreading awareness about what is happening in different parts of the organization. It also serves as motivation for divisions, since staff know that everyone will see how they are doing. Visual display of performance information is a simple and effective technique, and is widely used in the private sector as well.

Practice 2: Recognizing good performers

Importance and key criteria

Recognizing individual performance in organizations has two components:

- **Assessing** how well individuals have performed; and
- **Rewarding** good performance (and not rewarding poor performance).

Assessing performance usually happens as part of an annual appraisal process. In organizations that effectively recognize good performers, the appraisals always take place every year and are seen as a tool for the organization to evaluate and correct the performance of its staff. In other organizations, the appraisals are seen as a formality so that officers can receive promotions, and so the appraisals may not even be done annually but rather once every few years when it is time for the officer to go for promotion. These organizations often leave it up to the individual officer to have his/her appraisal form filled, which is a sign that the organization itself does not take assessing individual performance very seriously.

Rewarding good performance is more difficult in the public sector than the private sector, because the nature of public sector work does not usually allow for high-powered monetary incentives. However, contrary to common perception, this does not mean that individual performance cannot be rewarded. **Incentives are not only monetary** – they can include public recognition, training, informal career development (e.g. committee membership, “acting” responsibilities), and regular promotion (or delayed promotion for poor performers). Even a simple **“thank you”** or **“good job”** from a supervisor can go a long way to making officers feel that their performance matters.

Ways it currently happens in Ghana

The table for Practice 2 illustrates three examples of how recognizing individual performance is currently approached in Ghana's public sector. In one ministry it is

viewed as a purely formality, a box to be ticked for the sake of promotion, so there are no rewards and the appraisal forms are not even completed annually. In another ministry the appraisal is undertaken annually and there are informal benefits for good performance, such as being recommended to be the focal person for an activity. However, performance still has little effect on promotion, and the only tangible rewards are an end-of-year bonus which is given to all staff regardless of performance.

The example set by an infrastructure ministry shows how public sector organizations can effectively assess and reward performance. Appraisals are undertaken annually, and information on officers' own performance and that of their peers is **constantly communicated** throughout the year. The ministry uses a transparent voting process to award **annual best worker awards** for each division and for the organization, and does not promote officers who do not perform well. It also **occasionally recognizes officers in writing for exceptional performance** of specific tasks, and these commendations are highly prized by staff – this illustrates that **rewarding good performance does not have to cost any money**.

Innovative practices and ideas for improvement

With respect to assessing performance, the most important thing is that appraising staff should be seen as something that is done **for the benefit of the organization** rather than for the benefit of individual staff. This transforms staff appraisals from a formality for promotion into a tool for the organization to **communicate information** about individuals' performance, **identify star officers** who can take on more important roles, and find ways to improve the performance of struggling individuals.

Rewarding performance can happen in many different ways, some examples of which from Ghanaian organizations are shown in the Practice 2 table. One especially innovative approach being implemented by an agency in the economic sector is to create an award system for divisions. The focus on rewarding divisional performance rather than individual performance is in recognition of the team-based nature of most of the agency's work. The **PPME division will track a number of criteria** (e.g. reporting timeliness, annual workplan execution, use of website and intranet) throughout the year in a transparent fashion, and base their end-of-year awards on this. In addition to **creating incentives for teamwork and good performance**, publicly tracking these indicators will help management to identify internal challenges and opportunities to improve efficiency that may have been overlooked otherwise.

Practice 3: Identifying problems and improving practices

Importance and key criteria

Identifying problems facing an organization and finding ways to address them may seem basic, but in fact it is one of the most difficult things for any organization to do. In large part it is so difficult precisely because it is taken for granted – as one interviewee said, “You would see if there was a problem because it affects your work.” But if problems are identified once they have affected work, it is too late – the problem has already had a negative impact. And sometimes problems can exist in one part of the organization without senior management or officers in other divisions being aware of them, so they never get solved.

Practice 3: Identifying problems and improving practices

Key questions for analysis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When problems occur in carrying out work, how do they typically get identified and fixed? • Are potential problems proactively sought out, or do they only get identified once they have slowed work? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often are existing processes discussed and challenged? • If younger or mid-level officers have ideas to make the organization's work more effective, how could they raise these suggestions? How does the organization encourage this?
What actually happens – three examples from government organizations in Ghana		
<p><u><i>Not the best</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A social sector ministry becomes aware of problems only once they have affected work. • Management occasionally meets but this is not regular. "We hardly meet as a team." • Management relies entirely on officers to take the initiative to raise problems, but even in these cases the focus is on logistical problems rather than operational performance. • If an officer has an idea to improve efficiency they can start using it themselves, but there is no way to encourage innovation or share ideas. • "It's the way things are done here." 	<p><u><i>Average</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A social sector ministry has quarterly sector working group meetings, as well as monthly meetings for a particular programme. Challenges and new ideas could be discussed at these, although they are viewed mainly as routine briefings. • However, most problems are still not identified until they have negative impacts. "You would see if there was a problem because it affects your work." • Within the ministry, officers could go to their supervisor if they wanted to raise an issue, but this depends entirely on individual initiative. 	<p><u><i>Star performer</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An infrastructure ministry holds biweekly directors meetings and each division holds weekly meetings. • The divisional meetings are very open, and operational staff see it as their job to make their directors aware of issues so they can be raised at a higher level. Feedback about the division from other divisions is discussed – for example whether the division is meeting deadlines or submitting receipts to the Finance division properly. • Almost all officers keep electronic diaries so they know what is due at what time and when they should expect responses. They also use the register of outgoing letters kept by the division's secretary to track outstanding issues. • Officers are encouraged to put new ideas in writing or raise them at meetings, for example when they've gone abroad to a conference and heard about a useful practice. It is common for these to be forwarded to the Chief Director and adopted. • The ministry's agencies also write with suggestions on ways the ministry could do things better. • Staff use the email system (when it's working) to share ideas, and all monitoring reports are shared with all directors on a routine basis.

Practice 3 (continued): Identifying problems and improving practices

Other innovative practices being used in Ghana		
<u>Internal approaches to improving performance</u>	<u>Bringing in external ideas</u>	<u>Attitudes</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An infrastructure ministry has a Planning Working Group comprising all planning and monitoring and evaluation staff from the ministry and its agencies, plus RSIM staff from the ministry. They meet monthly – not just during budget preparation – to hold discussions, educate themselves, and share ideas. Sometimes they ask for a report from a particular agency, not necessarily because it is performing poorly but in order to better understand the challenges and how it works. • An economic sector agency has a Core Transformation Team of nine or ten officers who meet every quarter and come up with a list of suggestions to improve the organization. These are put into a memo and sent to management, and fourteen days later management will meet with the Team to discuss. The members of the team include some division heads but also many younger officers, and were selected because they are bold and outspoken. The agency is also trying to create an Idea Forum as an additional way of encouraging staff to suggest innovations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economic ministry has a research liaison committee that brings in new ideas and knowledge from outside the organization. The committee meets at a national level, but the regions and some districts also have their own research liaison committees. Committee meetings are opportunities to present papers and critiques, but also for external researchers to give feedback on how the ministry is currently doing things. • An infrastructure ministry holds monthly meetings with stakeholders in one of its sub-sectors. These meetings are used to discuss innovations and new ideas. These meetings were initially started by one NGO and have now been taken up by another one. The ministry is considering sponsoring it and hosting it within the ministry itself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one infrastructure ministry, all levels of staff discuss processes constantly, almost every day. “We’re always looking for a better way to do things.” Work is seen as collaborative and meetings as opportunities for brainstorming. • The rationale for processes is discussed with all staff – not just <i>what</i> to do but <i>why</i>. “People need to buy into the process, so it’s important that they understand it.”

Identifying internal problems therefore requires **conscious and sustained effort** to address. It should not be taken for granted that problems will be obvious, or that staff will automatically raise them with their supervisors. Rather, the organization should have in place **dedicated forums to discuss challenges** (e.g. management meetings, divisional meetings). These should encompass all levels of staff. Organizations can also put in place **routine mechanisms to track the progress of work** (e.g. registries of outstanding letters).

Identifying problems also goes hand-in-hand with creating and adopting new ideas and more efficient ways of working. Indeed, process improvements often arise in response to identified challenges, and can be discussed in the same forums. As with identifying problems, **it should not be taken for granted that individuals will raise new ideas** unless they are given the opportunity and encouragement to do so. In part this requires creating dedicated forums for them to do so, but more importantly it requires **building a culture where sharing ideas is actively encouraged for all levels of staff**. Officers can be most innovative when they come to see generating new ideas and improving processes as an integral part of their jobs.

Ways it currently happens in Ghana

As shown in the table for Practice 3, some government organizations do not have any regular measures in place to identify challenges and practice improvements – in one social-sector ministry, for example, management meetings do not come on regularly and officers are not encouraged to share new ideas. Another social-sector ministry does hold quarterly sector working group meetings at which challenges and ideas are discussed, but does not have any other internal methods to bring these out.

The infrastructure ministry described in the table, by contrast, ensures that there are a **variety of ways for problems and new ideas to be identified**. These include regular management meetings and divisional meetings. These meetings feed into each other: problems or ideas mentioned in a divisional meeting can be raised by the division's director at the management meeting, and likewise the director can use the divisional meetings to disseminate ideas or information from the management meetings. The organization has also worked to **build a culture of actively identifying potential problems** – for example by using registers of outgoing letters to see what issues are at risk of being late – and of soliciting new ideas from staff as well as the agencies under the ministry.

Staff attitudes are as important as formal processes:

“We’re always looking for a better way to do things”

“People need to buy into the process, so it’s important that they understand it.”

- Interviewee in an infrastructure ministry

Innovative practices and ideas for improvement

There is no one best way for organizations to identify problems and bring out new ideas. Each way has its own strengths and includes different staff groups, and so effective organizations **use multiple approaches to try to maximize discussion** and inclusiveness.

These can include internal meetings focused on identifying challenges and new ideas, such as the regular **Planning Working Group** meetings in one infrastructure ministry

or the **Core Transformation Team** in an economic-sector agency. But external parties also often have valuable ideas and insights. One economic-sector ministry tries to take advantage of these through a nationwide system of **Research Liaison Committees**, while an infrastructure ministry holds **monthly stakeholder meetings** for one of its sub-sectors.

Practice 4: Setting balanced targets

Importance and key criteria

Organizational targets are a crucial tool for measuring and improving performance. Of course, different targets are appropriate for different organizations, depending on policy choices and the particularities of their sector. But across all organizations, in the public as well as the private sector, it usually makes sense to define and track a **balanced set of targets**.

Practically, this means that public organizations should establish targets not just for **activities** and **outputs**, but also for **outcomes** and **internal processes**. Output targets show whether the organization is producing the deliverables it intends to; outcome targets show whether these outputs are having the desired result; and process targets show how efficiently the organization is conducting its business.

For ministries, there is the added complication that implementation activities are conducted by their agencies, so output and outcome targets often focus more on the agencies than the ministry itself. In these cases, **the ministry should focus on using process targets** (e.g. turnaround time for forwarding budget release requests, execution of procurement plan) to make sure that the ministry is performing its support and oversight roles effectively.

Many ministries and agencies have targets defined either by external parties (development partners, MDGs, international bodies) or by statute (their authorizing legislation). While these are important, they should not be seen as a substitute for internally defined performance targets. **The most important drive for improved performance is always internal.**

Likewise, many organizations have formally defined outcome or process targets in strategic plans or Sector Medium-Term Development Plans (SMTDPs), but the targets are more on paper than in practice. Targets only matter if they actually guide decision-making within the organization, **so a target that no one is aware of is not of any use.**

Ways it currently happens in Ghana

The general trend in Ghana is that, in practice, many organizations only target completion of activities and certain outputs. These targets then become a simple checklist of activities, or an accounting of what the organization did during the year. The administration-sector ministry in the table for Practice 4 illustrates this. The social-sector ministry in the next column is a slight improvement on this, in that it also targets a handful of key interim outcomes, but the coverage of these is far from comprehensive.

Practice 4: Setting balanced targets

Key questions for analysis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of objectives and targets are set for the organization (at an operational level rather than overall policy goals, i.e. what the organization is actually going to do this year)? • Do the targets cover outputs (deliverables that are directly under the organization's control)? • Do the targets cover outcomes (the overall impact of the organization's outputs)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the targets cover processes (the efficiency with which internal activities are executed)? • For ministries, are targets defined for headquarters as well as for the agencies? For agencies, are targets defined for headquarters as well as for regions/ districts? • Are the targets determined mainly by statute and/or other stakeholders (e.g. donors, MDGs, MOFEP, treaties), or are they selected by the organization itself as a way to improve performance? 	
What actually happens – three examples from government organizations in Ghana		
<p><u><i>Not the best</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An administration-sector ministry's only targets are activities or outputs. • Monitoring performance against these targets consists solely of counting the activities undertaken by the ministry during the year. • Outcomes and processes are neither targeted nor monitored, so the ministry has no way to try to improve on these aspects of its performance. • Officers in the ministry are unaware of the targets of the agencies under the ministry, making it difficult for the ministry to fulfill its oversight role. 	<p><u><i>Average</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A social-sector ministry has targets for outputs and a handful of interim outcomes, although some key outcomes are not measured at all. • “The NDPC requires that MDAs have an M&E plan with indicators on four levels: input, output, process, and outcome. But we focus only on input and output.” • One division has more thorough monitoring of outcomes, collected mainly in conjunction with a donor program in that sub-sector. • The efficiency of internal processes is not targeted or monitored. “In the whole of the MDAs, efficiency is very low. Nobody does those measurements in all of Ghana.” 	<p><u><i>Star performer</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an economic-sector agency, the agency as a whole is focused mostly on outcome targets, while each division has output targets. These output targets contribute to the organization's overall outcome targets. • Each division has key objectives (long-term); strategies for achieving them (medium-term); and specific targets (annual outputs). • The organization also has some process targets, for example dealing with permit applications in a certain time period. These are defined in the agency's authorizing act, and tracked to see whether they are meeting it or not. • The heads of divisions have a tracking mechanism in Excel to help them measure their progress against their targets. They use specific indicators (activities and outputs), since the key objectives are too broad to be tracked in this way.

Practice 4 (continued): Setting balanced targets

Other innovative practices being used in Ghana		
<u>Implementing process targets</u>	<u>Using e-tools to help implement process targets</u>	<u>Identifying risk factors</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One infrastructure ministry uses process targets to assess how well it is supporting its agencies. For example, the ministry is procuring equipment for some of its agencies and has set itself specific targets for time of shipment, delivery, clearing, etc., based on their procurement plan. • Another infrastructure uses process targets for financial management, in order to track and reduce the amount of time it takes to get invoices to the Ministry of Finance for payment. • This ministry also sets targets for itself on the percentage of its budget spent on certain prioritized expenditure categories. This helps to ensure that these priorities do not get overlooked amidst other pressing issues. • An administration-sector ministry has defined process targets for day-to-day office work. Examples include the number of days to reply to a letter and number of days to take a decision on a memo. However, these are not currently being tracked. Although officers know that such targets are defined, they are not sure on the details. In this ministry the first step of defining the process target has been taken, but making use of the target to improve performance will require additional steps from management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One economic-sector agency is trying to address process efficiency as part of its new strategic plan. They have already been operating with a statutory target for number of days to handle permit applications, but they want to reduce the time even further and so have set themselves a new target that almost halves the statutory target. They are introducing an online permit application system to meet this demanding target. • This agency is not currently measuring the time it takes to deal with these permits, but they are moving to put one in place. In fact the system itself is ready but because of challenges with internet reliability it is not currently operational. To address this they are trying to improve internet connectivity in their regional offices, and in the meantime they have asked those regions with connectivity to start collecting the data as a pilot. Once this system is online, management will be able to monitor in real-time the progress of applications, average times, number of outstanding applications, and other data that can help improve process efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an infrastructure ministry, each unit is assigned key outputs and targets to be measured against a baseline. Along with each target is a discussion of the potential risk factors for the output. This helps them to identify and plan for potential risks, and also to help them assess whether the target is realistic or not. <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Evaluating, not just monitoring</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an infrastructure ministry which already does an excellent job of monitoring output indicators, staff have pointed out that the ministry is doing more monitoring than evaluation. The sector as a whole has now begun discussions about how they need to do more evaluation work to be able to see the link between outputs and outcomes. They held a conference discussion about this recently, and have contracted a consultant to help them begin to include more evaluation in their performance assessments.

Finally, one economic-sector agency uses a multi-tiered system of targets. The **agency as a whole focuses on outcome targets**, while **each division focuses on output targets**. In order to connect the divisional output targets to the organizational outcome targets, each division has key **objectives** (long-term), **strategies** for achieving them (medium-term), and specific **targets** (annual outputs). The agency also has some **process targets**, such as a maximum number of days for dealing with different types of permit applications. These are continually tracked by management.

Innovative practices and ideas for improvement

Although most organizations in Ghana's government focus on output and possibly outcome targets, an increasing number are using **process targets** as a way to track and improve efficiency. As the examples in the Practice 4 table show, these can be for organizational-level processes, like financial management. They can also be for day-to-day, individual tasks, such as the number of days to reply to a letter.

However, it is easier to define process targets than to actually measure them. Many organizations, for example, have established written Service Charters with numerous standards for completion of various processes. But very few of these organizations actually track these targets, and in many cases staff are not even aware they exist. Because process targets can be difficult to track, it can be better to **begin by defining a small number of targets and actually tracking them** than by defining a comprehensive range of targets that are so overwhelming that they don't get implemented.

Practice 5: Reviewing organizational performance

Importance and key criteria

Reviewing organizational performance is at least as important as setting targets or undertaking monitoring activities, yet it often receives little attention. Meetings and reports are the most common tools used to review performance, and some form of these exists in all the organizations studied. However, the key issues that determine the effectiveness of these review activities are:

- **Regularity**, whether meetings are actually held when they are supposed to or whether they often do not happen;
- **Focus**, issues of performance and problem-solving should take priority over administrative or logistical issues;
- **Inclusiveness** of different groups of staff; and
- **Existence of different forums** for addressing different issues and different time horizons.

As with identifying problems, there is no one best way to review organizational performance, and the most effective organizations take **multiple approaches to reviewing**. For example, management meetings and divisional meetings are both important venues for different types of performance review. Likewise, weekly or monthly management meetings serve a different review function than annual reviews, so ideally an organization should make use of both of these tools.

Ways it currently happens in Ghana

The first social-sector ministry discussed in the Practice 5 table is supposed to have internal management meetings as well as quarterly reviews for some programs. In practice, though, the management meetings are not performance-focused and do not come on regularly, while only the donor-led quarterly reviews are always held regularly. Another social-sector ministry does hold regular monthly management meetings and annual reviews at which performance are discussed, but staff below management level are not involved in these. Although there are staff durbars held occasionally during the year, these deal more with administrative and logistical issues than performance.

In an economic-sector agency, by contrast, performance review happens weekly (Monday morning management meetings), quarterly (divisional reports and divisional meetings), and annually (annual planning retreat, end-of-year review with all staff). These different reviews always **happen regularly, include all staff** in various ways, and make sure that short, medium, and long-term performance issues are all **constantly addressed** by the agency.

Innovative practices and ideas for improvement

Some steps to improve performance review are very simple, such as **actually holding regular meetings regularly**. Others simple steps concern the follow-up to meetings: one ministry sends a **memo with a list of all agreed actions to take before the next meeting** to all directors after each management meeting, while another ensures that **minutes are circulated within 48 hours** after the meeting (instead of just before the next meeting) so that the minutes can help guide work before the next meeting.

Another simple but innovative practice is to post information on divisional and organizational targets and performance on a **public noticeboard**. This serves a dual function of putting pressure on divisions to perform and educating lower- and mid-level officers about the organization's activities and performance.

"When we had a noticeboard you would see people standing there reading it, some were very excited about it!"

- Director in an economic-sector agency

Other ministries make use of existing tools in innovative ways, by actively encouraging staff to **use the float folder** to inform themselves and by ensuring that **quarterly reports are circulated to all staff involved** with a particular issue, not only management.

Finally, a number of ministries have created working groups that include key stakeholders from outside the organization in reviewing the ministry's performance. These can be general-purpose **Sector Working Groups**, or more functionally oriented bodies like a **Sector Planning Group** or **Data Working Group**. The advantage of involving parties outside the organization in reviewing performance is that they can bring new information, perspectives, and ideas to discussing performance, and help to keep organizations on their toes.

Practice 5: Reviewing organizational performance

Key questions for analysis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the organization review its performance, formally or informally? • Are management meetings held regularly, or do they sometimes get overlooked? Are these meetings used to review the organization's performance, or are they mainly for administrative and logistical matters? • Does the organization hold periodic reviews of its performance (e.g. annual, mid-year, quarterly)? • Are these review discussions useful? Are they structured to identify the root causes of problems, or are they treated simply as a matter of routine? • Who is involved in reviewing performance? Would officers below management-level know how the organization is doing against its targets? How is performance communicated within the organization? • If an action is agreed at one of these review meetings, how would it be carried forward? What follow-up would be done? 		
What actually happens – three examples from government organizations in Ghana		
<u>Not the best</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Star performer</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A social-sector ministry holds monthly management meetings, but these have not been regular for the past year. • Management meetings are “more for human management and the condition of the office and that kind of thing than results management. There's very little discussion of what are we supposed to do and where are we.” • The ministry has quarterly reviews for some of its programs, but only the donor-led ones are regular. • Quarterly and annual reports are seen as a formality undertaken to meet external requirements, not an opportunity to review performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another social sector-ministry has monthly management meetings, which are regular, plus an annual review. These are focused on performance. It also holds staff durbars (about three per year) to discuss administrative issues. • Directors are supposed to brief their officers after management meetings, but this does not always happen. More senior officers would learn about the organization's performance through working with their directors. • Agreed actions would be minuted to the officer responsible. “That's if the minutes can be done in good time, sometimes they can take long.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economic-sector agency has several levels of performance review: weekly, quarterly, and annual. Each level involves different groups of staff, so everyone gets to know about the agency's performance. • Management meetings are held every Monday morning. • Each division writes a quarterly report. These feed into the agency's quarterly report to its ministry, but are viewed by the agency as an opportunity to review performance. • Directors are supposed to meet quarterly with their divisions. They usually do this, but not 100% of the time. General staff meetings are also held occasionally. • The agency holds an annual planning meeting in August. This is a retreat for senior management to assess performance, do their annual workplans and draw up a budget (although the meeting is not mainly focused on the budget). When management returns from this, the heads of departments brief their staff. • At the beginning of the year a review is held to discuss the previous year's performance, annual plans are reviewed, and the Executive Director meets with all staff to roll out the annual plan.

Practice 5 (continued): Reviewing organizational performance

Other innovative practices being used in Ghana		
<u><i>Internal approaches to assessing performance</i></u>	<u><i>Sharing performance information</i></u>	<u><i>Reviewing performance beyond the organization</i></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one administration-sector ministry, each quarter the M&E division scores each division on completion of their workplan. For now, their emphasis is on looking for evidence to back up the division's own quarterly report. The scoring is done with representatives from the division present, and the final report submitted to the Chief Director. • These reports are circulated to all directors, so they can see the performance of the other divisions as well as their own. Each director is given ten copies of the report so that other officers in the division can also see, but whether they pick up their copy depends on the individual's initiative so many officers never see them. <p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>Following up</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately after each management meeting, an economic-sector ministry sends a memo to each director with the specific follow-up actions they have to take before the next meeting. This is copied to all directors, so everyone can see what each other are responsible for. • One infrastructure ministry also makes sure management meeting minutes are circulated within 48 hours after the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One economic-sector agency has posted information about the various divisions' targets and performance on a public noticeboard. This puts pressure on non-performing divisions. It also helps lower- and mid-level staff to learn the performance of their division, and see the connection between their own work and that of other divisions and the organization as a whole. • "When we had a noticeboard you would see people standing there reading it, some were very excited about it!" • In an infrastructure ministry, non-management staff are actively encouraged to use the float folder to stay informed. "People really use it – sometimes I spend two hours in the morning seeing what's happening. This also helps people like us to know about performance." • This ministry also ensures that copies of quarterly reports are sent to all officers concerned with a particular issue, not only directors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least six sectors have quarterly or annual meetings of sector working groups, which include not only the ministry and its agencies but also donors and civil society (where appropriate). These working groups review the implementation of MDAs' workplans, but also serve as a forum for new ideas to emerge and for government institutions to explain their challenges and needs for support. • One infrastructure ministry has a Sector Planning Group which comprises all planning staff from the ministry and its agencies, plus Research, Statistics, and Information Management (RSIM) from the ministry. This group meets monthly to coordinate, discuss challenges, and share ideas for more efficient ways of doing things. • A social-sector ministry has a Data Working Group comprising staff of the ministry and all its agencies. This helps ensure that data collected by each agency is available to the whole sector, and minimizes duplication of effort.

DISCUSSION

The previous section described some of the ways in which management processes and practices vary across different public sector organizations in Ghana. This section takes a slightly more analytical approach to discussing common patterns in this variation across the public sector. Specifically, it focuses on the difference between management “on paper” and management “in practice.”

Management practices “on paper” and “in practice”

There is a tendency to think of management only as those processes which are formally defined and written down somewhere. But in every organization worldwide, there is always a difference between what is written on paper and what actually happens.

Sometimes this is for the worse: formal processes may be defined, but not actually carried out. But it can also be for the better: **formal processes must be supported by complementary (often informal, unwritten) management practices**. These complementary practices are necessary for the formal processes to be carried out effectively, in the spirit in which they were intended; otherwise they become mere formalities. These informal, complementary practices often take the form of **norms, expectations, or organizational culture**.

In Ghana, informal management practices are often associated with negative practices such as patronage or corruption. But **informal management practices are not inherently bad**. They simply represent all the aspects of management that cannot be written down. A positive example of an informal practice would be a director convening a quick divisional meeting to brief his staff after a management meeting. **Informal management practices exist in every organization and are just as much a part of good management as formal procedures**. Recognizing this means that instead of always trying to write down and impose good management practices, reforms should also focus on how to foster positive informal practices – that is, productive norms, expectations, and organizational culture.

Table 2: The relationship between formal and informal management practices in government organizations in Ghana

	Not the best	Average	Star performer
Formal processes	Not carried out	Carried out	Carried out
Complementary/ informal practices	Non-existent/ ad hoc	Non-existent/ ad hoc	Systematically instituted
Result	Management is ad hoc	Formal processes are just formalities	Processes used effectively

Across government organizations in Ghana, a common pattern emerges. For a given area of management, one group of organizations largely carry out whatever is the formal process for that area, but do not take additional steps beyond that (see *Average* in Table 2 above). In the example of staff appraisal discussed above, this would be the ministry which conducts appraisals annually but treats them as a formality. A second

group of organizations does not even regularly implement the formal process, so whatever happens is ad hoc and depends entirely on individual personalities (*Not the best*). And a third group of organizations **implements the formal process and takes additional steps to ensure that the process achieves its purpose** (*Star performer*).

It is commonly acknowledged in Ghana that management “on paper” does not usually align with management “in practice”, but what is not always recognized is that the relationship between “on paper” and “in practice” management is different in different organizations. An implication is that **improving management will mean different things for different organizations**.

Execution is as important as what's on paper

Another implication of Table 2 is that the execution of formal processes is just as important as the details of those formal processes. For organizations that do not currently implement their existing formal processes, what is on paper is actually irrelevant.

This means that reform efforts should begin by taking stock of the current state of affairs. If a process is not working, is it because the design of the process is bad, or because it is not being executed? **In many cases, it may be better to begin by making sure the existing process is being executed**. This will make it easier to redesign the details of the process later, because staff will be in the habit of executing the process. Changing the details of a process that is not currently being executed can often be ineffective, because **staff can assume that if the previous system was not being taken seriously, then neither will the new one**.

The importance of making formal processes more than formalities

If a formal process is being executed but is not proving effective at achieving its ultimate aims (e.g. performance reviews don't generate meaningful discussion), it has become a formality. In these cases the problem may not be the design of the process – what's written on paper – but rather that staff go through the motions of the process without also internalizing the intention behind it. **When staff understand and buy into the reason why a process is important, they will not only go through the motions of the process but also take additional steps to make the process meaningful**.

Because these informal complementary practices are highly contextual and require individual discretion, they cannot be written down. No one can force officers to take them, and so trying to institute new rules or formal processes is not an effective approach. Rather, fostering these informal complementary practices involves:

- **Providing staff with information**, so they understand the rationale of the process, see how their role connects to that of other individuals or parts of the organization, and are able to identify the steps they need to take to make the process effective; and
- **Encouraging staff to take initiative**, to create a culture where staff can do what they need without always waiting for direct orders, and where taking responsibility for collective performance is the norm.

These steps will obviously take different forms in different organizations, but a common feature of the examples of management in *Star Performer* organizations discussed above is that they make deliberate efforts to make sure staff are well informed and understand how their work connects with the organization as a whole, and also create an organizational culture where individuals go above and beyond what's on paper to make sure that work gets done.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lessons

This report has sought to demonstrate the diversity of management processes and practices in Ghana's public sector. **Rather than one "public sector way" of working, there are many different ways.** This has three major implications for thinking about how to improve management in government organizations:

- 1) **Improving management means different things for different organizations**, because each organization currently functions differently and improvement must begin from where the organization currently is. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving management.
- 2) **Changing formal processes can be an effective way to improve management in some organizations, but not in others.** For organizations that do not regularly carry out their existing formal processes, changing processes "on paper" is unlikely to have any real effect since existing processes are not being executed anyway. In these cases, it may be best to focus on improving execution of existing processes before trying to introduce new ones. This can build momentum and credibility for reform.
- 3) **Most improvements in management must originate from within the organization.** Stakeholders outside the organization have much more influence on processes "on paper" than "in practice". The most important steps to improving management happen through continually discussing internal processes and making minor adjustments within the organization. Most of these steps do not cost anything and can start immediately. Organizations should not wait for someone else to come improve management for them, and stakeholders outside the organization should recognize what they can and cannot influence and focus their efforts accordingly.

These lessons are particularly important for reforms such as the newly developed IPAT, which explicitly seeks to benchmark organizations' performance against a list of indicators. **External assessments like the IPAT are more effective at capturing execution of basic formal processes than at understanding whether these processes are really achieving their aims.**

For example, the IPAT can measure whether an MDA submitted its Annual Report as a mandatory deliverable, but it cannot judge whether compiling this Annual Report has helped the organization to review its performance and come up with actions to address failings. Likewise, the IPAT can measure whether the Audit Report Implementation Committee meets, but not whether the audit recommendations lead to organization-wide transformations.

In this way, the IPAT highlights all three of the above lessons. Because it is most effective at monitoring the execution of formal processes, it is likely to be more effective at improving execution of these processes than at encouraging organizations to make these processes meaningful. In terms of the categories used in this report, it will therefore help move organizations from *Not the best* to *Average*, but probably not from *Average* to *Star Performer*.

This does not mean that the IPAT will not be useful, just that **it will likely be more useful for some organizations than others** and it should not be expected to solve all management problems. Because the most meaningful management improvements must come from within organizations, the IPAT should ultimately be **complemented by other efforts that involve more collaboration and buy-in** from the organizations themselves. Whereas the IPAT's strength is as an external assessment for the purpose of accountability and enforcing mandatory standards, a more collaborative approach may be more useful as a learning tool. This could focus more on discussion, benchmarking, problem-solving, and innovation. The UK's Departmental Capability Review programme is one example of an approach that tries to involve the organization itself in benchmarking its management processes.

Recommendations

In the spirit that improving management means different things for different organizations, the recommendations of this report do not include a specific list of "best practices" that all organizations should implement. **Different processes and practices are suited to different organizations, and individuals in these organizations are best suited to determining what specific practices are most appropriate.** The innovative ideas described in this report are meant to serve as inspirations in this effort.

Instead of recommending "best practices", then, this report recommends two key objectives to guide readers in thinking about improving management in their organizations. **These objectives focus not on *what* to do, but on *how* to do it.**

- 1) **Make internal processes a regular topic for discussion in the organization.** It is often assumed that problems or new ideas will arise all by themselves, but the most effective organizations actively seek them out. This can be done in many ways, such as: making internal processes a standard agenda item in meetings; instituting forums for discussing new ideas; and setting targets for internal processes and tracking process indicators. The important thing is that there is a constant organizational effort towards continuous improvement.
- 2) **Include all levels of staff in performance discussions.** Information on organizational and divisional performance is relevant to all staff, so performance information should be communicated downwards as well as upwards. Likewise, lower- and mid-level staff often have the best perspectives on how well the organization is working and ideas about how to improve it, and they should be actively encouraged to share these. The point is not that all staff must be present at every review, but rather that there should be multiple forums for discussing performance and all staff should be included in these in one way or another. One simple way is to always hold divisional meetings immediately after management meetings.

The final message of this report is that **there are many examples of managerial excellence in the public sector**, and it is important to recognize these. This recognition can serve as a reward for these individuals' dedication and creativity, but more importantly, it can help to dispel the notion that bad management and poor performance are symptomatic of the whole public sector. Unfortunately, such inspirational individuals and organizations cannot be recognized in this report due to the anonymity under which interviews were conducted, but it is hoped that the examples discussed herein will encourage others. **Public sector excellence can exist – indeed, already does exist – in Ghana. Recognizing this is a first step towards making it even more widespread.**