19. Organising for Policy Implementation: The Emergence and Role of Implementation Units in Policy Design and Oversight

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Introduction

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

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

The emergence of policy implementation units is intriguing, if only because they seem to have been at the instigation of prime ministers and premiers, and not the result of a recent call by policy scholars to build new capacities. Indeed, although implementation analysis has long been a staple in the tool-kit taught

in graduate policy programs and textbooks, and should be an essential feature of decision briefs prepared for ministers, arguably the implementation literature has lost considerable profile and steam, with a small band of insightful contributors refining and elaborating theoretical propositions (Hill and Hupe 2002). Relatively little attention has been paid to question of capacity and doing better at making initiatives work in ever more complex policy environments. This, of course, has been a top concern of political leaders, who have adopted new performance regimes, the language of the New Public Management, and project management techniques to ensure priority initiatives are realized. Against this backdrop, the emergence and nomenclature of policy implementation units, however intriguing, seems like a throwback – one would have thought that the wave of such units would have hit in the 1980s in response to the original insights of Bardach, Pressman, Wildavsky, and many others writing at that time.

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

The cases considered in this chapter (Richards and Smith, 2005; Wanna, 2005; Tiernan, 2005) reflected the universe of known ‘named’ policy implementation units in late 2005.² Despite the preponderance of Westminster systems serving as backdrop for these cases (with the exception of the European Union case), they have considerable diversity with respect to the motivations of political leaders who established them, the bureaucratic capabilities and roles that were installed, and the governance environments in which they have operated (unitary, federal, and multi-level governance). This chapter seeks to provide a framework for analysing and assessing the work of these units to date. It begins by with a brief synopsis of the evolution of thinking on implementation, and then considers the new environment for governance, policy development, and implementation.

Against this backdrop, the chapter casts policy implementation and delivery units as one of several ‘ad hococracies’ that populate the centre of government (Desveaux, Lindquist, and Toner, 1994; Lindquist, 2004), and distinguishes among different functions because, despite their labels, implementation units may take on quite different roles and could be seen as rival capabilities and processes to other central capabilities. The chapter then provides an overview of the case studies and key findings. It provides a preliminary analysis of the patterns of these units, seeks to explain their arrival and mandate, and considers whether functional equivalents might exist in other jurisdictions. The chapter identifies lessons for establishing central implementation units and concludes by considering the prospects for these units and calling for more engagement with scholars on these developments.

Evolving perspectives on implementation

There has been no shortage of reviews of the implementation literature. Generally, it is suggested that the modern literature has moved through three phases (for example, Goggin et al, 1990; Hill and Hupe, 2002; Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; Schofield and Sausman, 2004). The first phase was triggered by the contributions of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), Bardach (1977), and others. A flurry of writing emerged on the gap between policy intentions and the reality of program delivery in the US and other jurisdictions, considerable introspection about the limitations of social science research and ambitious ideas and solutions informing policy-making and the design of programs, and strong interest in discerning what interventions worked. Recognition of and debate over the implementation challenge was a defining moment for the modern policy literature, producing important strands of inquiry on implementation, evaluation, and knowledge utilisation that further defined the field and became insinuated into the ‘policy cycle’ heuristic (see Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; Pal, 2001; Bridgman and Davis, 2000; Hogwood and Gunn, 1984) but distinguished it from the early policy sciences approach (Lerner and Lasswell, 1951).

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

quasi-experiments of program implementation, and effectively has defined the work supported by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management for the last two decades.

Like all fields, many of its early strands of writing endure as important lines of thinking in their own right. Howlett and Ramesh (2003) have suggested that more recent inquiry in implementation has tapped into game theory, public choice and principal-agent models to frame implementation challenges and guide empirical research. Considerable attention has focused on how instruments can be wielded and used in combination to achieve policy goals as well as different sectoral and national styles for approaching design and implementation (Linder and Peters, 1990; Howlett, 1991; Howlett, 1993). Recently, there has been renewed interest in implementation in the context of whole-of-government and multi-level governance perspective (Schofield and Sausman, 2004) and the challenge of managing complexity and networks more generally (O'Toole, 2004).

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

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

to inform the upstream of policy development and to provide central oversight of implementation, suggests that the study of implementation units at the apex of governments is a timely and potentially fruitful line of inquiry.

Evolving contexts, new rationales for Implementation Units

Innovations like policy implementation and delivery units do not spring out of thin air: they are responses of first ministers to perceived challenges, signals about how they expect policies should be designed and implemented. Whether such innovations are well-conceived and live up to their promise is one matter, one that will be addressed by the case studies. Here we consider how the policy environment might have changed to stimulate such action in several different jurisdictions.

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

As some governments turned the corner in their efforts to stabilise deficits and climb back to surplus positions, this raised the possibility of investing in new policy initiatives. With the pain of cuts fresh in the minds of decision-makers, there were likely higher tests for what constituted prudent and worthwhile spending, and for ensuring that the funds led to intended results. Arguably, too, by the end of the 20th century policy-makers had a much better sense of the interconnectedness of issues, the need for alignment in the use of different governing instruments, and the reality that many policy solutions required working across the boundaries of departments and agencies within and across levels of government. Whether such appreciation for complexity and the need for horizontal and whole-of-government thinking emerged from lessons from

downsizing and restructuring, the frames emanating from hypertext and we-based models, or systems thinking from the likes of Peter Senge and others does not matter. The important observation is that more citizens and policy-makers sought to be more careful about how new policy initiatives were designed, how well-aligned new instruments were with existing ones, and how quickly such initiatives could be put in place.

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

- *Meeting government commitments.* During the 1990s many political leaders as they campaigned for office committed to policy platforms with specific program commitments (i.e., the Liberal 'Red Book' in Canada; Gingrich's 'Contract with America', British Columbia's 'New Era Commitments', etc). Here delivery and implementation units can be seen as an additional tool for first ministers and their government to ensure that top political and government commitments get met – a means for ensuring that governments kept focused on its agenda and message.
- *Asserting political control.* This hypothesis would be rooted in the presumption that departments and agencies would resist adopting new policies because they might compete with existing programs or not reflect the preferences of public service leaders. The goal of an implementation unit would be to bring pressure to bear and a spotlight on the public service.
- *Anticipating design challenges.* This hypothesis would argue that there is a need to vet policy proposals from departments and agencies for whether they fully account for the complexity of problems and the interaction of pertinent policy instruments, perhaps wielded by other governments or with other sectors.
- *Navigating implementation challenges.* The more complex a policy initiative, the more likely it will require capacity to manage and coordinate implementation in a multi-level governance context.
- *Addressing political optics.* Given the loss of credibility of government with citizens, and the perceived need for governments to become more 'business-like', implementation units might be established to project a new image and focus on getting programs in place on time and within budget.

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

Implementation Units and the ecology of central capabilities

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

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

Traditional cabinet secretariats

Perhaps the most important, if the least exciting, central capabilities are the secretariats that handle the upstream and downstream logistics for the meetings of cabinet and its committees. Typically, these units are dedicated to ensuring that proper notice, sign-off, consultation, and proper documentation and analysis occur before initiatives are tabled for ministers to consider. Depending on the size of the cabinet and its jurisdiction, there can be many secretariats, some serving cabinet as a whole and others serving particular standing and ad hoc committees. Usually, these units function as gate-keepers and process managers, and do not have the capacity to undertake policy and implementation analysis, nor to monitor or hold to account the performance of ministers and departments assigned responsibility for implementation.

Other standing cabinet secretariats

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

Coordinating secretariats

First ministers often establish several policy units at the centre of government, such as national advisors or secretariats on security, science, Aboriginal affairs, and the environment. These are different from the traditional standing secretariats

responsible for supporting cabinet and its committees (although coordinating secretariats may support ad hoc committees of cabinet). These secretariats can function as focal points to move issues higher on the government agenda and clear the path for policy development; what Bakvis and Juillet (2004) have depicted as a 'catalytic' or champion role. However, Lindquist (2004) suggests that without strong political will, such capabilities will quickly become seen as 'symbolic' (Myer and Rowan, 1977).

Policy adhocracies in departments

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

Scrutiny and challenge

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

Facilitation advice

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

Downstream coordination

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

Monitoring and evaluating performance

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

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

- *Upstream implementation.* First ministers in Australia and Queensland have created implementation units in cabinet offices seemingly intended to ensure that *when* new initiatives are proposed, the administering organisations are properly identified, constructed and located, and that the right questions have been asked about a variety of implementation issues (Shergold, 2003). These implementation units provide *ex ante* quality control, to ensure the priority issues of government are properly addressed.
- *Downstream implementation.* A related, but distinct, function is to monitor progress on implementation and, when necessary, invoke central authority to clear the path for horizontal initiatives as they evolve. The best example

of dedicated capabilities for this purpose is the Delivery Unit in the British government, initially attached to the British Cabinet Office along with other policy and reform capabilities, and later moved over to the Treasury (Burch and Holliday, 2004).

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

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

The Cases: Summary of findings and key themes

The three case study papers were presented recently at the Second Annual International Comparative Policy Analysis (ICPA) Workshop on October 3, 2005 in Vancouver. They included the following papers:

- David Richards and Martin Smith, ‘Central Control and Policy Implementation in the UK: A Case Study of the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit’ (2005) chronicles the emergence of the Delivery Unit (PMDU), but first considers larger trends in the governance of the core executive in the UK. The authors show how the design of the PMDU and its direct reporting to the Prime Minister (even though it has been located in the Cabinet Office and the Treasury) can be seen as a response not only to the arrival and challenge of New Public Management themes to the Westminster style of governance but also to significant fragmentation of delivery of service. They see the PMDU as a concerted effort of the Prime Minister to work *directly* and negotiate with delivery agencies on implementation of priority initiatives because the departments of the core executive had failed to bring about a necessary

culture shift to improve delivery performance. Richards and Smith see the PMDU and its monitoring activities as reflecting Tony Blair's 'personalism' in carrying out the duties of the Prime Minister.

- John Wanna, 'From Afterthought to Afterburner: Australia's Cabinet Implementation Unit' (2005) examines the decision of Prime Minister John Howard and his top political and public service advisors to create a capability to encourage ministers and public servants to focus attention on the delivery or implementation aspects policy decisions. This interest arose close to the second term of the Howard government, and was addressed as part of the transition planning for his third government. Wanna describes how Prime Minister Howard and top officials learned from the UK experience with the PMDU and located a small Cabinet Implementation Unit (CUI) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The CUI can be seen as one of many strategies that Howard employs for running a 'disciplined' cabinet system. While the officials do not seem to be the high-flyers found in the PMDU with direct access to the Prime Minister, the unit does review all proposals going to cabinet for implementation analysis and risk assessment, and the unit maintains a 'traffic light' system to the Prime Minister and cabinet for about 30 per cent of all proposals that the cabinet has approved.
- Anne Tiernan, 'Working With the Stock We Have: The Evolving Role of Queensland's Implementation Unit' (2005) provides some background on Queensland's history and governance challenges, including efforts of the last couple of decades to modernise public sector governance and administration. The interest of Premier Peter Beattie in implementation arose as a result of several embarrassments during the second term of his government that revealed a disconnect between cabinet decisions and on-the-ground service delivery. This interest emerged as he shifted from a collaborative style of governing with colleagues to a far more directive and populist approach, running against the performance of the public service and working hard to keep his ministers in line. Beattie and his top officials were very well aware of Blair's PMDU and Howard's Cabinet Implementation Unit. However, they chose to re-organise standing policy and reporting capabilities to establish an Implementation Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet' Policy Division. An interesting feature of the Queensland experience is the extent to which the Premier sought to have this capability work through the 'desk officers' in DPC responsible for liaising with departments and agencies.

The annex to this chapter contains the list of the questions sent to contributors to guide the drafting of the cases. Table 1, inserted below, summarises many of the details from the cases studies along several dimensions. The rest of this section considers the similarities and differences in the experience to date with the three implementation units.

Table 1 – Highlights from Case Studies

Dimension	United Kingdom – Prime Minister's Delivery Unit	Australia – Cabinet Implementation Unit	Queensland – Implementation Unit
<i>Genesis and Context</i>	<p>Prime Minister's Delivery Unit arises in 2001 from the PM's disappointment in lack of follow-through of policy initiatives on the ground, such as Joined-Up Government. Challenge was to create coherence and coordination in highly de-concentrated and fragmented delivery system. Cabinet Secretary designed the unit as part of transition planning before 2001 election.</p>	<p>Part of third term approach of the Howard government. Put in place in February 2004 at behest of Cabinet Secretary with a business background determined to assist in effort to consolidate and ensure implementation, incl. project management. Part of a larger reorganisation of the DPMC.</p>	<p>Emerged after June 2004 election as result of second term difficulties of Beattie government concerned Cabinet decisions that had not been implemented and led to a campaign promise to 'fix' the problem. Queensland public service yet to modernise. Created room for bureaucratic entrepreneur to create unit.</p>
<i>Exemplars and Precursors</i>	<p>UK Prime Ministers have a tradition of creating central units in the Cabinet Office for driving major public service reform strategic initiatives. Typically staffed with a mix of central, departmental and private sector officials. Blair ran a highly personalised government and created many central units relating to policy and implementation issues.</p>	<p>The Australian government established strong policy and coordination units in the 1920s, 1940s, and mid-1970s. Informed by UK's PMDU as result of Australian DPMC staff on interchange in the UK Cabinet Office. Secretary of DPMC went to UK to learn more about PMDU. Sought a bureaucratic as opposed to political-based capability that would be more collaborative.</p>	<p>Strong premier tradition with traditional structures, and a brief dalliance with a higher capacity Cabinet office during the 1980s. Beattie established central units in Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) on Strategic Policy, Reporting for Government, and Policy Research. Beattie moved from collaborative to directive role by end of second term. Design of IU informed by Queensland officials on exchange with UK Strategy Unit, and by Australia's CIU and UK's PMDU.</p>

<i>Stated Goals</i>	To 'ensure the delivery of the Prime Minister's top public service priority outcomes'. To work directly with delivery units, rather than departments, to identify reasonable delivery schedule and outcomes. To monitor whether goals in the Public Service Agreements, first introduced in 1998, are getting achieved.	The Primer Minister sought a more strategic approach to managing the government's mandate. Key facet of this was to ensure timely and effective implementation of decisions, early warning if initiatives off track, awareness of best practices, and better design of significant policy and horizontal initiatives.	To monitor key election and cabinet policy commitments of the government, and to ensure that implementation takes place. To encourage considering implementation when policy is determined, to identify and remove obstacles. Underlying goal was to avoid previous failures.
<i>Capacity, Skills, and Leadership</i>	PMDU consists of 40 staff reporting directly to the PM. Comprised of a mix of central, department, agency, officials and private sector consultants. It is led by a Chief Advisor on Delivery, and has had two leaders to date.	CUI started in 2003 with 5 staff; by mid-2005 had 10 staff. The unit does not include high-level executives. Came from several policy and reporting units in DPC; no special expertise in policy or project implementation.	Queensland unit has 15 staff with strong central expertise in policy and reporting, but no expertise in implementation per se. Initial leader came from experienced pod of central officials who knew the Premier. Succeeded by a Treasury official with strong interest in risk management.
<i>Location</i>	First physically located in the Cabinet Office; PMDU moved in 2002 to the Treasury to ensure a good relationship with the Treasury's Civil Service Division. However, PMDU continued reporting directly to the Prime Minister. In 2005, PMDU became part of Building Capacity Section of Cabinet Office including EGU, OPSR, and the Better Regulation Unit.	Inside the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.	Inside Policy Division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Dimension	United Kingdom – Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit	Australia – Cabinet Implementation Unit	Queensland –Implementation Unit
<i>Ex Ante Modus Operandi</i>	<p>Worked with Treasury and agencies to develop targets associated with the bilateral Public Service Agreements. PMDU works with the PM on his priority areas – health, education, crime and transport – which involves 20-25 of the approximately 130 negotiated PSAs, and five departments.</p>	<p>Review cabinet proposals at the design and development stages. Goal is to ensure that proper risk assessment and implementation analysis has been undertaken by sponsor departments. Identifies the milestones to guide reporting. The CUI can also negotiate the implementation plans of departments.</p>	<p>Involved in announcing key government priorities; developing and circulating Ministerial charter letters; reports on ‘Top Fifty’ to Cabinet; developed the Implementation Assessment Template and revised the handbook for submissions to Cabinet. Goal is to educate DPC and department staff.</p>
<i>Ex Post Modus Operandi</i>	<p>Once targets are agreed on, PMDU reports on progress. This includes the Delivery Planning Process (links targets to deliverables), the Delivery Report (assesses whether targets are realistic), and the Prime Ministerial Stock-take (agency representatives meet directly with the PM). If there are problems, a Joint Action program is negotiated.</p>	<p>Progress reports and early warning should initiatives get off track. Includes a traffic-light warning system of about 30 per cent of initiatives to the Prime Minister; he sees all of them, departments see reports that involve them. Quarterly roll-ups are sent to Cabinet. The reports do not have qualitative assessment, but there have been a few reviews of whole-of-government initiatives.</p>	<p>Monitor and pursue the implementation of all Cabinet and Cabinet Budget Review Committee decisions, election commitments, and key policy initiatives. Produces reports on milestones, Top Fifty, and Key Initiatives. Reports to Premier and twice yearly to Cabinet on Charter Letters.</p>

<i>Interactions with Central & Other Actors</i>	<p>PMDU intrudes in an area previously the domain of the departments. PMDU must also navigate complex central terrain. Blair had also created a Forward Strategy Unit in the PM's Office, a Policy Innovation Unit in Cabinet Office, and the E-Government Unit (EGU), Office of Public Sector Reform (OPSR), and a Better Regulation Committee.</p>	<p>DPMC Secretary consulted portfolio secretaries about the CUI concept. Few tensions have emerged because CUI is essentially a reporting unit and does not connect to the budget process, nor to the priority-setting process, and therefore does not compete with other central units.</p>	<p>Premier concerned about not overburdening departments with more central interactions; therefore IU required to work through DPC desk officers (PCOs) for each department. No link to budget process and highly dependent on data and information from departments. Treasury, however, does have very public outcomes for each department on the web. Often IU staff pulled off to deal with crises due to expertise.</p>
<i>Degree of Precariousness</i>	<p>Clearly driven by the Prime Minister, and has regular engagement with him. Not a support for Cabinet per se; a means for the PM to interact and negotiate directly with agencies – effectively an end run around ministers and departments.</p>	<p>Unsure of role at first, largely because of departure of its progenitor. However, has emerged as a 'ginger group' informing PM of status of initiatives. Another tool used by an experienced PM running a disciplined cabinet. It seems that portfolio secretaries do not mind the reporting – helps with delivery agencies. In part, CUI exists due to disinterest on the part of DOFA on program management, implementation, and program evaluation in recent years.</p>	<p>Key challenges: dependent on departments for information; early identity crisis because did not report directly to the Premier; had to work through PCOs, so had low profile, and, because of staff expertise in policy and research, often were pulled off to fire-fight on crises engaging the Beattie government. Gap in leadership for four months.</p>

Dimension	United Kingdom – Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit	Australia – Cabinet Implementation Unit	Queensland –Implementation Unit
<i>Impact to Date</i>	<p>Perhaps the best evidence of impact is the amount of time that the PM spends with the PMDU and the agencies in priority areas, but this is not the same as indicated that better performance has been secured with agencies. However, it has fostered a shift in emphasis from process to outcomes, and from relying on departments to the PM to oversee agencies in the priority areas.</p>	<p>PM-driven process; ministers not keen to be ‘shamed’ in Cabinet. However, increased awareness and discussion of delivery and implementation, particularly among policy and delivery staff in department. More project management units in agencies. PM likes the regime – part of running a disciplined Cabinet system. Led to collecting more data on delivery, such as third parties.</p>	<p>Mixed reviews: evidence of raising awareness of PCOs and departments, but could be another check-off provision.</p>
<i>Prospects</i>	<p>Appears highly contingent on proclivities and energy of the current Prime Minister. One possibility is for the capability to move more squarely into the domain of the Treasury.</p>	<p>Clearly driven by current PM and DPMC Secretary. Three possibilities are the status quo, for CUI to move to DOFA, or emerge as a joint central unit to connect reporting to budget decisions, risk assessment, and the challenge function.</p>	<p>Depends on the Premier. Might persist, or capabilities may be directed to take up other suite of tasks. Its new leader is moving IU more into realm of risk assessment.</p>

The case studies suggest several similarities in how the implementation units came to be created, how they were conceived and initially located, and what have constituted their ‘bread and butter’ activities. All of them were introduced by experienced first ministers with had considerable experience running their respective governments, and therefore had a good sense of implementation issues and gaps. For two, lesson-drawing was at play, with Australia tapping into the UK-PMDU experiment, and Queensland officials learning from both the British and the Commonwealth of Australia initiatives. Each first minister had top political and bureaucratic support and engagement for building capacity to improve implementation, but this implicitly reflected either disinterest or insufficient capacity on the part of other central agencies in the respective systems, such as budget offices or management boards, to take up this responsibility. The units each appeared to have relatively narrow scope – their creation did not entail, for example, absorbing other functions from other central units and they were carefully kept separate from the budget process. None of the units played exclusively in the upstream or downstream of policy implementation; rather, they were all in vetting policy proposals before cabinet decisions were taken and in the downstream monitoring of implementation. Monitoring involved a strong focus on identifying milestones and reporting on priority initiatives; the horizon for the milestones seems to be around a year, and this functioned, as intended, an early warning system for first ministers. This vetting and oversight was motivated by the aspiration of educating and raising the awareness of ministers, central agencies, and the leadership of departments and delivery agencies about the need to anticipate and deal with implementation issues.

Despite these similarities there were differences. The size of the implementation units vary considerably – PMDU (40), Queensland (15), and Australia (10) – and so does their composition, with the Australian and Queensland units tapping more into public servants with generalist policy skills, whereas the UK PMDU assembles expert teams for each of the priority areas from central agencies, departments, and the private sector, presumably reflecting the specialist expertise for certain priority monitoring. The more substantial size and composition of the PMDU reflects an oversight regime that, in addition to the monitoring of milestones and general reporting to cabinet, is deeper and more aggressive, working with the Prime Minister to plan, negotiate, and oversee the performance of delivery agencies, circumventing the traditional roles of departments. Not surprisingly, the PMDU is very prominent, clearly an agent of the Prime Minister in dealing with delivery agencies. In contrast, the Queensland IU has a low profile, working through other parts of the DPC to liaise with departments. This represents an interesting anomaly, since the Premier has made much of the need to improve the quality of the public service and to ensure follow-through on service delivery. However, the Queensland IU has a latent function, assisting

the Premier with crisis issues, because of its staff capabilities also included policy and ‘fire-fighting’ experience.

Finally, notwithstanding the engagement of first ministers with the implementation units, and evidence that they seem to be playing significant transactional and education roles, the case studies seem to indicate their existence is somewhat precarious. Implementation units are inventions of particular first ministers, who often reorganise or structure their central capabilities in their personal and cabinet offices. It is not clear that these units have built a strong constituency beyond the respective first ministers – it seems unlikely that ministers, central agencies, or executives in departments and agencies would strongly argue for the offices to be maintained once the current first ministers left office.

Implementation Units: What and why?

One purpose of the case studies is to determine more precisely the role and functions of implementation units that have emerged in recent years, realising that the label could encompass a variety of activities. Accordingly, this section returns to the hypotheses set out earlier in the chapter to determine whether implementation units emphasise one stream of potential activities over others, and whether this differs significantly across the cases. This section also ventures ideas about why implementation units have emerged in the way they have, and at this particular juncture.

Table 2 demonstrates that, based on the evidence provided in the case study papers, the implementation units do not seem to focus on only one or two aspects of implementation, such as only monitoring government policy commitments or fixing delivery problems as they emerge. Rather, they seem multi-functional, designed to accomplish multiple goals. To be sure, the accounts suggest that each unit has different emphases: arguably the UK PMDU is more squarely focused on challenging agencies to develop robust timetables and to address problems, and has the capacity to do so; Australia’s CUI devotes more time in the upstream reviewing cabinet policy proposals for the quality of implementation analysis; and Queensland’s IU seems more focused on ensuring more complete cabinet proposals (as opposed to closely vetting proposals) and reporting. These emphases get revealed not only in the balance of activities, but also the number and staff capabilities associated with each implementation unit.

Table 2 – Findings on Hypotheses re Rationale and Roles

Hypotheses	UK – PMDU	Australia – CUI	Queensland – IU
<i>1. Meeting government commitments</i>	Yes – a monitoring system for tracking progress on top policy commitments	Yes – a monitoring system for tracking progress on top policy commitments.	Yes – a monitoring system for tracking progress on top policy commitments.
<i>2. Asserting political control over bureaucracy</i>	Yes, asserting control was an important motivation behind its creation, work, & staffing arrangements.	Somewhat: its focus is on reviewing and monitoring – it does not problem-solve like UK's PMDU.	Not really: designed not to over-complicate the work of departments, yet send a message about priorities.
<i>3. Anticipating policy design challenges</i>	PMDU focus more on identifying targets and realistic timetables than implementation analysis.	Implementation analysis in upstream an important role for CUI – reviews all Cabinet policy proposals.	Hired staff with policy and reporting background; not hired for implementation analysis; focus on better cabinet documents.
<i>4. Navigating implementation challenges</i>	PMDU involved not only in monitoring but also in negotiating and making adjustments through JAP.	Mainly provides an early warning system for PM; issues likely addressed by the portfolio secretaries.	Provides an early warning system; presumably the DPC-PCOs and ministers deal with delivery issues.
<i>5. Addressing political optics</i>	Not simply optics, but does seem a factor – PM invests considerable time negotiating milestones for priority initiatives.	No, other ways to secure optics...about injecting better analysis, avoiding surprises, and less about solving delivery problems.	Does seem more symbolic and IU diverted to fight political fires. However, there is an educative and monitoring roles at play.

It bears repeating that the goals encapsulated by these hypotheses can be achieved by governments using other capabilities and processes; in other words, there could be central units and processes that are very much concerned about implementation but undertake the work without the 'implementation' label. Identifying such functional equivalence does not fall within the scope of this exploratory study.

Having explored the patterns in genesis and modus operandi of implementation units, we can now step back and consider broader questions like: Why entities with these labels and responsibilities emerged at this point in time? What accounts for the different emphases of the units in each jurisdiction? Why have some central agencies not seemed threatened or taken on the responsibility for implementation advising and oversight? Here I venture several different broad speculations in response to these questions.³

- *Governance challenges, results, and responsible government.* At the outset of this chapter it was observed that the emergence of this handful of implementation units across jurisdictions was not stimulated by any recent manifesto from the scholarly literature (if anything, it appears to be a triumph of circumstance with a tapping into a general concept, well-established for several decades). And, it seems that relatively little attention has been paid to the literature in designing and carrying out the mandate of the units. A better explanation may emerge from the complexity of governance challenges and the expectation that governments need to identify commitments and demonstrate results. In parliamentary systems first ministers are answerable for the progress of the government in implementing its agenda, even if the responsibility for implementation for specific initiatives rests with ministers, departments, and the associated service delivery agencies. In the face of such complexity, first ministers must demonstrate that their governments are making progress on commitments, and react as required if things go wrong. This pressure only increases with demonstrable failures or implementation gaps, particularly so when first ministers were caught unawares. Implementation units can be seen as entirely pragmatic response to contemporary governance pressures.
- *The demonstration effect.* It may be true that the staff of implementation units have not tapped into the implementation literature (and this may be because the literature does not attempt to speak to central institutional designers and agents), there can be no doubt that they have emulated other governments. In designing the PMDU, Prime Minister Blair emulated the approach taken in previous central initiatives associated with public sector reform in the UK, and, subsequently, both Australia and Queensland quickly adopted variants on the theme, even if not as potent and directive as the British model. The point is that all governments in the OECD countries are under similar

governance pressures from Opposition parties and citizens; the emergence of an approach that promises to symbolically and substantively deal with some of those pressures will get examined more closely, and particularly so given the close ties between Australian and British officials.

- *Governance traditions matter.* The PMDU seems more robust and aggressive than the CUI and IU in Australia. One explanation seems interesting, and this involves the ‘style’ of handling public service reform. Modern British prime ministers have developed a tradition of creating strong central units that tap into a mix of internal and external expertise to design and implement major corporate initiatives (consider the Rayner scrutinies, the Financial Management Initiative, and Next Steps). The PMDU reflects this tradition. Creating such a significant central capability would be far less likely in Australia or Canada, for that matter.
- *Implementation and budget offices.* Earlier we noted that results discourse would explain why first ministers might be anxious to demonstrate symbolically and in real terms how their governments have progressed on key commitments. First ministers and their central governments have strong incentives to get out in front of external auditors and the public before problems with implementation and delivery arise. However, this does not explain the disinterest of budget offices and treasury board agencies, which creates the need and room for implementation units. One answer is that these offices are far more focused on meeting financial targets and working with the principles of accrual accounting, to the exclusion of program management – in other words, programs that ‘under-perform’ by not getting enough services out the door to target audiences mean that the programs are within tolerances and do not pressure budgets. An implementation frame leads to different, more managerial questions; concern emerges if deliverables or milestones are not met.
- *Fragmented service delivery and fighting guerrillas/knaves.* Another perspective casts the emergence of implementation units as a response to a failure to effect change in the culture and performance of the organisations actually delivering public services, particularly in the context of significantly fragmented service delivery systems. This perspective is consistent with the second hypothesis, that there are recalcitrant or hard-to-change service delivery bureaucracies, but is more elaborate because it points the finger towards ministers and core departments (see David Richards and Martin Smith, 2005). One way to see this argument is that implementation units are devices employed by first ministers to bolster or force ministers and departments more closely monitor and manage the performance of delivery agents, whether departments, agencies, or third-party providers at other levels of government or in the non-profit or for profit sectors – or to use a phrase from Canada, to ‘make the managers manage’. Aidan Vining suggested

that we depict the predictable resistance of service providers as ‘guerrilla warfare’ which requires a coordinated, strategic response and the cache of first ministers to make a dent in the problem. In this view, first ministers establish implementation units as ways to stiffen the resolve and create incentives for ministers and top officials to more closely manage service delivery capabilities. In the case of the UK, the Prime Minister is clearly attempting to circumvent ministers and department on priority issues.

The explanatory power and worth of these suggestions is clearly conditioned by the very small number of cases at hand, but they are intriguing nonetheless. At the very least, the three exploratory cases put some interesting questions on the table, and constitute prisms through which we can view larger forces at play.

Functional equivalents and the seeds of destruction

This chapter has been informed by a small, but interesting, set of cases for exploring the role and the evolution of implementation units. There is variation in jurisdictional complexity, ranging from sub-national jurisdictions (Queensland), to a unitary national system (the United Kingdom), and to a federal system (Commonwealth of Australia).

At the level of nation-states, it appears that implementation units have emerged mainly in parliamentary systems, although this is a very small sample from which to draw any firm conclusions. It is well understood that first ministers in many parliamentary countries have sought to exert further increase control over government priorities and managing the public service as a whole even as the challenge of doing so seems to steadily grow more daunting (Savoie, 1999; Weller, 2003; Burch and Holliday, 2004). This suggests that jurisdictions with ‘strong’ centre traditions are more disposed to such experimentation (Peters, 2003; Lindquist, 2000), in contrast to the more autonomous agency traditions and weaker central institutions often associated with Western European governments.

A comparative methodological perspective leads one to acknowledge that the small number of cases explored in this collection implies that most parliamentary national and sub-national jurisdictions have *not* established policy implementation units. This brute fact is even more interesting because there is likely considerable awareness in different cabinet offices around the world of the delivery and implementation units in the UK and Australia, since both governance systems are often considered exemplars of reform. Many first ministers and political or bureaucratic advisors have undoubtedly examined implementation units in the UK and Australia and decided not to emulate or adapt the concept in their jurisdictions.⁴

There are several reasons why an implementation unit may not be perceived as desirable or needed. First, such oversight can be seen as the responsibility of a

budget office or management board, responsible for overseeing the budget and the management of the government and its programs. Second, the normal guidance given to ministers and their deputy ministers by first ministers, as well as the performance review and accountability process could be seen as sufficient for ensuring that a government's priority initiatives are on track and implemented. Finally, having an implementation unit working out of the cabinet office, it could be argued, might be inconsistent with its mission as a coordinating agency and muddy the conventions of ministerial accountability.

Whether or not one agrees with these reasons, it points to the fact that creating policy implementation units are not the only way to improve implementation analysis and monitoring from the centre. There are other ways that this can be done, including the strengthening of the monitoring and challenge capabilities of finance departments, budget offices, and management boards. Moreover, the secretariats to cabinet committees could insist on higher-quality implementation analysis in the upstream of decision-making. This suggests that ministers and senior officials in some jurisdictions may recognise the latest incarnation of the implementation challenge, but find other institutional and process solutions for grappling with them (but we must recognise that many jurisdictions may simply have gaps in this regard). It is either the existence or the possible emergence of functional alternatives that, in jurisdictions that do have implementation and delivery units, may lead to competition, rivalry, or too much clutter or irritation, and the prospect of a first ministers either dissolving them or absorbing them into other central agencies.

Lessons for designing Policy Implementation Units

The three case studies of recently created implementation units, as well as the more theoretical discussions, have practical implications for those who wish to design similar processes or capabilities. They suggest the following:

- *First minister support is critical.* It is obvious that to create implementation units (or the functional equivalent in monitoring capabilities) requires the interest and authority of the first minister, and locating them so that they carry the authority of the position. However, it is equally important that first ministers tap into the advice and reports of implementation units; otherwise their credibility will likely diminish quickly.
- *Create focused capabilities.* The progenitors of implementation units thought carefully about their mandate and limited the scope of their activities with respect to the number of initiatives and how long the monitoring takes place. In part, this is sensible gardening of the ecology of central capabilities, but it can be seen as a shrewd strategy for overstressing resources, building credibility for assembling data and reporting, and avoiding overlap and conflict with other central actors.

- *Systematic reporting.* Although the units may rely heavily on departments and delivery entities for data, following through with regular reporting on progress on key initiatives is bound to increase awareness and focus on implementation in the system. At the very least it creates rhetorical awareness of implementation issues and, if there is gamesmanship in reporting by delivery agencies and departments, then the responsibility for poor performance will rest on those departments and agencies, even if it will undoubtedly constitute a test for the entire government.
- *Possible role expansion.* While implementation units may be precarious, there is a scenario that could see them take up more responsibility consistent with current mandates in the longer term. The upstream vetting, setting and monitoring the achievement of milestones, and reporting all constitute 'transactions' that can increase the knowledge of a central agency unit. After a handling a few cycles, implementation units should build considerable expertise on different strategies for developing indicators and clearing the path for initiatives. This is a medium term strategy, which could lead to a deeper role for such units, consistent with their mandate and capacities.
- *Enhanced role, more capacity.* The case studies suggest that, if implementation units are expected to more deeply evaluate and aggressively negotiate the nature of implementation regimes for specific priority initiatives, then they should have ways to supplement generalist expertise in the units. The UK PMDU provides a good example of how this can be accomplished.

The lessons outlined above presume an interest in creating implementation units, but they could also apply to functional equivalents. Similar capabilities, processes, and reporting could be created or enhanced in other parts of cabinet offices, budget offices, or treasury or management board entities.

Conclusion: Prospects and implications

This chapter has contrasted and analysed the findings of three detailed case studies of implementation and delivery units associated with the cabinet offices of the United Kingdom, Commonwealth of Australia, and Queensland. It demonstrated that these units were multi-faceted and similar in many ways, and two benefited from cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices across jurisdictions, but were nevertheless distinctive in key ways. The chapter sought to explain their emergence and observed patterns, and, to the extent these seemingly precarious capabilities have survived to date, identified lessons on design for building similar capabilities committed to improving implementation analysis and oversight, and elaborating those in place.

There is certainly more research to be done. Beyond monitoring the fortunes of cabinet implementation units, there is a need to carefully explore whether and how functional equivalents in other governance systems handle implementation

analysis and monitoring. Another fertile area to explore would be detailed case studies on the effect of particular efforts by implementation units to influence and monitor policy departments and delivery agencies; some interesting work on the UK experience has been reported (Kelman, 2005), but this should also be contrasted with experience from other jurisdictions. Finally, the advent of cabinet implementation units should be understood alongside the emergence of gateway reviews in the UK and the adoption of this approach to learning and oversight in Australia at the Commonwealth and state levels.

What are the prospects for implementation units? Earlier it was suggested that there was great potential for competition and possibility of absorption, but it bears noting that the same could be said for many central secretariats and adhocracies not directly connected to the transactions associated with managing a cabinet system. What is remarkable is the extent to which these units have survived and taken root, albeit in circumscribed ways, and not been attacked. However, their first real test will be to see if they survive once the experienced first ministers who created them step down; if they survive that test, perhaps with changes in roles and repertoires, it would show that successor first ministers (who might have been ministers monitored through those units by the previous first minister!) see their value as another instrument for managing government mandates and ministerial colleagues, and that there are some real political and control imperatives calling for this distinct functional capability. Moreover, the jury is still out in other jurisdictions; they might emerge elsewhere as new governments take power or new issues associated with implementation emerge. On the other hand, the experiment with distinct implementation units could melt away, joining a long list of efforts to more systematically improve the decision-making of governments, and we would be left with the time-honoured question of how to inject good implementation analysis into policy decision-making.

If one were to speculate about sources of competition for implementation units, or places where the units might be transferred to, there are two strong possibilities: the divisions in cabinet offices responsible for general planning and managing of government mandates, and budget offices and management boards. As noted earlier, implementation units can be seen as a critique of existing central agencies, particularly since first ministers and governments are under great pressure to deliver on promises and demonstrate performance, and the critique came from a powerful quarter. This critique suggests that it is not enough for cabinet offices to keep a checklist of whether government commitments are met on schedule nor for budget offices to keep track of financial flows associated with these priorities – there needs to be more thought and effort expended in the upstream and downstream to ensuring that initiatives get the attention they deserve.

It is hard to imagine that this pressure will lessen in the years to come. However, while it might seem natural for cabinet offices and budget offices to take on more responsibility for implementation analysis and monitoring, like any organisation they may resist taking on tasks that threaten to complicate their mission or do not play to the strengths and competencies of staff (Wilson 1989). Cabinet offices may see a conflict between their responsibility for policy advising and managing the decision-making system, and budget offices may want to focus on financial perspectives as opposed to management questions. Even if required to absorb implementation units (or in jurisdictions with functional equivalents), there may be strong incentives to create distinctive units for this purpose. An open question would be whether the implementation units could gain or maintain credibility without the direct support of the first minister; presumably this would require linking the function to key decision-making processes (that is, cabinet decision-making, budget approvals, regular review of programs, and so forth); otherwise, they could quickly lose their effectiveness and, at best, become symbolic nods towards the desire and principles of 'good implementation' thinking and practice.

Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves that the genesis of these units was not inspired nor informed by the modern policy implementation literature, although undoubtedly the recourse to the notion of implementation and alertness to some issues attached to the concept hearkened back to the insights generated during the 1960s and 1970s. There was little evidence from the case studies that the recent progenitors of the implementation and design units surveyed the most recent implementation literature nor did they contact the current gurus in the field. Indeed, one wonders, if asked, what lessons or advice would have been proffered. Arguably, there would have been a blind spot or disinterest based on the modern literature on implementation, which has devoted considerable attention to managing networks and identifying strategies for mutual adjustment and cooperation, insights of considerable sophistication and importance. Early on, the literature could be characterised as against, in principle, the idea of developing strategies for fostering top-down change, let alone advising and monitoring across the sweep of a government's mandate. Political and bureaucratic leaders regularly innovate without reference to any scholarly work, of course, but there has been a missed opportunity to distil from the literature good advice for central authorities about how better to advise on, coordinate, and monitor multiple initiatives, as well as strategies for adjusting those not working. Perhaps the call for improved implementation by first ministers may lead scholars in the field to consider this vantage point and provide an opportunity for recent implementation insight to be coupled with policy advising.

ENDNOTES

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

² This chapter contextualizes and sets out a conceptual framework for the three case studies, and interprets them. The case studies will be published as a special issue in the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*.

³ Many of these ideas arose from discussants, observers, and paper-givers at the Second International Comparative Policy Analysis Forum at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC, on October 3, 2005.

⁴ For example, while testifying at Canada's Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities hearings earlier this year, the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet indicated his office had considered but rejected the notion of an implementation unit, arguing that the Treasury Board cabinet committee and its Secretariat had this responsibility (Canada, 2004). This despite several other recent and high-profile examples of where far better implementation analysis and monitoring was surely warranted (e.g. the gun registry fiasco, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, etc.).