

Lessons Learned

In brief, a number of lessons for leaders and for public organizations can be learned from these cases.

First, there are good leaders in government. Some are enabled by the electoral process, others from policy directives granting them authority. Others emerge to respond to the demands of a given situation, leading until the situation has been resolved satisfactorily.

Second, all these types of leadership matter. We saw that without the top-level, policy support projects could not succeed. There needs to be someone in the organization at a high level who is committed to the goals of the project, someone who engenders belief in the "goodness" of the project. And when goals are not clear, or when there is considerable uncertainty about the outcome, or when the leadership at the top is not well-defined or evident, projects can be saved by the skill and commitment of team members. All these kinds of leadership are necessary, no one type is sufficient in itself.

Third, leadership styles work best when they fit the nature of the project. If cooperation is a necessary ingredient for success, then leading through consensus gives the clear message that everyone will be heard. If a massive culture change is coming, a charismatic, risk-taking leader is called for. If change is inevitable but unsettling and unwanted, leaders have to be both convincing and consistent in their commitment to change. When the goals are very visible to the public, leaders have to inspire and pitch in personally to get the work done. When a project embodies high risk and complexity, a leader at the top of the government who supports the project is of immense value, both for symbolism and for resources.

Leaders were a critical success factor in all of these innovation projects. Leaders communicated the value of the undertaking, they engendered and encouraged commitment from the working group, they negotiated the environment to get resources and build support, and handle criticism. They created the environment to get the work done. They rolled up their sleeves and did the work themselves. Each of these aspects of leadership contributed to progress, acceptance, and success.