

Public Management Report

An occasional (and maybe insightful) examination of the issues, dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities in leadership, governance, management, and performance in public agencies.

On the core drivers of:

CitiStat

Public officials from across the country—indeed, from around the world—are traveling to Baltimore to check out CitiStat. CitiStat won one of the Kennedy School's 2004 awards for Innovation in American Government. It ought to be worth replicating. If CitiStat can improve the performance of city government in Baltimore, it ought to be able to help other cities—indeed, other public agencies at all levels of government.

But when these visitors go home, what do they take with them? What have they seen? What lessons have they learned? What do they think are the key features of CitiStat? What do they think they have to do to create their own version of CitiStat?

Any visit to CitiStat begins in the CitiStat room—a room specifically created for the CitiStat meeting. For those familiar with Compstat—the performance strategy created in the New York City Police Department by William Bratton and Jack Maple—the room and the meetings held there will be familiar. After all, it was Maple who convinced Baltimore's Mayor Martin O'Malley to adapt the Compstat concept to manage the entire city.

In the center of the room stands an agency head—the manager who is responsible for the operational issues to be examined at the meeting. Sitting at an arc of tables and facing the agency manager is the city's top leader-

ship, including the mayor, his first deputy mayor, Michael Enright, and the director of CitiStat, Matthew Gallagher. And behind the agency manager are two screens, onto which the CitiStat team projects a variety of maps and data.



Not only is the CitiStat room reminiscent of the Compstat room; the CitiStat meetings are also reminiscent of those held at Compstat. For these meetings focus on the performance challenges and operational problems facing the agency and on what strategies might be employed to solve the problems and deal with the challenges. A

member of the CitiStat staff has examined the current problems and challenges and, the previous evening, delivered a detailed memo to O'Malley, Enright, and Gallagher. Thus, the questioning and discussion are shaped by an analysis of the latest data, as well as a comparison with data from previous periods and with historical trends.

Many city agencies appear at CitiStat every other week. For example, the Transportation Department comes to CitiStat every other Friday at 8:30 a.m., while Recreation and Parks appears on alternate Thursdays at 1:00. Other city agencies, such as the Health Department come to CitiStat every four weeks.

So when visitors arrive at city hall in Baltimore to observe CitiStat, this is what they see:

the room, the meetings, the data, the maps, the technology to project the data and the maps onto the wall, and the questioning of department heads. Looks straightforward enough. It ought to be easy to replicate all this back home. Sure there's a small, up-front capital cost for the room and the technology. And you do need some operating funds for a few bright analysts to track the data. But once you've taken care of these two minor budgetary problems—and what mayor can't do that?—CitiStat looks simple.

Yet, the one-day visitor to Baltimore can easily miss several of the underlying principles of CitiStat—the core drivers that really make it work. I'll just mention two: the depth of the leadership commitment, and the perseverance of the questioning. These are not the only drivers, though they are easy to miss in a one-day visit.

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After all, the mayor, himself, may not even be in the room. These days, O'Malley attends maybe a quarter of the CitiStat meetings. He set it up. He got it going. But once it was going, he could, apparently, let it run all by itself. He no longer has to attend the meetings.

So who does run the CitiStat meetings? Answer: Michael Enright, the first deputy mayor, is almost always there. He was at the meeting two weeks ago. He was at the meeting four months ago. And he will be at the meeting two weeks, and at the one four months from now. A visitor may not recognize this: Who is leading the questioning? Obviously, it doesn't have to be the mayor.

But the agency head knows. The agency head knows that the questions asked and the answers given two weeks ago (or even two months ago) provide the foundation for this week's questions. And the agency head knows that the questions asked today—and, more importantly, the answers given—will provide

the foundation for the questioning two weeks from now. A visitor sees just a single exchange in a much longer and on-going discussion.

Moreover, the visitor cannot observe, though the agency head well knows, that Enright is persistent. The next meeting will not merely fasten on Enright's latest obsession. The next meeting will continue to focus on the primary challenge of delivering basic public services in a big city. The next meeting will continue to focus on O'Malley's key efforts for improving Baltimore.

For Enright doesn't attend CitiStat meetings because he has nothing else to do. Enright runs the CitiStat meetings because the mayor wants him to. And when he is running the meetings, he is speaking for the mayor. No agency head would think of complaining to the mayor about Enright's questioning. That would be suicide.

Each week, Enright persists, running four or six or even eight CitiStat meetings. He persists because the city's elected chief executive is committed to using CitiStat to make Baltimore's city agencies improve their performance. These two critical drivers may be missed by a one-day visitor. They are not missed by a single agency head. **E**

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