

Entrepreneurial Management Strategies in Public School Reform:

Insights from New York City, 2002-2009

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to determine the relative effectiveness of different management strategies in achieving a robust entrepreneurial approach to public school reform in mayoral control districts. It makes this assessment by examining the approach of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein in pursuing systemic school reform between 2002 and 2009, and analyzing their effectiveness in adopting and implementing key policies in this time frame. The study assesses the influence of Bloomberg/Klein's management approach through the lens of five critical success factors for robust entrepreneurial policy-making. These factors are: (1) mobilizing clients and constituents behind reform, (2) identifying, incubating, and incorporating innovative ideas, (3) attracting financial risk capital for innovative models, (4) increasing accountability through increased use of data and client feedback mechanisms, and (5) driving a culture of innovation by recruiting, rewarding, and protecting risk-taking.

The study finds that the degree of Bloomberg/Klein's success in meeting each of these five factors varied widely. Their greatest strengths lay in attracting risk capital to invest in and test innovations, and in incubating local and national innovation models and

providers. (This was particularly evident in their expansion of choice and competition through small and charter schools.) The record was more mixed in increasing accountability, and in successfully driving a system-wide innovation-oriented culture. They were weakest in developing and sustaining the political capital necessary for reform through mobilization. Here, criticisms of a lack of inclusiveness in decision-making and implementation have been loudest, largely from organized parent and community groups, employees' unions, and various elected representatives.

The study concludes that in order to be successful, leaders who pursue large-scale management change must galvanize and sustain a broad-based coalition of support. They must also recognize that in moving quickly to put in place significant reforms, even the most competent administrations run the risk of implementation missteps and blowups. Such events not only adversely affect the constituents being served, but often further alienate change-seeking leaders from stakeholders and the broader public – making the coalition-building imperative even more difficult to achieve.