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# Organizing for Policy Implementation: The Emergence and Role of Implementation Units in Policy Design and Oversight

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**ABSTRACT** *The leaders of governments in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Queensland recently created “implementation” or “delivery” units at the centre, ostensibly to advise, monitor, and ensure better implementation of policy initiatives. This collection of papers seeks to explore the emergence, roles, functions, and accomplishments of policy implementation and delivery units, as well as their prospects. This overview paper provides a framework for analyzing and assessing the work of these units to date, beginning with a synopsis of the evolution of thinking on implementation, and turning to the new environment for governance, policy development, and implementation. It casts policy implementation and delivery units as one of several “ad hoc racies” that populate the centre of government, which may take on quite different roles. The paper provides an overview of the case studies and key findings.*

## Introduction

Over 40 years ago the spotlight was put on gathering scholarly interest on policy implementation with the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) seminal book on *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland*.<sup>1</sup> In its slipstream came Bardach's (1977) *Implementation Game* outlining the myriad ways in which policy initiatives could be diverted, deflected, dissipated, and delayed. Despite his pessimism about the promise of big policy solutions more generally, and the prospects for improving implementation in particular, Bardach nevertheless suggested creating capabilities related to implementation in two institutional locations for the purpose of “game-fixing”: in staff policy analysis and evaluation units in pertinent department budget offices and, in an environment of policy-capable US legislatures, in policy or appropriation committees with low turnover in staff and representatives. There, he speculated, officials might have the

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incentive, perspective, expertise, and resources to mitigate dysfunctional implementation dynamics.

Forty years later, in very different institutional contexts, the leaders of governments in several jurisdictions – the United Kingdom, Australia, and Queensland – have created “implementation” or “delivery” units at the centre, ostensibly to advise, monitor, and ensure better implementation of policy initiatives. In the UK, the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit was established by Prime Minister Tony Blair in the Cabinet Office in 2001. In Australia, a Cabinet Implementation Unit was installed by Prime Minister John Howard in the Commonwealth’s Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 2003, and an Implementation Unit was established in March 2004 in the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet under Premier Peter Beattie.

The emergence of policy implementation units is intriguing, if only because they seem to have been at the instigation of prime ministers and premiers, and not the result of a recent call by policy scholars to build new capacities. Indeed, although implementation analysis has long been a staple in the tool-kit taught in graduate policy programmes and textbooks, and should be an essential feature of decision briefs prepared for ministers, arguably the implementation literature has lost considerable profile and steam, with a small band of insightful contributors refining and elaborating theoretical propositions (Hill and Hupe 2002). Relatively little attention has been paid to questions of capacity and doing better at making initiatives work in ever more complex policy environments. This, of course, has been a top concern of political leaders, who have adopted new performance regimes, the language of the New Public Management, and project management techniques to ensure priority initiatives are realized. Against this backdrop, the emergence and nomenclature of policy implementation units, however intriguing, seems like a throwback – one would have thought that the wave of such units would have hit in the 1980s in response to the original insights of Bardach, Pressman, Wildavsky, and many others writing at that time.

The purpose of this collection of papers is to explore the emergence, roles, functions, and accomplishments of policy implementation and delivery units, as well as their prospects. It does not argue that such units should be established as a feature of modern central government, but rather that their emergence is worthy of note and understanding. Proceeding under the auspices of first ministers, these capabilities can be seen as a critique of existing management, implementation, and monitoring capabilities of the larger governance and public service systems where policy priorities are concerned, and the latest instrument unsheathed by some first ministers to design, assist, and embed critical policy initiatives. But policy implementation units join the panoply of different capabilities leaders have experimented with to drive policy agendas and co-ordinate government activities, and, in the modern era, where policy is often recognized as inherently complex, share some similarities with capabilities intended to manage horizontal and whole-of-government initiatives. Indeed, a key goal of this collection is to ascertain what policy implementation units actually do, and whether they will endure, recognizing that capabilities with the same names may play completely different roles in different systems, presumably reflecting the ecology of their respective institutional environments and the strategic needs of their progenitors.

The cases in this collection reflect the universe of known “named” policy implementation units. Despite the preponderance of Westminster systems serving as the backdrop for these cases (with the exception of the European Union case), they have considerable diversity with respect to the motivations of political leaders who established them, the bureaucratic capabilities and roles that were installed, and the governance environments in which they have operated (unitary, federal, and multi-level governance). This paper seeks to provide a framework for analyzing and assessing the work of these units to date. It begins by with a brief synopsis of the evolution of thinking on implementation, and then considers the new environment for governance, policy development, and implementation. With this backdrop, the paper casts policy implementation and delivery units as one of several “adhocracies” that populate the centre of government (Desveaux *et al.* 1994, Lindquist 2004), and distinguishes among different functions because, despite their labels, implementation units may take on quite different roles. The paper then provides an overview of the genesis case studies and key findings.

### **Evolving Perspectives on Implementation**

There has been no shortage of reviews of the implementation literature. Generally, it is suggested that the modern literature has moved through three phases (e.g., Goggin *et al.* 1990, Hill and Hupe 2002, Howlett and Ramesh 2003, Schofield and Sausman 2004). The first phase was triggered by the contributions of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), Bardach (1977), and others. A flurry of writing emerged on the gap between policy intentions and the reality of programme delivery in the US and other jurisdictions, considerable introspection about the limitations of social science research and ambitious ideas and solutions informing policy-making and the design of programmes, and strong interest in discerning what interventions worked. Recognition of and debate over the implementation challenge was a defining moment for the modern policy literature, producing important strands of inquiry on implementation, evaluation, and knowledge utilization that not only since defined the field and been insinuated into the “policy cycle” heuristic (see Howlett and Ramesh 2003, Pal 2001, Bridgman and Davis 2000, Hogwood and Gunn 1984) but also distinguished it from the early policy sciences approach (Lerner and Lasswell 1951).

A second stream of writing focused on searching for useful theoretical perspectives and frameworks on implementation. This included work seeking to determine the most productive vantage points for thinking about how to anticipate and work through implementation challenges, which included the interesting debate over “top-down” (forward-mapping) and “bottom-up” (backward-mapping) approaches (Elmore 1979, Berman 1978), increasingly sophisticated efforts to develop frameworks and more sophisticated analytic tools that addressed the complexity of implementation (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983), and the sustained efforts to find better means to monitor and measure the impact of policy interventions (e.g., Williams *et al.* 1982). Arguably, this latter stream of research has built the most momentum over the years, particularly in the US, leading to a huge consulting industry dedicated to evaluation and quasi-experiments of programme implementation, and effectively has defined the work supported by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management for the last two decades.

Like all fields, many of its early strands of writing endure as important lines of thinking in their own right. Howlett and Ramesh (2003) have suggested that more recent inquiry on implementation has tapped into game theory, public choice and principal/agent models to frame implementation challenges and guide empirical research. Considerable attention has focused on how instruments can be wielded and used in combination to achieve policy goals as well as different sectoral and national styles for approaching design and implementation (Linder and Peters 1990, Howlett 1991, Howlett 2005). Recently, there has been renewed interest in implementation in the context of whole-of-government and multi-level governance perspectives (Schofield and Sausman 2004) and the challenge of managing complexity and networks more generally (Kickert *et al.* 1997, O'Toole 2004).

However, like the knowledge utilization literature (though not as thoroughly), one senses that the literature on implementation has dissipated as a coherent field into specific lines of inquiry, effectively a victim of its success. Despite its status as a foundation stone in the policy tool-kit, many of the themes associated with implementation are taken up under different rubrics, such as horizontal management, whole-of-government, evaluation research, governing instruments, network analysis, etc. (Hill and Hupe 2002). Relatively few scholars march forward waving the implementation flag. And, despite the interesting theorizing still occurring, and recent resurgence in interest in implementation (Schofield and Sausman, 2004), there is little evidence of applying implementation theory in practice and engaging practitioners in the emerging challenges of implementation, a style that was the hallmark when the literature first emerged (O'Toole 2004).

For the purposes of this collection of papers, this sketch of the implementation literature should suggest that contributors have done a good job of recognizing complexity over the years, and thinking carefully about the analytic challenges of anticipating implementation issues; the mix, qualities, and merits of different policy instruments for an implementation perspective; and the evolutionary and emergent quality of handling implementing policies and programmes, a process of negotiation, adjustment, and learning as managerial strategies. All of these themes and lessons should resonate even more in today's arguably more complex policy-making landscape. However, Bardach's early musings about building the right organizational and institutional capacities to mitigate implementation challenges has not received much attention over the years, and at best is only implicitly addressed in the field. This, combined with the lack of dialogue with practitioners on implementation challenges in recent years and the fact that several governments have recently considered or created units in their core executive to inform the upstream of policy development and to provide central oversight of implementation, suggests that the study of implementation units at the apex of governments is a timely and potentially fruitful line of inquiry.

### **Evolving Contexts, New Rationales for Implementation Units**

Innovations like policy implementation and delivery units do not spring out of thin air; they are responses of first ministers to perceived challenges, signals about how they expect policies should be designed and implemented. Whether such innovations are well conceived and live up to their promise is one matter, one that will be

addressed by the case studies. Here we consider how the policy environment might have changed to stimulate such action in several different jurisdictions.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, a common challenge for many OECD countries concerned stemming the growth in the size of government budgets and either cutting or rationalizing programmes. Public bureaucracies were depicted as having their own incentives, resistant to efforts by governments to control growth in programmes, and political leaders unwilling or unable to take decisive steps. This led to the argument that governments should assert political priorities and control over public service institutions, buttressed by theoretical perspectives such as public choice and agency theory. As tough fiscal decisions were made by many governments, their focus was less about implementing new policies and more about scrutinizing and changing existing policy regimes, and meeting aggressive expenditure targets and reorganization timelines. In this context policy implementation naturally received less attention, executive careers were increasingly based on managerial performance as opposed to policy shrewdness, and policy capabilities (not to mention labour negotiation capabilities) in public service institutions waned in many jurisdictions. For similar reasons focused less on the challenges of policy design and implementation (Barrett 2004) and more on scrutinizing alternative ways to deliver government services, ensuring that big service transformation projects were on time and budget, and adopting performance regimes.

As some governments turned the corner in their efforts to stabilize deficits and climb back to surplus positions, this raised the possibility of investing in new policy initiatives. With the pain of cuts fresh in the minds of decision makers, there were likely to be higher tests for what constituted prudent and worthwhile spending, and for ensuring that the funds led to intended results. Arguably, too, by the end of the twentieth century policy makers had a much better sense of the interconnectedness of issues, the need for alignment in the use of different governing instruments, and the reality that many policy solutions required working across the boundaries of departments and agencies within and across levels of government (United Kingdom 2001, Australia 2004, Canada 2004). Whether such appreciation for complexity and the need for horizontal and whole-of-government thinking emerged from lessons from downsizing and restructuring, the frames emanating from hypertext and web-based models, or systems thinking from the likes of Peter Senge and others does not matter. The important observation is that more citizens and policy makers sought to be more careful about how new policy initiatives were designed, how well aligned new instruments were with existing ones, and how quickly such initiatives could be put in place.

With this sketch of the recent evolution and swings in the governance environment for many OECD jurisdictions, we can venture several different hypotheses for establishing policy implementation and delivery units. They include:

- *Meeting government commitments.* Since the 1990s many political leaders have campaigned for office committed to policy platforms with specific commitments (i.e., the Liberal “Red Book” in Canada; Gingrich’s “Contract with America”, British Columbia’s “New Era Commitments”, etc.). Delivery and implementation units can be seen as another tool for first ministers and their governments to ensure that key commitments get met and they keep focused on its agenda and message.

- *Asserting political control.* This hypothesis would be rooted in the presumption that departments and agencies would resist adopting new policies because they might compete with existing programmes or not reflect the preferences of public service leaders. The goal of an implementation unit would be to bring pressure to bear and a spotlight on the public service.
- *Anticipating design challenges.* This hypothesis would argue that there is a need to vet policy proposals from departments and agencies for whether they fully account for the complexity of problems and the interaction of pertinent policy instruments, perhaps wielded by other governments or with other sectors.
- *Navigating implementation challenges.* The more complex a policy initiative, the more likely that it will require capacity to manage and co-ordinate implementation in a multi-level governance context.
- *Promoting cultural change.* Another hypothesis would suggest that the ultimate goal of implementation units is to change how front-line service delivery units do their work, to increase focus on better serving clients, improving the measuring and monitoring of results, and, as a result, to change their values and culture.
- *Addressing political optics.* Given the loss of credibility of government with citizens, and the perceived need for governments to become more “business-like”, implementation units might be established to project a new image and focus on getting programmes in place on time and within budget.

Interestingly, each hypothesis implies that a government might staff an implementation or delivery unit with different kinds of talent and expertise, where they are located at the centre, and what processes they engage with. That said, the case studies may reveal that governments had overlapping and reinforcing reasons for creating the units, and that, no matter the initial goals driving inception, they evolved over time.

### **Implementation Units and the Ecology of Central Capabilities**

The “centre” in most governance systems is comprised of a constellation of central agencies and secretariats dedicated to serving first ministers, and supporting and co-ordinating the government and the public service as corporate entities. Implementation units cannot be understood and evaluated on their terms because they are insinuated into an ecology of capabilities at the centre of government.

This observation is important for three reasons. First, implementation units may have emerged as a critique of other central units in the systems. Second, in a complex and “congested” central state apparatus, such units have to compete for resources and the attention of ministers and departments alike. Third, any unit may be called on to take up different tasks and roles in the upstream or downstream of the policy-making process. In what follows we consider the ecology of capabilities that such units have to navigate and consider the different roles that implementations units might play.

*Traditional Cabinet Secretariats.* Perhaps the most important, if the least exciting, central capabilities are the secretariats that handle the upstream and downstream logistics for the meetings of cabinet and its committees. Typically, these units are dedicated to ensuring that proper notice, sign-off, consultation, and proper

documentation and analysis occur before initiatives are tabled for ministers to consider. Depending on the size of the cabinet and its jurisdiction, there can be many secretariats, some serving cabinet as a whole and others serving particular standing and ad hoc committees. Usually, these units function as gate-keepers and process managers, and do not have the capacity to undertake policy and implementation analysis, nor can they to monitor or hold to account the performance of ministers and departments assigned responsibility for implementation.

*Other Standing Cabinet Secretariats.* Cabinet offices typically have responsibility for advising the first minister and cabinet secretary on the overall direction of public service institutions. In this connection there usually are secretariats that provide advice and support on the appointment of top executives across the public service, the overall structure of ministerial portfolios and the machinery of government, and broader reform initiatives such as renewal and public service reform. Finally, there will be secretariats dedicated to co-ordinating the assessment and evaluation of ministers and top officials.

*Co-ordinating Secretariats.* First ministers often establish several policy units at the centre of government, such as national advisors or secretariats on security, science, Aboriginal affairs, and the environment. These are different from the traditional standing secretariats responsible for supporting cabinet and its committees (although co-ordinating secretariats may support ad hoc committees of cabinet). These secretariats can function as focal points to move issues higher on the government agenda and clear the path for policy development; what Bakvis and Juillet (2004) have depicted as a “catalytic” or champion role. However, Lindquist (2004) suggests that without strong political will such capabilities will quickly become seen as “symbolic” (Myer and Rowan 1977).

*Policy Adhocracies in Departments.* The lead responsibility for developing, framing, and advocating a major policy initiative – even one that is clearly horizontal – will typically be assigned to a lead department or ministry, unless it is determined by the first minister that it is prudent or necessary for a central co-ordinating units to be established. Such units are responsible for assembling expertise and undertaking analysis, developing a coherent and politically sensitive policy plan, and dealing with and managing the central agencies and cabinet. It is in this latter role that such policy units will encounter and perhaps clash with policy implementation units.

*Scrutiny and Challenge.* Central agencies may tend to defer to departments for their policy and operational expertise, but one time-honoured role of the centre is scrutinize and challenge new proposals and often their implementation plans, even if approved by the cabinet. Such scrutiny emerges from the responsibilities of departments of finance and treasuries – particularly in the expenditure management and budget office functions – to ensure that funds are well spent and provide good value for money. This challenge role can be exercised as part of informing cabinet deliberations when considering proposals, but it can also take place once policy decisions have been made, and finer-grained budget and human resource allocation decisions have to be made in the downstream to decisions. The extent to which this



takes place will also depend on how potent the budget office and finance ministries are in the implementation process; in some jurisdictions, managerial flexibilities and traditions of autonomy may circumscribe this role.

*Facilitation Advice.* In some systems, central capabilities are established to support horizontal initiatives, either by providing advice, training or lesson-drawing. They could facilitate learning, the dissemination of best practices, and function as a “centre of excellence”. This could be relevant to implementation initiatives since there could be learning and support informed by previous experience. Such capacity could assist officials leading a horizontal initiative at the formative stage, but such a role should be seen as distinct from the catalytic, champion, and implementation roles identified above.

*Downstream Co-ordination.* The implementation of policy initiatives are usually assigned to lead departments, but sometimes their complexity and horizontality may require that the centre establish a co-ordination secretariat, either located with a lead department and sometimes in the cabinet office. In a parallel way, central agencies may often agree to co-ordinate across “service” lines, particularly if key oversight functions and policies are distributed across different central agencies, to streamline the approvals and reporting associated with a particular initiative.

*Monitoring and Evaluating Performance.* The line between monitoring progress on specific implementation initiatives and evaluating the performance of ministers and their executive teams can be blurry, but the latter activity focuses on more global assessment and reporting, whereas the former may involve remedial steps by the centre to ensure that implementation occurs. This might involve working with ministers and their departments to identify milestones and performance indicators for specific initiatives, and, more generally, developing accountability frameworks for departments and executive teams, and reviewing indicators to inform the annual assessments of executive performance. It may also involve identifying broad outcome indicators for gauging the impact of government policies and programmes in different domains over a longer period of time.

The foregoing leads us to see that there is a significant difference between creating capacity to promote priorities, assign responsibilities for horizontal initiatives, design significant policy interventions, co-ordinate approvals, facilitate progress, provide information, monitor implementation, and assess outcomes. These are distinct roles for co-ordinating units to play in government, and itemizing them in sequence lays bare the inherent complexity for properly managing policy initiatives from the centre. It is in this context that we need to consider the role of policy implementation units at the centre for government. But even here we can have functional differentiation, and in this connection it is useful to identify two different potential roles that such units could play:

- *Upstream implementation.* First ministers in Australia and Queensland have created implementation units in cabinet offices seemingly intended to ensure that *when* new initiatives are proposed, the administering organizations are properly identified, constructed and located, and that the right questions have been asked

about a variety of implementation issues (Shergold 2003). These implementation units provide *ex ante* quality control, to ensure the priority issues of government are properly addressed.

- *Downstream implementation.* A related, but distinct, function is to monitor progress on implementation and, when necessary, invoke central authority to clear the path for horizontal initiatives as they evolve. The best example of dedicated capabilities for this purpose is the Delivery Unit in the British government, initially attached to the British Cabinet Office along with other policy and reform capabilities, and later moved over to the Treasury (Burch and Holliday 2004).

It should be understood that implementation units could play one or both of these roles, or their focus could evolve over time depending on the interests of first ministers, and, of course, the competition and comparative advantage of other central capabilities.

More generally, we can see that there is great potential for implementation units, however defined and mandated, to overlap with and perhaps assume the responsibilities of other central actors in governance systems. Indeed, implementation units may have been established precisely to compensate for, and constitute a critique of existing central capabilities. This implies potential for overlap and rivalry for implementation units, and suggests that other central capabilities may exert pressure or attempt re-build capabilities to compete with or absorb implementation units. Moreover, there is no end to ongoing demand to create adhocracies and secretariats at the centre, and considerable pressure and incentive – particularly symbolic in nature – to retain them (Lindquist 2004). However, prime ministers and top advisers also have to ask, “How do you cull and re-align the centre?”, so that governments can maintain their focus, and the time of central actors, departments, and agencies can be utilized more effectively. In short, this canvassing of central capabilities suggests a degree of precariousness for these new units. These are important empirical questions to explore in the case study contributions of this collection.

### **The Cases: Overview and Approach**

The empirical part of this project focused on three case studies. Authors familiar with central structures and initiatives were invited to prepare papers. The annex to this paper contains the questions sent to contributors to guide the drafting of their cases. Their findings were presented at the Second Annual International Comparative Policy Analysis (ICPA) Workshop on October 3, 2005 in Vancouver. The papers included:

- *David Richards and Martin Smith* (Sheffield University), “Central Control and Policy Implementation in the UK: A Case Study of the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit”. This paper chronicles the emergence of the Delivery Unit (PMDU), but first considers larger trends in the governance of UK’s core executive. The authors show how the design of the PMDU and its direct reporting to the prime minister (even though it has been located in the Cabinet Office and the Treasury) was a response not only to the arrival and challenge of New Public Management

themes to the Westminster style of governance and to significant fragmentation in the delivery of services. They see the PMDU as a concerted effort of the prime minister to work *directly* and negotiate with delivery agencies on implementation of priority initiatives because the departments of the core executive had failed to bring about a necessary culture shift to improve delivery performance. Richards and Smith see the PMDU and its monitoring activities as reflecting Tony Blair's "personalism" in carrying out his duties as prime minister.

- *John Wanna* (Australian National University), "From Afterthought to Afterburner: Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit". This paper examines the decision of Prime Minister John Howard and his top political and public service advisors to create a capability to encourage ministers and public servants to focus attention on the delivery or implementation aspects of policy decisions. This interest arose close to Howard's second term, and was addressed in the transition planning for his third government. The author describes how Prime Minister Howard and top officials learned from the UK experience with the PMDU and located a small Cabinet Implementation Unit (CUI) in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The CUI can be seen as one of many strategies that Howard employs for running a "disciplined" cabinet system. While the officials do not seem to be the high-flyers found in the PMDU with direct access to the prime minister, the unit does review all proposals going to cabinet for implementation analysis and risk assessment, and the unit maintains a "traffic light" system to the prime minister and cabinet for about 30 per cent of all proposals that the cabinet has approved.
- *Anne Tiernan* (Griffith University), "Working With the Stock We Have: The Evolving Role of Queensland's Implementation Unit". This paper provides some background on Queensland's history and governance challenges, including recent efforts to modernize public sector governance and administration. Premier Peter Beattie's interest in implementation arose from several embarrassments during the second term of his government, revealing a disconnection between cabinet decisions and on-the-ground service delivery. This interest emerged as Beattie shifted from a collaborative style of governing to a far more directive and populist approach, running against the performance of the public service and working hard to keep his ministers in line. Beattie and his top officials were very well aware of Blair's PMDU and Howard's Cabinet Implementation Unit. However, they chose to reorganize standing policy and reporting capabilities to establish an Implementation Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Policy Division. An interesting feature of the Queensland experience concerns how the premier sought to have this capability work through the "desk officers" in DPC responsible for liaising with departments and agencies.

Not long after the workshop was held, I presented the framework and broad findings from this project at the Annual Research Meetings of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management in November 2005 in Washington, DC. There I learned of research by *Steven Kelman* (Harvard University) on PMDU and its monitoring of front-line service delivery agencies in a paper on "Central Government and Frontline Performance Improvement: The Case of Performance Targets in the United Kingdom". In a highly serendipitous way, Kelman's paper effectively takes up

the final observation in the Richards and Smith paper in the collection: “Real improvements in delivery will only come about with greater attention paid to the resources and culture of those who operate at street level.” Kelman does so in two ways. First, he reviews the organization theory literature to develop a framework that captures how central units might control, regulate, or facilitate entities delivering services. His four-part framework includes: decision making/design; monitoring/approval; knowledge creation and transfer; and value infusion. Second, using that framework, he reports on interview findings from a host of officials at the centre, in departments, and in front-line roles with respect to several specific case studies in the UK involving the negotiation and monitoring of performance targets. Though less focused on the emergence of PMDU as a new central phenomenon, Kelman’s framework nicely complements the one advanced in this paper.

While small in number, this set of papers is interesting for exploring the emergence, role, and evolution of this wave of implementation units. There is variation in jurisdictional complexity, ranging from sub-national jurisdictions (Queensland), to a unitary national system (the United Kingdom), and to a federal system (Commonwealth of Australia). At the level of nation-states, it appears that implementation units have emerged mainly in parliamentary systems, although obviously this is a small sample from which to draw any conclusion. It is well understood that first ministers in many parliamentary countries have sought to exert further increase in control over government priorities and managing the public service as a whole even as the challenge of doing so seems to steadily grow more daunting (Savoie 1999, Weller 2003, Burch and Holliday 2004). This suggests that jurisdictions with “strong” centre traditions are more disposed to such experimentation (Peters 2003, Lindquist 2000), in contrast to the more autonomous agency traditions and weaker central institutions often associated with Western European governments. It is also the case that first ministers and their cabinets in other jurisdictions have similar concerns but rely on functional equivalents to cabinet implementation and delivery units.

This last possibility is taken up in the concluding paper to this collection, which not only compares the information from the four papers with respect to their character and roles of central implementation units in three jurisdictions, particularly with respect to how the actual roles and activities support the hypotheses outlined earlier in this paper. It also considers the lessons and prospects for cabinet implementation units, and explores some implications for the literature.

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## Note

1. See Hill and Hupe (2002) for an excellent description of the genesis of this literature, including precursors to the work of Pressman and Wildavsky.

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## Annex: A Guide for Drafting Case Study Papers

The goal of this collection of papers is to describe and analyze the emergence and roles of implementation and delivery units in the UK, Australia and Europe, to understand how they differ from each other, and how they evolved and fared. Their arrival undoubtedly reflected broader developments in the management and evolution of central institutions in each jurisdiction, so some background on this would be useful. The authors of the case studies were asked to address several points identified as best they could, but were encouraged to develop their analysis and narrative in the way that made the most sense to them. Here are the guiding questions:

- What was the rationale for establishing these units? Did they reflect the specific interests of first ministers or other leaders? Did particular failures or scandals lead to their creation, or was there a more general critique in the air? Was their emergence partially as a critique of the inability of other central agencies to make these kinds of assessments?
- What is the location of implementation and delivery units in the immediate organizational ecology of the core executive? Did this evolve over time? Why?
- What kind of leaders and staff were chosen to fill these units? What was the size of these units? Did the type of leader change over time?

- What is the specific role of the units in policy development, agenda management, and oversight processes by first ministers and their governments? Does the label “implementation unit” really reflect their role? Are they working the upstream of developing policy initiatives, or do they operate more fully in the downstream with the actual implementation of initiatives, or both? Or are they monitoring the progress of other entities – such as departments, ministries, or agencies – as they seek to implement a policy initiative? Are they reserved for dealing only with certain kinds of policy initiatives?
- How do these units carry out their mandates in complicated, shifting institutional environments with a multitude of delivery agents but also a good number of other core executive agencies and units? Can you point to instances where these units successfully carried out their roles? Are there instances where they were marginal or ineffective? Has their effectiveness evolved over time?
- Are there functional equivalents or competitors to implementation units, such as central processes or other units and central agencies that provide implementation thinking in the upstream of policy development and then monitor progress?
- Has “lesson-drawing” taken place across jurisdictions (Rose 1993), when the units were created, or as they took up their mandates?
- What does the future appear to hold for these units? Is the existence of these units precarious, at the whim of first ministers and certain governments? Or do they appear have the promise of becoming institutionalized? If so, where?