Imagine you are a retired and very proud guards officer watching the trooping of the colour. How embarrassed and puzzled you would feel if things started to go wrong. The columns of scarlet-clad troops slightly out of sync with the marching music. Some of the orders being given by men in suits rather than by the sergeant majors on parade. I used to work for the defence intelligence staff (DIS) and the Cabinet Office assessments staff—who draft the papers for the joint intelligence committee (JIC) and intelligence reports for No. 10—and that’s how I felt during the Hutton inquiry, and how I feel now.

Lieutenant Colonel Crispin Black recently retired from the British Army offered the above reflections upon the inquiry and eventual report of Lord Justice Hutton. The suicide in July 2003 of Dr. David Kelly—the U.K. Ministry of Defence’s chief adviser on Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons program—had prompted the Hutton inquiry. Kelly had become embroiled in
a controversy over whether Prime Minister Tony Blair had exaggerated evidence concerning the
ability of Iraq to deploy Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Black’s commentary appeared in *The Guardian* on 12 February 2004. It lamented the
seeming abandonment on the part of the Blair government of standard protocols for the
processing and analysis of intelligence by permanent officials before use by the political
executive. On one level, the commentary highlights the extent to which eagerness among
political executives to embrace specific policies and to rush toward their implementation has
eroded the integrity of the distinctive contributions of career public servants. On another, the
remarks implicitly underscore the extent to which standard procedures for integrating
departmental views of policy options have atrophied in many cases to the point of becoming next
to irrelevant. A staff statement of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United
States drives this point home by underscoring the combined effects of relentless cut in resources
for analysis and the ever-insatiable appetite of modern political executives for instant responses
to political challengers:

…the rise of round the clock news shows and the Internet reinforced pressure on the
diminishing number of intelligence analysts to pass along fresh reports to policymakers at
an even faster pace, trying to add context or supplement what their policy consumers
were receiving from the media (2004, 3).

This paper will assert that Black’s lament fits within the compass of the gradual erosion
in Anglo-American democracies of the mutual regard among political executives and career
officials for the integrity of each others’ specific competences with respect the devising of
policies and the making of decisions based upon these. With reference to men in suits ordering
guards, Canada has clearly eschewed the U.S. system with its political appointees embedded as
much as five layers down into departmental hierarchies. Indeed, it has even proven slightly more orthodox than the U.K. concerning the canons of the Westminster system by allowing less overt involvement on the part of the party-political staffs of the prime minister and ministers in the development of policy. Still, the Canadian approach to apportioning roles to political executives, their appointees and career officials in the development and implementation of policy has shown fault lines. These pertain both to monocratic leadership on the part of prime ministers and a discounting of the legitimate input of career officials. Indeed, some perceived patterns have set off alarms among knowledgeable observers (Savoie 1999; 2003). Significant tensions have emerged over the freedom with which officials may register advice about policy options and their implementation. In addition, while procedures for interdepartmental review of issues and their resolution perhaps receive more lip service than in other Anglo-American systems, their decline in significance has nonetheless proven very substantial over the past 20 years.

This paper focuses on the integrity of public servants’ contributions to policymaking and implementation and the relevance of interdepartmental processes to collaborative approaches to governance. While it will focus upon developments in Anglo-American executive systems, it hopes to serve as a orientation to the conference’s wider search for actual or potential “smart practices” worthy of consideration for those concerned about integrity and integration governance. The term “smart practices” serves as a more dynamic concept than its familiar predecessor “best practice.” Eugene Bardach employees in order to capture the extent to which both political executives and career officials rise much more readily to the opportunities and challenges of institutional adaptation if they develop “craftsmanship thinking” (1998, 321). He defines this as creativity combined with public spiritedness.
By stressing public spiritedness, the smart practice perspective provides a link between this current paper’s central concerns—the latitude for career officials’ inputs and the integration of departmental perspectives. Bardach’s work provides one of the first recent examples of leading students of public management who stress, as well as the requirement of greater creativity in policy development and implementation, the need for processes through which players may reconcile their world views and professional ideologies (1998, 306, 308). This current paper assumes, perhaps more expressly than other authors’, that the search for smart practices might take us beyond success stories to include failures as well. Indeed, it operates from the proposition that, in the case of failures, smart practices might often involve an aptitude for honest and collaborative assessment of what went wrong and how changes might reduce the chances of repeating previous mistakes.

Thus, in some cases reviewed at this conference, smart practices will suggest themselves from an examination of “success” stories. In others, they will emerge from reflections upon instances where career officials could not make effective inputs and inadequate integration between departments exacerbated a lack of connectivity between advice concerning options and the ultimate decisions of political executives. In other words, many of the smart practices will derive from observations about procedures in place but ignored or ones whose future institution would provide a systemic check that might prevent political executives and officials from replicating the same errors over and over.

This paper will examine in detail thinking through the past century and into the current decade about the nature of the distinctive contributions that career public servants make to policy. In this regard, we will see that during the middle part of the 20th century the concept that officials play significant and legitimate roles in devising policies gained currency and then faced
considerable challenges both from the right and the left. We will also note that public choice—which advanced the view that only political executives should devise policies that officials then implement according to highly prescriptive guidance—held great sway in Anglo-American systems through the last two decades of the 20th century. The treatment finds that the public choice view introduced a specific set of difficulties that eventually revealed inherent limitations to this approach as well. The paper argues—on the grounds of manifest difficulties both with granting officials a high degree of latitude in determining the contours of policy and greatly constricting their input—that systems should seek to achieve a balance between three competencies of salience to virtually all policy issues. This would entail integration of concerns centering upon fiscal feasibility and probity, political responsiveness, and likely eventual consequences—both negative and positive.

Theory About the Distinctive Contributions of Career Officials to Policy Making and Implementation

1. Policy Making Roles Seen as Legitimate but Problematic

In the 1960s and 1970s, students of public administration in advanced liberal democracies began to give great attention to the roles of senior public servants in the executive-bureaucratic arena. Interest heightened notably in the degree to which permanent officials influence the development of policy and not simply administer its implementation (Landau 1962, 10; Putnam 1973, 277, Aberbach and Rockman 1977). The concept that career officials bring to the policy process a specific collection of competences not readily adducible from political executives and/or their party-political appointees attained wide currency. Indeed, a literature emerged in the late 1970s that saw the involvement of senior permanent officials in policy making as a natural consequence of the leverage they enjoy through their expertise—be it strategic (mastery of how to pursue or
thwart change within the system), technical or a mix of each (Suleiman 1974; Campbell and Szablowski 1979). Thinking in Canada in this time accorded relatively high legitimacy to the policy roles of officials. It also held relatively strenuously to the principle that synergy between political executives and career officials rested very substantially upon processes that promoted communication between the two cadres and integration of departmental views.

The trend in the literature toward acknowledging the policy and—by extension—political roles of career officials reached an apogee in 1981. In that year, a work—Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies—appeared that soon became a classic within its genre (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981). The book argued that rarely do officials confine themselves merely to administration. Minimally, they involve themselves in policymaking but confine themselves to imparting relevant facts and knowledge to decision makers. However, officials close to the apex of power more typically engage in political calculation and manipulation—but in response to narrower bands of concerns than political executives and with less passion or ideology. Significantly, and in recognition of works such as those by Ezra Suleiman and Colin Campbell cited above, Joel D. Aberbach, Robert H. Putman and Bert A. Rockman did argue that some officials—styled “Image IV”—with exceptionally strategic positions develop and employ a full range of behind-the-scenes political skills and passionately commit themselves to assuring specific polity outcomes (1981, 2-20).

Colin Campbell subsequently found in the existing literature fairly substantial evidence of Image IV behavior (1988). It might occur in positions requiring the type of crosscutting gamesmanship that prevails in central agencies and among top officials in line agencies. Further, reactive career officials attempting to maintain the status quo, proactive change agents in the permanent civil service and party-political officials given coordinative and/or line
responsibilities (as in the U.S., France or Germany—Heclo 1977; Suleiman 1974; Derlien 1988) might all reveal Image IV traits to some degree. The evidence seemed to fly in the face of putative dichotomy between realms of policy and administration that saw the politicians prevailing within the former realm and officials centering their activities in the latter.

Some researchers and practitioners in the early 1980s might have concluded that—with the clear signs of policy roles for career officials—academics and public managers would move on to crafting a positive theory and administrative science for dealing with what appeared obvious. However, they would have come out wide of the mark. Indeed, the last two decades of the past century would witness a major backlash against the role of senior career public servants in policymaking.

Initially, the groundswell appeared the strongest in the U.S. Liberals became impatient with the slow expansion of the welfare state there and concerned with the acquisitiveness of the so-called military-industrial complex. Thus, they frequently registered frustration with obstructionism in government agencies. (See, for instance, Kaufman 1969.) Those wanting greater responsiveness to societal needs within the public service often spoke of “iron triangles”—intractable alliances of special interests, key bureaucrats and congressional patrons promoted incremental decision-making and, in its worst forms, maintenance of the status quo (Aberbach and Rockman 1977, 43). Conservatives, on the other hand, viewed career officials as promoters of the “nanny state” and who sought only to feather their own nests through “budget-maximization.” (See, for instance, Niskanen 1971.)

Both the left and the right, thus, revealed precisely the skepticism of entrusting too much latitude to a permanent state apparatus that has accompanied the development of the U.S. as a nation since the American Revolution (Rockman 1984, 8, 48). Indeed, the notion of a dichotomy
between policy and administration that held such sway in the first third of the last century (until the New Deal) in many respects served as a legitimization of state building notwithstanding the U.S.’s commitment to a minimalist apparatus (Wilson 1941—reprint; Goodnow 1900, 92-93; Gulick and Urwick 1937, 10). Operating under this mythsphere, officials cloaked their concerns as ones of efficiency in the face of the tendency among political executives toward profligacy. Of course, such a focus—if strongly legitimized (especially by the president) could serve as a Trojan horse for more substantive positioning and inputs. General Dawes—the first director of the Bureau of the Budget—captured this while reflecting upon his role in the early 1920s:

…no Cabinet officer on the bridge with the President, advising as to what direction the ship of state should sail…will properly serve the captain of the ship or its passengers, the public, if he resents the call of the Director of the Budget from the stoke-hole, put there by the captain to see that coal is not wasted (Dawes 1923, Preface as cited by Berman 1979, 6).

Alasdair Roberts has examined thoroughly the effects, and lack thereof, in post-WWI Canada of this “scientific” approach to public management in *So-Called Experts* (1996).

Significantly, the public service tradition in the U.K. did not place anywhere near this degree of emphasis on the dichotomy of policy and administration. Since the 1854 Northcote/Trevelyan report, the emphasis concentrated on building a genuinely vocational cadre whose education, training and career development stressed intellectual acuity and an aptitude for public service (Chapman and Greenaway 1980, 40-41). Here the external trappings of detachment from partisan politics did not proscribe involvement in the process of policy making. The animators of Whitehall reforms until the 1970s assumed that they would tap the best and brightest among the “dynamic and progressive” middle class and focus these individuals’ talents
on “policy” as opposed to “routine” administration (44, 59, 62). The policy/administration dichotomy—insofar as it had any relevance at all—served as a rationale for the distinction between the “Administrative Class” of the civil servant and the lesser grades. The select would occupy themselves “forming and administering policy and, organizing and directing government” while the rest would handle relatively mundane matters (106). By the 1960s, observers diagnosed a policy/administration dichotomy, however, one in which the upper echelons of the public service would not sully themselves with managerial detail (197-198). This emphasis contrasted sharply with the optimism of Canada’s Glassco Commission that had as much wanted to free hemmed-in managerial capacity as to generate it. (See, for instance, Glassco 1962, p. 48-51.)

As noted at the outset of this section, the debate in Canada about the relative salience of policy and administrative roles in the public service has rarely followed polarized lines. Here a stronger consensus emerged through the middle part of the twentieth century about the capacity of the state to intervene to insure social welfare. Further, the central state apparatus, to which career officials had become integral, played crucial and legitimized roles in nation building. The relationship between political leaders and top officials operated within the compass of synergy (Porter 1965; Granatstein 1982). In the United States, ever-expanding layers of appointees stood in the way of direct interaction between the political heads of agencies and career officials. In Canada, the connection remained an apex relationship. That is, in each department one career official, normally styled the deputy minister, stood at the top of its hierarchy and epitomized its core disciplines and values. This both fostered and gave direction to mutuality in the relationship between ministers and their departments. However, the overarching system advanced mutuality as well.
The collective nature of cabinet decision-making meant that departments, in order to press their stances successfully, had to consult with one another over major initiatives and innovations. Indeed, officials prepared proposals through committees that shadowed cabinet bodies and gained access to crucial meetings at the ministerial level. Both practices became routine by the 1930s and 1940s (Granatstein 1981, 86, 92, 145, 253, 332; 1982, 207; Heeney 1946, 282-301). Importantly, attendance of officials at cabinet committees rarely occurred in other Westminster systems (Campbell 1985). However, Canadian officials strenuously defended their attendance at cabinet committees on the grounds that it advanced the “blending of roles” between the political executive and senior officials “that requires mutual confidence and awareness of their differences” (Robertson 1973, 449-451).

Indeed, the upper echelons of the Canadian public service seemed to have attempted a melding of the type of specialized training admired in the U.S. but frowned upon in the U.K. along with the relative mobility within and between departments much more akin to Whitehall than Washington (Campbell 1983, 317, 330, 333). Notionally, this would combine the benefits of managerial and subject matter expertise with a generalist grasp of how to advance positions within the system. The approach seems to have worked in the middle part of the 20th century (Granatstein 1981; Granatstein 1982). However, concerns emerged by the late 1970s that the senior cadre had expanded so rapidly that it had begun not to wed adequately specialized training and judgment about how to operate effectively within the system (Pitfield 1977, 12, 13, 16). Indeed, some observers voiced alarm that the generation of officials that had entered government during the expansionary years of the Trudeau government had reached the top so rapidly that they had become accustomed to unsustainably rapid career advancement (Morgan 1981).
One comparison of evidence that central agents in the U.S., U.K. and Canada had learned to cope with the “cross-pressures of modern bureaucracy” found a condition of “near schizophrenia” among the Canadian respondents:

They rattle off the most traditional views about the relationship between politics and administration even though they recounted earlier the most expansive sketches of how vitally they involve themselves in cabinet decision-making. This internal contradiction finds at least a partial explanation in the relative youth, inexperience, and upward mobility of our Canadian respondents (Campbell 1983, 332).

By the 1980s, thus, the Canadian public service did not seem to be carrying off a very successful blend of the U.S. and U.K. approaches to executive-bureaucratic politics. The timing could not have been worse for confusion within the public service about its role. Public choice was about to rear its head. It would work dramatic effects in all Anglo-American systems.

2. The Reassertion of the Dichotomy Between Policy and Administration

Over the last two decades of the 20th century, we witnessed a dramatic paradigm shift in Anglo-American democracies away from acceptance of a blending of policy and administrative roles among career officials. Increasingly, political executives embraced a dichotomous view whereby they would maintain exclusive domain over policy making and while officials would simply implement what their masters had set forth. Indeed, in time, the ever-constricting view of the legitimate inputs of officials began to apply not only to the contours of policies but as well to the details of their implementation.

As noted, the Canadian system had achieved a relatively tolerant attitude toward the policy making roles among career officials and which might even have betrayed a naiveté about the dangers excessive latitude for bureaucrats in regard to democratic accountability. Similarly,
it perhaps responded less monotonically than other Anglo-American systems as blended roles became to most administrations more an anathema than an ambiguous but integral quality of governance in the modern state. This paradigm shift rested upon a monumental transformation in the prevalent view of accountability in Anglo-American systems—a huge topic that has been in greater depth than allowed for in this current study. (See, for instance, Campbell and Halligan 1992, 193-218; Campbell and Wilson 1995, 249-288). The nub of the issue rests with how accountability runs through the political process.

In the classic Westminster paradigm, the public elects a parliament in which one party gains sufficient control to form a government (whether majority, minority or in coalition). The government, under the leadership of the prime minister, assumes collective responsibility—most immediately, to Parliament, but, ultimately, back to the public who might not renew its mandate in the next general election. In addition, each minister is individually responsible to Parliament—the theory being that parliamentary displeasure with certain policies or actions might force him or her to resign. Most ministers’ “portfolios” involve oversight of all or part of a government department. In the Westminster tradition, career public servants overwhelmingly staffed these organizations in which hierarchical accountability functioned as glue. In exchange for their loyalty and, in instances of policy or managerial failure, silence, ministers imparted to career civil servants a high degree of control over management of their cadre and security of tenure.

Of course, practice has never correlated perfectly with theory. The rise of strong party discipline in the latter part of the 19th century meant that during the 20th century backbenchers exerted only limited control over cabinets. The process by which parties garner electoral support through the appeal of their leaders has often given prime ministers sufficient leverage to run command-oriented rather than consultative cabinet government. Career officials, a cadre that
traces its ancestry to the royal household, frequently have pursued their own agendas. In Whitehall, this took the form of a long-term, think-of-Britain cast of mind that often clashed with the immediacy of political exigency. But, certainly we have seen failures even of the contractual core of the Westminster system--namely, ministers who have refused to take blame and officials who have not remained silent. And, in any case, Westminster-style accountability becomes multifaceted with officials having to mediate responsibility to such diverse objects as their minister, their departmental superiors, the prime minister, Parliament, clients, professional standards and the national interest. Thus, the iterative chain of accountability postulated by the Westminster model rarely pertains in reality. In fact, laments of its passing might well amount to nostalgia for something that never actually existed.

With respect to the presidential-congressional system of the United States, the founding fathers largely construed the arrogance of Britain toward the 13 colonies as resulting from the autocracy of the executive as embodied in the monarch. They embraced thus the concept of separation of powers as protection against autocratic rule. Herein, both the executive and legislative branches found themselves on independent mandates. This places the career bureaucracy in the position of serving two masters--the president and Congress. It also makes cabinet government extremely difficult as career bureaucrats, ever-mindful of likely responses of their patrons in Congress, often divert cabinet secretaries from an administration’s agenda to one emanating from so called iron-triangles mentioned in the previous section.

If the Westminster tradition has erred on the side of career officials who develop and ply their own views of the national interest, the US tradition has displayed a tendency toward short-term, politics-driven policymaking capable at best of only incremental change. As we saw in the preceding section, reformers in the US have struggled with what exactly the relationship between
cabinet secretaries and their officials might be and the degree of latitude permanent public servants should have in devising policy. However, the system did seem to have attained a certain degree of equilibrium in the middle part of the last century—notwithstanding perennial angst from both the left and the right over officials’ ability to advocate or obstruct policies.

The two energy shocks of the 1970s along with increased vulnerability to Asian economic competition thrust Anglo-American countries into a decline neurosis that swung the popular pendulum against permanent officials’ latitude for influencing policy. Indeed, the public became highly susceptible to arguments in favor of constraining public service (Rose and Peters 1978). Public choice theory increasingly provided the theoretical streetcar for those wanting to build-down government. However, its principal advocates betrayed a decidedly American view of the political process (Buchanan and Tullock 1962; and Niskanen 1971). Public choice stressed the immense leverage of the career public service in exploiting their expertise and positional advantage to play the political leadership, legislators and interest groups one off the other in order to maximize their budgets. Within the public choice framework, other values such as professionalism, service of the public, equity, and, to be sure, ethics would take a back seat to controlling officials so as to minimize budgetary bottom lines.

Public choice theorists reserved special contempt for those who believed that analysis and comprehensive approaches to budgeting would bring government spending in line. This simply took politicians off the scent and led them further into the clutches of budget maximizers (Niskanen 1973, 6-8). In practice, the separation of powers made the desired automatization of budgeting in the US as elusive as achieving comprehensive rationality within and between social welfare programs proved to be in the 1960s. This did not prevent reformers in other Anglo-American countries from attempting to adapt public choice theory to their own circumstances.
The consequences went well beyond automatization of budgeting to mighty impingements of every sort of discretionary authority including individual ministerial discretion beyond the narrow confines of specific outputs.

A difficulty presented itself here, however. Public choice prescriptions spoke very much from the background of the American experience. And, this contrasts sharply with that in the Westminster systems for two main reasons. First, permanent officials in the US tend to focus their careers much more narrowly than their opposite numbers in Westminster systems (Heclo 1977, 116-120). This makes them more prone to defending relatively parochial bureaucratic interests. Second, and more fundamental, the Westminster parliamentary systems do not have truly transformative legislatures. That is, rank and file legislators in these systems lack the capacity to mold and reshape laws and budgets independently of the guidance provided by the political executive as embodied in the leadership of the governing party or coalition (Polsby 1975, 277). This means that American prescriptions about limiting budget-maximizing tendencies in Westminster systems might amount to over-treatment. Indeed, the part of the doctrine that denigrates programmatic analysis can work especially perverse effects in Westminster systems. Policies must go through some validation process and rigorous assessment of likely implications can compensate for a lack of exposure to pluralistic challenge.

Indeed, in the US, the separation of powers provides a robust counterfoil to monocratic approaches on the part of the executive branch. In Westminster systems, constricting the latitude for officials to engage in the give and take of executive-bureaucratic politics leaves the way open for just the type of command-oriented leadership that lacks sufficient counterveillance for effective governance.

3. The Dichotomy is Pushed to Excess: The Case of New Zealand
It is instructive that public choice has focused to the degree that it has on the relationship between the political leadership and officials. However, it is naive in the extreme for those concerned that the latter might be manipulating the former to believe that a “principal/agent” straightjacket would put things right. Notwithstanding this caveat, public choice has tried to tackle an issue that could only have emerged in the 20th century. Previously, political leaders plied their trade as oligarchs, at best, rather than pluralists, and imparted to like-minded officials huge discretion on the grounds that that way they did not have to keep track themselves of where the bodies were buried. Those who studied the relationship between political leaders and officials in the 19th century did not anticipate pluralism as it has developed in advanced democracies.

We can understand, thus, why in the oligarchic democracies or authoritarian regimes of the 19th century theorists tended to assume that the folkways marking a separate estate would prevail in bureaucracy. Most notably, Max Weber considered a firmly established bureaucracy as a status group whose positions and actions basked in the glory of institutional cogency based on discipline. In this regard, Weber maintained that strong affective mutual attachments on the part of members to a bureaucracy served as its glue just as the spiritual commitment of the priest did for the religious order (Weber 1948, 253-4). Weber also revealed considerable skepticism about the ability of either politicians or the public generally to sway a determined bureaucracy. He styled the former as dilettantes pitted against the expert and considered the latter relatively powerless owing to the difficulty of penetrating a culture bent on maximizing the leverage gained through secrecy (Weber 1948, 232-3).

This current work takes the position that a mutual respect between politicians and bureaucrats for each other’s contributions in the policy arena better serves the interests of the public. However, it acknowledges that such mutuality stands as a tall order—even in oligarchic
regimes much less under the centrifugal pressures of pluralistic democracy. Indeed, the imposition of the strictures of public choice arguably makes equilibrium between the roles of political executives and senior officials more rather than less difficult to attain as oligarchy loses sway in advanced democracies. The New Zealand experience proves instructive in this respect.

Among Westminster systems influenced by public choice, New Zealand bears special attention. In the late 1970s, the state was buffeted especially severely by the energy shocks and the dissolution of preferential trade agreements with the United Kingdom. The latter had previously insured markets for the agricultural products that still serve as the nation’s core source of foreign exchange. Structurally, the state bore many of the stigmata of post-colonialism. A lack of both internal capital and foreign investment drove a strong tendency to construe the provision of essential goods and services as the domain of the public sector. The state indulged itself with the luxury of upward of 40 departments that tended to function as fiefdoms narrowly focused on specialized policy domains (Boston 1992, 91).

The New Zealand management reforms emerged from an intense review of the role of the state conducted within the Treasury before the Labour government, which had come to power in 1984, renewed its mandate in 1987. The documents that provided an intellectual justification for the reforms cited copiously American agency literature, especially that centering on the firm (e.g. Alchain and Woodward 1987). They asserted that the proposed reforms would establish the iterative process inferred in classic views of democratic accountability (Scott and Gorringe 1989). Bureaucrats would become the agents of politicians who in turn would serve as the agents of the populace. They distinguished here between strategies for improving “performance” and those attempting to enhance accountability. The former centered on whether officials actually produce the outputs required by the politicians; the latter focused on whether the goods
and services which politicians purchase from bureaucrats align with social goals like wealth, justice and the relief of suffering.

Other assessments of the New Zealand reforms have isolated in great detail dysfunctions stemming from construing democratic accountability as bilateral principal/agent relationships between the public and politicians and then between politicians and bureaucrats. Among these, Robert Gregory has made perhaps the most direct assault on the resultant reemphasis of the policy/administration dichotomy (1998a; 1998b). His analyses have concerned the accountability issues surrounding the 1995 Cave Creek disaster in which 14 people lost their lives in the collapse of faultily constructed viewing platform. In his thoroughgoing assessments, Gregory details how the purchaser/provide framework clouded rather than clarified responsibility (1998b, pp. 522-523).

In recognition of the limitations of public choice as implemented in New Zealand, the National Party government developed during 1993-1994 a new policymaking framework whereby it distilled strategic result areas (SRAs) which transcended departmental outputs and identified outcomes which it sought within a three-year period. The government had come to the conclusion that the format that disaggregated governance into purchaser/provider relations between ministers and officials obscured long-term strategic goals and the integration of these with ongoing policy decisions especially those concerning the budget (Boston and Pallot 1997, 382). However, the government tended to look at bureaucratic organizations rather than cabinet itself as the potential agents of the desired higher degree of integration. This emphasis applied especially to the hope that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet would assume responsibility “for overall monitoring and coordination of policies” (Boston and Pallot 1997,
395). Traditionalists in Westminster systems would consider such an agency as simply providing support for cabinet and its committees in fulfilling these functions.

Similar shades of expectations for officials reveal themselves in Allen Schick’s assessment of the New Zealand reforms (1996). Schick makes his clearest contribution by underscoring the need for shifting the focus of ministers’ relation with their departments from purchaser/provider more to that of owner. This would enshrine their responsibility for achieving overarching social and economic objectives that go beyond the parameters of departmental outputs (44). In a very pointed passage, Schick infers that the public choice format has not given sufficient focus to the fact that ministers must serve as trustees [my term] of the long-range viability of departments as well as purchasers of their outputs: “..they should forbear from demanding so much by way of outputs and from pushing the purchase price down so far as to jeopardize the department’s long-term capacity to perform” (43).

Notwithstanding the deftness of his critique, Schick’s prescriptions suggest a lack of clarity about how collective decision-making might work in Westminster systems. Indeed, Schick seems to view central guidance through the prism of the type of monocratic direction frequently attempted (but rarely achieved) by US presidents through the White House and the Executive Office of the President: “The central departments must prescribe and enforce accountability requirements, and they must deal with matters that cross departmental lines…”(33).

4. Melding Roles with a Focus on Trusteeship and Attaining Policy Competence

The dysfunctions that became manifest in New Zealand’s pressing the dichotomy between policy and administration prompted it that country a reopening of consideration of blended approaches to the policy and administrative roles of officials. Here, the concept “trusteeship” allows for
examination of how conscientious political executives and diligent permanent officials might work together to safeguard the long-term viability of public service organizations in providing value. The accountability issues embedded in such a dynamic call to mind a debate in American political science that waged more than 40 years ago. At the time, the most thoroughgoing analysis of legislators’ representational roles was *The Legislative System: Explorations in Legislative Behavior* (Wahlke *et al.* 1962). The authors of this work struggled with the salience, in modern democracy, of Edmund Burke’s apologia to the electors of Bristol. Burke had exhorted his constituents to understand that a parliament served not as a congress of agents for disparate interests but as a deliberative assembly seeking to discern “the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole” (Wahlke *et al.* 1962, 269).

Wahlke and his colleagues took an agnostic stance toward this lofty expectation. In fact, they indulged what would strike rational choice theorists as heresy. They argued that various actors in the policy arena might adopt different rational principles (9-10). “Democratic reformers” will operate with a clear conception of the public good. The rationality of those who perceive themselves as agents of their constituents and/or vested interests will plow much narrower furrows. However, threatening either type of rationality when it becomes monotonic we find the “politico”:
…who rationally perceives the actions demanded of him by various “forces” outside the legislature…and who rationally weighs the strength of these pressures against his own rational preferences for the various courses of action urged upon him, then strikes a balance and acts accordingly (10).

Significantly, the authors found in their study of four state legislatures that majorities ranging between 55 and 81 per cent of respondents adopted the Burkean “trustee” representational-role (281). In each case, the politicos proved the next largest group (ranging between 13 and 29 per cent). Thus, agents (or “delegates”) formed clear minorities ranging in size between 6 and 20 per cent. The findings, thus, provide a snapshot of the immense reversal of cultural bias sought by public choice, which itself emerged in the 1960s. Wahlke and his colleagues, who in fact seemed slightly partial to politicos, concede that Burke’s “pious formula” might best suit the realities of complex democratic systems:

People themselves may pay lip service to the notion that a representative should not use his independent judgment, but in fact they are unlikely to be able, or may not care, to give him instructions as was possibly the case at an earlier time when the tasks of government were comparatively simple…Rather than being a “pious formula,” the role orientation of trustee may be a functional necessity (281).

Regarding senior officials, the bulk of research during the 1970s equally suggested that top bureaucrats found themselves operating with a degree of independence within the executive-bureaucratic arena. This empirical work perhaps did not go so far as to sustain Norton C. Long’s assertion in the 1950s that legislators had become less representative, responsive and responsible than bureaucrats (Long 1952, 810). However,
the evidence from several studies suggested that officials see themselves as playing
significant integrative roles within the policy arena (Suleiman 1974, 13 and ch. 8; Putnam
1973, 268-269; Aberbach and Rockman 1977; Presthus 1973, 60-63; Campbell and
Szabowski 1979; Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981). To be sure, subsequent
research has suggested that command-oriented governance, which emerged during the
1980s under neo-liberal administrations, had tempered if not reversed somewhat this
reflex (Aberbach 1991; Campbell and Halligan 1992, 217-218; Campbell and Wilson

Such reeling in of public servants has produced ambiguous results. Wholesale
efforts to blinker the strategic perspectives of officials inevitably diminished policy
integration. Further, when matters fell between stools, it became increasingly difficult to
apportion responsibility between and among political leaders and senior officials.

Further, when advanced systems entered into the politics of budgetary surplus—
from which the U.S. soon lapsed, they lost the imperative of fiscal stringency as a
justification for command leadership. Surpluses necessitated relearning how to manage
choice. And, this, in turn, called for a more interactive dialogue between politicians and
bureaucrats about strategic objectives. The trusteeship of both cadres concerns the future.
Under the politics of constraint, the imperative of addressing the building fiscal crises
sharply proscribed deliberations about future programmatic options. The encouragement
of wide strategic perspectives among officials struck neo-liberals, perhaps with some
justification, as a luxury. Under the politics of surplus, strategic choice becomes a
necessity and requires a strong analytic base both with regard to options and
implementation. This is the core competency of the senior civil service. Only the United
States chose to dodge entirely the politics of choice by ceding budgetary surpluses in a flash with myriad tax cuts. Indeed, American political leaders have restored the U.S.—both at the federal and state levels—to deficit-laden fiscal frameworks and the command executive direction that they foster. It appears that three forces conflict with one another in the arena in which actors attempt to reconcile the requirements of fiscal, responsive and strategic competence. (See Figure 1.) Fiscal competence evokes the standards of the bond markets and places a premium on shrinking the portion of GNP claimed by government. Its advocates assume the stance of budget minimizers. Typically, their adherents populate the central agencies with custody over the fiscal framework and budget review and the neo-liberal wings both of cabinets and parties. Budget minimizers will resort more reflexively than others to automatization of budget decisions which, in turn, might lead to an overemphasize of short-term fiscal exigencies. The early New Zealand experience suggested—even to those eager to press the purchaser/provider model for governance—that the minimizer approach can lead to a focus on inputs at the expense of outputs and outcomes. We can say this notwithstanding the determination of those adopting the agency approach to focus officials’ attention on fulfillment of desired outputs.

[Figure 1]

By the mid-1990s, the notion of ownership received the highest profile as a characterization of the stance that participants in budget decisions should take toward the issues they face. Initially, its promoters seized upon the utility of the concept in reasserting the prerogatives of the political heads of organizations, typically members of cabinet, as distinct from those of the top civil servants whom they ostensibly direct.
Experience with implementing purchaser/provide formats suggested that they often conveyed too strictly a doctrine whereby politicians would make policy while officials would simply administer it. Subsequently, the concept migrated, as we saw above with New Zealand, toward acceptance of a certain degree of partnership between politicians and career officials in ownership. A strong ownership ethos running through the executive-bureaucratic complex, in addition to focusing on outputs, would cater especially well to the achievement of responsive competence. This meant that the approach would allow ministers and officials to demonstrate in clear terms how their efforts have produced goods and services desired by the public or, perhaps more exactly, groups and interests that will register their disgruntlement if they conclude that they have not received full-value from government expenditure in a specific field. The vagaries of serving citizen “customers” along with the pressure to produce associated with electoral cycles usually will constrict the horizon of the politician or public-servant “owner” to the medium term.

This current work’s counsel for adoption of trustee roles—focused on longer-term strategic consequences with respect to public value—might strike readers as a call for blue-sky, wide-eyed idealism. To the contrary, this analysis fully recognizes the dysfunctions of long-term, evaluation-oriented foci on outcomes that operate outside the rigors of discourse informed by fiscal and responsive competence. In an extreme case, Pierre Trudeau’s cabinets in Canada during the mid-1970s, though arguably as strategically oriented as any others in this century anywhere in the world, consistently enshrined desired outcomes divinely unconstrained by fiscal and political realities (Campbell 1983, 92, 193-194). However, a system that under-invests in long-term
planning and programmatic evaluation will deny itself the cognitive acumen whereby it can adapt creatively, rather than reactively, to transformation of its environment. The case of Australia is instructive here. During the politics of constraint of the mid to late-1980s, it achieved a high degree of policy competence through robust cabinet dynamics and comity between ministers and senior officials. This struck a balance between fiscal exigencies, political demands and strategic considerations (Campbell 2001).

Smart Practice and the Integrity of Public Service Inputs and the Integration of Departmental Approaches in the Policy Process

An emphasis on encouragement of trustee cultures in public service and a greater degree of connectivity between political executives and career officials in the search for policy competence would dovetail substantially with an emerging consensus among students of public service innovation. This argues that fostering conditions that allow spontaneous adaptation on the part of organizations might, in the long run, prove more productive in the quest for innovative public services than pressing controls and guidelines from the center. In addition, both scholars and practitioners embracing this view seem to recognize one thing above all else: when senior career officials enjoy some degree of latitude for autonomous engagement in policy development and deliberations over resource commitments, this, in turn, greatly increases the chances of spontaneous adaptation to future opportunities and challenges.

Significantly, interest in the autonomy of public service organizations with regard to contributing to policy competence—especially through concern with strategic commitments—has emerged most strongly in the American literature. A perennial issue arises here because the separation of powers in the U.S. governmental system does not
lend itself to comprehensive coherence in the development and implementation of agencies’ long-term strategies. At best, U.S. agencies might be able to deploy “mixed scanning” (Etzioni 1968, 282-288) whereby they identify the need for critical evolutionary adjustments that they must embrace and for which they must win political support and resources in order to remain viable. However, Barzelay and Campbell have found that even a strenuous, seven-year-long effort in the Air Force at best achieved “guided incrementalism” or the capacity at key decision points to reposition that military branch so that it could move opportunistically when departures from the status quo gain political momentum (2003, 144-146). This finding fits the mounting evidence that, in the U.S., the gods of institutional innovation help those who help themselves (Wolf 1997; Carpenter 2001).

Notionally, the Government of Canada would lend itself more to strategic planning. Just the fact that ministers annually review the government’s overarching strategy and then central agencies track departments’ responses to this would suggest much greater life-chances for mixed scanning. In fact, the ethos as reflected in the literature recounting efforts at strategic planning often tilts toward comprehensive coherence between governments’ core policy objectives and departments’ programmatic commitments and resourcing priorities. Indeed, Evert Lindquist notes that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development now urges such approaches still more emphatically on the grounds that the “complexity and challenges” faced by governments currently will prompt more “collaborative, horizontal and open approaches” (2001, 61, 67). We know, however, that political realities and bureaucratic inertia have often confounded even attempts at mixed scanning, let alone center-driven efforts at
achieving programmatic coherence (Aucoin and Bakvis 1988, 124). Indeed, central agencies have conflicted over the criteria whereby priorities will be racked and stacked (French 1980). In addition, a growing literature takes on board the indisputable fact that relentless decentralization of Canada’s federal system coupled with the fragmentation of the ways in which departments deliver programs makes mixed scanning at least as difficult actually to achieve in this country as in the U.S. (Aucoin 1995a; 1995b, 129-130; 1997, 299).

Significantly, the U.S. public administration literature increasingly advocates a higher degree of spontaneity and inventiveness on the parts of agencies in coping with fiscal stringency and the fragmentation of governance. This runs counter to the trend over the past 30 years in advanced democracies. As we have seen above, economic conditions and skepticism about the public spiritedness of career bureaucrats have led to an emphasis on the standards of budgetary constraint and responsiveness to detailed political direction in efforts to resolve both policy and administrative issues. This reached the point by the 1980s where long-range strategic issues often received little or no weight in debates between players in the executive-bureaucratic complex. As a consequence, decisionmakers now run the risk of routinely settling on suboptimal policies, from the standpoint of long-term efficacy, as they seek to identify and pursue solutions to many of the greatest challenges faced by their governments.

Students of public service organizations often register alarm about this trend. Martha Derthick’s exhaustive work on the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) pointed up the potential effectiveness of spontaneous strategic planning on the part of agencies (1979). When Derthick revisited the SSA in the late 1980s, she found an
agency that had lost its capacity to keep ahead of the curve regarding adaptation of policy and administration to shifting requirements due to the combined effects of fiscal stringency and the proliferation of specific mandates—which often conflict—from political authorities (1990, 213-216). Several studies have echoed such concerns as they pertain more broadly in the U.S. public service (Gormley 1989; Feldman 1989; Aberbach and Rockman 2000). Further, we find evidence of such pressures in Canada (Aucoin 1995b, 127).

In response to the discerned malaise in agencies associated with fiscal stringency and blinkered mandating, a body of thought has begun to emerge around the view that political executives would gain much more value-added from standing bureaucracies if they gave more coherent guidance to officials (Aberbach and Rockman 2000; Aucoin 1995b, 116). However, in order to accomplish true symbiosis, they would have to provide bureaucrats with the resources necessary to accomplish stated objectives. More fundamentally, political authorities would have to foster an atmosphere in which officials might function more autonomously (Carpenter 2001). This would facilitate public servants’ contributing creativity, public spiritedness and value both to policymaking and administration (Moore 1995, 301; Bardach 1998, 321). Both students of and practitioners in Canadian bureaucratic culture remained relatively immune from the most jarring managerialist rhetoric (Doern 1994; 91-92; Savoie 1998, 400; Savoie 1999, 293). Therefore, recognition of the legitimacy of a degree of public service autonomy remained relatively strong in this country (Aucoin 1995a, 269-250; Dwivedi and Gow 1999, 150; Office of Auditor General 2001, 26-27).
A profound problem emerges here. The agenda toward encouraging greater spontaneity in agencies, although strongly emergent in the U.S. and implicit in the Canadian literature, will still ring like public administration homiletics to many analysts and the bulk of political leaders. Scholars cannot simply praise such efforts and achievements as manifest in the Air Force case in the hope that these will incite entrepreneurial leaders to act more courageously and organizations to work more coherently. We have to find more cogent evidence of the instrumental utility of such approaches more broadly within public services in advanced democracies. Donald F. Kettl has recently underscored the necessity of this sort of reflection (2002). He argues that, while spontaneous adaptation served as an ideal during the mid-20th century pre-managerial era, it has become a necessity in our current time in which fiscal stringency and blinkered mandating preordain that “the real task of administration is coordination—weaving together separate programs into a sensible policy.” (166).

How do we move from such theoretical justifications to a systematic body of knowledge that can guide future efforts toward spontaneous adaptation in government departments and agencies? Our conference seeks to produce a framework that will assist the political and permanent leaders of departments and agencies to diagnose whether their organizations might profitably initiate major strategic adaptation and, if so, knowledgeably select smart practices for proceeding given various arrays of circumstances that they might meet.

Hopefully, our current approach will address the concerns of those who have become skeptical of the overload and hollow lip service of innovation exercises imposed from the center (Derthick 1990; Light 1997; Dwivedi and Gow 1999, 131; Savoie 1998,
It will examine the issue principally from the perspective of the line agency. This emphasis comports as well with recent Canadian thinking regarding strategic planning in the federal government (Kernaghan, Marson and Borins 2000). Most specifically, can the culture of the organization sustain a high level of discourse throughout its executive leadership—including both key political appointees and senior permanent officials—about future strategies yet at the same time negotiate measuredly the inevitable ambiguity as it moves from an agreed vision to specific programmatic commitments? Do the executive-bureaucratic contexts surrounding the issue clusters of greatest importance to the organization lend themselves to “position for opportunities” (Barzelay and Campbell 2003, 8-9)? That is, do future opportunities and challenges boil down in such a way that the agency’s leadership can devise a case whose cogency will immediately galvanize support once the need for strategic adaptation captures the attention of stakeholders in the wider policy arena?

While political executives and central coordinating agencies can foster conditions that would prove conducive to organizations’ pursuing spontaneous adaptation, this framework will take an agency-eye view of the potential for releasing and re-channeling inventiveness and creativity in public services. Broadly, recent literature provides increasingly robust guidance for such a perspective. Paul Light, for instance, stresses the importance of the degree of professionalization within an agency workforce—a standard under which the Air Force would score very high indeed (1997, 221). Sandford Borins (1998, 290-291) and Daniel P. Carpenter (2001, 365-366) separately identify what we might term the acuteness of an organization’s apex as highly relevant to the latitude that career officials might enjoy in pursuing relatively free advocacy for a new organizational
vision and associated resource commitments. If organizations have relatively few layers of political appointees between the department or agency head and the top permanent officials, then they seem more likely to engage in creative efforts to revamp themselves.

Doubtlessly, matters surrounding both professionalization and the acuteness of organizations’ apexes play a very significant role in our discussions. Currently, very legitimate concerns have arisen in Canada about an apparently serious recession of these standards during the global rise of managerialism (Savoie 2003). However, the Canadian career public service still appears to have experienced less slippage than have some other Anglo-American systems. First, its professional autonomy has maintained a relatively high degree of robustness. Second, it operates within much more acute apexes. For instance, in contrast to the U.S., where as many as four layers of political appointees stand between top career officials and cabinet secretaries, in Canada, usually only one member of the political executive, the minister, occupies a formal hierarchical position within a department. As well, a single permanent official, the deputy minister, stands at the pinnacle of the career cadre of each department—paradoxically enjoying a wide array of prerogatives and, in current times, focusing on the huge pressures associated with departmental adaptation (Bourgault 2003).

1. Maintaining the Autonomy and Integrity of Public Servants’ Inputs

This subsection proceeds with guarded optimism. As noted above, we have seen in the literature a growing interest in the autonomy of career officials’ contributions to policy development. Ironically, this might owe more to failures in managing the relationship between political executives and top public servants that any proliferation of success stories. It has become extremely difficult in the age of public choice for career officials
not only to proffer advice without fear of reprisal but to engage moral agency that would
draw upon the integrity of their status as permanent public servants.

My own research with Michael Barzelay on the U.S. Air Force uncovered how officials might proceed in insuring that their competences receive due attention by the political executive (Barzelay and Campbell 2003). First, they can stake out their credibility in strategic competence. This includes discerning future opportunities and challenges from the standpoint of pursuing public value over the long haul. Second, they can partner constructively with political executives in efforts to optimize the attainment of public value. That is, they involve themselves in the type of creative dialogue that will further the attainment of the highest level of policy competence possible given the immediate exigencies associated with achieving and maintaining a tenable fiscal framework, and servicing the political executives’ obvious interests in continued electoral support. Generally, however, Anglo-American systems have sought to tighten political executives’ direct control of permanent officials through three devices—strengthening staffs directly accountable to the chief executive, increasing the number of political appointees in departments and bringing greater specificity to officials’ performance obligations.

Observers have styled increments in the staff resources of chief executives “presidentialization.” They would more appropriately refer to personalization. Reliance upon hand-picked and unyielding partisan staffs has greatly intensified in the U.S. since authors in Westminster systems first wrote of “presidentialization” in the 1960s. That is, presidents since have increased dramatically their capacity for monocratic leadership by resorting to White House and Executive Office of the President units to develop critical
policy initiatives and to oversee position-taking with reference to Congress regarding requisite legislative enactments and issues associated with implementation (Nathan 1983; Moe 1985). Although prime ministers have been slower to embracing this approach, we find that it now plays a very substantial role in the U.K., Australia and Canada.

Essentially, presidents and prime ministers alike deploy the enhancement of staffs as a means of insuring that they attain a higher degree of responsiveness within the state apparatus toward their political agendas.

Similarly, both U.S. administrations and Westminster governments have made greater use of party-political appointees within departments so as to multiply further the available levers for establishing and sustaining partisan responsiveness. However, Westminster systems, for the most part, have stopped short of placing party-political figures in line positions within agencies. U.S. administrations now control four levels between cabinet secretaries and the first layers of permanent officials—a situation that greatly attenuates communication between former and the latter. Among Westminster systems, Australia, more than any other, has resorted to the enhancement of ministers’ offices as a device for shadowing, often overriding, policy development in line departments. Although they have not garnered the personnel available in Australia, ministers’ offices in the U.K. have become highly interventionist—which means that they often leave themselves, if anything, more error prone if the ultimate consequences of policies and decisions based upon these have not received sufficient consideration.

Establishing clear agency objectives and evaluating organizations’ and officials’ in reference to these has become the Holy Grail for reformers in Anglo-American systems. For the most part, more progress has been made in instituting objectives for
agencies than for individual managers. Follow-through from the standpoint of performance has usually fallen considerably short of the rhetoric deployed while advocating reforms. If the political executive sets objectives and performance metrics with inadequate consultation of officials, an overemphasis of outputs at the expense of outcomes will emerge.

Numerous studies have focused in the past several years on the consequences of these various efforts. We can relate the findings from such research both to the degree to which reforms have improved responsive competence in Anglo-American systems and the extent to which they have advanced the type of balance between political responsiveness and long-term strategic issues that we would associate with policy competence. With respect to the U.S., Joel D. Aberbach (2003) has consistently argued that the type of competent public-spiritedness identified in the Air Force and other organizations (Campbell and Barzelay 2003; Bardach 1998) persists notwithstanding the tendency for successive administrations since Nixon to assume that officials will remain intractable without considerable prodding. Here a paradox enters the equation. Aberbach has found in the aftermath of reforms designed to enhance responsiveness that officials have become significantly more attuned to the exigencies faced by their political masters and less inclined to fight the corner of particular interests or clientele groups. However, they believe that they have experienced a substantial slippage in the influence they exert over policy.

Treatments of developments in Westminster systems point in a similar direction. Graham K. Wilson and Anthony Barker, for instance, find that political executives in successive U.K. administrations have found, notwithstanding Whitehall’s efforts to
become more responsive, that career officials simply do not give sufficient attention to political exigencies (2003). Some scholars view this impasse as leading relentless to the diminution of capacity for strategic competence—a hollowing of the state (Bevir, Rhodes and Weller 2003). Others have argued that the permanent public service has simply maneuvered itself over the past several decades away from the pluralistic accountability that was seeping into Whitehall as British politics became more egalitarian. Here the upper echelons of Whitehall have maintained their leverage as brokers but in ways that channel this more directly at the service of the prime minister and the chancellor (March, Richards and Smith 2003). The hollowing of the state has pertained to diminished inclusiveness in the executive rather than to a decrease in responsive competence in so far as the latter focuses on the prime ministers electoral viability and the requirement of fiscal competence as prompted by the chancellor of the exchequer.

2. Integration of Departmental Approaches

In the aftermath of several misfires in his policy development process, Tony Blair came upon the aphorism “policy first, explanation later” as encapsulating what had ailed his government’s management of the issues it faced. Notionally, Blair had recognized that he had to take greater pains to consult his cabinet colleagues and backbenchers before embracing potentially divisive policy options. Ironically, the insight came in Summer 2003. Four years before the Blair government had embraced the mantra “joined-up government” as its aspirational mantra. It was responding to the frustrations it had experienced in mobilizing Whitehall that persisted well into its first term. Had its determination to institute “joined-up government” vis a vis Whitehall led to “policy first, explanation later”? That is, had its eagerness to leave a distinctively “New Labour”
stamp led to center-driven initiatives that too readily overrode the competencies of departmental ministers and officials to discern as well the desirable outlines of policy.

A similar paradox accompanies Australia’s Children Overboard case during the 2001 general election in that country (Marr and Wilkinson 2003). The official committee under whose purview the matter fell—the People Smuggling Task Force—purported to have followed the Coalition government’s commitment to “whole of government” approaches to issue management. In reality, it consisted of war room which placed officials under immense pressure for instant responses to political exigencies. Indeed, the fact that the Olong incident took place at the beginning of a general election exacerbated the task force’s inherent tendency toward war-room style group think. Intelligence gained entry without processing and members worked on-call to their respective ministers without the “space” necessary to diagnose circumstances dispassionately much less distill advice that cohered with reality.

We find a full literature on the efforts to achieve joined-up government (JUG) under the Blair administration which began in earnest in 1999. In its initial shapes, JUG appeared focused on so-called wicked issues that had fallen between departmental stools (Kavanagh and Richards 2001). As such, it fitted within another Holy-Grail quest. This one concerned the recurrent series of initiatives attempting to bring overarching rationality to clusters of agencies with overlapping remits—to overcome the so-called pathology of departmental government (3-4). The Blair approach, however, did not subscribe to the need for sweeping reforms in machinery of government such as those previously instigated with the creation of super ministers and/or departments. From the outset, observers detected in the schematic outlined by the government an emphasis upon
renovation of the existing system rather than reform of its underlying structures (15-16). They also wondered whether the government’s plans revealed sufficient knowledge that ultimately it had to put in place a system of incentives that would motivate departments to consider not just their outputs toward specific goals but the overall outcomes of policies as well. The movement appeared center-driven and, therefore, potentially subject to overload.

To be sure, virtually any conscientious government will discover soon after it takes power that approaches pursued previously have failed to address sufficiently integrative dilemmas surrounding “wicked issues.” However, it appeared that the Blair government had not sufficiently understood two things. First, no administration can credibly embrace a project with the compass of JUG without putting in place structures and incentives that will prompt spontaneous mutual adjustment as well as top-down discipline between agencies. Second, the realm of “wicked issues” presents a menu of potential challenges and, significantly, opportunities, with ebbs and flows stemming from circumstances often beyond the ken and/or control of even the most disciplined or coherent core executive. This makes it all the more important that approaches to coordination and control allow for a strong component of bottom-up, self-starting adaptation originating from departments. (Pollitt 2003 makes points similar to these—see p. 46.)

Studies of the implementation of JUG under the Blair government seem to bear out the salience of these caveats. For instance, some critiques have viewed the administration’s approach as decidedly state-centered notwithstanding the immensely more important roles of non-governmental stakeholders and delivery networks
consequent from reforms of Whitehall beginning since 1979 (Flinders 2002). This reality seems to argue on the side of structural reforms that would match the exponentially more complex nature of dynamics surrounding wicked issues rather than simply trying to achieve change through top-down control and homiletics incanting the need for more integrative approaches (71-72).

More fundamentally, analyses of the actual emphases that have manifested themselves under the JUG suggest two elements of self-denying ordinance embedded in the approach as pursued by the Blair government. First, JUG has pulled into the vortex of the central government myriad matters that during the new public management reforms of the 1980s and 1990s had increasingly fallen in the domain of departmental discretionary control. (See, for instance, Lee and Woodward 2002). Such devolutions served two purposes. As the bucket of resources available to Whitehall units shrunk they at least received the ameliorative benefit of greater flexibility in the use of what remained. Core to a positive theory of what public management sought to accomplish, however, the increased discretions also provided more latitude for departments to become more creative in their pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness.

Within the JUG framework, the Treasury, Cabinet Office and No. 10 raked back flexibilities that departments had accrued over two decades in how exactly they produced outputs. Departments and executive agencies would now operate under a much more articulated framework of performance criteria under which they could gain “earned autonomy” through good behavior (Lee and Woodward 2002, 54-55). Critically, as we saw in Figure 1, outputs come most prominently under the compass of ministers. They provide the streetcars through which these political executives might project their
adeptness at responsiveness. To centralize decision-making about how exactly
departments will wed available resources to outputs is to impinge upon the value-added
ministers might provide to political responsiveness and to court their disengagement from
day-day management of their departments.

The second element of self-denying ordinance stems from the fundamental view
of ministers’ involvement that it tipped. The JUG impetus seemed from the outset torn
between two perspectives. On the one hand, did it expect that greater integration at the
micro-level would flow from greater rationality of policies at the macro-level? Or, was it
focusing primarily on a lack of coordination at the level of service delivery? Observers
began to conclude three years into the implementation process that JUG—despite first
embracing the rhetoric of collective decision making at the ministerial level—focused, in
practice upon coordination of service delivery and quality measures (Ling 2002, 615).
One sees, thus, why the problematic of “policy first, explanation later” would grip the
government by Summer 2003. However, one does not see at this writing a clear picture
of what the administration will do with the cabinet structure, if anything, to remedy this
situation—although it has professed a determination to make “policy management” an
integral part of the policy process rather than simply “bolted on.”

We have seen similar patterns unfold in other Anglo-American systems which
suggest serious effects from the tensions introduced by these two self-denying
ordinances. First, with respect to centralization as opposed to devolution of discretion
over policy and budgetary priorities, bow waves have buffeted agencies severely since
the early 1980s. Even in Australia, where departments gained arguably the greatest
degree of autonomy, officials groused during the late 1980s and early 1990s about
frequent disjunctions between central agency’s rhetoric concerning increased discretions and failure often to restrain budget examiners who persisted in micro-review of some departmental expenditures (Campbell and Halligan 1992, 144-162). New Zealand’s reforms centered on an even more radical disaggregation of the executive-bureaucratic system based upon creating executive agencies that function within contractual frameworks under which officials would shoulder responsibility for providing specified outputs for individual ministers. Bow waves, however, roiled executive-bureaucratic relations in two opposing directions. Contracts inspired by doctrinaire views of principal-agent relations blinkered chief executives from considering interdepartmental coordination as part of their obligations (Boston 1992; Schick 1996). In addition, the combination of draconian budget cuts with radical, center-driven alterations of the state apparatus meant that chief executives struggled even to fulfill their obligations toward producing designated outputs in a satisfactory way.

As we say earlier, public choice theory emerged in the U.S. over disgruntlement with the level of autonomy enjoyed during the middle part of the last century by departments and agencies. The reader might find it ironic, thus, that bureaucratic organizations in the U.S. federal government have proven relatively immune from the bow waves that have swept through other Anglo-American systems. To be sure, they have endured successive budget cuts. However, many agencies operate with legislated insulation from presidential fiat or direction (Lewis 2003). Even offices within departments frequently operate within frameworks with significant immunity from direction by the president and/or cabinet secretaries that Congress has mandated. Principal-agent relations, thus, operate in the U.S. in connection with the separation of
powers and ebbs and flows in relation to such factors as whether the same party controls both the presidency and Congress, the size of congressional majorities and presidential approval ratings.

Independent of the move toward providing greater discretion to sub-cabinet organizations under the rubric of “executive agencies,” departments in Anglo-American systems have responded differently to the opportunities and challenges that present themselves when they gain greater autonomy in how they use their available resources. By the mid-1980s departments in both the U.K. and Australia began to take considerable pains to define their missions and to clarify each constituent unit’s objectives in relation to these and assess their actually performance in these regards (Campbell and Wilson 1995, 126ff; Campbell and Halligan 1992, 177ff). Generally, such initiatives yielded the clearest benefits when ministers assumed sufficient responsibility in the process to establish and maintain momentum, a consensus emerged among officials about the utility of greater coherence in the objectives and operations of constituent units and these related to one another within an overarching policy sector. Connecting budget allocations to performance almost always lagged—even in devising requisite technology—the linking of objectives with organizational missions. U.K. evidence suggests that the further step of disaggregating departments through creation of executive agencies often failed to provide clear results with respect to a feedback loop from performance to budget allocation (Hyndman and Eden 2001, 595).

Barzelay and Campbell (2003) have argued that those seeking connectivity between missions, objectives, performance and resource allocation perhaps set themselves up for failure if they expect one-to-one fits along the way. They studied in
depth two massive exercises that took place in the U.S. Air Force during the 1990s.

These attempted to bring greater effect to visioning and planning to programming and budgeting within that organization. The authors found that—as the Air Force learned about the difficulty of attaining connectivity—approaches such as “position for opportunities” and “guided incremental”—while suboptimal in the eyes of rationalists—proved relatively effectual in improving the Air Force’s preparedness for future challenges.

Several factors came together toward fostering such innovation. First, the Air Force has prided itself in maintaining during its short history a capacity for spontaneous adaptation lacking in the other services. Second, two successive chiefs beginning in 1994 gave high priority to long-term strategic planning and followed through with attention to intra-service deliberative bodies dedicated to improving connectivity between mission, objective, performance and budgets. Third, the service learned, as it proceeded through its two major exercises, the importance of engaging the participation and support of the political executive and the major commands who own segments of operations and support. It also gained sophistication in pursuing dialogue with stakeholders—attentive senators and congressmen along with interest groups. This involved an increased focus on future challenges, requisite critical capabilities for the service to rise to these, and identification of “forks-in-the-road” at which the service had either to make tough resource decisions or resign itself to losing windows of opportunity.

The convergence of these three elements—a culture that prized spontaneous adaptation, leadership and the commitment of institutional resources to sustaining visioning and decisional dynamics, and an aptitude for learning smart practice throughout
the process—presents itself in the Air Force case as a rarity. Unfortunately, the center cannot infuse such convergence by fiat. Nor will it likely emerge if political executives have disaggregated organizational structures. One-side-fits-all approaches involving either center-driven aggregation or compartmentalization of governance into output-fixated executive agencies seems to overlook a simple reality about public service: Departments must do most of the heavy lifting for the discernment and analysis of policy issues necessary to attain a high degree of rigor and for implementation across operational units to achieve strong coherence.

**Conclusion**

This paper has sought to initiate an effort to ascertain smart practices toward innovative public management. It has worked from the premise that political executives and career officials can achieve a more productive blend of their respective policy and administrative roles. It has stressed along the way two apparent requirements. First, political executives would reap the benefits of greater creativity among officials if they gave greater legitimacy to the permanent public servants’ distinctive contributions to policy development and management. Second, conditions within executive-bureaucratic complexes—at least over the past twenty or so years—have not leant themselves to the reconciliation of differences between departmental viewpoints. Thus, any search of greater creativity will by necessity lead to rethinking of routines for integration within and between departments, political executives and career officials and the cultures that sustain these.

Our review of trends in Anglo-American countries points to several important reflections regarding the continued vocational integrity of permanent public servants. To
begin, governments must make it clear that officials will not be penalized if they render advice as they see fit. A government that does not establish this principle clearly as the code of the road ultimately will make itself error prone. On many occasions, it serves a government’s purposes to be able deny that it knew fully the possible consequences of a specific stance or action. However, life by deniability ultimately will undermine a government’s reputation for policy competence. It might well succumb to death by a thousand half-truths. Ultimately, a government that canvasses widely options and possible outcomes will become wiser both about what it asks the public service and what it does with the information.

Officials should engage more their moral agency when offering advice. Rather than demurring when confronted by political executives’ unhappiness, they should follow procedures that insure that the message gets through and that others have witnessed its tendering. One-on-one meetings—which come at a premium in any executive-bureaucratic community—clearly become mixed blessings if they allow ministers to deflect advice and later claim they have no recollection of it receiving it. Not just for their own protection but for the well-being of the state, officials should be much more procedural both in the way they give advice and the contexts in which they convey it.

How do such caveats square with the era of instant communication? Not readily. And this is especially where routines for integration of policy positions comes to the fore as a key issue. Officials, should receive much more training about when and when not to employ rapid communication technologies that might short-circuited standard operating procedures for issue management that evolved through the past century. Tightening up output requirements for advisory units and consultative bodies would prove productive
here. With strictures from those quarters, free-lancers who establish great familiarity
with ministers and/or their political advisers will ultimately face peer censure for failure
to observe the canons of process. The tendering of advice should be focused on products
from the permanent public service to the political executive. It should only rarely involve
output from teams containing political executives, their aides and officials. Meetings of
officials should include set representatives of all designated member departments or duly
appointed delegates. Others who attend meetings should either be providing specialized
knowledge necessary for the discussion or facilitating and recording proceedings.
Generally, these two are the same auspices to which official participation in meetings of
ministers should confine itself. Meeting proceedings should be recorded and minutes
circulated for correction. This practice leaves no doubt as to the options and
consequences that the group considered and why it offered the advice it forwarded to the
political executive.

Much greater emphasis should be given on the courses of action available to those
who believe that political executives have ignored and/or distorted tendered advice in
order to proceed imprudently or illegally. If chief executives or cliques within cabinet
increasingly act without giving much consideration to the preferences of colleagues, we
can well grasp why so frequently political executives seem to set aside advice provided
by career officials. The resulting dysfunctionality of the relation between politicians and
bureaucrats seems to cry out for options beyond the hierarchical channels. For instance,
in Westminster systems, what benefit we realistic expect from by appeals first to the
permanent head of one’s department and, if these fail, the head of the cabinet secretariat
in case where such officials have become virtual apparatchiks of the government of the
day?

With respect to integration of departmental views, we have found substantial
support of the view that so-called joined-up government requires above all coherently
developed policy rather than simply trying to harmonize often contradictory and
inconsistent outputs in the field. Failures in policy development as manifest on the
frontline of delivery often result in a re-absorption of initiative and discretion by the
center with little or no additional investment in infrastructures and cultural adjustments
required for effective policy making—including anticipation of implementation
difficulties—at that level.

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Figure 1: The Interaction of the Three Competencies (Source: Campbell 2001, 260)