

6. Balance Top-Down & Participatory Approaches

As an innovator, you will also have to navigate a second tension. Rather than finding the right balance between collaboration and disruption, this tension requires both exercising executive leadership and responding to the public will.

Mayors in particular have many assets at their disposal to encourage a culture of innovation within city government and beyond. They can use the bully pulpit while providing protection to the reformers they've unleashed across the bureaucracy. Yet we have seen examples where executive level leadership that is poorly communicated, detached from constituents, and does not engage the community in identifying priorities and creating solutions has failed.

Top-Down

The top-down end approach represents a strong executive leadership model that relies on such tools as using the bully pulpit to elevate a reform agenda, driving new policy or rule changes, and challenging incumbent interest groups.

- Executive-level leadership
- Use the bully pulpit to elevate reform
- Drive new policy or rule change
- Challenge incumbent interest groups

Participatory

The participatory approach is more inclusive and is characterized for example by mechanisms for securing and incorporating client feedback, parent meetings, town halls, use of digital media to invite participation, and partnership with neighborhood organizations. It involves responding to public will—whether it is for change or the status quo.

- More inclusive, grassroots or bottom-up
- Incorporate client feedback
- Host parent, town hall and other meetings that encourage citizen voice
- Use digital media to invite participation
- Partner with neighborhood organizations

Any innovation or reform effort could place itself along both dimensions: disruption versus collaboration and top-down versus participatory. But over time, one might shift strategic approaches along and across each axis. The challenge is to find a balance that works best for the local environment and circumstances, and to be willing to make shifts as the need arises without compromising one's overarching goals.