

International Delivery

Centres of government and the drive
for better policy implementation

BY JENNIFER GOLD

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the many government officials who so generously shared their insights and experiences. It is also a truly transatlantic collaboration. At Mowat, Matthew Mendelsohn and Sunil Johal provided much appreciated feedback, guidance, and support throughout. Special mention should also be given to Elaine Stam, for designing this report, and Elizabeth Sweitzer, for her research and linguistic skills. At the Institute for Government, a special thank you goes to Jill Rutter and Emma Norris whose knowledge and support were invaluable. I am also grateful to Petr Bouchal, Josh Harris and Marc Kidson for sharing insights from their work on related research projects. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author.

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Historically, centres of government have devoted far more attention to advising and supporting policy formulation than they have to implementation. This is changing.

Foreword

This report is the product of collaboration between the Institute for Government in the UK and the Mowat Centre in Canada. It recognizes the common international problem of turning election pledges and policy proposals into real changes on the ground. And it is particularly timely given the national elections that will take place next year in both countries.

Governments need to consider how central agencies will oversee and support this implementation process. Traditionally, central agencies have focused on policymaking, but they are playing an ever greater role in correcting long-standing shortcomings in implementation performance across government.

Both the Institute for Government and the Mowat Centre are committed to learning from the experience of other countries and administrations. This report offers an international survey of the central machinery that is emerging to support policy implementation. Four areas of activity are highlighted: implementation planning, chasing priorities, major projects management, and evaluation. To take one example, it is revealing that central agencies across a number of governments are seeking to improve the performance of large-scale, high-risk projects by introducing or strengthening central assurance systems, as well as centrally coordinating the deployment of project-delivery expertise where needed. This is particularly interesting in the UK context in view of the work of the Major Projects Authority and its leadership academy.

International Delivery pays particular attention to developments in Canada and the UK, identifying the main strengths and weaknesses of both governments' arrangements, while setting them in a broader international context. While the two countries have similar government institutions and parliamentary systems, they face very different capability gaps at the centre.

For the Institute for Government, this study adds valuable international insights to our existing work on building a more effective Whitehall. It complements two recent reports: *Centre Forward: Effective Support for the Prime Minister at the Centre of Government* and *Doing them Justice: Lessons from four case studies of policy implementation*.

For the Mowat Centre, this report provides a comparative perspective in which to situate our own work on how to make government smarter and more effective. It provides needed detail for our *Shifting Gears* series on how to transform government processes and structures to deliver real results for Canadians.



Matthew Mendelsohn
DIRECTOR, MOWAT CENTRE



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Executive Summary

Historically, centres of government have devoted far more attention to advising and supporting policy formulation than they have to implementation. This is changing. Central agencies across multiple jurisdictions are now making concerted efforts to improve the operating environment for policy delivery. This report offers an international survey of these developments.

For all the differences in the way various centres of government are approaching the task of improving implementation performance across government, there are also important similarities. *International Delivery* identifies four common areas of activity that have increasingly become the focus of emerging institutional arrangements:

» Implementation planning

By systematically scrutinizing the feasibility of departmental policy proposals and training policy professionals in implementation planning, a growing number of central agencies are working to ensure that policy development across government is more alert to the *practical* realities of implementation.

» Chasing priorities

There is a truly global trend in heads of government establishing central “delivery units” that are tasked with keeping departments focused on implementing election commitments and the government’s highest priorities. These units typically collect and scrutinize performance data, and, where necessary, intervene to resolve problems.

» Major projects management

Central agencies across a number of governments are working to improve the performance of large-scale, high-risk projects by introducing or strengthening central assurance systems, as well as centrally coordinating the deployment of high-calibre project-delivery expertise.

» Evaluation

High-quality evaluation evidence collected during mid-stage and end-of-project reviews can help modify implementation trajectories; support decisions on the renewal, expansion, or termination of initiatives; and assist implementation planning in other projects and programs. Many centres of government are working to raise standards by directly monitoring departmental evaluation activities, offering technical assistance, and professionalizing the government-wide evaluation function.

These activities are designed to address long-standing shortcomings in the way implementation has traditionally unfolded in government. They are aimed at strengthening the capability of centres of government to assess implementation performance, take pre-emptive action to resolve problems, and build effective delivery capacity across government.

International Delivery draws lessons from these initiatives and identifies a range of factors that enhance the ability of centres of government to drive better implementation performance.

Throughout, this report pays particular attention to developments in Canada and the UK, while setting them in a broader international context. *International Delivery* closes with a comparison of the relative strengths and weaknesses of agencies at the centre of both governments. While there are some commonalities, what is particularly striking is that these jurisdictions face very different capability gaps.

Canada has taken significant strides in improving the role that the centre plays in front-end scrutiny and raising standards in departmental evaluation activities. But the centre has few means of measuring progress on key policy objectives. Since heads of government are so frequently held at least partially accountable for the delivery of their election commitments, this represents a critical gap in capability. Similarly, the centre has little capacity to map the distribution of project management skills at a whole-of-government level and ensure they are put to best use. And despite its strategic importance, the project management profession does not enjoy the kind of status or support it receives in other jurisdictions.

In contrast, the UK has established institutional structures to both chase progress and improve the management of major projects that are now being replicated across the world. There are still improvements to be made, especially in the area of major projects, but these developments constitute significant advances. However, a lack of systematic front-end scrutiny means that far too many projects and programs are founded on unrealistic and overly-optimistic cost and timescale estimates. Equally, in terms of evaluation, the centre has little understanding of what evaluation activities are taking place across government. Nor has the government-wide evaluation function been professionalized as it has elsewhere.

Today's fiscal environment has only heightened pressure to improve implementation performance across government—and therefore reduce instances of projects going over budget, falling behind schedule, and failing to meet their policy objectives. This context makes addressing these capability gaps a strategic priority.

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Introduction

All too often policy implementation failures attract international headlines and undermine the credibility of political administrations.

The technical problems that plagued the roll-out of the US *healthcare.gov* website; Canada's troubled procurement of F-35 fighter jets; the delays and IT system write-offs that have marred the UK's Universal Credit program; the French national rail operator's purchase of trains too wide for many station platforms—each time such stories emerge they rightfully raise questions about whether heads of government and their immediate support systems are doing enough to effectively oversee and support delivery across government. Are central agencies subjecting project proposals to sufficient scrutiny? What mechanisms are in place to ensure heads of government understand the progress being made on flagship policy initiatives? Do agencies at the centre of government have a grasp of which departmental projects represent the highest risk of failure? And is the centre making sure evaluation evidence is being used to determine whether projects or programs should be stopped or re-scoped? *International Delivery* seeks to answer these questions.

FOCUS OF REPORT

This report offers an international survey of how central agencies are working to improve the operating environment for policy delivery.¹

Because “*implementation has been the Achilles' heel*” for so many governments in recent years,² there is a growing trend in central agencies strengthening their capacity to raise implementation standards across government. This marks a departure from a more traditional preoccupation with advising and supporting policy formulation.

Centres of government vary in size and structure, but when it comes to improving implementation they usually perform three key functions: i) performance management (e.g. scrutiny and standards setting); ii) problem solving (e.g. trouble-shooting, brokering, and technical support); and iii) capacity building (e.g. training, issuing guidance, and coordinating communities of practice).

This report explores four areas of increasing central-agency activity that cut across and support these functions:

» Implementation planning

Ensuring that policy development across government is more alert to the *practical* realities of implementation. Some centres of government are now systematically scrutinizing the feasibility of policy proposals submitted to Cabinet, involving delivery experts in the policy development process, and training policy professionals in implementation planning.

1 This report uses the definition of “central agencies” used by the OECD: “Those organisations in the executive branch that co-ordinate the activities of, and provide guidance to the operating ministries and agencies” (OECD 2002). In Canada this refers to the Privy Council Office, Department of Finance Canada, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, and Office of the Prime Minister. In the UK this refers to the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, and the Prime Minister's Office.

2 Harris and Rutter, 2014, p.4

» Chasing priorities

Keeping departments focused on implementing manifesto commitments. There is a global trend in heads of government setting up central “delivery units” to track departmental progress in delivering key policy priorities and, where necessary, intervening to remove obstacles to delivery.

» Major projects management

Strengthening oversight and enhancing the capacity of departments to deliver large-scale, high-risk projects. Central agencies are strengthening their oversight of major projects at a government-wide level, as well as centrally coordinating the deployment of high-calibre project-delivery expertise, and raising professional standards in project and program management across government.

» Evaluation

Ensuring that decision-making is informed by high quality evaluation evidence. Central agencies are working to make certain that information collected during mid-stage and end-of-project reviews is used to modify implementation trajectories and support decisions on the renewal, expansion, or termination of initiatives. Actions include setting evaluation standards, directly monitoring departmental evaluation activities, scrutinizing evaluation plans, offering technical assistance, and professionalizing the government-wide evaluation function.

REPORT STRUCTURE AND METHODS USED

Section One of this report examines these four areas of central activity in turn. It highlights the specific initiatives that governments have underway to improve implementation, and it asks what new or transformed structures they entail and precisely what value add they offer.

Section Two then draws on key lessons from these current initiatives. It considers both the success factors and the different institutional models (from SWAT teams to centres of excellence) that help central agencies undertake effective performance management, problem solving, and capacity building functions.

This report is not an exhaustive survey of different international arrangements. Rather it identifies the major trends in governments’ efforts to improve their central support infrastructure for policy implementation. It pays particular attention to developments in Canada and the UK, identifies key capability gaps at the centre of each government, and sets them within a broader international context.

Equally, it is important to note that the initiatives highlighted here have been active for varying lengths of time. Where some are still in their start-up phase, others have been going for some years and continue to evolve. The benefit of this variety is that it enables lessons to be drawn from early adopters.


Research for this report is based on four strands of inquiry:

» A broad environmental scan to identify the arrangements that jurisdictions have in place at the centre of government to support policy implementation. This scan covered just over 30 jurisdictions.

» Interviews with 22 government officials working across 10 jurisdictions.³ Our sample included public servants working both in central agencies themselves and in line departments that interact with central agencies.⁴ These interviews were supplemented by conversations with former public servants who are now either retired or employed in different sectors.

³ These jurisdictions are: Australia, Canada, Maryland (USA), Michigan (USA), Minas Gerais (Brazil), Ontario (Canada), South Africa, South Australia (Australia), UK, and Wales.

⁴ The direct quotations used from both the interviews and roundtable are referenced in footnotes but the anonymity of the individuals concerned is preserved.

- 
- » A private roundtable discussion with UK government practitioners working in both central agencies and departments.
 - » Recent research projects by both the Mowat Centre (on improving evaluation functions in government) and the Institute for Government (on both organizing an effective centre and lessons from the implementation of four social justice programs).⁵

The current fiscal environment has only heightened calls for governments' delivery of policies, projects, and programs to be both more effective and more efficient. It will always be difficult to quantify the precise value add that agencies and units at the centre of government offer to departments—as one roundtable participant noted, it is “*hard to see the benefits of a problem avoided*”.⁶ But the reality is that central agencies and heads of government will often be held partly accountable for implementation failures, even if they may not always receive credit where it is due. For this reason, if for no other, policy implementation will remain a key strategic priority for centres of government.

⁵ See Galley, et al., 2014; Gold and Mendelsohn, 2014; Harris and Rutter, 2014; and Norris, et al., 2014
⁶ Roundtable, 2014

For all the differences in the way various centres of government are approaching the task of improving implementation performance across government, there are also important similarities.

1

Areas of Activity

This section examines the actions central agencies are taking to improve the operating environment for policy delivery. It maps out four key areas of activity that emerged out of the environmental scan and interviews conducted for this study.

Implementation Planning

Poor policy design is a common cause of flawed implementation. As one former head of the Public Service of Canada put it, there is ultimately “*no good way to implement bad policy*” (although good policy can of course be badly implemented).⁸

Yet it is still the case that in many governments, policy development is treated as a distinct and separate task to implementation planning.⁹

Several recent public service reform blueprints, including Australia’s *Ahead of the Game* (2010), the UK’s *Civil Service Reform Plan* (2012), and Canada’s *Destination 2020* (2014) call for a more integrated approach. Collaborative and evidence-based decision-making is identified as a means of ensuring that policymakers think through the feasibility of their proposals.

Central agencies are also taking steps to bridge this gap and bring design thinking into the policy development process. Specific actions include the central scrutiny of policy proposals, implementation planning training for policy professionals, and the establishment of centre-of-government policy labs. These will be considered in turn.

TREND 1 → SCRUTINIZING POLICY PROPOSALS

To date, few countries have mechanisms in place to subject policy proposals to routine, independent feasibility assessments prior to programs and projects being approved. A number of US commentators have been especially vocal in arguing that such scrutiny would reduce the likelihood of federal projects falling behind schedule, going over budget, and failing to meet policy objectives—with all the negative publicity this attracts.¹⁰

“Many problems that present as implementation problems are, in fact, problems arising from poor policy formulation that did not take implementation sufficiently into account.”

INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, IRELAND, 2013⁷

7 Institute of Public Administration, 2013, p.28

8 Interview, 2014

9 HM Government (UK), 2012, p.16

10 See, for example, Weaver, 2010 and Eggers and O’Leary, 2009. The Congressional Budget Office looks at the cost implications of proposed legislation but no systematic feasibility assessments are conducted.

Countless post-implementation audits highlight the frequency with which government approval of programs and projects is founded on expectations that are unrealistic and overly-optimistic.¹¹ A slew of recent reports by the UK National Audit Office, for instance, have criticized the cost and timescale estimates used in business cases for a range of major projects including high-speed rail, welfare-to-work, and the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.¹² Inadequate stakeholder engagement, data integrity issues, and short-term political pressures were all contributing factors.

While departmental Accounting Officers in the UK are charged with approving implementation plans and Permanent Secretaries are responsible for raising implementation concerns, commentators have highlighted the need for more independent scrutiny.¹³ There has been some recent progress with both the Cabinet Office's Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat and Implementation Unit taking a greater—albeit ad hoc—role in scrutinizing some proposals pre-implementation.¹⁴

In contrast, however, both Canada and Australia have developed more comprehensive approaches.

Since 2011, Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit (located in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) has been tasked with assessing the feasibility of all medium and high-risk policy proposals submitted to Cabinet. Similarly, the Government of Canada has strengthened its front-end scrutiny of proposals over the past decade, with policy secretariats in the Privy Council Office (PCO) required to scrutinize all Memoranda to Cabinet. The Department of Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat, and PCO also hold meetings with departments to consider implementation issues both during the Memoranda to Cabinet development phase and after Cabinet policy committee approval.¹⁵

Interviews with executives in both governments reveal that these challenge functions include scrutinizing whether:

» There is a feasible critical path, with a timescale that takes account of *“interdependencies with other programs/ measures [and] critical requirements, such as the passage of legislation or negotiations with the states and territories”*.¹⁶

» Departmental cost estimates hold water. Canada's Treasury Board Secretariat is also setting up a Costing Centre of Excellence that will undertake financial modelling to stress-test departmental estimates as part of the scrutiny process (see Box 1).

» Stakeholder reactions have been anticipated, with strategies for managing a potential backlash in place. Sponsoring departments should have consulted affected agencies and levels of government, and wherever possible, addressed concerns.

» Clear governance and resource arrangements are in place, risk assessments undertaken, and performance monitoring and evaluation plans outlined.

One Australian executive in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet described this new challenge function as *“a game changer”* that has ensured *“we are actually thinking about delivery right upfront at the same time that the policy is being constructed”*.¹⁷

Central scrutiny has also shone a spotlight on gaps in departmental capacities to *“actually plan delivery upfront,”* particularly around governance arrangements and stakeholder engagement.¹⁸

This has led to the Cabinet Implementation Unit providing greater technical support, including convening stakeholder meetings and information sessions on how to design the implementation plans that accompany Cabinet submissions.

At a time when in some countries the *“confidence of the civil service to challenge”* ministers is relatively low,¹⁹ central scrutiny also provides critical back up for public servants in line departments. In the UK context, the Institute for Government has previously argued that central bodies could support permanent secretaries in raising implementation concerns by undertaking this type of assessment as policy proposals are developed.²⁰

While it is important to recognize the value of central oversight, it is equally important this challenge function does not introduce new biases into the system. For instance, it is well recognized in the Government of Canada that both the Treasury Board Secretariat's program sectors and the Department of Finance have tended to *“exert downward*

11 See NAO (UK), 2013, p.3

12 Ibid

13 See Paun and Harris, 2013

14 Harris and Rutter, 2014

15 Interview, 2014

16 Cabinet Implementation Unit, 2014

17 Interview, 2014

18 Interview, 2014

19 Roundtable, 2014. See also Hallsworth et al., 2011; Page et al., 2014; Pearson et al., 2014

20 Paun and Harris, 2014, p.44

pressure on cost estimates—irrespective of the merits of the calculations used. The result is overly-optimistic budgets that departments are then “*on the hook to implement*”.²¹ Now, partly in response to this problem, the Government of Canada is establishing a Costing Centre of Excellence, which will independently validate the cost estimates of business cases put forward by departments (see Box 1).

TREND 2 → IMPLEMENTATION TRAINING FOR POLICY PROFESSIONALS

As research from the Institute for Government has highlighted, the implementation of policies, projects, and programs requires a diverse mix of capabilities including procurement, project management, and change management capabilities.²² And the skills needed are not constant; different technical expertise is required at different stages of delivery.²³

Too often policy professionals lack training and experience in implementation and too little consultation takes place with operations staff and change management experts when policies are being developed.²⁴

What is more, in countries like the UK, some of the central machinery emerging to build capability risks reinforcing the separation between policy and operations staff. There is a danger, as one roundtable participant commented, that the UK Major Projects Leadership Academy “*is seen as for operation and delivery people*” while the High Potential Development Scheme “*is seen as for policy people*.”²⁵ Less polarized enrolment would improve the skill set of policy professionals.

But there are some encouraging developments. The UK’s Implementation Unit has recently joined forces with the Major Projects Authority (both discussed later in this section) to deliver an implementation training course through the Cabinet Office policy school. Increasing numbers of policy professionals are also now enrolling in the Major Projects Leadership Academy as a means of building a much stronger understanding of project management across the civil

BOX 1 Costing Centre of Excellence, Government of Canada

The Treasury Board Secretariat is setting up a Costing Centre of Excellence (CCE) to improve the reliability of cost estimates used in Cabinet decision-making. The roughly 30-strong CCE team will perform two key functions:

SCRUTINY

Undertaking cost modelling to validate the estimates submitted by departmental Chief Financial Officers in the Memorandum for Cabinet process.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Raising professional standards across the Public Service of Canada by offering training, guidelines, and secondment opportunities to costing specialists.

The Centre’s ability to provide independent advice and scrutiny will be safeguarded by reporting directly to the Comptroller General of Canada (who is responsible for financial management and audit) instead of the Secretary of the Treasury Board (who is responsible for programs, policies and directives).

service.²⁶ This is part of a wider effort under the Civil Service Reform Plan to ensure that all project and program leaders (Senior Responsible Owners) pass through the Academy.²⁷

Since August 2013, Australia’s Cabinet Implementation Unit has run “Implementation Planning Workouts” for policy professionals in both the line ministries and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.²⁸ These intensive two-hour sessions are designed to raise the standard of Cabinet Submissions by teaching participants the basic elements of implementation planning, from whom to consult to what a rigorous plan looks like.

21 Interview, 2014

22 Norris et al., 2014, p.13

23 Norris et al., 2013, p.42

24 Interview, 2014; Roundtable, 2014

25 Roundtable, 2014. The Major Projects Leadership Academy was established in 2012 as a training centre for improving project leadership skills across the UK civil service (see Box 3). The High Potential Development Scheme is a talent management program which prepares high-performing Deputy Directors and Directors for senior executive positions.

26 Roundtable, 2014

27 HM Government (UK), 2012, p.18.

28 Interview, 2014; Cabinet Implementation Unit, 2013

TREND 3 → POLICY LABS

The widespread conviction that implementation planning will improve if policymakers spend more time engaging with delivery experts is driving the establishment of policy labs in many jurisdictions. In broad terms, policy labs are collaborative, experimental spaces where stakeholders with policy and delivery expertise can come together to analyze complex problems, generate ideas, and stress-test solutions.²⁹

These labs are part of a broader open policy making agenda that is seeing central agencies champion crowdsourcing initiatives (e.g. hackathons, wikis, and open data portals)³⁰ and the greater use of evaluation evidence in policy making.

Policy labs take a range of forms. Malaysia's Prime Minister's Department operates pop-up labs that bring together diverse stakeholders to develop action plans on the Cabinet's core priorities for government.³¹ Denmark's cross-ministerial MindLab offers public servants an innovation space and set of tools to work through specific service delivery problems.

Labs also use diverse methodologies from big data analytics to ethnography. But most share a common commitment to helping policymakers understand policy or service delivery issues from an end-user perspective.

These labs are now being embraced by central agencies in a number of governments (as well as emerging in a range of other settings, both inside and outside of government [see Figure 1]). Both the UK Cabinet Office and Canadian Privy Council Office are currently establishing central policy labs.³²

Whether a policy lab actually belongs in the centre of government is very much dependent on the function the lab is designed to serve—a point that a number of practitioners emphasize (see Figure 1).³³

The past few years have seen some labs flourish while others have closed.³⁴ Many of the practitioners interviewed in this study pointed to a number of key success factors for centre-of-government labs:

» The ability to demonstrate quick, politically salient results

Governments often establish innovation labs as pilot projects—waiting until the “*lab concept has been proven*” before providing more secure funding.³⁵ This is true of the recently-launched Cabinet Office Policy Lab in the UK, which faces a 12-month timeframe,³⁶ just as it was of the UK's Behavioural Insights Team (which was initially given 2 years) and Australia's DesignGov (18 months).

Given this probationary context, it is important that labs seek out quick, demonstrable wins. The UK's Behavioural Insights Team is a case in point. The Team's preference for testing interventions through short, randomized control trials supplied them with compelling, early results that have stimulated interest and buy-in from departments.

The choice of policy area is significant too. Director David Halpern has reported publicly that the Team “deliberately chose areas in which there would be a quick payoff.”³⁷ Trials in politically popular areas such as tax compliance and employment support services yielded discernible financial gains and have now been rolled out nationally.

Not only did the Behavioural Insights Team continue in the Cabinet Office until 2014 (when it became a limited company), but centre-of-government experimental behavioural insights units now also exist in the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.³⁸ The Government of Canada's newly-announced central Innovation Hub will also assist departments in using behavioural insights (alongside a range of other approaches) to address public policy problems.³⁹

29 Torjman, 2012

30 For more detail on crowdsourcing formats see City of New York, 2014

31 These labs are intensive 6-8 week initiatives where stakeholders come together to develop action plans. See Daly and Singham, 2012. The Tanzanian Government have adopted a similar model, sponsored by the UK Department for International Development.

32 Government of Canada, 2014; Design Council, 2014

33 Puttick et al. also note that “proximity to government and executive leadership is a question of mission and mandate.” See Puttick et al., 2014, p.106.

34 The Helsinki Design Lab operated between 2009 and 2013. Australia's DesignGov operated between July 2012 and December 2013.

35 Policy Profession Board, 2013, p.13

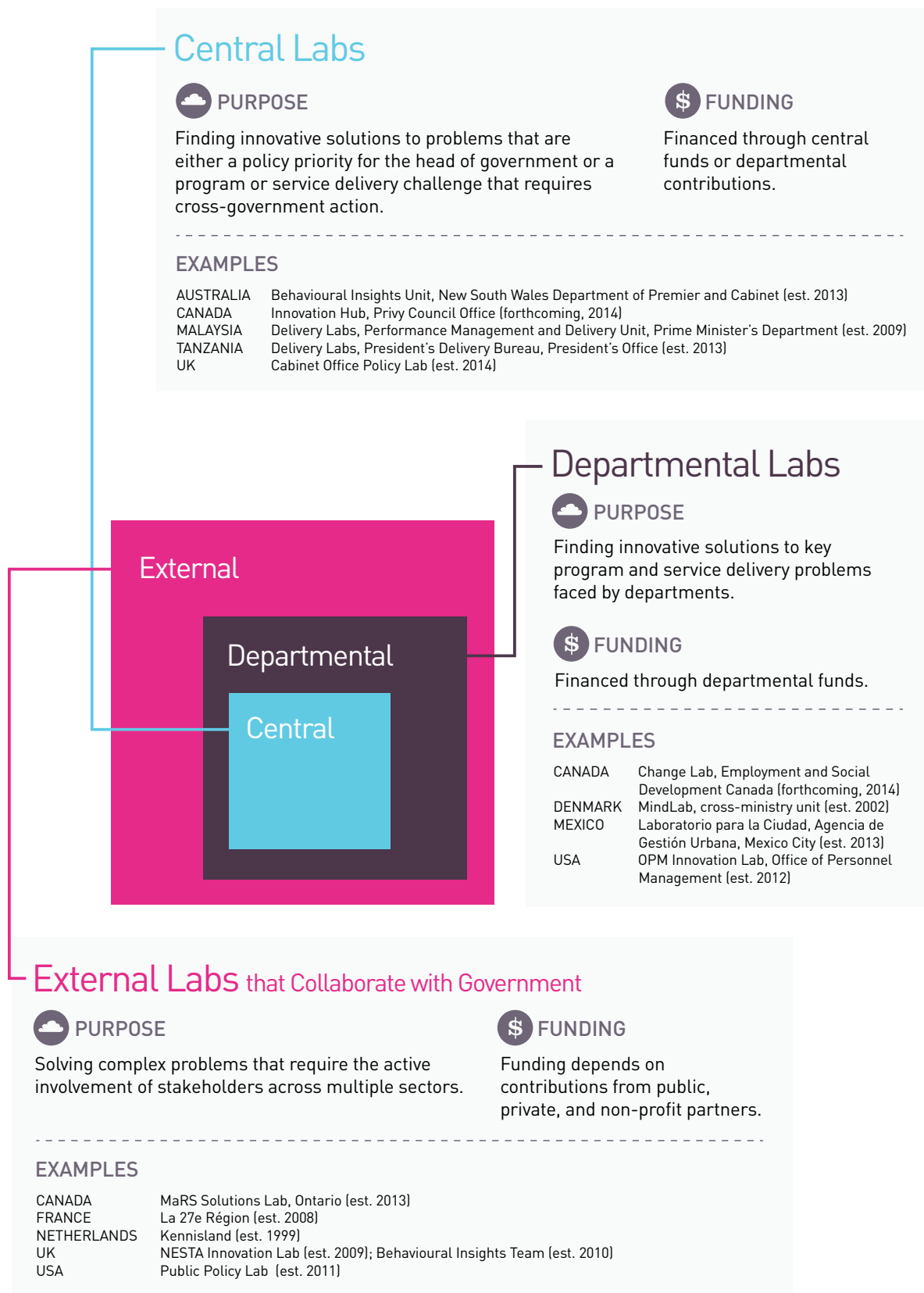
36 Kimbell, 2013

37 Halpern cited in Rolles, 2013

38 Although multiple federal agencies were already running behavioural insights trials before the creation of this White House unit, this central team was set up to promote collaborative initiatives across government agencies.

39 Government of Canada, 2014, p.12

FIGURE 1
Examples of policy innovation labs and their location in relation to government



» A carefully-negotiated departmental engagement strategy

Impacting policy delivery is no easy task for policy labs located at the centre of government. These labs face two major challenges. First, they must avoid becoming isolated from line departments resistant to the innovations they develop.⁴⁰ Here, connectivity is critical. Labs must develop a careful departmental engagement strategy. This involves initiating projects with willing executives and seeking out and engaging what Ontario's MaRS Solutions Lab refers to as the “5% of the people in [the] system already committed to change.”⁴¹

Secondly, their ability to challenge the system is limited by the political realities of operating in government. Political sensitivities (e.g. concerns over leaks) or legal restrictions (e.g. data protection controls) often limit the extent to which external stakeholders with either end-user or delivery expertise are brought into the lab design process. Here, successful labs—such as MindLab—have found that fieldwork (e.g. ethnography, interviews and focus groups) is at least one way of “holding up a mirror” to the system and making a strong case for change.⁴² As Puttick et al. observe, although the mandate of centre-of-government labs “is not one of radicalism, the work they do is radical compared to what else is happening in government.”⁴³

» Finding the right mix of staff

Governments often make the mistake of seeing “labs as physical spaces ... and investing in well-designed meeting rooms,” as one lab director put it, instead of recognizing labs as a specific mix of people using appropriate methodologies and processes to facilitate innovation.⁴⁴

Labs typically need a flexible staffing model: a small, core team that is skilled in facilitation, designing experiments (e.g. randomized control trials), and user-focused design approaches,⁴⁵ supplemented by an ability to second or hire subject matter experts on a short-term basis as required. This is particularly important for centre-of-government labs as they tend to focus on a broad range of policy areas. Without this staffing model, labs often lack the right mix of expertise to be useful to departments.⁴⁶

40 Mulgan, 2014

41 MaRS Solutions Lab, 2014

42 Interview, 2014

43 Puttick, et al., 2014, p.106

44 Interview, 2014

45 In this context, the term “user-focused design” refers to a policy development process that is guided by an in-depth understanding of the behaviour and needs of service users. Popular techniques being used as part of this approach include service user journey mapping, ethnography, and the analysis of behavioural data.

46 Interview, 2014

Chasing Priorities

“One of the things I found [on coming into office]...was there was no clear mechanism for reporting back to the First Minister directly. As the First Minister has an overarching responsibility, which is met every week through questions in the Assembly and in other ways, I felt it was important for there to be a mechanism in place to ensure that I have what I thought was the right level of understanding, on an overarching basis.”

CARWYN JONES, FIRST MINISTER OF WALES, 2013.⁴⁷

Even heads of state who sweep to power with a clear public mandate find fulfilling their priorities and promises a far from easy task. Setting aside parliamentary hurdles, there is a range of bureaucratic challenges that make implementation difficult.

For a start, the head of government's policy priorities do not neatly align with government structures. Successful implementation may depend on cooperation between multiple semi-autonomous departments with their own set of priorities and operating cultures.

Equally, rigidly hierarchical delivery chains can limit progress. A justice department, for instance, will often see itself serving an agenda-setting role, while prisons, courts and probation services control delivery. Departmental officials typically spend little time visiting the frontline. And even when delivery problems are understood and detected, there is often a feeling in departments that they lack sufficient leverage to drive change.⁴⁸

These challenges can be exacerbated by other, local factors. Some leaders must navigate coalition politics and work to satisfy the competing interests of different factions. Others face comparatively weak central support structures.⁴⁹

47 Testimony to the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister of Wales, National Assembly for Wales, February, 2013.

48 Barber, 2007, p.363; Interview, 2014

49 Truswell and Atkinson, 2011

FIGURE 2
Location of existing delivery units⁵⁰



⁵⁰ Delivery units have also briefly existed in the Netherlands and the Australian states of Queensland and Victoria.

In the UK, for instance, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Office are fairly modest when set against similar political systems. There is more than a little truth to King’s and Crewe’s blunt assessment that “Neither the prime minister nor any other powerful institution at or very near the centre of government is capable in practice of checking and balancing, let alone controlling and directing, much of what goes on elsewhere.”⁵¹

Most heads of government have few mechanisms at their disposal to understand what progress is being made on the pledges they set out in their election manifestos. This inability to track “how far the needle has moved on key priorities” was described as an important “gap in central functions” by one public servant from Canada’s Privy Council Office.⁵² Nevertheless, there is a particularly high-profile and growing trend in governments addressing these concerns through the creation of delivery units.⁵³

TREND → DELIVERY UNITS

The proliferation of “delivery units” represents a truly global trend in the evolution of central support structures aimed at improving policy implementation (see Figure 2).

These small, progress-chasing units typically fulfil a number of functions:

- » Tracking progress against key policy priorities through analyzing a constant stream of departmental performance data.
- » Undertaking field visits to identify obstacles to delivery and flag where additional resources are needed to fix problems.
- » Supplying heads of government with routine progress reports on the delivery of their manifesto commitments.
- » Organizing “stocktake” meetings between heads of government and senior departmental officials. These serve as forums for both challenging departmental executives to respond to difficult questions and brainstorming solutions.

This model first emerged in the UK in 2001, with the creation of the now defunct Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU). The UK government has since created an Implementation Unit

in the Cabinet Office, which—despite some differences in set up—bears “more than a passing resemblance” to the PMDU.⁵⁴ Since 2011, the delivery unit model has been replicated across six continents, albeit with substantial adaptations (see Table 1), and there has been a recent surge in the number of units being established (see Figure 2).

Part of the recent growth in delivery units is down to increasing interest from the international development sector. Where, traditionally, efforts to strengthen governance have focused on transparency initiatives (e.g. election monitoring), much more emphasis is now being placed on the need to reinforce delivery mechanisms in government.⁵⁵

While foreign aid budgets have been ring-fenced or even increased in many countries, agencies such as the UK Department for International Development and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada are nonetheless under heightened pressure to improve the efficacy of their spending.⁵⁶ For government aid agencies, delivery units represent an especially good return on investment. A second major player driving this expansion is the Africa Governance Initiative, a charity set up by Tony Blair in 2008 that is actively sponsoring the spread of the PMDU model developed under Blair’s premiership.

Adaptation

The delivery unit model is by no means static. Even the PMDU itself went through some major changes in form and function before it was abolished in 2010 (and then replaced by the Implementation Unit in 2011).⁵⁷

Jurisdictions have adapted the original PMDU model to suit their own purposes. Some of these second-generation units have themselves served as the model that others have replicated. The President’s Delivery Bureau in Tanzania, for instance, was modelled on Malaysia’s Performance Management Delivery Unit and receives technical assistance from Malaysian officials.

51 King and Crewe, 2013, p. 314

52 Interview, 2014

53 Another initiative that is beyond the scope of this project is the use of time-limited special units that have a mandate both to raise the profile of a particular issue and support cross-government delivery. Examples include the Climate Change Secretariat which operated in Ontario’s Cabinet Office between 2008 and 2011 to monitor the activities of multiple government departments in fulfilling their obligations under the *Go Green: Ontario’s Action Plan on Climate Change* (2007). For more examples in the UK context see Harris and Rutter, 2014.

54 Mullin, 2014. Like its predecessor, the Implementation Unit collects and analyzes performance data, undertakes “deep dives” to investigate implementation problems, and works with ministers and project teams to agree upon any required remedial action. Unlike the PMDU, the Implementation Unit (IU) is focused on scrutinizing initiatives that contribute to specific outcome targets (e.g. growth) rather than service delivery targets. The IU also reports its findings to the Prime Minister within the context of Cabinet Committee meetings rather than separate “stocktake” meetings between the Unit, Prime Minister, and department officials.

55 Africa Governance Initiative, 2014

56 Todd et al., 2014, p.i. The UK’s Department for International Development has supported the establishment of Tanzania’s President’s Delivery Bureau, while Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada has supported efforts in South Africa.

57 For a detailed history of the PMDU see Panchamia and Thomas, 2014, ch.5

TABLE 1
Key variations in the delivery unit model

1. Whose Priorities are Being Tracked?	
◆	<p>HEAD OF GOVERNMENT The majority of delivery units in operation today pursue priorities set by their head of government. This includes units in Australia, Brazil (Minas Gerais), Wales, and the US (Maryland).</p> <p>CABINET The priorities set for Malaysia's Performance Management Delivery Unit are arrived at collectively through Cabinet workshops.⁵⁸</p> <p>COALITION GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP Both David Cameron and Nick Clegg jointly decide on the priorities monitored by the UK's Implementation Unit.⁵⁹</p> <p>DEPARTMENTS Before the Netherlands' central delivery unit was abolished, the goals it monitored were largely set by departments.⁶⁰ The UK's Implementation Unit also devotes some time to holding departments to account for progress made in delivering on commitments set out in their own Business Plans.⁶¹</p>
2. What Priorities are Being Tracked?	
◆	<p>KEY SERVICE DELIVERY TARGETS In its original form, the PMDU focused on monitoring a select number of service delivery priorities in specific departments: Health (e.g. wait times), Education (e.g. literacy), Home Office (e.g. crime rates) and Transport (e.g. rail delays).⁶² These priorities were based on commitments made in the Labour Party's 2001 election manifesto. Maryland's Governor's Delivery Unit still largely follows this approach.⁶³</p> <p>HIGH-PRIORITY OUTCOME TARGETS The UK's Implementation Unit monitors a range of schemes intended to promote economic growth, including broadband roll-out, export promotion, and housing market interventions.⁶⁴ This focus on a portfolio of schemes expected to contribute to a particular outcome has been adopted by Minas Gerais's Escritório de Prioridades Estratégicas in Brazil and Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit.⁶⁵</p>
3. Internal vs. External Transparency	
◆	<p>INTERNAL TRANSPARENCY Delivery units, including those in Wales, Ontario, Australia and the UK are primarily a mechanism to drive internal transparency and accountability. They offer heads of government up-to-date information on progress made on key service delivery priorities and allow departments to be held to account. Information is not made public.</p> <p>EXTERNAL TRANSPARENCY The operations of a number of delivery units are bound up with external transparency and accountability agendas. The Governor's Delivery Unit in Maryland maintains a performance dashboard that measures progress against the Governor's strategic goals in almost real-time. Key performance indicators are labelled "on track", "progressing", or "insufficient progress."⁶⁶ Chile's Unidad Presidencial de Gestión del Cumplimiento operates a similar system. Both jurisdictions publish their performance dashboards online alongside supporting datasets from departments. The Governor's Delivery Unit in Maryland also publishes summaries of stocktake meetings alongside any visual aids used.⁶⁷</p>
4. How are Problems Resolved?	
◆	<p>STOCKTAKES WITH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT Using progress reports produced by their delivery units, jurisdictions including Malaysia, Wales, Sierra Leone, and Maryland will bring together heads of government and departmental officials to discuss results and ways of improving performance.⁶⁸</p> <p>INNOVATION LABS Delivery units in Malaysia and Tanzania organize 6-8 week pop-up policy labs that bring together delivery experts (including frontline practitioners) to solve program and service delivery problems (see discussion in previous section).</p> <p>◆ "DEEP DIVE" REVIEWS The main remit of the UK Implementation Unit is to undertake 6-week reviews of high-priority projects in partnership with departments. This involves intensive fieldwork, discussing findings with stakeholders, and generating an action plan that is monitored.⁶⁹ Similar methodologies are used by Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit and Minas Gerais's Escritório de Prioridades Estratégicas in Brazil.</p>

58 Michael Barber, 2014

59 Roundtable, 2014

60 Stan Kaatee (Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Netherlands), 2011

61 Mullin, 2014; Atkinson and Truswell, 2011

62 Barber, 2007, p.50.

63 Government of Maryland, 2014b

64 Roundtable, 2014

65 Interview, 2014

66 Government of Maryland, 2014b

67 Interview, 2014. See StateStat (Maryland), 2014

68 The UK Implementation Unit presents findings to the Prime Minister and allows ministers to be challenged in the context of Cabinet Committee meetings.

69 Mullin, 2014

The Effectiveness of Delivery Units

Centre-of-government delivery units have been associated with notable policy successes. For instance, many of the service delivery targets that were subject to PMDU scrutiny—from hospital wait times to rail punctuality—were met.⁷⁰ Equally, concerns flagged in delivery unit reviews have also led to important changes in delivery methods. Practitioners involved in the UK's Sure Start Children's Centres program, for instance, have credited a PMDU review in 2005 with prompting the Department for Education and Skills to recognize the need for an arm's length delivery partner.⁷¹

Yet, it is difficult to measure the precise value add offered by a unit that is set up to help ensure problems are averted.⁷² There *“is an irony,”* as the head of one delivery unit conceded, *“that we hold everyone else to very objective, quantifiable standards and there is almost a good faith understanding that this works.”*⁷³

However, the experiences of delivery units and their staff do shed some light on the factors that influence their relative effectiveness over the past decade. The most important are:

» Breadth of scope

A defined focus has proven critical to the effectiveness of delivery units. In its early years, the PMDU concentrated on just a handful of key priorities that both lent themselves to direct measurement and matched the subject matter expertise and skills of staff members.⁷⁴ Yet delivery units have suffered from *“trying to do too many things.”*⁷⁵ When the PMDU's mandate broadened to include responsibility for monitoring a wide-ranging set of inter-departmental delivery targets, the unit rapidly expanded and quickly lost credibility as a centre of expertise.⁷⁶

Equally, in 2008, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty established a Cabinet Office delivery unit—the Strategy and Results Branch—that was initially tasked with both tracking key performance indicators and leading a number of flagship inter-ministerial policy initiatives. However, staff found it hard to reconcile these two responsibilities: they required very different skill sets and the political urgency of the flagship initiatives overrode the results

monitoring work.⁷⁷ In more recent years, the Branch has moved away from its monitoring function and enjoyed success in building policy capacity and offering strategy advice on key initiatives.

» The strength of the centre

An institutionally strong centre of government is an important factor in empowering delivery units to drive improvements in performance.

Netherlands' now defunct delivery unit *“was undermined by powerful ministers and departments, who lobbied to make their own targets as easy as possible to achieve.”*⁷⁸ Limited departmental cooperation in granting access to meaningful performance information also severely hampered the unit's operations.⁷⁹

The dynamics of coalition politics can also weaken the centre. For Indonesia's delivery unit (UKP4), coalition government has not only made achieving consensus on delivery priorities difficult but it has also heavily politicized the rating system used by the unit. As Michael Scharf recalls:

*At a press conference following a July 2010 cabinet meeting, [Delivery Unit Head] Kuntoro reported that a quarter of ministries received red marks for not implementing priority programs....In reaction, some ministers called on the president to dismiss colleagues whose ministries received poor scores—especially if those colleagues hailed from contending political parties.*⁸⁰

» Strong working relationships (departments and heads of government)

Central scrutiny generates fear within departments over the potential repercussions of poor performance ratings. There is also often understandable concern that information relating to complex projects such as poverty reduction or transport infrastructure could be misrepresented to decision makers.⁸¹ This anxiety often results in strategic behaviour such as withholding information or gaming reporting systems.

70 Barber, 2007, pp.380-389

71 Norris et al., 2014

72 Roundtable, 2014

73 Interview, 2014

74 Panchamia and Thomas, 2014, p.49

75 Interview, 2014

76 Harris and Rutter, 2014

77 Interview, 2014

78 Atkinson, 2011

79 Stan Kaatee, 2011

80 Scharff, 2013

81 Interview, 2014

Strong working relationships between departments and delivery units have proven critical to securing compliance.⁸² It is for this reason that relationship management skills are often as sought after as analytical capabilities when hiring for delivery unit positions.⁸³ Departments need reassurance on how information will be used by delivery units as well as clarity on the potential benefits of cooperation (e.g. a promise to lobby for additional resources in cases where genuine need is detected).

Equally, political sponsorship is critical to the success of delivery units. Evidence that a delivery unit has the backing of a head of government (e.g. by having them chair “stocktake” meetings) improves compliance.⁸⁴ Changes in leadership similarly pose a challenge. In the wake of the 2010 election, the Coalition Government abolished the PMDU. It was perceived as a mechanism for driving top-down targets—an approach that was the antithesis of the decentralization agenda promoted by the Prime Minister’s Office.⁸⁵ Australia’s Cabinet Implementation Unit has also sometimes “*struggled a bit to find its way*” following changes in Prime Minister.⁸⁶ The CIU has had to work hard at adapting its operations to suit the different leadership styles of different Prime Ministers.

Major Projects Management

“Ninety-five per cent of government policies are delivered through major projects. Successful project delivery is therefore essential to government delivering its promises and objectives. ... Historically, the majority of major projects in government have not delivered the anticipated benefits within original time and cost expectations.”

UK NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE, 2013

At any one time governments are typically implementing a diverse range of major projects from transportation infrastructure to large-scale IT systems.⁸⁷ Questions over the adequacy of central oversight and support systems have led to recent changes in how a number of governments manage their portfolios.

In 2013, for instance, Queensland’s Commission of Audit criticized a lack of “*sufficient rigour and discipline*” in project management. Major infrastructure projects such as the Sunshine Coast University Hospital and Queensland Children’s Hospital suffered from significant cost overruns, while departments had failed to realize the anticipated benefits of ICT and internal transformation programs.⁸⁸ The Commission called for both improved central scrutiny and coordinated capacity building efforts.⁸⁹ A Strategic Project Program Board has since been created to oversee high-risk or large-budget projects, while Projects Queensland (a unit in Queensland Treasury and Trade) has been charged with raising professional standards in the delivery of complex projects.⁹⁰

These structures and activities are representative of a growing trend in centrally managing large-scale projects as part of an integrated cross-government portfolio.⁹¹

82 Interviews, 2014

83 Interview, 2014

84 Interview, 2014

85 It should be noted that many aspects of the PMDU model have been brought back under the new Implementation Unit (see Table 1).

86 Interview, 2014

87 The UK Government divides its major projects portfolio into four main categories: “government transformation and service delivery,” “ICT,” “Infrastructure and Construction,” and “Military Equipment.” See Major Projects Authority, 2014, p.7.

88 Queensland Commission of Audit, 2013a, p.17

89 Ibid, p.54

90 Queensland Commission of Audit, 2013b

91 National Audit Office, 2014, p.5

TREND 1 → PORTFOLIO OVERSIGHT

A number of jurisdictions—most notably the UK—are creating systems to integrate and strengthen central oversight of high-risk projects.⁹² In 2011, the Major Projects Authority was set up in the UK Cabinet Office to facilitate a more holistic understanding of existing major projects, inject a “culture of realism” into project management,⁹³ and intervene to resolve problems.

At the portfolio level, the Major Projects Authority maintains a government-wide roster of projects (the Government Major Projects Portfolio). Each project must have an Integrated Assurance and Approval Plan⁹⁴ and is awarded a delivery confidence rating on the basis of the quarterly performance data that departments are required to submit. The Authority’s activities—especially its use of a “traffic light” rating system to indicate the likelihood of successful delivery—allow problems to get “*flagged around the system*” and resources to be diverted to help troubled projects get back on track (see Box 2).⁹⁵

At the departmental level, these activities mean that ministers and senior officials have better access to project information and can be more stringently held to account. “*If we put an amber/red rating on something or a red rating on something,*” notes John Manzoni (the MPA’s Executive Director), “*that immediately gets a lot of attention. It gets me on the phone bugging the Permanent Secretary [of that department]*”.⁹⁶

BOX 2

Key interventions for troubled projects

The Major Projects Authority (MPA) is developing a range of tools to help get projects at risk of failure (i.e. those with delivery confidence assessments of red or amber/red) back on track. These direct interventions include:

ADDITIONAL REVIEWS

Conducting a special Project Assessment Review (PAR)—a “deep dive” investigation into project performance that can last up to 10 days and results in a series of recommendations to fix implementation problems. Follow up Assurance of Action Plan reviews are also used to determine whether sufficient progress has been made in implementing PAR recommendations.⁹⁷

PROJECT “RESETS”

MPA staff can be brought in to help craft new implementation blueprints for troubled projects. In 2013, the MPA Chief Executive led a 3-month “reset” of the Universal Credit program, assisted by staff from the MPA, the Government Digital Service, and the host department.⁹⁸

“CASE CONFERENCES”

Organizing meetings with project teams to address concerns and agree upon remedial action. These meetings typically last between 1.5 and 2 hours, with the MPA taking responsibility for checking whether agreed actions have been taken.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Approximately 30 Assurance of Action Plan reviews have been conducted to date. See also National Audit Office, 2014, p.12.

⁹⁸ National Audit Office, 2013b

⁹² Another key trend in strengthening central scrutiny that lies beyond the scope of this report is the growing adoption of staged approval processes (“gateway reviews”) where central agencies scrutinize initiatives at key points in the project lifecycle. This methodology is used in jurisdictions including Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, New Zealand, Ontario, Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia. The Government of Canada has made use of gateway reviews for some major projects.

⁹³ Major Projects Authority, 2014, p.11

⁹⁴ Since April 2011, all projects within the Government Major Projects Portfolio need an Integrated Assurance and Approval Plan (IAAP) to ensure that scheduled assurance activities line up with the Treasury’s financial approval process. The Major Projects Authority and HM Treasury both review departmental IAAP drafts and coordinate their response. See HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2011, p.9

⁹⁵ Under the Major Projects Authority’s Red Amber Green (RAG) ratings system projects can be awarded green, amber/green, amber, amber/red, or red status. There are also some projects which are exempt on national security or commercial confidentiality grounds. In 2014, the Authority added a “reset” category for projects that have been significantly re-scoped.

⁹⁶ John Manzoni (Executive Director, Major Projects Authority), evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, June 5, 2014.

Other jurisdictions have started to follow suit. The Welsh government, for instance, has begun to “*mimic the MPA*” by introducing a reporting process that provides the Commercial and PPM Division with greater visibility over the 20 most complex and/or highest budget projects in the government’s portfolio.⁹⁹ Queensland has set up a new Strategic Project Program Board to monitor the performance of high-risk or large-budget initiatives across the government’s major projects portfolio.¹⁰⁰

Canada’s Treasury Board similarly requires federal departments to submit regular performance information on high-risk major projects.¹⁰¹ Unlike other jurisdictions, however, the type of update required is more tailored to individual projects.

While this level of cross-portfolio oversight has been heralded in some quarters as “*a sea change*” in the management of large-scale projects,¹⁰² questions over the effectiveness of central oversight remain. These include:

» Resource limitations and the impact of prioritization

Despite overseeing a portfolio that currently consists of 199 projects, the UK’s Major Project’s Authority has a comparatively small staffing complement.¹⁰³ This inevitably constrains the scope of its activities. In 2012, the former head of the MPA, David Pitchford, conceded that finite resources meant that the Authority necessarily focuses much of its efforts on scrutinizing the “*high-risk end*” of the portfolio. At the same time, he conceded that to categorize projects as lower risk did “*not necessarily mean that they are well run.*”¹⁰⁴ There is always a risk that emerging problems are missed. The same is true of the Treasury Board of Canada’s policy of concentrating oversight activities on the highest-risk projects, with responsibility for most of the portfolio devolved to departmental deputy heads.

99 Interview, 2014

100 Queensland Commission of Audit, 2013b

101 Kenney, 2011. The Treasury Board has also moved away from using budget size as an index of the degree of central oversight a project requires. Since 2012, assessments of project complexity and a lead department’s capacity to manage implementation risks have become the main determining factors. See Treasury Board Secretariat, 2014

102 Cabinet Office, 2011.

103 The MPA had 38 staff members in June 2012. This was increased to 59 in early 2014. See House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2012, p.Ev8 and National Audit Office, 2014, p.10

104 David Pitchford (former Executive Director, Major Projects Authority), evidence to Committee of Public Accounts, 25 June 2012. See House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2012, p.Ev8.

» Extent of influence over project approvals

There are certainly isolated examples where MPA reviews have led to a project being re-scoped (e.g. a National Health Service IT program) or terminated (e.g. a Carbon Capture and Storage Competition). However, HM Treasury is not required to act on the findings of MPA project reviews and the Treasury has been criticized for making limited use of the project performance data collected by MPA (with the notable exception of Infrastructure UK).¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Wales’ PPM & Commercial Division has no financial authority over the projects it monitors.¹⁰⁶

» Impartiality

The MPA’s oversight and support roles remain a careful balancing act. Concerns over the Authority’s vulnerability to political pressure recently surfaced when the Universal Credit project avoided a confidence rating downgrade following discussions with ministers. The Authority instead created a new “reset” category to reflect the project’s adoption of a new implementation blueprint. Given the MPA’s involvement in the development of this blueprint (see Box 2), this case also points to the fact that the desire of central agencies to see improvements and demonstrate their own effectiveness sits uneasily with the need to conduct rigorous assessment.

TREND 2 → PROMOTING DEPARTMENTAL PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

At the departmental level, efforts are also underway in both the UK and Canada to promote better portfolio management.

In 2012, the Government of Canada introduced a new *Policy on the Management of Projects* that encourages a greater focus on departmental portfolio management. Instead of scrutinizing the ability of departments to manage individual projects in isolation, the Treasury Board now takes “*a more strategic view of departmental management practices*” and adjusts the amount of oversight a project requires depending on a department’s ability to manage implementation risks.¹⁰⁷ To encourage better portfolio management at the departmental-level, capacity assessments give weight to

105 Infrastructure UK is a unit within HM Treasury that uses the performance data collected by MPA to inform investment decisions and track the progress and spending patterns of major infrastructure projects. See National Audit Office, 2014, p.32

106 Interview, 2014

107 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2014

factors such as the existence of integrated governance and monitoring systems and the degree to which projects are “selected, prioritized, and resourced according to [their] contribution to the organization’s strategic objectives.”¹⁰⁸

In a more ad hoc way, the UK Major Projects Authority has been working with senior management and ministerial teams to encourage a more coordinated approach to project planning and resource decisions, “ensuring that the collection of projects across a department works as a whole to deliver policy objectives.”¹⁰⁹

As well as holding five-day workshops for Permanent Secretaries, the MPA recognize that ministerial support will be critical to any change in management practices. Sudden policy changes—particularly following ministerial reshuffles—are one of the most challenging aspects of portfolio management. Many of our roundtable participants felt that ministers faced insufficient challenge over risk, resources, and capacity.

The MPA has begun hosting workshops on portfolio management with ministerial teams.¹¹⁰ While MPA staff readily accept that these initiatives will not transform departmental operating environments overnight, they do believe they have helped “slightly change the conversation” between ministers and senior management.¹¹¹

TREND 3 → THE STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT OF EXPERTISE ACROSS GOVERNMENT

A portfolio approach to major projects also enables central agencies to coordinate the deployment of project management expertise. Such a coordinated approach has often been lacking in the past. In their work on the London 2012 Olympics, Norris et al. found little evidence of a “strategic attempt to redeploy” accumulated project management expertise, with Government Olympic Executive staff “being served with redundancy notices and moved to roles that do not always make use of their skills.”¹¹²

Central agencies can help identify suitable project managers to fill specific vacancies or mobilize additional support for project delivery teams by connecting them with experienced practitioners working elsewhere in government.

Centrally-organized communities of practice are proving a popular vehicle for both understanding the distribution of project management expertise across government and putting those skills to best use. In 2011, Australia’s Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) created an inter-departmental Policy Implementation Network that is playing an increasing role in improving the governance arrangements and succession planning around major federal projects. Chaired by the Secretary of PM&C, the Network brings together almost 30 Deputy Secretaries to discuss implementation issues across the government’s portfolio of programs and projects.

An example of the Policy Implementation Network in action came in 2012, when a Network member from the Department of Defence was appointed to the National Disability Insurance Scheme’s program board. With a strong track record in delivering major projects (rather than specific program-area expertise), this official was tasked with strengthening the Scheme’s governance arrangements by serving “as a ‘critical friend’ and neutral expert.”¹¹³

In the past, this type of deployment of expertise “relied, for lack of a better word, on an ‘old boys network’ where people just know each other because they’ve worked with each other over a period of time rather than any systematic ability to see right across the service and where the areas of expertise lie on delivery and then be able to tap into and utilize them on particular projects.”¹¹⁴

The UK’s Major Projects Authority has started taking a more systematic approach to redeployment. Staff members have begun to monitor leadership turnover in major projects, investigate if there is cause for concern, and participate in the selection of new project leaders via membership of appointment panels.¹¹⁵

The Authority is also looking at ways human resources processes can be modified to facilitate the speedy redeployment of project managers. As one staff member pointed out: “...when you need capability on a project you need it now. You don’t want to wait 6 months while you go through some protracted process to be able to get that capability. Problems are urgent.”¹¹⁶

108 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2013

109 Major Projects Authority, 2014, p.15

110 Roundtable, 2014

111 Ibid

112 Norris, et al., 2013, p.42.

113 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2013, p.46

114 Interview, 2014

115 National Audit Office, 2014, p.33. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts has called for the MPA’s input into the recruitment process to become more widespread and formal (Committee of Public Accounts, 2014).

116 Roundtable, 2014

From time to time Infrastructure UK also steps in to ensure the infrastructure project portfolio has the right expertise “*at the coal face to actually do the job properly.*”¹¹⁷ As part of the Treasury they can circumvent departmental pay restrictions to bring in specialists from outside of government.

TREND 4 → PROFESSIONALIZING PPM

There is growing recognition of the need to “*elevat[e] ... project delivery as a profession to be on a par with the policy profession*” if governments are to address high turnover rates in program and project management positions and an over-reliance on external contractors.¹¹⁸

As one UK public servant put it: “*for a long time being a project manager was one better than being a second-hand car salesman but not a huge amount better.*”¹¹⁹ Promotion systems have tended to undervalue project management while there has been insufficient recognition of the need for a well-trained cadre of project and program managers.

Centres of government are now taking a range of actions including setting up centrally-run communities of practice, establishing recognized professions, and coordinating training.

Communities of practice

The communities of practice highlighted above are also part of a broader trend to professionalize program and project management.

Australia’s Policy Implementation Network and more recently the UK’s Civil Service Project Leaders Network and Wales’ Project and Programme Management Community of Practice and much smaller Senior Responsible Owner Network all hold regular meetings that provide opportunities to network, discuss challenges, brainstorm solutions, and listen to external speakers.

Australia’s experience suggests it takes some time for these forums to make a meaningful contribution to building project and program management capacity. While centre-of-government sponsorship boosts attendance, it also makes participants more reluctant to air delivery issues.¹²⁰

Early on, there was a tendency for participants to use the Network for showcasing their credentials and experience. It has taken time “*to get to the point where they are*

comfortable to share their war stories and their disasters” and solicit advice.¹²¹ Indeed, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat has helped avoid this problem by participating in, but not running, a community of practice initiated by departments.¹²²

Recognized professions

While these communities of practice offer a valuable resource to project managers, a number of interviewees felt that having recognized professional status played a bigger role in helping project management enjoy a more equal footing with other government functions, especially policy.¹²³

Many jurisdictions including Canada and the UK have a set of officially-recognized “professions” or “functional communities.”¹²⁴ These provide strategically-important functions—from policy and communications to law and audit—with a head of profession or centre of excellence that will champion their interests, coordinate training opportunities, set professional standards, and develop competency profiles.

While there is still considerable room for development, the UK has a Project Delivery Profession, with the Major Projects Authority taking a leading role in supporting and professionalizing this function (see Box 3). In contrast, project management is not one of the almost 20 “functional communities” in the Government of Canada.

Training

Few jurisdictions offer centrally-organized project leadership training aimed at raising project delivery standards across government.¹²⁵

The UK is a notable exception, with the creation of the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA). The course is commendable for its “*appreciation that leading a major project is not simply scaled-up ‘project management.*”¹²⁶ The curriculum is carefully tailored to the leadership competency profile developed by the Major Projects Authority (see Box 3).¹²⁷

117 Roundtable, 2014

118 Cabinet Office, 2013

119 Interview, 2014; Norris et al., 2013, p.74

120 Interview, 2014

121 Interview, 2014

122 Interview, 2014

123 Interviews, 2014

124 A recognized “civil service profession” in the UK government is broadly equivalent to a “functional community” in the Government of Canada.

125 Roundtable, 2014

126 Saïd Business School, 2014

127 NAO, 2013, p.33

BOX 3

The Major Projects Leadership Academy, UK

Launched in February 2012, the Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA) is a partnership between the Major Projects Authority, the Saïd Business School at Oxford University, and Deloitte. Successive cohorts of senior project leaders complete assignments and attend intensive residential courses over a period of 12 months.¹²⁸ The prestige offered by such a high-profile course goes a long way to helping raise the professional standing of project management in the UK civil service.

The curriculum combines individual evaluation (psychometric testing, 360-degree performance reviews, and a final panel assessment), with presentations, workshops, seminars, and assignments on areas such as technical and commercial capabilities, leadership skills, and project planning and assurance.¹²⁹

The government aims to have the leaders of all major projects either enrolled in or graduated from the Academy by the beginning of 2015. Ultimately, MPLA training will become a prerequisite for project leadership (Senior Responsible Owner) appointments.¹³⁰

128 Saïd Business School, 2014

129 Civil Service World, 2012

130 Cabinet Office, 2013

Yet, significant gaps remain in the training that is available to practitioners at the sub-leadership level.¹³¹ Some agencies (notably HM Revenue and Customs) and devolved administrations (e.g. Wales) have sought to address this gap by developing their own courses for practitioners working “*throughout the hierarchy of a project.*”¹³² Other initiatives include a Scottish Government mentoring scheme and Welsh MPLA graduates sharing course insights with the Welsh Government’s Project and Programme Management Community of Practice.¹³³ Nevertheless, training options are limited for many UK public servants.

TREND 5 → IN-HOUSE CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Aside from direct interventions triggered by central assurance systems, some jurisdictions have established central units that offer project management support across government. Both South Africa’s Technical Assistance Unit and Ontario’s Transformation Consulting Services Branch offer in-house consultancy services to departments undertaking projects. As one consultant commented:

*[We can go in and] say “OK, you are at this point, have you considered this? Have you brought in IT? If you do it six months down the road, IT cannot deliver in line within the timetable.” We can help identify pitfalls early on in the process.*¹³⁴

Such support is only provided in response to departmental requests. While there are a number of governments offering technical assistance services, the units emerging out of South Africa and Ontario are unique in the extent to which they address capability gaps around change management in government.

Despite major programs and projects often necessitating significant changes to existing operating cultures,¹³⁵ governments have often neglected this aspect of project management in the past. As one Welsh government executive put it:

131 Agbonlahor, 2014

132 Interview, 2014; *Ibid*

133 Interview, 2014

134 Interview, 2014

135 The new service delivery models being developed by local authorities under the UK’s Troubled Families Programme, for instance, involve frontline practitioners offering intensive case management to families with complex needs. Greater Manchester acknowledged in its business case that this move towards carefully sequenced, customized support involves “a significant cultural shift” for its workforce. In particular, caseworkers need to be much more open to challenging the status quo and redesigning support services if existing interventions are not producing improved outcomes.

So many [public sector] organizations when they embark on projects fail to pay sufficient regard to the business change elements of a project. They will focus on the technical details to the detriment of actually engaging with stakeholders...[and] articulating a case for change.¹³⁶

In instances when change management has been taken seriously by governments it has tended to be in the context of workforce downsizing. And even here, governments are typically either reliant on external consultants or they instruct “bright policy people” to lead internal restructuring.¹³⁷

The UK government has openly acknowledged in its 2013 workforce development plan that change management constitutes a key “capability gap” that has contributed to consistently poor leadership and managing change scores in the annual Civil Service People Survey.¹³⁸ Yet unlike the other priority areas identified in the plan, few practical solutions are offered and departments and units at the centre of government are not assigned an active role in building capacity.

Both South Africa’s Technical Assistance Unit and Ontario’s Transformation Consulting Services Branch offer consultancy services to departments undertaking large transformation projects. Consultants work with senior departmental executives on all or part of a change initiative and undertake a range of activities from readiness assessments to designing communication and engagement strategies.

These units are also helping those departments who wish to bring in external change management consultants become more “*intelligent clients*.” As one practitioner put it: “*senior executives often don’t have the knowledge of transformation to know what to ask for in the procurement process.*”¹³⁹

Technical assistance units can advise departments on the tasks consultants will most likely be required to perform. This helps reduce instances of departments incurring additional fees from asking consultants to undertake tasks that were never specified in their original contracts.¹⁴⁰

136 Interview, 2014
137 Interview, 2014
138 Civil Service, 2013; Cabinet Office, 2013
139 Interview, 2014
140 Interview, 2014

Evaluation

“Evaluation has a key role in generating evidence and learning about what is working ... and what is not; it can identify better ways of doing things; allow for course corrections of programmes to improve effectiveness; ensure that lessons are learned during the development process and resources shifted to where they are most effective; and improve the ability to respond to change.”

UK DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, 2013A, P.III

High-quality evaluation evidence collected during mid-stage and end-of-project reviews can help modify implementation trajectories; support decisions on the renewal, expansion, or termination of initiatives; and assist the implementation planning of other projects and programs.

Most evaluation activity that takes place in government is the responsibility of departments and agencies.¹⁴¹ While central requirements often dictate that departments use evaluation evidence to inform implementation planning and delivery, there are a range of demand- and supply-side barriers that prevent this from happening (see Box 4).¹⁴² Units at the centre of government are increasingly assuming an active role in attempting to address these barriers.

141 South Africa is an example of a jurisdiction where the Treasury –and more specifically its Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation—plays a much more direct role in coordinating, funding, and undertaking evaluation activities.

142 Rutter, 2012

BOX 4

SUMMARY OF DEMAND-AND SUPPLY-SIDE BARRIERS

DEMAND-SIDE BARRIERS

In the age of the 24-hour news cycle, departments have become understandably risk averse. Evaluation evidence has increasingly become associated with reductive “success” or “failure” headlines in the media, rather than being viewed as part of a learning process.¹⁴³ As one former Canadian government executive put it:

Look at our program and tell us how to make it better, that is one way to view [evaluation]. Or look at our program and tell us how we are screwing up and that’s how the media looks at it ... [That] is a disincentive to ask tough questions.¹⁴⁴

A recent survey of evaluation activities in the South African government found 54% of departments reporting that evaluation information was “not treated as an opportunity for learning and development.” Other barriers to evaluation included a lack of support from senior management (45%), evaluation units lacking influence (39%), rigid hierarchies restricting opportunities to challenge performance (27%), and the absence of a strong culture of both evidence-based decision-making (27%) and program evaluation (40%).¹⁴⁵

SUPPLY-SIDE CHALLENGES

Equally, there is range of supply-side problems relating to the way evaluation is conducted. Common concerns raised by audit bodies include evaluation coverage and quality, departmental capacity to conduct evaluations, and whether evaluation results are accessible to decision-makers (see Table 2).

143 Galley et al., 2013, p.23

144 Interview, 2014

145 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2013. Survey participants were asked “Which of the following are major barriers to the effective use of M&E for decision-making, learning and accountability in your department?” Of the 155 national and provincial departments asked to complete the survey, 96 responded.

TABLE 2
Supply-side barriers

Problem Area	Select Examples		
	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	UNITED KINGDOM
<p>COVERAGE There is limited evaluation evidence available for many programs, projects and policies.</p>	<p>The National Audit Office criticized the “<i>low level of formal evaluation activity across the Australian Government</i>” in 2014. An audit of 16 agencies found only half had evaluation plans for the majority of their programs.¹⁴⁶</p>	<p>Since 2009, large departments and agencies are required to evaluate the effectiveness of all direct program spending over a five-year cycle. A recent review by the Auditor General of Canada found non-compliance in two out of the three departments audited.¹⁴⁷</p>	<p>Of the 71 major projects set out in departmental business plans in 2013, the National Audit Office found that only 27 had been earmarked for evaluation.¹⁴⁸</p>
<p>CAPACITY A lack of financial and human resources often limits the ability of departments and agencies to fulfill evaluation obligations.</p>	<p>A 2014 performance measurement audit found that “<i>agencies continue to have difficulty developing meaningful key performance indicators</i>” that shed light on program effectiveness.¹⁴⁹ The National Audit Office highlighted the need for continued improvements in the evaluation guidance and training available to departmental officers.¹⁵⁰</p>	<p>A 2013 audit found that while federal departments have bolstered their evaluation capacity over the past 5 years, the Treasury Board’s growing evaluation requirements pose considerable resource challenges for departments.¹⁵¹</p>	<p>Recent budget pressures have put departmental evaluation functions under additional strain. A spot check of four major departments—Work and Pensions; Education; Communities and Local Government; and Business, Innovation and Skills—found that a total of 25 evaluations were cancelled over an eight -month period in 2010.¹⁵²</p>
<p>QUALITY Evaluations are often hindered by inadequate performance data. Limited investment in scientifically-rigorous evaluation methods (e.g. randomized control trials and quasi-experimental studies) and an absence of outcomes-based performance metrics makes impact assessment difficult.</p>	<p>The final report of the National Commission of Audit stresses the need to improve the quality of performance information available for evaluations. The Australian Trade Commission’s Export Market Development Grants Scheme was singled out as an example of a program whose data “<i>is of limited usefulness in answering basic questions like what was the money used for? What was the policy objective? Was it achieved?</i>” Available information is limited to the total number of grant applications and recipients.¹⁵³</p>	<p>In a 2013 audit of federal evaluation reports, the departmental evaluation process was found to be compromised by inadequate performance data in 70 percent of cases. Departmental evaluation specialists had either been forced to “<i>rely on subjective and qualitative information</i>” or divert limited resources into gathering more data.¹⁵⁴</p>	<p>A quality assurance review of 35 departmental evaluation reports commissioned by the National Audit Office found an uneven evidence base. While reports on employment and education policy typically made use of control groups, none of the 14 reports relating to spatial policy and business support could “<i>reliably attribute observed outcomes to policy.</i>”¹⁵⁵</p>
<p>ACCESS Existing evaluation evidence is not always used to inform decision making. While there are some demand-side causes (e.g. a lack of political interest), there are also a range of supply-side problems including time lags in producing evidence and the restricted distribution of evaluation reports.</p>	<p>A 2013 National Audit Office report criticised the widespread practice of “<i>conducting evaluations for internal decision-making and management rather than to support the Australian Government’s overall decision-making or accountability.</i>”¹⁵⁶</p>	<p>A recent review of 32 applications to Treasury Board for program funding found that only 10 made use of available evaluation evidence.¹⁵⁷</p>	<p>In a National Audit Office survey of 110 departmental analysts, only 45 percent of respondents reported sending all evaluation reports to ministers. Eleven percent never sent reports to ministers.¹⁵⁸</p>

146 Australian National Audit Office, 2014, p.76

147 Auditor General of Canada, 2013, p.17

148 National Audit Office (UK) 2013, p.14

149 National Commission of Audit (Australia), 2014, p.67. See also Australian National Audit Office, 2014

150 Australian National Audit Office, 2014, p.55

151 Auditor General of Canada, 2013

152 National Audit Office, 2013, p.40

153 National Commission of Audit (Australia), 2014

154 Auditor General of Canada, 2013

155 National Audit Office 2013, p.23

156 Australian National Audit Office, 2014, p.76

157 Auditor General of Canada, 2013, pp.27-28

158 National Audit Office, 2013, p.29

TREND 1 → EVALUATION MONITORING

Departmental evaluation activities are subject to varying levels of central oversight. While Canada has established a central monitoring system, and countries such as South Africa are strengthening central oversight, other governments take a more hands-off approach.

A recent review by the UK National Audit Office, for instance, found it impossible to calculate current levels of departmental spending on evaluation:

We found it difficult to obtain reliable, accurate information from departments on overall spending on evaluation, because departments either said they did not have this information, or that it would be available at disproportionate cost.¹⁵⁹

In contrast, Canadian departments and agencies are required to submit evaluation spending data to the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) alongside other operating information and documents (e.g. evaluation reports and statistics on staffing levels in evaluation units). The oversight duties of TBS include:

» Undertaking an annual capacity assessment

The Treasury Board’s Centre of Excellence for Evaluation (CEE) produces an *Annual Report on the Health of the Evaluation Function* that monitors departmental capacity to fulfil evaluation requirements. Reports focus on indicators such as resources dedicated to evaluation (spending, staffing levels, and use of external contractors), departmental governance arrangements, and the use of evaluation evidence by departments.

This process creates an important feedback loop for the Treasury Board Secretariat (something that most central agencies lack). Information gathered for the report—which draws on an annual Capacity Assessment Survey of departmental evaluation units, focus groups with departmental heads and directors of evaluation, and an online survey of evaluation specialists (focused on personal development)—offers the Treasury Board Secretariat feedback on the quality of evaluation support it provides to departments.¹⁶⁰

TABLE 3
Extract from Management Accountability Framework Methodology

Area of Management: Evaluation	
MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
QUALITY OF EVALUATION (50%)	QUALITY OF EVALUATION REPORTS Evidence that evaluation reports consistently address relevance and performance in a sound and credible manner.
	EVALUATION CAPACITY Evidence that there is a sound evaluation function with sufficient capacity to produce quality evaluation products.
	PROGRAM SUPPORT TO THE EVALUATION FUNCTION Evidence that the deputy head ensures that program managers develop and implement performance measurement so that sufficient performance information is available to effectively support evaluation.
USE OF EVALUATION (50%)	EVALUATION COVERAGE Comprehensive evaluation evidence is available to support decision-making.
	USE OF EVALUATION Evidence that evaluation findings are used to support policy and program improvement, expenditure management, Cabinet decision-making, and public reporting.
	TIMELY DISSEMINATION OF EVALUATION REPORTS Evidence that the results of evaluation are available to TBS and Canadians to support government accountability for results achieved by programs.

159 National Audit Office, 2013, p.40. The UK Office of National Statistics does collect spending data on Research and Development activities. Some of these funds are 'used for evaluation, but not separately identified in the statistics' (National Audit Office, 2013, p.39).

160 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2012

» Administering a performance rating system

As part of the Treasury Board Secretariat's Management Accountability Framework (MAF)—an assessment tool used to rate departmental management practices—the Centre of Excellence for Evaluation is responsible for appraising the performance of departmental evaluation functions. The annual MAF ratings for evaluation performance issued by the CEE are based on six key criteria (see Table 3).

One departmental evaluation specialist credited this rating process with helping ensure that branch colleagues and Deputy Ministers take evaluation seriously.¹⁶¹ Through scrutinizing whether departments consult evaluation specialists as part of the Memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board Submission process, the system has also encouraged the integration of evaluation evidence in the program development and renewal process.¹⁶²

But the performance ratings process also raises challenges. The Centre of Excellence for Evaluation, which awards the ratings, has both a performance management and capacity building mandate. This leaves it vulnerable to “grade inflation.”¹⁶³ The desire to see improvements and demonstrate one's own effectiveness sits uneasily with the need to conduct rigorous assessment.

In a recent audit, the MAF ratings that the CEE awarded to departments for evaluation coverage were found to be overly positive. The Auditor General criticized the CEE for being too willing to accept departments at their word by giving credit for planned evaluations that could be delayed or scrapped:

*In our opinion, evaluations should only be counted for coverage once they are completed ... If the coverage requirements assessed through the Management Accountability Framework are to serve the purpose of monitoring this element of evaluation in departments, the methodology needs to generate more accurate and reliable departmental ratings.*¹⁶⁴

This case underscores the continuing need for independent, external scrutiny of such ratings systems.

Finally, while Canada's Treasury Board Secretariat and Australia's Department of Finance have primary

responsibility for setting evaluation guidelines and monitoring compliance, practitioners in both governments feel the Privy Council Office (Canada) and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia) could play a greater role in making sure evaluation evidence informs decisions on major projects and programs.

One Privy Council Office Director conceded that policy secretariats needed to “get better” at ensuring that departmental policy proposals set out evaluation plans

*on timelines that support policy decisions ... typically what you might see is a five year program that is going to be evaluated at the end. If you are evaluating something at the end of five years, there is no chance that that evaluation is going to inform the renewal ... I think we need to get into the habit of saying “review earlier.”*¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit is expanding its mandate to include gathering evaluation reports from departments. This will improve their understanding of “what delivery models work, what governance structures didn't work or why they didn't work” and feed back into their work in scrutinizing policy proposals and tracking progress on the delivery of the Prime Minister's priorities.¹⁶⁶

TREND 2 → SUPPORT

The departmental executives interviewed in this project were overwhelmingly in favour of the centre of government providing greater guidance and technical assistance on evaluation. While government audit offices are hubs of expertise on evaluation procedures, they are rarely willing or able to help departments with their evaluation processes for the simple reason that they will have to audit these processes at some point. As one former Canadian official commented:

*On several occasions when I had been working on a project and I approached the Auditor General and said “help me set up an evaluation framework” ... the Auditor General said “I cannot help you ex-ante because I will be auditing you ex-post.”*¹⁶⁷

Central agencies can serve this demand in a number of ways:

161 Interview, 2014

162 Routhier, 2013

163 Norris, 2013

164 Auditor General of Canada, 2013, p.17

165 Interview, 2014

166 Interview, 2014

167 Interview, 2014

» Guidance and advice

While some departments and agencies develop their own evaluation procedures, they must still comply with central requirements.¹⁶⁸ In some governments, these stipulations are laid out across numerous policy documents, leading to significant confusion and inconsistent implementation. As the Australian National Audit Office noted in 2013:

*By maintaining multiple sources of policy and guidance, rather than consolidating the requirements ... into a single reference document, the likelihood of entities consistently and effectively applying the Outcomes and Programs framework is likely to be reduced.*¹⁶⁹

Departments and agencies also frequently need assistance in interpreting guidelines. As the UK National Audit Office recently stated with regard to HM Treasury's requirements that "all policies, programmes and projects should be subject to comprehensive but proportionate evaluation, where practical to do so":

*Government evaluation guidance provides little practical guidance on how to implement the principle of proportionality in what and how to evaluate.*¹⁷⁰

Australia's Department of Finance is now taking steps to develop "a more coherent performance management framework" that will be finalized later this year. This will be accompanied by tools, templates and guidance material to aid the implementation of evaluation requirements.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, in recent years Canada's Centre of Excellence for Evaluation has developed a diverse range of implementation guidance and continues to field compliance questions.¹⁷²

168 National Audit Office, 2013, p.13

169 Australian National Audit Office, 2013, p.54

170 National Audit Office (UK), 2013, pp.12-13

171 Australian National Audit Office, 2014, p.99

172 The CEE issues guidance that helps departments interpret and implement evaluation requirements. Publications include *A Guide to Developing Performance Measurement Strategies* (2010), *Guidance on the Governance and Management of Evaluations of Horizontal Initiatives* (2012), and *Guidance on the Neutral Assessment of the Departmental Evaluation Function* (2014). The CEE liaises with departments and answers specific compliance questions. One evaluation chief interviewed for this study cited the value of recent input from the CEE on whether a cross-agency evaluation he was helping design was compatible with the federal government's Policy on Evaluation.

» Building capacity and raising the profile of evaluation

Creating a "demand-driven evaluation system," as staff in South Africa's Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) have observed, is critical to ensuring that evaluation evidence is used to improve policies, projects and programs.¹⁷³ The alternative is that evaluations are simply carried out for the sole purpose of compliance.¹⁷⁴

Cultivating such demand requires building capacity, professionalization, and changing departmental cultures through championing evidence-based decision-making. Central units across a number of governments have taken a range of recent actions (see Table 4). The Canadian and South African governments have been particularly active in this area, with a range of initiatives designed to support the development of a recognized evaluation profession across government.¹⁷⁵

Central units can only perform meaningful oversight and support duties if they have sufficient capacity and expertise. In 2009, Canada's Auditor General questioned the adequacy of the CEE's staffing complement. Despite a rising workload, staffing levels (at 12 analysts) were lower than they had been in 2004/5 (when they stood at 15). A lack of experience among those evaluation specialists was highlighted as a further problem.¹⁷⁶ Since then, the Auditor General has praised the CEE for improving their staffing complement:

*The Centre has increased its staff since the 2009 audit, with most staff at the level of senior analysts. Funding for the Centre has been stable from the 2009-10 fiscal year to the 2011-12 fiscal year. In addition, the Centre has defined the evaluation expertise its staff require.*¹⁷⁷

The CEE has also sought additional staff on secondment as necessary. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, for instance, is currently loaning two evaluation specialists who are working on special projects related to data management and course curriculum development.¹⁷⁸

173 Goldman et al., 2013

174 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2012

175 The Government of Canada has designated evaluation as a "functional community".

176 Auditor General of Canada, 2009. The CEE's staffing complement stood at 12 in 2008/9, compared to 15 in 2004/5.

177 Auditor General of Canada, 2013

178 Interview, 2014

TABLE 4
Creating a “Demand-driven Evaluation System”

Action	Select Examples
TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Australia’s Department of Finance recently designed a <i>Financial Management and Budget Training Program</i> that covers “<i>the way that government activities are measured, evaluated and reported on, according to the Outcomes and Programs Framework.</i>”¹⁷⁹ » Canada’s Centre for Evaluation Excellence is currently developing new course curricula for federal evaluation specialists.¹⁸⁰ » South Africa’s DPME now offers program managers and departmental evaluation units a range of training courses including <i>Evaluation Methodology</i> and <i>How to Manage an Evaluation</i>.¹⁸¹
COMPETENCY STANDARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Canada’s CEE has issued a competency profile template that has been praised by the Auditor General for helping departmental evaluation units “<i>define the evaluation expertise their staff require.</i>”¹⁸² » South Africa’s DPME has developed a competency profile to assist the recruitment practices of departmental Monitoring and Evaluation Units.¹⁸³
COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » South Africa’s DPME has established a National Monitoring & Evaluation Network that acts as a professional community of practice for government evaluation practitioners and interested groups from both elsewhere in government and other sectors. The Network hosts events and an online discussion forum.¹⁸⁴ » Canada’s Centre of Excellence for Evaluation hosts cross-government meetings and working groups for departmental heads of evaluation alongside an online community of practice.¹⁸⁵
CHAMPIONING EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The UK Cabinet Office has appointed a What Works National Adviser who is tasked with both overseeing the development of a network of evidence centres and establishing and chairing a What Works Network Council that will “<i>promote the network’s approach across government, advising ministers and government leaders on the effectiveness of good evidence in policy and spending decisions.</i>”¹⁸⁶ » South Africa’s DPME offers senior managers and Members of Parliament information and training sessions on evaluation “<i>to build support ... for evidence-based policy-making and implementation.</i>”¹⁸⁷
TECHNICAL SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » South Africa’s DPME has created a specialist unit that offers departments on-the-ground assistance in conducting evaluations.¹⁸⁸

179 Australian National Audit Office, 2014

180 Interview, 2014

181 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2014a

182 Auditor General of Canada, 2013, p.30; Interview, 2014

183 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa), 2013, p.34

184 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa), 2014b

185 Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2011

186 Cabinet Office (UK), 2013

187 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa), 2014c

188 Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa), 2013, p.36

Because it is “*hard to see the benefits of a problem avoided*”, it will always be difficult to quantify the precise value add that agencies and units at the centre of government offer departments.

2

Overall Lessons Institutional Structures

Box 5 offers a basic typology of the different institutional models that central agencies are using to improve the operating environment for policy delivery. At one end of the spectrum, there are highly centralized units that tend to focus on compliance. At the end other end, there are bodies with a decentralization agenda that are focused on building capacity within departments.

It is important to emphasize that this typology is intended as a helpful summary of the institutional models that are popular with governments today. Not all of the bodies discussed in this report fit neatly within this typology. Canada's Centre of Excellence for Evaluation, for instance, is tasked with both building organizational capacity (e.g. through providing guidance and training) and scrutinizing departmental compliance with central evaluation requirements. Central units have also changed their functions over time. For example, Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit has taken increasing responsibility for capacity building alongside its scrutiny mandate.

BOX 5 Institutional Models

A number of institutional models have emerged at the centres of governments to improve the operating environment around policy implementation.

SECRETARIATS AND SPECIAL UNITS

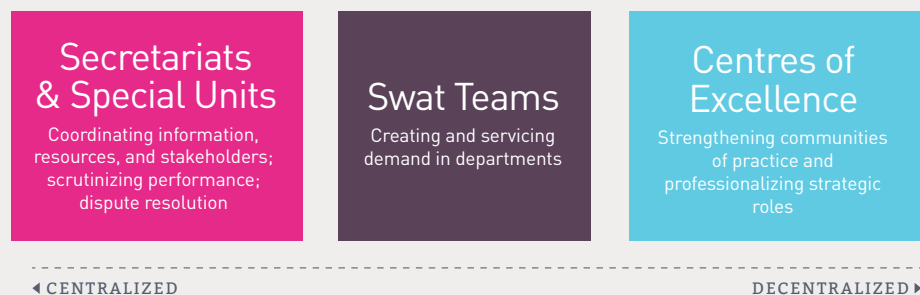
Centres of government are using secretariats and special units to actively manage a cross-government portfolio of major projects, track departmental progress in delivering manifesto commitments, and monitor compliance in areas such as evaluation and policy proposal development. The aim is to

improve internal transparency and accountability, create a "culture of realism", and lead coordination and integration efforts. The UK's Major Projects Authority, the Governor's Delivery Unit in Maryland, and the policy secretariats within Canada's Privy Council Office are just some of the many examples of this model that are featured in this report.

SWAT TEAMS

Governments are increasingly using a "SWAT Team" model that creates and services demand across a range of activity areas. Thus, rather than compel departments to implement specific policy priorities or accept technical assistance, units work to generate interest, establish their credibility, and "*pitch their wares to departments.*"¹⁸⁹ The recent growth—in a number of jurisdictions—of centre-of-

FIGURE 3
Popular institutional models



government behavioural insights units is a prime example of this approach. South Africa's Technical Assistance Unit and Ontario's Transformation Consulting Services Branch are similar examples in the field of major project management.

CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

These units help professionalize roles that are of strategic importance to effective policy implementation within departments. They produce guidance materials, develop course curricula and training programs, organize communities of practice, build competency profiles, and/or offer a "helpline-type service" that fields questions from departments.¹⁹⁰ The Welsh Government's centre of expertise on project management, the UK's Major Projects Leadership Academy, and Canada's Centre of Excellence for Evaluation are all examples.

Success Factors

The remainder of this section draws lessons from the current activities of central agencies outlined in this report. It highlights the factors that enable agencies to support effective policy implementation across government through their various performance management, problem solving, and capacity building functions.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Central units should work to maintain political support and sponsorship

Political support and sponsorship is critical to the success of most central units that serve an oversight function. The Head of Maryland's Governor's Delivery Unit, for instance, acknowledges that the bi-weekly stocktake meetings attended by the Governor are important to their mission. Not only does the Governor's presence ensure departmental executives "do a very diligent job" scrutinizing performance data before each meeting, but the opportunity to call on the "raw power of the Governor's Office" for help in removing obstacles to delivery that are outside of their control is an attractive value add for departments.¹⁹¹

Equally, departmental cooperation has been seen to diminish quickly as political support wanes. "The curse of the centre," as one former UK public servant put it, "is that [political sponsorship] can come and go very quickly. And ... civil servants are very attuned to whether you have the ear of the Prime Minister ... As soon as people expect that you don't, it's then over. It doesn't matter how skilled and capable you are."¹⁹²

190 Interview, 2014
191 Interview, 2014
192 Interview, 2014

FIGURE 4
Stocktake meeting, Governor's Delivery Unit, Maryland



Source: StateStat, 2014

Shifting leadership priorities or changes in head of government have seen many centre-of-government units disbanded. While some flux is inevitable, central units also have a role to play in adapting their operations to suit different management styles and personalities. When Kevin Rudd assumed office in Australia, for instance, the Cabinet Implementation Unit switched from tracking specific service delivery targets (as Julia Gillard had wanted) to monitoring the implementation of a high-level strategic plan for government.¹⁹³

Centre-of-government issued ratings systems should be subject to external scrutiny

Where central units are tasked with both performance management and capacity building functions there is always a risk that performance rating systems will be vulnerable to "grade inflation."¹⁹⁴ The desire of central agencies to see improvements and demonstrate their own effectiveness sits uneasily with the need to conduct rigorous assessment. Canada's Auditor General, for instance, found the ratings that Canada's Treasury Board Secretariat awarded to departments for evaluation coverage to be overly positive.

193 Interview, 2014
194 Norris, 2013

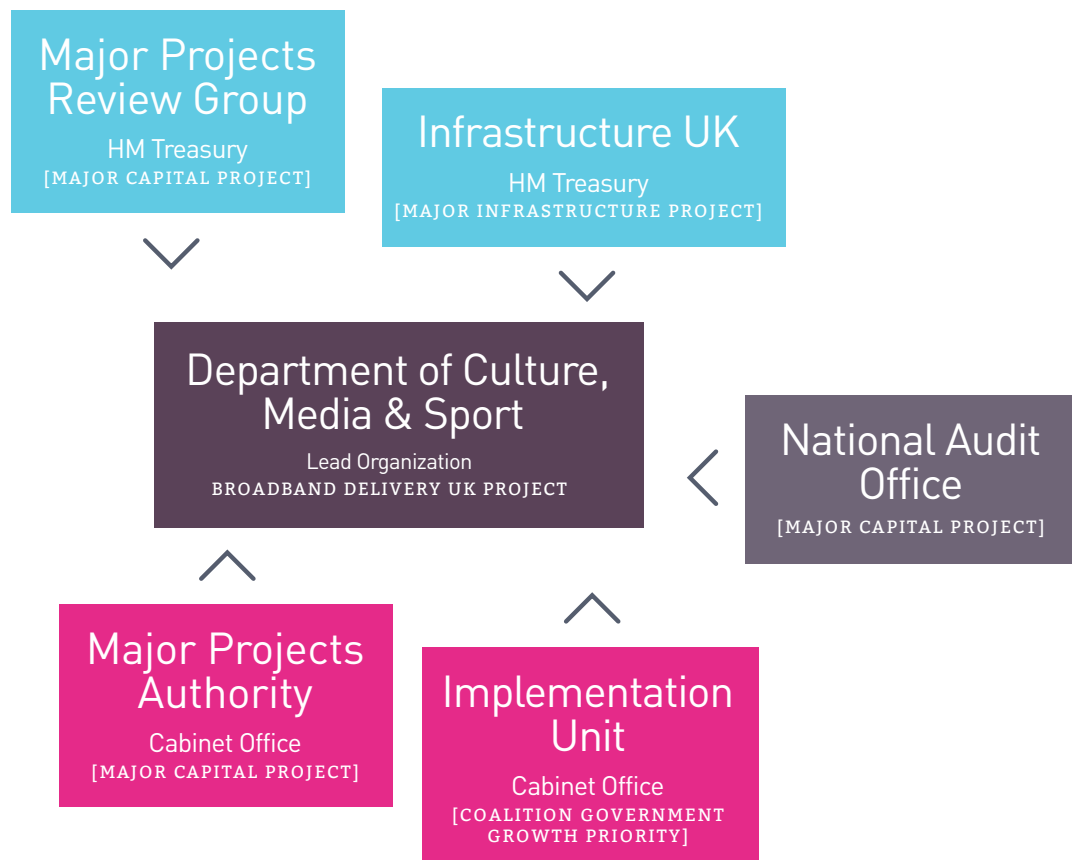
While so far avoiding ratings inflation across the board, the UK's Major Projects Authority has been widely criticized for “resetting” rather than downgrading the Universal Credit program—a major project they have been heavily involved in assisting. These cases underscore the continuing need for independent, external scrutiny of ratings systems by audit bodies.

The administrative burden on departments can be reduced by ensuring that central agencies coordinate information requests and share intelligence

Some projects and programmes delivered by departments fall under the overlapping remits of multiple centre-of-government bodies by virtue of their cost, complexity, political sensitivity and priority (see, for example, Figure 5). The result—as one UK Treasury official concedes—is that “some departments, particularly the smaller ones ... do feel as though they are being bombarded by the centre.”¹⁹⁵

A more joined-up approach to central oversight is needed to ease this burden. This includes better coordination in scheduling reviews and requesting and sharing information. Recent cooperation between the centre-of-government bodies scrutinizing the Broadband Delivery UK infrastructure project offers an example of good practice.¹⁹⁶ Equally, over the past several years, Canada’s Privy Council Office, Department of Finance, and Treasury Board Secretariat have strengthened cooperation and streamlined their front-end challenge function. These agencies hold meetings to share input and coordinate activities both during the Memoranda to Cabinet development phase and after Cabinet policy committee approval.¹⁹⁷

FIGURE 5
The central oversight of Broadband Delivery UK



195 Roundtable, 2014

196 Roundtable, 2014
197 Interview, 2014

Departmental cooperation depends on centre-of-government bodies articulating a clear value proposition

Resource constraints mean that if central agencies are to fulfill their performance management obligations they need departmental cooperation. It is for this reason, for instance, that the UK's Major Projects Authority will often accept requests from Ministers and Permanent Secretaries to take a closer look at projects that fall outside the Authority's portfolio. "One of the ways to build this collaboration," as the MPA's Executive Director explained in 2012:

*is to actually help when someone needs help ... You might think that we have not got enough resources, but what I am resourcing overall is the collaboration. Without that, we are not going to get this done, because the number of resources means that we need to work with Departments to get it done.*¹⁹⁸

Developing this type of value proposition for departments is also critical to changing the tone of the conversation between central agencies and departments. As one senior UK civil servant put it, there needs to be "the expectation that if you raise problems the result of that is not necessarily going to be a tonne of bricks coming down on you."¹⁹⁹

A number of central bodies, including Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit, Maryland's Governor's Delivery Unit and Ontario's Strategy and Results Branch, have significantly improved cooperation and reduced attempts to game ratings systems through consciously articulating the support they can offer. This can take various forms: a promise to lobby for additional resources in cases where genuine need is detected or a pledge to support departmental executives in their drive for internal reforms—or even a commitment to bring on board the head of government to help remove external obstacles to implementation.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Flexible staffing models are required to service demand

Central units tasked with providing in-house consulting services need a flexible staffing model to respond to demand. Practitioners working in both technical assistance units and centre-of-government policy labs emphasized the need to remain agile, with the flexibility to scale-up operations as needed through secondments and short-term contracts.

Without this provision, units either have to significantly limit their activities or maintain a large, permanent establishment where skill sets may not be aligned with departmental requests.²⁰⁰ South Africa's Technical Assistance Unit has developed a bespoke procurement model that allows it to employ external consultants far more rapidly than other parts of government.²⁰¹

The credibility of central units is enhanced by having staff with past experience of delivering programs and projects in departments.

There is often a minimal exchange of staff between central agencies and line departments. In particular, the prestige associated with working at the centre-of-government can lead to public servants spending most of their careers there.

This lack of mobility limits the number of staff in central units that have recent departmental experience of delivering programs and projects. And it undermines perceptions of the problem-solving capacity of central units, fuelling a general sentiment "that you don't understand what it's like being me," as one UK roundtable participant commented.²⁰²

Secondment programmes—such as those used by Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit, Canada's Costing Centre of Excellence, and Ontario's Strategy and Results Branch—have proved a particularly effective way of increasing staff mobility and ensuring the centre has relevant and continually replenished delivery experience.

198 David Pitchford (former Executive Director, Major Projects Authority), evidence to Committee of Public Accounts, 25 June 2012. See House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2012, p.Ev8.
199 Interview, 2014

200 Interview, 2014
201 Interview, 2014
202 Roundtable, 2014

Clarity is needed around the terms of an intervention

Capacity constraints require centre-of-government units to be selective in responding to demands for technical assistance services. As a result, it is vital that a unit has clarity with regard to the triggers for intervention, the type of support provided, and the point at which an intervention has achieved its objectives.²⁰³

South Africa's Technical Assistance Unit, for instance, uses a Project Selection Committee that meets weekly to consider assistance requests from departments. The Committee undertakes a preliminary assessment of whether the requests are compatible with the mandate and resource capacity of the Unit. A designated project manager then completes a diagnostic assessment of those projects deemed compatible, using tools developed by the Unit. This covers the needs of the department and the kind of support that should be offered. A future Committee meeting then considers the results of this diagnostic assessment and decides whether or not to approve the project.²⁰⁴

CAPACITY BUILDING

Professionalize strategically important roles

There are numerous specialist roles that are critical to effective policy implementation. Yet many governments face retention problems. Costing specialist positions, for instance, are often treated as “stepping stones” to more prestigious roles in financial management.²⁰⁵ Project management skills have traditionally been undervalued and overlooked by promotion systems.²⁰⁶

A number of governments are taking proactive steps “to strengthen the authority and influence of the Civil Service professions.”²⁰⁷ Central agencies are at the forefront of this drive. The UK's Major Projects Authority has established the Major Projects Leadership Academy. Canada's new Costing Centre of Excellence is designing professional training courses for costing specialists, while its Centre of Excellence for Evaluation has created a competency profile for evaluation specialists.²⁰⁸

A delivery-focused culture is needed across the centre of government

Policy divisions in the centre of government often see it as “*the job of... departments to worry about*” delivery issues.²⁰⁹ And departments in turn often see implementation issues as the concern of frontline practitioners. Ensuring that central agency policy staff consider the feasibility of policy proposals is as important as raising the standards of implementation planning across departments.

Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU), for instance, provides central agency staff with training to enhance their understanding of delivery issues. CIU staff members also make regular visits to the policy divisions within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to discuss implementation planning.²¹⁰ Meanwhile, the UK's Major Projects Leadership Academy admits Cabinet Office staff members.

Central agencies must be attuned to differences in departmental operating cultures

Departments will be more receptive to the capacity building efforts of central agencies if the technical support they offer accommodates local operating cultures. As one UK Major Projects Authority executive put it: “*you don't [want to] have fiefdoms that are working in completely autonomous and possibly in a diverse direction. But equally you've got to be culturally intelligent ... because government is not always in the same business and you can't compare, you know, one department necessarily with another.*”²¹¹

For instance, while the UK's Behavioural Insights Team has typically built capacity in government by designing trials in partnership with other departments, it was recognized that HM Revenue & Customs would be more receptive to applying behavioural insights if BIT helped the agency establish its own internal behavioural insights unit.

203 Norma Wood, First MPLA Graduation Ceremony, 2013. See *Civil Service*, 2013

204 Interview, 2014

205 Interview, 2014

206 Interview, 2014; Norris et al., 2013, p.74

207 HM Government, 2012, p.23

208 Interview, 2014; Lahey, 2010.

209 Interview, 2014

210 Interview, 2014

211 Roundtable, 2014

Central agencies
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Conclusion

Historically, centres of government have devoted far more attention to advising and supporting policy formulation than they have to implementation. This is now changing. Central agencies across multiple jurisdictions are now making concerted efforts to improve the operating environment for policy delivery.

A range of institutional structures are appearing at the centre of governments to drive better implementation performance. The precise functions these structures perform reflect the priorities and management styles of different governments. Equally, the actions of central agencies are very much dependent on their size, the institutional relationships in place, and the resources at their disposal.

Yet, for all these differences, there are also important similarities in the way various centres of government are approaching the task of improving implementation performance across government. This report highlights four common areas—implementation planning, chasing priorities, major projects management, and evaluation—in which centres of government are especially active at present. Crucially, these efforts are all aimed at increasing the capacity of central agencies to address long-standing problems in the way implementation has traditionally unfolded in government. Table 5 summarizes the relative strengths and weaknesses of both Canadian and UK central agencies in these areas.

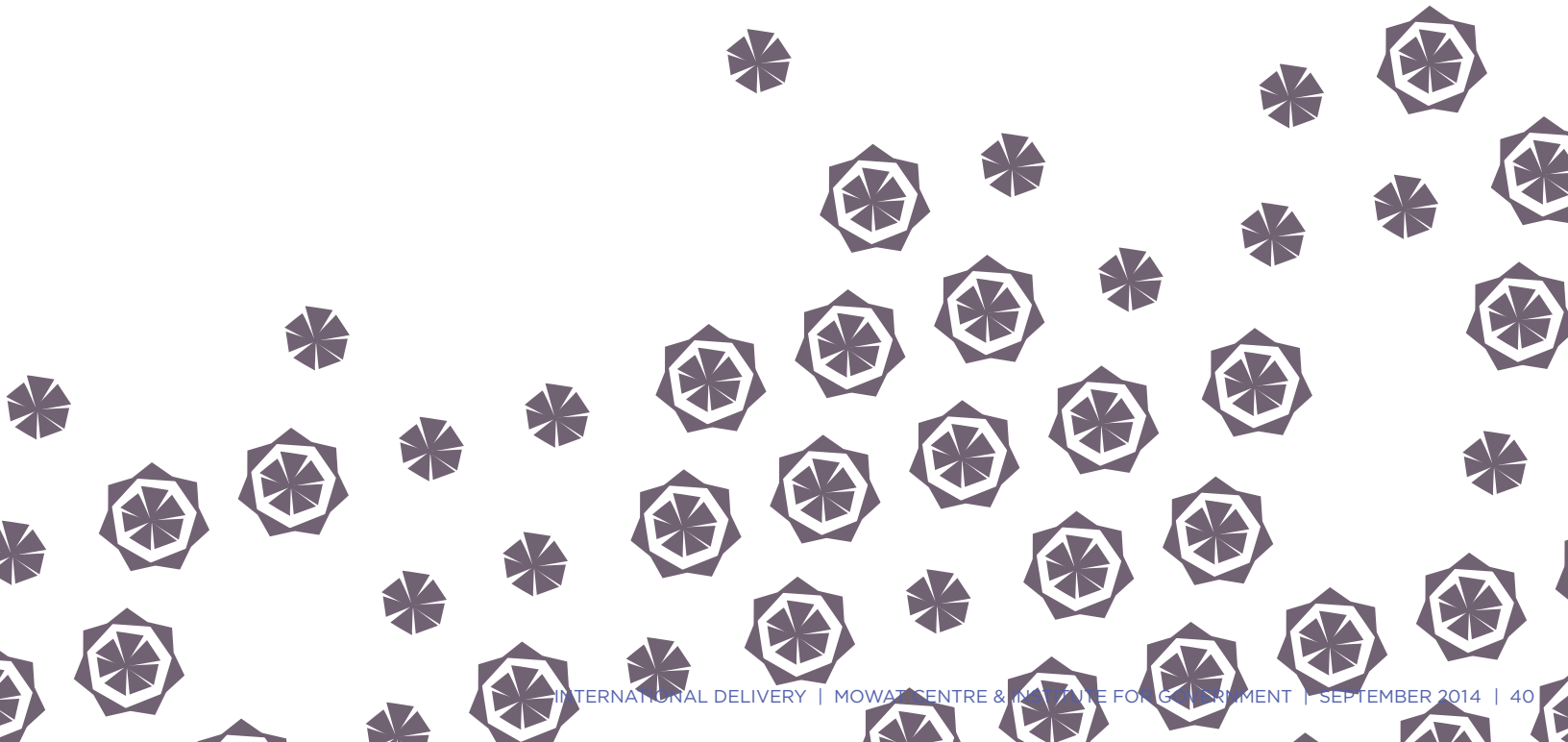




TABLE 5
Canadian and UK Government Capability in Driving Implementation from the Centre

Category	Action	Canada	United Kingdom	Other jurisdictions with strong track record
IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING	Scrutiny of policy proposals for implementation feasibility	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆	Australia
	Implementation planning training for policy professionals	◆	◆◆	Australia
	Policy labs that offer spaces to work through service delivery problems and stress-test solutions	◆◆	◆◆*	Denmark; Malaysia; New South Wales (Australia); USA
POLICY PRIORITIES	Delivery units that track progress on, and remove obstacles to, the delivery of key policy priorities	◆	◆◆◆◆◆	Australia, Chile, Maryland (USA), Malaysia, Minas Gerais (Brazil), and Wales
MAJOR PROJECTS MANAGEMENT	Cross-government portfolio oversight	◆◆◆◆	◆◆◆◆	
	Championing departmental portfolio management	◆◆◆◆	◆◆	
	Strategic approach to the cross-government deployment of project management expertise	◆	◆◆	
	Professionalizing PPM (e.g. project leadership academies)	◆	◆◆◆◆	Australia
	In-house consultancy services	◆	◆◆	Ontario (Canada); South Africa
EVALUATION	Central oversight of departmental evaluation activities	◆◆◆◆	◆	South Africa
	Issuing guidance materials and advice on compliance	◆◆◆◆◆	◆◆	Australia
	Building capacity (e.g. training, establishing communities of practice, setting competency standards)	◆◆◆◆◆	◆	South Africa

NOTES:
*Rating refers to the newly-established Cabinet Office Policy Lab. The Behavioural Insights Team—which was located in the UK Cabinet Office between 2010 and 2014—is now a limited company operating outside of government.

Table 5 illustrates some commonalities. Central agencies in both jurisdictions, for instance, are taking significant steps to encourage departments to adopt a more coordinated approach to planning and resource allocation across their portfolio of major programs and projects. But there are also striking differences in the capability gaps central agencies in these jurisdictions face:

FOR THE UK

Improve front-end scrutiny

Numerous National Audit Office reports criticize the extent to which major projects and programs have been founded on unrealistic and overly-optimistic cost and timescale estimates. While both the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat and Implementation Unit have made recent efforts to improve front-end scrutiny, these activities are fairly ad hoc with implementation issues only considered *after* initiatives have already gained political approval. There is much greater scope for the Cabinet Office to subject policy proposals to routine feasibility assessments prior to program and project approval. Canada’s and Australia’s experience suggest the benefits of front-end scrutiny extend beyond improvements in data integrity, stakeholder engagement, and critical path planning. The process also sheds light on where technical support is required to plug gaps in departmental implementation planning capabilities.

Systematize evaluation activities

The availability of good-quality evaluation evidence can dramatically improve implementation planning and inform decisions on whether projects or programs should be renewed, expanded, modified, stopped or re-scoped. Yet the centre has little understanding of what evaluation activities are taking place across government. Departments and agencies are not required to collect and submit operating information, such as evaluation spending data. Where evaluation plans exist at all they are not scrutinized as part of the centre’s assurance processes. There is no central repository of evaluation reports or mechanism for sharing these reports (or lessons from them) with other departments involved in related projects.

For departments, the Treasury’s evaluation guidelines are not as clear as they could be. What is more, and in contrast to the Government of Canada, evaluation is not a recognized

profession.²¹² There is no head of profession championing the interests of evaluation specialists, coordinating a community of practice, or setting standards.

The result is significant variation in how departments approach evaluation. There is some very good practice. The Department for International Development (DfID) is a case in point.²¹³ But in many other departments evaluation is under-resourced, commissioning procedures lack coherence, and there is little evidence to suggest that evaluation information is being used to fix implementation problems or inform decision-making.

The centre needs to take a stronger leadership role by making evaluation a recognized civil service profession, overseen by a government head of profession. This would heighten recognition of the need for a well-trained cadre of evaluation specialists and facilitate the development of competency frameworks, evaluation standards, training opportunities, and a service-wide community of practice. The Cabinet Office's and Treasury's project and program assurance processes could also be adapted to scrutinize evaluation plans and use of evaluation evidence to hand.

FOR CANADA

Progress assurance

Since heads of government (e.g. Prime Ministers and Presidents) and central agencies are frequently held (at least partially) accountable for implementation failures, it is important that centres of government have some means of tracking the progress of priority initiatives. The federal government currently lacks any central mechanism for systematically keeping track of the progress that departments and agencies make in implementing key government priorities. While both ministers and deputy ministers are issued with “mandate letters” that allocate responsibility for achieving key policy objectives,²¹⁴ there is no accompanying delivery-unit-style mechanism for monitoring performance and investigating apparent problems.²¹⁵

212 A recognized “civil service profession” in the UK government is broadly equivalent to a “functional community” within the government of Canada.

213 DfID appoints its own cadre of evaluation specialists. It has an Evaluation Department that is responsible for setting standards, offering advice and technical support, quality assurance, and building capacity across the department. Senior management committees also convene to review evaluation information and practice. See Department for International Development, 2013b.

214 Harris and Rutter, 2014, p.70

215 As Harris and Rutter, 2014 observe, mandate letters can form the basis of performance discussions between the Prime Minister and individual ministers or the Clerk of the Privy Council and deputy ministers. However, there is no central unit systematically collecting and analyzing performance information, diagnosing delivery problems, and feeding information back to the Prime Minister or Clerk of the Privy Council.

Strengthen project management capabilities

Implementation requires a diverse mix of capabilities across a project's lifecycle. Some positions will need to be filled through external hires and many more require a greater ability to redeploy the expertise that already exists in government. Central agencies have a bigger role to play in understanding the distribution of skill sets across government and ensuring they are put to best use. In the UK, the Cabinet Office's Major Projects Authority is already beginning to help identify suitable project leaders to fill specific vacancies. In Australia, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has helped mobilize additional support for project delivery teams by connecting them with experienced practitioners working elsewhere in government.

In order to retain talent more also needs to be done to elevate the status of the project management profession within government. It needs to be put on a more equal footing with the policy profession. Project management is not a recognized functional community in the Government of Canada—a status enjoyed by many other strategically important functions, including policy, evaluation, internal audit, and communications.²¹⁶ As a result there is no central secretariat offering technical support or developing specialist training programs or competency profiles. Equally, there is no head of profession championing the interests of project managers. This is something the centre should revisit.

Finally, as in many governments, including the UK, there is also a tendency to overlook the extent to which major projects “*represent complex change management challenges*.”²¹⁷ The introduction of new operating processes involves significant changes to working practices. Yet, as Shared Services Canada has observed in the context of IT projects, many are “*treated exclusively as IT initiatives and leadership of business transformation is lacking*.”²¹⁸ Building up sufficient change management capability is critical to improving the delivery of major projects. This can be done through either professionalization or central technical assistance units—such as those emerging in Ontario and South Africa—which offer a range of consultancy services.

216 Functional communities are defined by the Treasury Board Secretariat as “people who work in the Public Service of Canada and who share common work purposes, functions and professional interests.” (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2008). They are broadly equivalent to UK Civil Service professions.

217 Shared Services Canada, 2013

218 Ibid

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MOWAT RESEARCH #97 | ©2014 ISBN 978-1-927350-85-0
SEPTEMBER 2014 | MOWATCENTRE.CA