

On his website, [Stephen Goldsmith](#) reviews current academic research that is most relevant to practitioners, policy advisors and policy makers.

This document summarizes: Heinrich, Carolyn J. “The four pillars of high performance: How robust organizations achieve extraordinary results; High-performance government: Structure, leadership, incentives” (Book Reviews). *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* Spring 2006, Vol. 25, No. 2: 499-503.

*It's always useful to have an insightful and well-written account of the latest additions to the significant body of research on improving performance in public and private organizations.*

In this article, Carolyn Heinrich reviews two books: *The Four Pillars of High Performance: How Robust Organizations Achieve Extraordinary Results*, by Paul C. Light; and *High-Performance Government: Structure, Leadership, Incentives*, edited by Robert Klitgaard and Paul C. Light. Although the research in both books is presented as lacking in detail, Heinrich extracts the most important lessons from both texts.

*The Four Pillars of High Performance* is based on research undertaken on RAND's database of 6,000-plus reports on management. He first uses examples from the private sector to demonstrate four sources of vulnerability for organizations: ignorance, inflexibility, indifference, and inconsistency. Next, through a survey of 126 RAND researchers on their perceptions of high-performing organizations, Light identifies “Four Pillars” crucial to high performance: alertness (measuring results and clearly defining expectations); agility (greater discretion to employees and enhanced communication); adaptability (determining customer satisfaction and creating incentives); and alignment (provide organizations with information and technology).

Heinrich asserts that Light's analysis of the research is merely another set of recommendations of best practices rather than an answer to his own question—whether organizations can truly change. The author adds that the narrow focus on RAND cases omits the larger academic literature on organizational performance; the book also suffers from not differentiating between performances within private and public sector organizations.

Heinrich writes that, of the two books reviewed, *High Performance Government* will be of more interest to public managers and scholars. The edited volume concentrates on methods for addressing the following causes of under-performance: misalignment with the mission; faulty systems for selecting leadership; and ineffective incentive systems. These problems and, more importantly their solutions, are based on a report from the National Commission on the Public Service, known as the Volcker Report. The book is a collection of essays organized around the report's findings. For example in the third chapter, “Governing the Market State”, Gregory Treverton writes that the government's role is evolving to one that brings together organizations, increasingly relying on infrastructure, information, and legitimacy to achieve its goals. This changing role of government induces an increase in public distrust, which invokes, in turn, increased involvement of the private sector and a devaluation of governmental authority. Frank Camm follows with a discussion of how public-private partnerships enhance government performance.