Reforming NYC Homelessness Strategy

Why did Bloomberg fail to effect change in homelessness strategy in the City that Never Sleeps?

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MANAGING STRATEGIC & ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Introduction

Despite many efforts over the last 30 years, homelessness has been increasing in New York City (NYC). In 2004 Mayor Bloomberg publically committed to reducing homeless by 66% within five-years (2009) and introduced an ambitious Action Plan to tackle homelessness. The strategy shifted away from the focus on the voucher system for federal housing previously effective in the Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani administration and emphasized a multi-sector approach, which called upon the "personal responsibility" of affected populations and private, public, and third sector actors to help quickly shift individuals and families into long-term subsidized housing. While the plan promised many elements of a successful reform, homelessness rates saw only a short-term reduction before continuing to rise. By 2012, funding for many initiatives had been cut and NYC continues to see record levels of homelessness. This unexpected course begs the question: Where did Mayor Bloomberg fail at managing the change process to create a successful reform?

This study aims to answer this question by analyzing Bloomberg's shift in homeless strategy throughout 2004-2013. The analysis tracks the reform through the stages of the policy cycle. As Bloomberg's new reform was a non-linear process, it can best be analyzed using the Bertelsmann Stiftung's model for strategic policy reform, which focuses on *Competence*, *Communication*, and *Capability to Implement*. The analysis is based upon observable implications from a broad range of secondary sources, such as varied media coverage and website information, opinion pieces and information released from advocacy groups, and a variety of policy briefs and reports issued by key stakeholders. Discrepancies in information on the reform's legacy across stakeholder communications, as well as between the original Action Plan and the progress report of 2008, especially reflect the flaws in the change process. This analysis is a jumping off point to assess key lessons learned and draw policy implications for future reform strategy on NYC homelessness.

The Problem: Rising homelessness in NYC

Homelessness in NYC has been steadily increasing and different strategies have been leveraged to address the changing needs of the problem. In the 1980s, the demographics of the homeless population, initially primarily white single men, began to grow and diversify. To address this shift, the Department of Human Services (NYC DHS) was founded in 1993 and drew upon the expertise of many community organizations through outsourcing and contracting of services targeted to specific populations. This approach allowed NYC DHS "to diversify and target its services to varying populations while beginning to hold providers accountable for their clients' outcomes" (Schretzman 2006). The overarching goal of this system was to have a "decent and service-enriched shelter system" that offered a linear, continuum of services to different individuals and offered long-term housing to those deemed "housing ready" (Schretzman 2006). This approach eventually came under criticism; as the shelter population and costs continued to rise, the question of whether resources could be better spent on supportive housing and preventive measures arose (Saul 2013). When Mayor Bloomberg came to office in 2002, homelessness was still on the rise and the time for change was imminent.
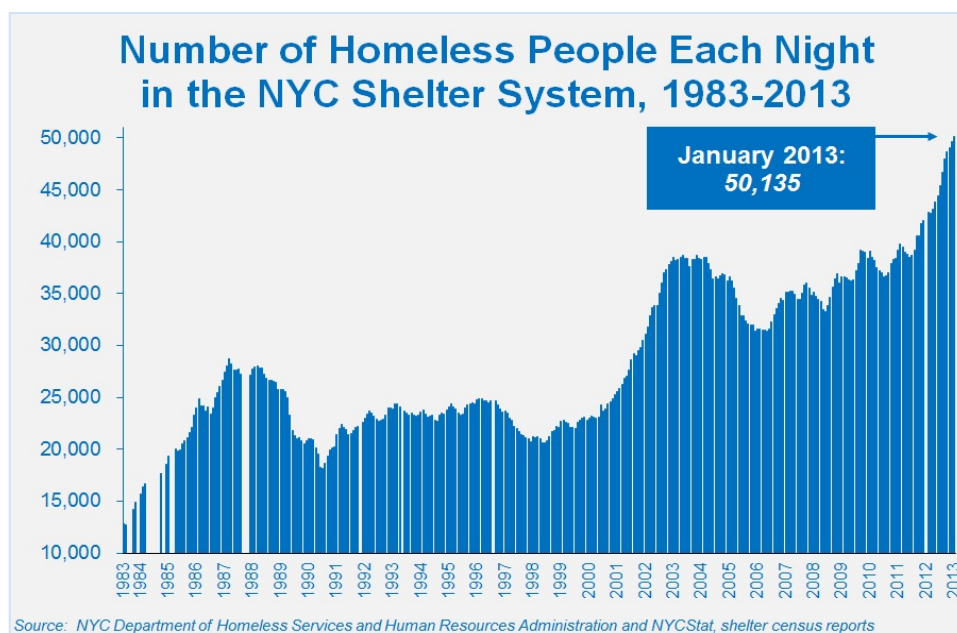

Figure 1: Shelter Census 1983-2013

Source: Markee 2013

The Proposed Solution: Bloomberg's Reform Strategy

Proposing a change of course

In 2004, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg publically announced his commitment to reduce homelessness by 66% within five years. His ambitious reform plan was intended to make this political promise a reality.

Bloomberg worked with a wide variety of supporting organizations and a team of experts to create an Action Plan, entitled *United for Solutions Beyond Shelter*. The plan proposed was a multi-sector, nine-point strategy that shifted the strategic focus to long-term housing solutions and work programs. While the plan acknowledged the importance of short-term shelters to the system, it departed from the previous focus on shelter systems on the premise that "a 'shelter first' responses to any and every need or housing crisis, however, will continue to drive up costs and shelter usage, while diverting attention away from prevention, supportive housing, and other community based interventions that solve homelessness" (Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter 2004, 4). The new strategy shifted focus to long-term housing and aimed to quickly achieve many objectives simultaneously, including overcoming homelessness, preventing homelessness, drastically reducing the number of shelter residents, and reducing the length of stays in shelters. The plan also called upon the interaction of key private, public, and third sector actors. Adding to the ambition, Bloomberg proposed to achieve these goals twice as fast compared to any other city's efforts to reduce homelessness.

Initially, the reform witnessed significant successes, such as decreased family recidivism rates (ICPH 2010) and the provision of new, attractive long-term housing units (Jeantet 2013a). In 2007, the Bloomberg administration partnered with the NYC DHS to introduce the "Advantage New York" program, which offered subsidies to long-term housing. In 2011, the program was cut when state funding was withdrawn. Only months after the program ended, NYC homelessness had risen sharply (18%) and necessitated the opening of at least nine short-term shelters. Many critics associate the failure of the Advantage program and necessity to revert back to the shelter focus as indicative to the overall failure of the reform.

Stakeholder Analysis

Many stakeholders were involved in the success or failure of Bloomberg's reform process. A snapshot of the actors that played key roles in either supporting or blocking the reform is essential to track the change process of the shifting strategy (see Annex 1 for further explanation).
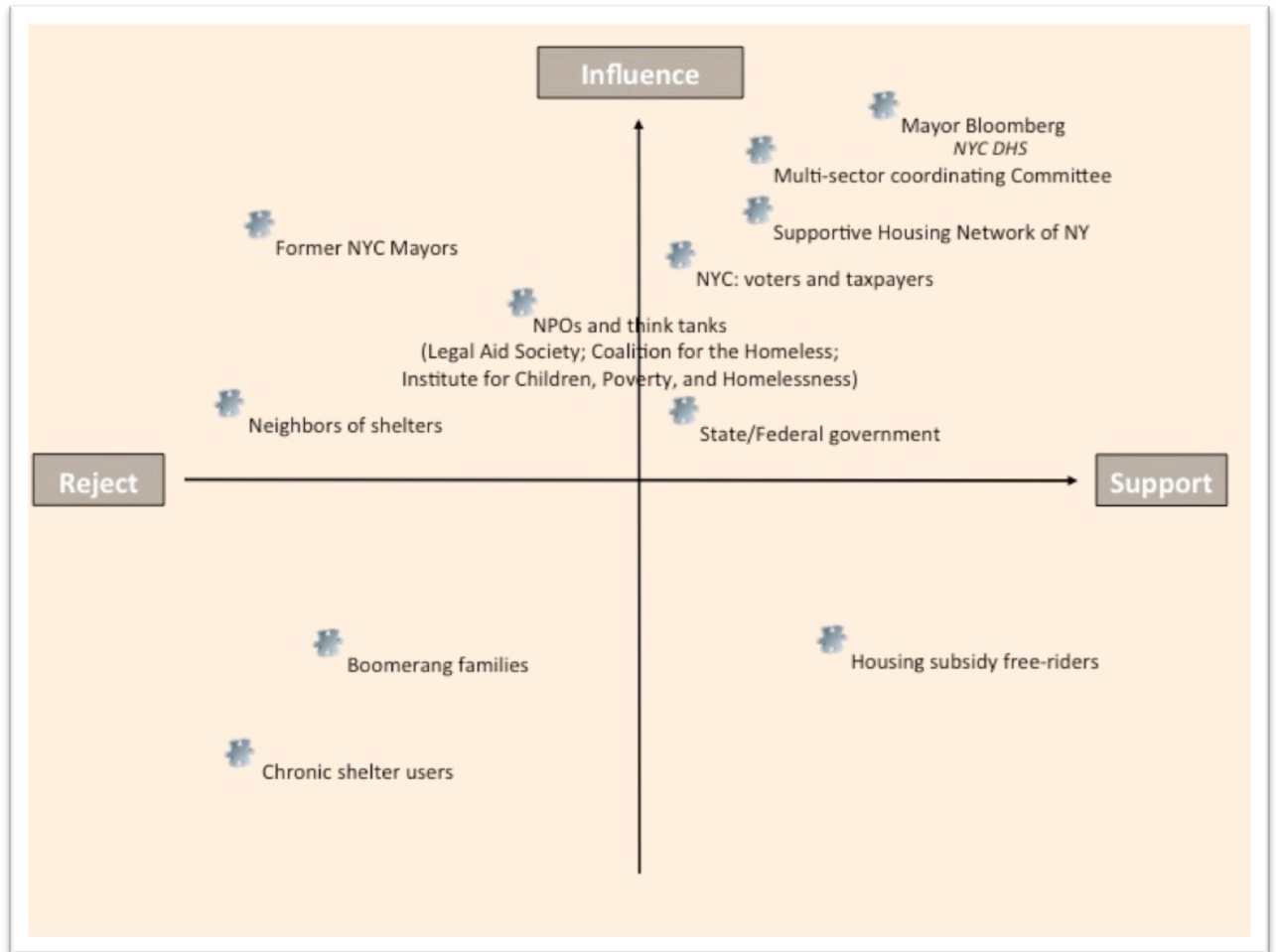

Figure 2: Stakeholder Analysis

Source: Own based on media & reports

Change process under criticism

Bloomberg's strategy has been heavily criticized throughout its conception and implementation. While many critics attribute its failure to reduce homelessness to faults in the policies, others blame the change process itself. Ineffective stakeholder management and conflict, lack of communication from the top or buy-in from the bottom, and inflexibility to change course or adjust incrementally are just some of the elements that have been identified as shortcomings in the process.

This kind of criticism is reflective of many of the key reasons reforms may go wrong, according to the Bertelsmann's *Guidelines for Strategic Policy Reform* (2011). Key failures that are particularly reflected here include conflicts of interests between stakeholders and political actors, the lack of trust and credibility around the plan and its implementation, the creation of a negative association with the homeless strategy reforms and polarizing media that perpetuates the disconnect of support. Perhaps the most major failing, however, is the reform's rigidity to a new strategy at a time when flexibility and consideration of new options was pertinent, given the onset of the economic crisis.

Methodology of Evaluation

This problem and failed solution give rise to the following questions: what went right, what went wrong and how the reform could have been more successfully planned, designed and implemented? With respect to these guiding questions, this ex-post analysis employs the Bertelsmann model for strategic policy reform, also known as the *"3 Cs" (competence*, *communication*, and *capability to implement)* to consider the change of strategy.

Following the policy cycle

There is no one-size-fits all instruction manual for strategic reform planning. On the contrary, every reform requires its own individual approach relative to its internal and external circumstances, actors, timeframe and issues at stake.

Nevertheless, all successful reform changes are contingent upon the strategic planning of key steps that any reform process must follow. These key steps are most succinctly reflected by the policy cycle:

Figure 3: Policy Cycle

Source: Own

Figure 3 illustrates the circular arrangement of phases, which is indicative for the continuous and dynamic nature of the policy cycle and its prescribed actions. Although these phases follow a consecutive sequence, the respective actions are not independent of one another but interwoven.

As the first move in gearing up for a strategic reform change, it is crucial to raise public awareness for the need of reform that matches with the wider public debate on future-related issues. For this, the urge for change needs to be depicted as an opportunity. When conveying a sense of urgency, policy makers must not raise unrealistic expectations; rather, the chances for success or failure must be taken into account and communicated accordingly. Building on this foundation, reformers need to identify various alternate courses of action and make accountable decisions. In policy-making, the currency of success is ultimately measured in terms of support, trust, credibility and legitimacy. The mobilization of majority support requires clear messages, realistic goals and strategic partnering with both insiders and external advisors.

During the implementation phase, policy makers need to ensure quality outputs by relying on management tools that allow for documenting, measuring and assessing of results along the motto: *"You can only manage what you can measure.*" This management requires the clear identification of roles and responsibilities so as to provide for an efficient and accountable division of tasks, while simultaneously using reward and control mechanisms. In this sense, the combination of executive and legislative leadership skills is particularly vital during the implementation phase, where multiple actors across agencies and often sectors interact.

Finally, strategic change is not an end in itself, but rather a process striving for continuous improvement. Since all indicators are flawed, reformers must not become complacent. In order to move from *good to great*, on-going impact evaluations are a means for organizational learning that requires transparency, the atmosphere and platforms to engage in horizontal learning and, above all, the leadership to face challenges and make painful corrections. This forward-looking outlook keeps the cycle turning, whilst moving the organization or policy ahead.

Bertelsmann model as analytical lens

The Bertelsmann guide on policy reform complements the policy cycle with three strategic dimensions into a comprehensive strategic planning model (see figure 4).
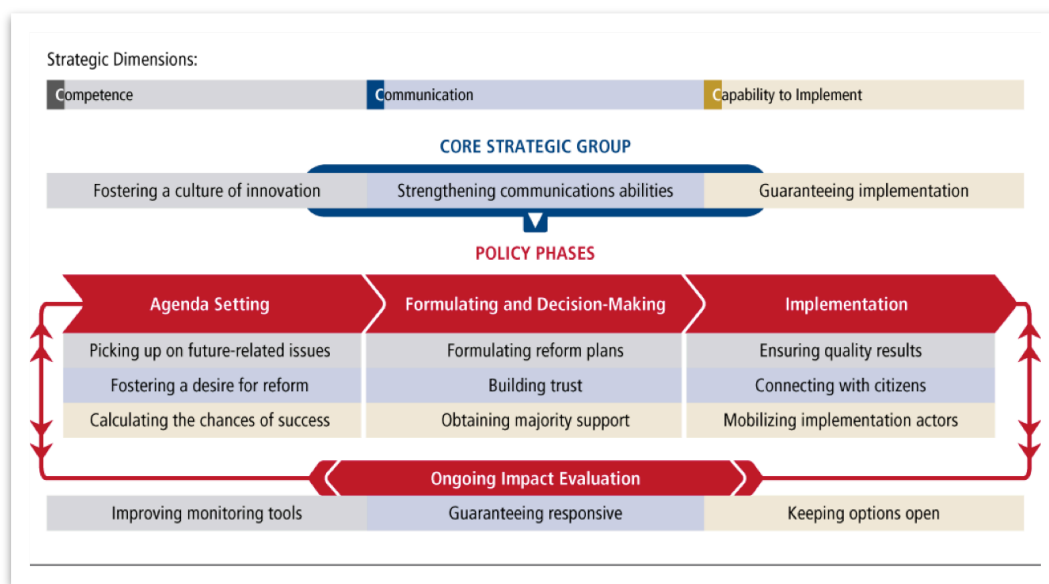

Figure 4: Bertelsmann Strategic Policy Model

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2011**,** 15

According to this model, the success or failure of a reform depends on the interplay of all dimensions at each phase of the policy cycle. It is essential to maintain balance of all *"3 Cs"* and not to over-emphasize one dimension whilst neglecting others. The mutual interplay of all three dimensions creates synergetic effects that have the ability to meet reform goals in the face of often counteractive political pressure.

For the purpose of conducting an ex-post analysis of Bloomberg's homelessness reform, the following aspects explain why the Bertelsmann model and its underlying logic is an effective overarching analytical framework:

✓ The Action Plan under study is representative of a public policy reform that must be analysed with respect to the policy cycle. The model's logic thus corresponds to the political decision-making procedures Bloomberg's administration went through and future mayoral teams will inevitably face.

✓ The model is easy to understand. Its logic highlights the continuous dynamic of policy change that allows both for first and second order change. In this case, transformational change was envisioned that was further mirrored by the high level of productive energy. The model allows tracking the specifically non-linear nature of change, in contrast to linear models, such as *Kotter's 8-step model*.

✓ Although the Bertelsmann model is top-down, it leaves room to maneuver through stakeholder involvement and the political participation process.

✓ The model highlights the importance of balancing the parallel functioning strategic dimensions, whilst accounting for their mutual reinforcement.

✓ The inter-linkage between the strategic dimensions and the policy phases is essential for a comprehensive analysis. This helps to identify which specific aspect of each dimension requires particular attention or improvement at which phase in the process.

Evaluation: "3Cs" in four steps

"That showed a lot of guts...It seemed to be the thinking of a business person, interested in solving problems rather than muddling through." (Jeantet, 2013a)

At first sight, Bloomberg's entrepreneurial and problem-solving approach was both ambitious and promising. The Action Plan was revolutionary in its comprehensiveness, envisioned timeframe and multi-sector engagement. Why then, did the change process fail to bring about a successful reform?

Agenda Setting

The timing of the Action Plan, its creation process, and its content suggest that the agenda-setting phase was carried out properly. In terms of capability to implement, Bloomberg instrumentalized the **window of opportunity** from his (re)-election to enact his comprehensive anti-homelessness plan. Invigorated by the so-called **"honeymoon effect,"** he made a political vow to reduce homelessness by two-thirds. Therefore, from the very beginning of his tenure, the Mayor expressed the need for reform and, building upon the communication and competence dimension, started conceptualizing his strategy. In an attempt to raise awareness and rally allies for the multi-sector and multi-layered change process, the mayoral team met with **field experts** and various stakeholders. By committing to different **onsite visits, face-to-face discussions** with affected people, and **outreach** to crucial **stakeholders** (e.g. citizens and housing providers), Bloomberg demonstrated his willingness to collaborate with the "people interested in making things happen" (Jeantet, 2013a). This positively **signaled** his **commitment** to an effective and enduring solution to the longstanding homelessness issue.

The Action Plan was the result of a **co-creation process**. The drafting of the Action Plan involved over 70 different actors and experts, who were split into various working groups respective of their different interests, (i.e. children services,

shelter services, homeless advocacy) (Jeantet, 2013a). This **broad-scale involvement** further signaled a sincere willingness for fundamental reform change.

Yet, despite all these positive steps, the agenda-setting phase had two major deficiencies, which negatively impacted the following phases of the policy process and ultimately contributed to the failure of the reform. First, the **inability to predict or plan for future trends** and developments diminished, to a large extent, the reform's chances of success. This was particularly evident following the outbreak the economic crisis, which exogenously triggered an increase in the homelessness census. Second, the change process fell short of sufficiently analyzing **other factors** leading to homelessness. "The problem, experts argue, is that Bloomberg's plan was designed to fight homelessness as a stand-alone problem, not as a symptom of several underlying problems, like poverty and the scarcity of affordable housing" (City & State 2010). It is arguable that there existed much **disagreement amongst the experts** themselves on how best to address homelessness in NYC. In retrospect, these criticisms create reasonable doubts about the effectiveness of the co-creation process.

Formulating and Decision-Making

From its conception, the Bloomberg's reform plan was **too ambitious**. Although it obtained initial public support, this support quickly eroded as the process was carried out. Indeed, Bloomberg's capability to implement the Action Plan was significantly undermined; **support** of several of his **key allies** was **lost**. For example, Governor Cuomo cut the state funding when the Advantage New York program failed to meet targeted outcomes. Furthermore, City Council speaker and 2013 mayoral candidate Christine Quinn, a traditional Bloomberg ally, eventually criticized Bloomberg's reformed policy (Paybarah 2013). In terms of competence, a **roadmap** establishing **courses of action** and a **timeline** for achieving goals were provided. **Pilot projects**, such as a homeless prevention program, were also initiated in the most needed neighborhoods across the city (Jeantet, 2013a). In addition, individual steps were developed, i.e. public education campaigns, inter-

agency collaboration, and community-based interventions. These steps did not, however, address core problems of homelessness, such as income inequality. The financial crisis obviously exacerbated these underlying problems. The decision-makers **did not consider** any **alternatives** and hence the plan was not flexible enough to adapt to changing exogenous circumstances.

Several deficiencies were also identified in the reform's communication management. Indeed, Bloomberg's reform did not manage to adequately **communicate** the **scope** and **challenges** of the paradigm shift that marked a clear discontinuity from the traditional stance towards tackling homelessness. The starting point of the reform plan was based on a wrong assumption about affected populations that ultimately led to a **loss of trust and credibility**. Furthermore, media coverage reveals that there is **no clear message** about the program's beneficiaries, but rather a controversy regarding what initially caused the administration to come up with this revolutionary plan. This focus on causes over desired long-term outcomes is detrimental to success. "For Arnold Cohen, the president of Partnership for the Homeless, the city's reaction to rising shelter numbers reveals a sense of helplessness. They basically blamed the homeless people: 'They're not looking for work…We've made it too comfortable for them…'" (Jeantet, 2013b). In other words, this defensive line of argumentation signals the administration's overall **lack of understanding** of the issue throughout the process.

Implementation

With regards to implementing Bloomberg's bold plan, it becomes all the more clear that there was **no clear-cut focus on specific results** as the reform plan was just too complex and wide-ranging to pinpoint its goals to one particular outcome. Christy Parque, the executive director of Homeless Services United, a coalition of more than 60 shelter providers, held that "the gigantic mission Bloomberg attributed to homeless services was far beyond its reach" (Jeantet, 2013d). When Bloomberg pledged to reduce homelessness by 66%, he made a **risky political commitment**, which he ultimately could not live up to. Although the Action Plan

claims to specifically define spheres of responsibility and accountability, the **diffuse power structure** of numerous actors across industries and sectors led to **ineffective accountability** mechanisms. This **lack of competence** for ensuring quality results was further exacerbated by the overall **inability** to **think the reform backwards** (i.e. taking all stakeholders' needs and demands into consideration). For instance, much criticism stemmed from neighbours who opposed the DHS's plan of turning private apartment buildings into shelters. In the end, some neighbourhoods managed to prevent the siting of shelter units in their apartment houses (Jeantet, 2013b). Despite the growing discontent amongst New Yorkers, the mayoral team did not commit to appeasing those citizens. There was no outreach; no needs assessment.

Other **policies**, such as the "tight front door" policy, intending to curb the family shelter census by tightening the eligibility criteria ironically had the **opposite effect**: it enhanced the pressure on the system as all those applicants who were refused access kept applying until they were granted their legal 'right to shelter' (ICP 2009). As a result, **frustration** crept up across the **implementation actors** who were confronted with **doubling workloads** and no solution to the problem. In retrospect, actors responsible for the reform managed to reach out to stakeholders and field experts during the agenda setting phase only, whereas the **interaction** and **feedback** procedure was **unsatisfactory** throughout the implementation and evaluation phases and thus failed to ensure quality results.

Besides counterproductive policies and the inability to keep track of the overall goal, the **lack of inspiring communication** of what went well during early implementation phases slowed down the reform's momentum and allowed critics to jump in as roadblocks. This detracted from the potential energy that could have been created from the numerous initiatives that unfolded with positive immediate and long-term impact, as summarized below (Jeantet, 2013a):

✓ Within months the overcrowded Emergency Assistance Unit was closed and replaced by a luxurious-looking building in the South Bronx to welcome new homeless families.

✓ Six pilot homeless prevention programs started running in six of the neediest communities and HomeBase was extended to the entire city in 2010.

✓ NYC received state approval for a new rental assistance program to reduce residents' length of shelter stay.

✓ Between 2005 and 2009, this street population was halved, decreasing from 4,395 to 2,328. This success is attributed to inter-agency collaboration and new engagement tools to bring homeless individuals and families inside. In the field of public support for community-based NPOs working with the chronically homeless who are not in shelters, New York is still regarded as a champion today.

Despite these positive developments, there was **not sufficient emphasis on quick wins** that could have kept the positive momentum and convince the reform's adversaries that the reform was worth backing. The analysis further reveals that Bloomberg himself made very limited comments about the challenges. The Mayor's line of argumentation in public was **defensive rather than proactive**. For instance, citing statistics suggesting that the city's homeless population is comparatively smaller than those of other major cities signalled that Bloomberg himself never succeeded in moving beyond crisis management. One could argue that the **leadership got stuck managing the reform crisis**, instead of solving the problems.

Impact Evaluation

As the process continued and encountered challenges that required adaptation, there were **no efforts** to **admit mistakes** and correct accordingly. This is most clearly reflected by Bloomberg's refusal to respond to warnings by Governor Cuomo, who repeatedly threatened to suspend state funding for the rental-subsidy program. Furthermore, there was **no intention of learning** signalled beyond the initial agenda-setting phase. On the contrary, there seems to be a gradual **decline of genuine exchange** betwen experts in the field and other stakeholders affected by the reform. It appears that the mayoral team literally **"muddled through"** by

merging, slimming or cutting initiatives as state pressure and other criticism rose. Arnold Cohen, president and CEO of the Partnership for the Homeless, suggested that "the mayor should publicly acknowledge that he has abandoned his 2004 goals and set in place a series of initiatives to address each of the underlying causes separately" (City&State, 2010).

Yet, there was **no transparent** process for **communicating results** and thus it seemed that the mayoral team itself had resigned to their goals. Moreover, credible impact evaluation presupposes the recording of reliable data. However, in this case there was **disagreement** over the **source and quality of data** assessed. Whereas Bloomberg's team defended their use of qualitative information, the media and advocacy groups polarized by means of mere quantitative facts. "There is a lack of publicly available information both on the adherence to program requirements and regarding the number of families returning to the city for prevention assistance or shelter after receiving an Advantage subsidy" (Scholl 2010). This shows that there was **no systematic** and **unanimously approved method** for exchanging **information** amongst implementing actors, such as DHS, city, advocate groups, and NPOs. Additionally, DHS did not release detailed information on why New Yorkers were applying to shelters, making it difficult to pinpoint the reasons behind the current high numbers. The **poor evaluation effort** signalled that the reform vision had been buried, since the administration made no effort to understand and clarify why the reform produced opposite outputs. There was **no leadership driving** towards the vision when it became difficult to pursue.

Overall, it can be concluded that neither of the strategic dimensions created an effective and efficient learning mechanism. This is indicative for the **lack of options and flexibility** of the reform process. Consequently, this raises questions about the **core strategic group's effectiveness**. Due to missing first-hand information, there are only assumptions about **its inability to see the big picture** and the **lack of anticipation** for **crisis scenarios**. Considering that the task force initially consulted with a large number of actors during the agenda-setting and decision-making phases, it is likely that it failed to do justice to the varying interests.

In general, it is evident that the **broader range of factors** influencing the reform were **ignored**; as the economic crisis triggered an accelerating domino effect worsening the conditions for implementing an anti-homelessness reform, there was **no strategic adaptation** to this **exogenous shock**. Without an early warning system, the debate amongst implementation actors had degraded into a **directionless blame game**. The disagreement over goals as well as the misinterpretation of responsibilities and accountability mechanisms accumulated in blame shifting between researchers, think tanks and other experts that further **eroded** any remaining **credibility** and **sense of trust**.

Lessons Learned & Moving forward

New York City continues to face record high levels of homelessness; in the face of the failed reform, the Bloomberg administration is backtracking and focusing on short-term shelter solutions in attempts to band-aid the problem. The failure of the Bloomberg's change process to carry his reform to success is a laboratory of significant learning, from which a plan forward can be drawn for the next visionary of the fight against homelessness.

1. Take advantage of a key moment and re-create the sense of urgency.
While the urgency to change the approach to reducing homelessness in New York City is higher than ever, the moment is both delicate and ripe for a new leader and a new vision to solve the issue. The dissatisfaction with the failed reform and increasing problem can be used as a key moment for the next New York City mayor (election to be held in November) to re-engage the public on the urgency of the issue and position themselves as the right leader, not manager, with the right plan and institutional learning to avoid the mistakes of the previous reform. Careful and proactive communication planning from the start can help craft this message early and perpetuate this sense of urgency.

2. Frame the solution as an achievable vision.

While Bloomberg's plan was certainly exciting and ambitious, which in many ways attracted key stakeholders initially, he inevitably found he had bit off more than he could chew. The creation of a vision that has clear-cut objectives, measurable outcomes, and realistic timelines for implementation and assessment are crucial to maintain support of key stakeholders and keep the trust and credibility necessary to push for more complex or politically tricky changes in the future.

3. Identify the fundamental needs of the problem.

Before launching a plan or political commitment of any kind, the next leader must take a careful and thoughtful needs assessment of the effected population (homeless people, chronic users, neighborhoods, all invested NPOs) and look for problematic symptoms of homelessness beyond the obvious. Leveraging the engaged and active community of private, public, and third sector stakeholders at this stage is essential to comprehensively understand the intricacies of the problem, as well as engage broad-based support right from the earliest stages.

4. Use dialogic approaches to appeal to the everyday New Yorker and regain public trust.

Breaking with the legacy of failed reforms will be challenging, but using a more dialogic approach to incorporate the needs and innovative ideas of all key stakeholders, including the general public, will help break with bad legacy moving forward. Trust and credibility can be regained through a message of solidarity with and responsibility of every New Yorker. Stakeholders need to be managed from the beginning in a mediated and inclusive learning atmosphere that encourages horizontal learning, accountability, and commitment to act over counterproductive blame-shifting.

5. Create short-term wins that are visible and effective.

While Bloomberg's administration witnessed many successes in the short-term, the public and key stakeholders did not see this success, but instead focused on the long, often unclear, road ahead. Creating short-term wins, such as pilot projects in areas that are likely to realize positive change, and communicating every success, is crucial to keep support and the momentum moving in times of positive progress, but more importantly when exogenous factors force the plan to change.

6. Exercise flexibility and allow for incremental change when unexpected circumstances hit.

A major flaw in Bloomberg's plan was an inability to predict or plan for exogenous factors that had the potential to turn the plan on its head; yet the greater problem was the rigid inflexiblity to adapt when these circumstances hit.   When the Advantage program was started in 2007, Bloomberg could not have foreseen the upcoming economic crises, yet an inflexiblity to change course doomed the plan to failure. The next leader must recognize when to adapt incrementally and have the courage to even occasionally take a step back before continuing forward. Admitting short-term failure, is sometimes the key to long-term success.

As the Bertelsmann model suggests, every reform process is different and future homelessness strategy reforms will undoubtedly face new challenges and make new mistakes.   However, continuous learning from past mistakes, as this guide has sought to assess, and a persistent optimism to find a solution that creates lasting impact on decreasing homelessness is crucial to any new vision and the change processes that turn those visions into reality.

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Annex

Brief timeline of Bloomberg's tenure and the reform process

1980 Demographics of NYC homeless population begins to grow and change. NYC DHS tackles the issue with a linear solution that strengthens the shelter system using contracted community organizations.

1990 Mayor Koch introduces Section 8 housing vouchers to relocate homeless families from the shelter system into permanent housing. Subsequent Mayors David Dinkins and Rudy Giuliani continued with the federally sponsored program, which moved more than 53,000 families into permanent housing between 1990 and 2005 (Markee 2013, 20). The program continues through 2005.

2002 Bloomberg comes to office as mayor of NYC.

2003 Bloomberg convenes an "unprecedented group of public, private, and nonprofit leaders" charged with developing a multi-sector strategy to tackle homelessness.

2005 Bloomberg is re-elected and makes a political commitment to reduce the homeless population by 66% in NYC within a period of five years.

2007 Bloomberg and the NYC DHS introduced a new strategy to tackle the issue of homelessness, called the *NYC Advantage Program*.

2009 Bloomberg is re-elected.

2011 Advantage New York is terminated, marking the end of federal subsidies for long-term permanent housing.

2012 Only months after the program was terminated, homelessness rises sharply (roughly 18%). At least nine short-term shelters are opened.

2013 In January, record high numbers of homeless were recorded (50,135 people, including 21,034 children); this reflects a 73% increase over Bloomberg's tenure as mayor (Routhier 2013). In November, New York City will elect a new mayor. Bloomberg is term-limited and cannot seek re-election again.

Description of Stakeholders

➢ **Mayor Bloomberg** initiated a comprehensive multi-sector reform strategy to tackle homelessness in a way unprecedented in scope and challenge to the City of New York.

➢ **New York City Department of Human Services** partnered with the Bloomberg administration to administer the Advantage Program.

➢ A **multi-sector coordinating committee** (with experts from the public, private, and third sector) was engaged by Mayor Bloomberg to create the action plan.

➢ The **Supportive Housing Network of New York** represented housing providers across the city and signalled their excitement.

➢ **New York City voters and taxpayers** of a new, more comprehensive approach that creates better long-term outcomes and reduces the cost of homelessness on society. In 2007 (the year the Advantage program was introduced), 81% of New Yorkers felt that homelessness was a "big problem" for New York City (Arumi & Yarrow 2007, 6).

➢ **State and federal governments** are interdependent and willing to fund the Advantage Program based on successful outcomes. When successful outcomes are not achieved, Governor Cuomo cuts funding and matching federal funds are lost.

➢ Many non-profits and think tanks were involved as experts from the very beginning of the program and supportive of a different solution. Many criticized the program while it was running, as well as after the program was cut.

➢ **Housing subsidy free** riders take advantage of housing subsidies, even if they do not necessarily need the subsidies. This gaming was a key point of criticism of the Plan.

➢ **Former New York City Mayors (Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani)** had implemented very different initiatives to combat homeless and set goals for more incremental time frames. Mayor Dinkins, however, sat on the Coordinating Committee for the action plan.

➢ **Neighbours of shelters** were not consulted or often not notified before temporary or long-term shelters were created, leading to anxiety and distrust among the public.

➢ **NPOs and think tanks** dominate the homeless services network in New York City. While many were initially excited to see a new and ambitious plan formulize, dissatisfaction with effectiveness and internal polarization on the best way forward quickly resulted.

➢ **Boomerang families** continually left and returned to the long-term housing system, given the tightening of eligibility criteria. The number of recidivist families rose from 25% to 40% in Bloomberg's second term.

➢ **Chronic shelter users** are those that suffer structural homelessness given an inability to meet the tightened criteria for long-term housing solutions (such as sobriety and drug possession).