

The Search for Coordination and Coherence in Public Policy: Return to the Center?

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The past several decades have been periods of significant reform in the public sector, and almost all governments have undertaken extensive changes in the manner in which they implement policies, and to some extent in the ways in which they select those policies (Bouckaert and Pollitt, 2004; Christensen and Laegreid, 2001). Although each government has had its own trajectory of change, the general pattern observed has been one of implementing a wide range of managerialist changes designed to enhance the efficiency of government and to "make government work better and cost less"--in the words of the Gore Commission in the United State. While many of the reforms implemented (see below) might be thought to be informed by a neo-liberal agenda, they have been adopted and implemented regardless of the political persuasion of the government in office--the Labor government in New Zealand was perhaps more active in any other political system. The heartland of the reform efforts has been in the more affluent countries of Europe, North America and the Antipodes, although the general approaches to reforming the State have been propagated by international organizations, and implemented in a wide range of political systems (World Bank, 2001).

Administrative change during the past several decades has, as noted elsewhere (Peters, 2000), had a number of different trajectories and a variety of different foundations, but one dominant pattern in those changes has been to move political and administrative controls away from the political center of government. These changes in the underlying control structures within government have, in turn, empowered a range of other actors in both the public and private sectors to make many more decisions than they might have under "traditional" administrative systems (Walsh and Stewart, 1992; Peters, 2004). As well as deconcentrating decisions within central governments, the reforms of the past decades have tended to decentralize power among levels of government and further to societal actors, both for profit and not-for-profit organizations. All of these changes have had the effect of diminishing power at the political and administrative center, and the predictability of the decisions that governments. Further, the logic of control in the public sector have switched away from hierarchy and toward competition and mutuality (see Hood et al., 2004).

Although most discussions of the changes occurring in the public sector has been carried on within the public administration community, these reforms are in fundamental ways also theories of governance taken more broadly. As such, their relevance extends far beyond changing the public bureaucracy and also influence the manner in which state and society interact, and the ways in which the several institutions within the public sector itself work together to make and implement policy. While the term "governance" often has been used to describe extreme forms of decentralizing government, I employ the term here in a more general sense of the pattern of steering society and economy in which governments engage through their choices of public policy..

In addition to structuring the interactions between state and society, the reforms in the public sector that have been implemented during the past decades also

influence the nature of the decisions made. For example, the more participatory forms of government that are emerging expand the opportunities for public participation, and therefore also tend to democratize the decisions taken, albeit in a form of democracy that tends to privilege local actors more than general societal interests. Further, emphasizing decentralization and deconcentration also reduces the political content of governance, while enhancing the influence of senior public managers and even lower echelons in public organizations.

The Sources of Change

Several major socio-economic changes, and sets of ideas, have undergirded the changes that have been observed in these reforms. First, most of the changes have been justified in terms of the ideas of "New Public Management" (Hood, 1991; Zifcak, 1994) or managerialism. The fundamental notion of this approach to administration, and to governing more generally, is that government will perform better if the senior managers in the public sector are given greater control over policy and administration. Although not stated explicitly, the implication of the emphasis on the role of managers is that the political elite would be to some degree disempowered. They would retain the capacity to frame policies but would be largely removed from the day-to-day concern with implementation.

One of the guiding principles of the New Public Management has been that government should, in the now familiar words of Osborne and Gaebler, "steer and not row". That is, government should be responsible for setting the broad guidelines of policy and then leave implementation, and the elaboration of the theories, to other actors. Thus, many of the service delivery functions of government could (should) be privatized or contracted out to the private sector, whether for profit or not for profit. These changes would, it has been argued, enable those services to be delivered more efficiently than if delivered by a public bureaucracy, and also many advocates of the New Public Management approach also argued that the services would be better because the providers faced competition.

Another element of the "theory" that has guided New Public Management has been that autonomous organizations, directed by those skilled public managers, will be more capable of attaining the policy goals of a society than will large ministerial departments. If government could not divest itself entirely of the "rowing" functions of service delivery then it should move those activities away from the center. The most obvious examples of this approach to governing have been the Next Steps Agencies in the United Kingdom (James, 2004). This deconcentration of the administrative system further limits the control of ministers over policy, but may put them in the uncomfortable position of having ostensible responsibility with little real control (Peters and Pierre, 2001). Again, the hero of this story about governing is the senior public manager who is capable of creating "public value" through the management of the organization and the implementation of policy.

An alternative logic for change in the public sector has been focussed more on political and democratic values than on efficiency values (see Sorenson and Torfing, 2002; Peters, 2004b). The participatory reforms have assumed that government organizations can be more effective if the lower echelons of government and the clients of public organizations are empowered to make more decisions. This perspective can be contrasted with the New Public Management logic of empowering the senior managers in organizations. The assumption in the participatory approach has been that the knowledge and skills of the lower levels of public organizations have been under-utilized in the past and that by empowering this group those organizations will perform more effectively.

Although the underlying logics of the New Public Management and participatory approaches are quite different, some of the implications of these two conceptions of reform in the public sector are actually quite similar. Both conceptions tend to push decisions away from the center of government, and to empower decision-makers other than those who have been at the center of hierarchical governance--politicians and top-level public servants. Further, both approaches to change in government have tended to devalue the role of politicians and to assume that members of the public bureaucracy, and citizens themselves, are capable of making most policy decisions.

While the participatory reforms have stressed the virtues of decentralization, even more extreme views, characterized by the phrase "governance without government" have become fashionable in political science, if not so much in the real world of politics. The basic idea of these "governance" reforms has been that not only should the clients of public organizations be empowered to influence policy, they would be capable of managing a good deal of what is now public business with little need for the formal apparatus of government. The assumption in this view is that self-organizing networks of public and private sector actors would be capable of controlling policy areas more effectively than would inflexible and unresponsive public organizations--the bureaucracy.

Finally, there has been a more general trend toward decentralization in the public sector. that has tended to move decisions away from the center of government and to enhance the policy-making capacities of sub-national governments. Again, this variety of reform has been justified in part in the name of democracy, on the assumption that local governments will be better able to reflect the demands of citizens than will larger and more cumbersome central governments. Further, not only might the sub-national governments be more capable of reflecting the desires of the public, these governments may also be more efficient in delivering those services, so that devolving implementation functions to sub-national governments and devolving those activities to agencies are part of the same general pattern of change.

In the case of the European Union concepts such as subsidiarity, "multi-level governance" and the Open Method of Coordination have been means of coping with demands for territorial decentralization of policy-making (Bache and Flinders, 2004; De la Porte and Pochet, 2002). In this instance also the tendency has been for governments to grant greater autonomy to actors at the lower levels of their systems, and thereby also to eliminate some controls from the center. That central control over policy was always to some extent problematic in the case of the EU, but governance reforms appear to have reduced that capacity for direction even further. Multi-level governance is increasingly a complex bargaining process rather than a system of control and coordination,

Governance in the Decentralized State

All the above mentioned reforms have tended to diminish the capacity for governing from the center, and in most instances that reduction in central governance capacity was a stated intention of the changes. The assumption of reformers has been the centralized, top-down and monopolistic nature of pre-reform government had been at the core of the governance problems that most countries had encountered. The associated assumption was that a more decentralized and deconcentrated government could be both more efficient and more democratic, and could respond more flexibly to the many challenges faced by contemporary governments. This approach to governing devalued coordinated and central responses to policy problems in favor of a flexible and entrepreneurial responses that also could be sensitive to

particularistic demands, whether based on geographical areas or economic interests..

Although the theory behind the NPM and participatory reforms was appealing to many active participants in government, and to many citizens, the reality of this distributed forms of governing caused some rethinking of what might be the most appropriate forms of governing. That rethinking appears to have come about for several reasons, and at different times. These various reasons for reconsidering the desirability of these reforms have been more or less important in different countries, but the emerging pattern is one of governments attempting to cope with the realities produced by the first round of reform with another round of reform. While these continuing reforms are responses to the first round, they have not returned government to the status quo ante by any means, but rather reflect an attempt to move the governing process forward.

Perhaps the first reason for reactions against the decentralization of government was that in a globalized and Europeanized world governments had to be able to speak with a single voice, and to be more coherent in their governing patterns rather than less. The conventional wisdom has become that globalized economic forces make conventional governance virtually impossible (see Strange, 1998). The alternative view is that these changes simply make more effective and coherent government more necessary. For example, a number of European countries have found that their decentralized means of governing have not been successful once they had to go to Brussels and speak with a single voice in order to get what they wanted through the complex European system (Kassim, Peters and Wright, 1992; Kassim, Menon, Peters and Wright, 1998). Likewise, effective policy-making in general requires more of a "whole of government" approach than the more fragmented version of governing that has emerged from the NPM reforms.

Secondly, the version of governing emerging from the NPM and participatory reforms has not produced the level of coordination and policy integration that political leaders and citizens alike are demanding from the system of government. Although the problems that the public can identify within the public sector are numerous and well-documented (see Nye and Zelikow, 1997), the lack of coordination and coherence in government is one frequently cited problem. Citizens and businesses encounter redundant reporting requirements, and a need to go from office to office in order to obtain the full range of benefits from government. Government programs also may be competitive, with one agency promoting the sale of wine and another attempting to reduce the level of drunk driving (Sciolino, 2004). Or multiple programs may still leave important lacunae in needed services, so that citizens are not receiving the full range of services from government that they may need.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the forms of decentralization that have been developed for service delivery present significant problems of accountability for government officials, and for citizens. The basic idea of creating agencies or using private sector actors as major components of the service delivery apparatus for government is to remove them from direct ministerial control and enable them to act more on the basis of efficiency values, rather than political values. Those values are important, but the capacity of elected officials to influence the choices made during implementation, and the ability to use political mechanisms to hold those agencies accountable, are crucial elements of democracy.

The difficulty is that the multiple organizations and their autonomy may reduce the capacity of political mechanisms to exert control over those organizations (see Whitford, 2003). Our own work has demonstrated that autonomy is far from unidimensional, and that when ministers cede one form of control they often

strengthen others (Verhoest, Peters, Bouckaert and Verschuere, 2004; see also Verhoest, Verschuere and Bouckaert, 2003), but the tendency is to diminish political power over programs. Political leaders are often in the position of having political responsibility for programs without any real capacity to influence the behavior of those organizations. For example, privatizing most aspects of rail transportation in the United Kingdom removed many aspects of ministerial control but when there have been rail disasters the minister has been left very exposed politically. While the budget and the capacity to legislate still provide ministers substantial control, the legitimacy of that control may be eroded.

Coordination as a Response to Decentering

As implied earlier, political leaders in the centre of government have become somewhat discontented with their loss of capacity to steer and are making some concerted attempts to re-establish at least a portion of their role as the sources of political ideas and initiatives (Peters, 2004a). This reassertion of the "primacy of politics" in governing (see Bouckaert, Ormond and Peters, 2001) is by no means universal, and some political systems continue to revel in their decentralization, or even to decenter government and administration still further. Still, an increasing number of individual leaders and administrative systems are attempting to find ways of governing more effectively from the centre.

That enhancement of governance from the center involves more than simply attempting to impose authority and govern in a more hierarchical manner. The attempt to cope with decentered government involves two alternative, but closely related, dimensions of change. On the one hand there is a need for leadership and vision at the top of government, so that common values and ideas can be used to steer policy. The problem in the decentered style of governing is that there are too many competing values so that no coherent direction can be provided. The assumption contained in this approach to governing is that fewer central ideas are needed to sort out some of the confusion that results from decentralizing.

The additional dimension involved in producing more coherent approaches to governing is the development of enhanced means of coordinating within government. Coordination has always been a problem in the public sector (Jennings and Crane, 1994; Seidman, 1999). The discussion of decentralization above, however, points to the extent that these governance problems have become exacerbated. Governments have increased their own problems through a series of reforms, and are now faced with implementing a whole new round of reform in order to correct for some of the problems created by the first changes imposed.

Coordination is a term that is generally used rather loosely in the study of the public sector. I will be arguing, however, that we should think of four possible levels of coordination, each involving greater integration of policy and therefore representing a greater investment of political capital (everything else being equal) to achieve. The first, and most basic, form of coordination, usually referred to as *negative coordination* (Scharpf, 1964) involves government organizations and programs merely getting out of each other's way, and producing any negative interactions among themselves. This form of coordination involves minimal investment of political capital and, although it may enhance service delivery, it is not likely to significantly alter patterns of policy making.

A second level of coordination can be termed *positive coordination*, and involves moving beyond simple mutual recognition of programs to finding ways of working together to provide better services for the clients. This involves not only

mutual recognition among programs but some agreement to cooperate around the delivery of services. This level of coordination assumes, however, that the individual organizations remain largely autonomous and pursue their individual goals. The only thing that changes is that the organizations (generally at the bottom) coordinate the actual delivery of programs.

The third level of coordination--*policy integration*-- involves moving from coordinating not only the delivery of services but also the goals being pursued by public organizations. This stage of coordination becomes more difficult politically. Not only do the lower echelons of organizations need to cooperate on implementation, other levels of the organizations need to cooperate to ensure that their goals are compatible. Policy goals of different organizations are often not in the first instance compatible, and may well be directly contradictory. Therefore substantial bargaining, and perhaps the imposition of authority from the top of government, may be required to make the collection of organizations perform their tasks in a more integrated manner.

One of the best examples of achieving a more integrated form of governing can be found in the experience of the Finnish government. Having joined the European Union the government of Finland found that it had difficulties in responding successfully to the demands of participation in the Brussels arena. Although the governance problems were highlighted by membership in the EU, some of the same difficulties were evident in coping with domestic policy issues. The semi-presidential structure of Finnish government, and a long history of a strong, if not dominant, public bureaucracy, was making central leadership difficult in that system (Bouckaert, Ormond and Peters, 2000). In a series of institutional innovations, the Finnish government developed a means of identifying, and then implementing, priorities that cut across conventional ministerial responsibilities.

These mechanisms for enhancing coherence in the Finnish government are at once both political and administrative. On the one hand the identification of the priorities for government are very political, being a task for each new government to undertake in the first weeks of its mandate. On the other hand, once identified by government, the implementation of the government program involves senior public servants and the creation of an implementation structure that may involve numerous ministries and departments. All the relevant priorities cut across conventional structures of government and require budgeting and implementation mechanisms that are not tied to those structures. Throughout that process, however, the primacy of politics continues to be respected for the program.

The final stage of policy coordination is the development of *strategies* for government. This level of coordination requires strategies that will not only cut across the usual organizational lines in government, and produce substantial agreement on general goals among public organizations, but also have a clear vision for the future of policy and government, and for the future of the policy areas involved. Further, an effective strategy for government would be able to integrate the integrated policies described above. As we will point out below in greater detail, the achievement of a level of strategy in government will move policy-making toward more comprehensive solutions to public problems, and perhaps also a means of coping better with the demands of collective futures.

Sustainable development could be used as an example of this fourth level of coordination among policies (Natural Resources Canada, 2004; OECD, 2002). This approach to environmental concerns involves not only a central concern for the quality of the global environment but also links that concern to a range of other policy areas. Environmental ministries have become "central agencies" (Doern, 1993;

Lenschow, 2002) in many governments simply because all programs must have their environmental consequences examined as a part of their approval, an approach that reaches the level of integration at best. Sustainable development, on the other hand, involves moving toward a articulated strategy for achieving other goals (especially economic goals) while at the same time maintaining the commitment to a sustainable environmental future.

The strategy of collaboration (Bardach, 1998) for achieving enhanced coordination brings together the two strands above of leadership and more formalized means of coordination. That is, collaboration requires coordination "entrepreneurs" who are capable of framing and reframing issues in ways that enhance the capacity of organizations within government to cooperate and produce strategic solutions to problems that can move government along as a whole, rather than in parts. The assumption of this approach to coordination and integration is that meaningful coordination can be achieved only through developing a common mental frame among the participants in the process, and that frame must be one which enables all the participants to feel that they are gaining something, or at least not losing, through their cooperation.

The frame of sustainable development potentially provides just that sort of a benefit for the participants in the policy process, assuming it can be developed appropriately. This frame can be made relevant to virtually any organization or program in government, and there are elements in the concept that should be appealing to the actors. Of course, constructing the consensus to press such a policy forward would not be easy, but arguably this framing and reframing is the only, or at least the most, viable means of gaining involvement and cooperation. This is an involvement in policy that goes beyond mere acceptance of difference, and can be considered a fundamental shift in styles of governing.

Other Approaches to Recentering Government

One of the more interesting examples of an attempt to recapture the primacy of politics can be found in Sweden. Sweden was the origin of the agency model that has been adopted by the United Kingdom and numerous other countries. Historically the autonomy of the agencies in Sweden did not present much of a problem of control for the ministries and the cabinet, given the broad agreement on the goals of the Social Democratic welfare state. As the managerialist ideologies have strengthened the capacity for autonomy for the agencies, and consensus on policy has waned, government has sought to establish greater direct control. One possibility raised by a Royal Commission has been to reorganize the State significantly, reduce the autonomy of the agencies (or perhaps move them into the ministries), and ensure more direct political control over implementation (SOU, 2003).

Some of the reactions to the loss of control in the center of government would be considered retrograde, most notably increasing levels of politicization in the civil service. Evidence from a number of countries in Western Europe and North America is that political leaders have sought to re-establish their control through increasing levels of political appointment in public administration (Peters and Pierre, 2004). For example, in New Zealand which had introduced one of the more radical versions of decentering the State, there has been some substantial reassertion of the role of politics in shaping the State and its policies. Certainly the state in New Zealand as it exists in 2004 is markedly different from that which preceded the "revolution" in the public sector during the 1980's, but the more recent reforms have been an attempt to restore greater political control to a political system that had become extremely "decentered".

An even greater move toward central controls in government can be seen in the strengthening of offices of presidents and prime ministers. Our earlier work (Peters, Rhodes and Wright, 2000) documented the expansion of the staffs serving chief executives in government, and that trend appears to have continued. Most subsequent discussions (see, for example, Hayward and Wright, 2003) of the staffs serving those executives report on increasing staff sizes, prime ministers, even in nominally collegial systems such as Denmark. The attempts by chief executives to assert their power often comes at the expense of other ministers, rather than decentralized agencies, but still the top of government is attempting to find the means for coordination and control in government.

Some other responses to decentering government have been simply to return to the *status quo ante*, and to restore some of the mechanisms that have been dismantled. For example, the Dutch experiment with the ZBO's, with their extremely high levels of autonomy, has been terminated and those organizations brought back to substantially greater control by elected politicians (Van Thiel, 2000; 2004). These are returns to the organizational and governance formats used in the past, but again this is being done in the context of models of governing that have been changed significantly.

The more important changes in governments have been to create innovative approaches to the challenges placed before them. In many ways these responses to the loss of influence from the centre have had the paradoxical result of decentered government resulting in approaches to governing that may become ever more centralized, and the control of those central actors in government may be increased. There is an unplanned process through which the powers of presidents and prime ministers, or at least their apparent position in governing, are increasing. This informal process depends in part upon the dominant position of these actors in the media, and also the importance of international affairs even for outcomes of domestic issues. At the same time that this more informal change is occurring, however, there are also changes in governments that are designed to enhance the control of those central actors.

As presidents and prime ministers have found that they were responsible for steering the society in a more integrated manner but did not have the levers at hand to do so they have begun to reshape their own offices and are attempting to develop an institutionalized capacity to steer and control government. To some extent this strengthening of the centre reflects political trends that have been noted as occurring for other reasons. The political focus on prime ministers has resulted at least in part from the influence of the media, and from the central positions of events such as European Summits and G-7 meetings. Again, however, even these officials may find themselves with a great deal of publicity but without the controls over policy that they might expect to have.

Finally, there are changes in the ideas about governing that are important for explaining the attempts to cope with the decentered government. This development of ideas has been evident in attempts of the British government to create a "joined up" government and a more integrated approach to the tasks of governing (6 et al., 2002). The idea of a "joined up" government has been used to restate the familiar need for coordination in a new and potentially more persuasive manner (Peters, 2005). Similar ideas about a joined up government have been adopted in Australia, and more recently there has been an attempt to create a "whole-of- government" approach to the policy problems there (AIPA, 2002). Likewise, Canadian government institutions have stressed the need for horizontal government, and greater

capacity to work across government (Bakvis and Julliet, 2004). In all of these cases the guiding assumption of the reformers in the public sector has been that the structure of government has become excessively specialized and the "stovepipes" that are likely to arise in any government have become too strong.

These ideas about the need to manage in a more integrated or "horizontal" manner are hardly broad, ideological statements about governing, but they have been used to justify and guide processes of changing institutions and patterns of governing. In the case of Britain, albeit less clearly than that in Finland mentioned above, one can also see the development of institutions designed to create the capacity for central control and policy management. The Cabinet Office has been enhancing its capacity for strategic planning and policy direction at the center of government, and has sought to identify the principal priorities for government. Once those priorities have been established, they are implemented through more conventional means than those used in the Finnish example.

In addition to these more economically developed political systems such as Finland and the United Kingdom, the candidate countries for the European Union coming from Eastern and Central Europe also are facing severe challenges of being able to bargain with the Union and to create sufficient domestic governance capacity to be able to administer the *acquis* when (or if in some cases) they are admitted. In these cases after some time of almost populist democracy following their release from the rule of the Soviet Union these countries now face the need to steer more from the centre and to govern effectively. This is yet another version of recentering, one that is to some extent threatened by the popularity of New Public Management ideas in parts of the donor community.

As governments attempt to recenter their style of governing, however, they confront new challenges and dilemmas. The most important of these is that while strengthening the center may overcome some of the problems that have been created by adoption of the decentralizing ideas of NPM, there is the danger of going back to the old centralized, hierarchical system that was the cause of much of the recent innovation in governing. That traditional system has largely been deligitimated, but there is as yet little intellectual rationale for the return to a seemingly more centralized system of governing.

In addition to the absence of any clear principles to legitimate the attempts to impose a more centralized vision on governance, the other problem that governments may confront is that the initial round of reforms had produced numerous benefits. Given those benefits, institutional designers in the public sector must consider a means of providing greater coherence within the system while maintaining some of the efficiency and effectiveness benefits. Those benefits may not be widely recognized by the public, but there is reasonable evidence that governments are indeed performing individual service functions better--while paradoxically the system as a whole may not be able to perform better.

The Strategic State

Any number of characterizations of the contemporary state have been developed. Rather than the Weberian, hierarchical state the contemporary system of government has been termed "enabling" or "hollow" or "privatized". These characterizations all convey some meaning of the changes in government, just as the various discussions of reform have all altered in some fundamental ways the nature of governing. Similarly, styles of governing have been portrayed using a variety of typologies (Richardson, 1984) and descriptors (Van Waarden, 1995), all attempting to capture differences among system and changes in governance occurring across often

broad spans of time.

The conception of the emergence of some recentering in the public sector after a period of decentralization provides some understanding of one aspect of change in contemporary government. After some decades of moving governance away from the center that center has begun to reassert its primary role in governing, and is attempting to find a means of providing more coherent direction to the society. As already noted, the strong sense of many political analysts, as well as many practical politicians, is that there is a need for that direction, and that the virtues of decentralization have been purchased at some costs to the strategic governance capacity of the public sector.

It is important to remember, however, that the reassertion of some governance capacity from the center of the political system is being done without any necessary reversal of the decentralizing changes that had been introduced earlier. As noted those decentralizing reforms have been effective in increasing the efficiency of government service provision. These decentralizations also have had substantial political benefits by democratizing, at least in some ways, public organizations and permitting the employees of public organizations also to have a greater role in shaping the agenda for their organizations. These reforms may be difficult to undo, even if a government wanted to, given that they have created close political ties to interests both in an outside of government.

The result of these successive rounds of change in government is what might be considered another version of the "hollow state". As in the earlier description of the hollow state (Weller, Bakvis and Rhodes, 1997; Burnham, 1994) this manifestation of contemporary governance reflects movement of governing capacity away from what is often conceptualized as the heart of government, especially a parliamentary government, the ministries. In fairness, some political systems had made a move of that sort some years before. The Swedish (and to a lesser extent other Nordic) governments had developed the agency model in the 18th century and continued to use this relatively decentralized form of governing. The United States has not had the formalized systems of agencies such as that in Sweden but the agencies within cabinet departments often have greater political clout than do the departments themselves (Seidman, 1999; Krause, 1999; Koppell, 2004).

The process of building stronger capacity for coordination and control in the center of government discussed above represents a process of removing substantial amounts of the policy-making capacity and responsibility from the ministerial levels of government, thus constituting another aspect of the hollowing process. Whereas ministers and their organizations at one time would have been major policy actors one aspect of the creation of more capacity for "joined up" government is that ministers will be forced to cede some of their authority to more central organizations, whether in the prime minister's office or in central ministries such as finance or perhaps foreign affairs.

The movement of the policy-making capacity away from the ministries is to some extent a mirror of the changes that have been noted in cabinet governments. A number of descriptions of cabinet systems have pointed to the declining influence of individual ministers and the accretion of power by prime ministers. Some of the centralizing forces mentioned above have enhanced the powers of presidents and prime ministers but in the process have made the average functional minister in government a less significant player. The extent to which that shift in powers toward prime ministers has occurred has, of course, varied. The shift to prime ministers appears especially pronounced for the Westminster democracies, with some claims that prime ministers are becoming more presidential (Foley, 1993; Allen, 2003), or at

least that the prime minister now dominates cabinet and therefore dominates government (see Savoie, 2003). On the other hand German, and to some extent Scandinavian, systems of governing vest the principal decision-making competencies in the ministries so that it is difficult to devalue these organizations as extensively as in the Westminster systems.

Thus, in this analysis, the State is hollowed out in the sense that much of the linkage between top and bottom is being eliminated, or at least devalued, by changes at both the top and bottom of government. Within the civil service and the administrative apparatus a good deal of middle management and the internal controls over implementation are being eliminated, with the top or the bottom, or perhaps both, being empowered (but see Peters and Pierre, 2000). In the macro-structure of government the top level--presidents and prime ministers and the central agencies--are empowered at the same time as are agencies and parastatal organizations, but the ministries and their ministers appear to have been assigned somewhat lesser priorities in governing than in the past.

What appears to remain after these processes of hollowing out the governing structures of contemporary democracies is an arrangement that clearly intends to separate policy and administration. That separation of functions is one of the old chestnuts in the study of public administration, and much of the logic of the New Public Management--steering versus rowing, for example--echoes the desirability of separating the two. If the emerging pattern can be to some extent stereotyped then there is to be a strong, active policy-making capacity at the top of government, focussed on the prime minister and his entourage. At the bottom of the system are a number of more or less autonomous public organizations and perhaps a range of quasi-governmental and private organizations that are responsible for delivering services.

For the purposes of this paper the typology presented by Aucoin (1991; see also Weller and Bakvis (1997) to describe shifts in the roles of core executives is a useful starting point for understanding the range of changes described above (see Table 1a). This typology is concerned primarily with the relationships between prime ministers and their ministers, but much of the same logic can be applied to the more extreme decentralization to agencies and para-statal organizations. Certainly the "Command" category is still relevant for strong prime ministers who invest time and energy to assert their control over government, although their control over the remainder of government might not be as strong as implied in that characterization. The conglomerate category may still apply also, but perhaps in a more extreme version, as I will develop below.

Table 1b represents adding some notions of additional movements out from the center of government, beginning with the original table from Aucoin. While the characterization of "Chaotic" is perhaps a hyperbolic description for this pattern, it does to some extent capture the difficulties of control that may be encountered when there is limited control over potentially large number of autonomous organizations. The other additional category is the strategic one in which there is a strong attempt to integrate at the top of government combined with a strongly decentralized implementation structure.

How can we characterize this recentering of governance in the continuing context of decentralization and deconcentration of service delivery. Perhaps the best way of describing this emerging pattern is one of "strategic governance". "strategic state" see Paquet (2001). There are a set of political leaders and their associates at the center that set broad patterns of policy, and that establish processes and structures that can coordinate the actions of other organizations involved in

making and implementing programs. At the bottom of the pyramid there are strong service delivery organizations directed by (presumably) skilled managers who deliver public services and who in the process also make policy about their rather narrow areas of concern.

The assumption of this model of governing is that these two principal areas of action in government, both of which are crucial for effective governance, are connected adequately, so that the political and administrative leaders at the top can actually control the behavior of the agencies at the bottom, and make their strategies for government as a whole work. This capacity is being reasserted in some ways, but in others the weakening of the center (especially ministers and ministers) may make that capacity rather ineffective. The absence of the central connections leaves fewer means of control, especially when the central agencies have somewhat greater need for control and coherent strategy.

There are certainly instruments, coming largely from the armamentarium of the New Public Management that can assist the center in its attempts to govern. For example, contracts (Cooper, 2003; Fortin, 2000) and negotiated agreements among the organizations involved (Parry and Deakin, 2003) are a means of specifying the requisite performance of agencies and agency leaders, and can be linked directly to the strategic aims of the center. Also, performance management involves a good deal of monitoring of the compliance of service delivery organizations with their policy commitments, so that a well-structured performance system would provide central managers with a clear picture of what has been happening in government (see Bouckaert, 1998). Performance management can also be used to augment the perhaps weakened political forms of accountability over public organizations under more decentralized forms of management, by focusing attention on the average performance of organizations rather than on egregious errors that can be used to embarrass a minister.

Budgetary controls, perhaps linked directly with performance systems, are also crucial for maintaining control from the center. For example, the Danish Ministry of Finance operates in a relatively decentralized administrative system but is able to maintain its control over ministries and agencies through its command of information and its central legal position (Jensen, 2003; 2004). The role the Ministry of Finance in the Netherlands is even clearer, with the Ministry being responsible for some of the initial movement toward the creation of agencies in Dutch government, but then developing the financial instruments for controlling those agencies (de Vries and Yesilkagit, 2003). Finally, the Government Performance and Results Act in the United States also provides the means of linking organizational achievement of goals to their budget, and constitutes a continuous (if still imperfect) monitoring device for Congress as well as for the executive itself.

All that having been said, however, there may be an optimal level of control for political leaders that is less than full control. That level of detachment from the center can be justified from both administrative and political perspectives. From the administrative perspective some autonomy for public organizations does indeed make sense. Whether justified on the grounds used by New Public Management or those employed by the participatory approach permitting implementing organizations to have some latitude in how they perform their tasks is likely to produce more effective administration. Most governments have until the reforms of the past few decades been unwilling to allow administrative organizations that degree of freedom for action, but now several intellectual justifications that are largely accepted have permitted substantial autonomy of action.

The political justification for maintaining autonomy is somewhat more

difficult to maintain, especially in light of the arguments above concerning accountability. The basic point that Jorgen Christensen (2001) made in his arguments concerning autonomy is that some autonomy from political control provides agencies the capacity to pursue their goals. At the same time, however, the political actors may enjoy some autonomy as well. In particular, it appears that the organizations can benefit from the deniability of responsibility for policy failures. Thus, for political leaders the ability to put some distance between themselves and substantive policy failures (see Bovens, 't Hart and Peters, 2001) may enable them to govern more effectively, at least in political terms.

Conclusion

The decentralization and deconcentration of government resulting from the administrative reforms beginning in the 1980's have produced a number of benefits for those governments, and for their citizens. Those reforms have, however, also imposed some significant costs. Many of costs have been borne by political leaders who come to office with great expectations for running their countries and imposing their policy priorities, but find that the structures devised for producing and implementing those ideas are difficult to manage. Politicians have complained about their difficulties in managing government for decades, but what may have changed is that there is now an ideology that justifies the diminished role of ministers and other political leaders in governing.

The discussion in this paper has focused on attempts by political leaders to reassert some of their policy controls, while maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness benefits produced by the initial reforms. Presidents and prime ministers have been relatively effective at creating, or re-creating their capacities as policy leaders, but in the process may have further diminished the policy capacity of other political leaders. These changes therefore may have produced an even more hollowed out version of government than that described earlier by Bakvis, Weller and others. Further, again, there are now several intellectual and political justifications for the changes. What may not yet exist is a clear set of mechanisms for linking the top and the bottom of government.

Ideas play a crucial role in creating a more integrated pattern of governance. In particular, if governments want to move toward a more strategic sense of governing then they will have to develop and propagate ideas, or policy frames, that can guide and justify the development of common approaches to governing. These ideas need to be relevant to a range of policy areas, and they also need to be sufficiently powerful to pressure organizations and actors which might as soon persist in their established patterns of action. In addition to the independent power of ideas, the development of more integrated conceptions of policy require the strengthening of the center of government and the use of the political power of those central actors. As noted, sustainable development is potentially capable of providing a frame for integrating a range of environmental, economic and agricultural programs, and moving policy-making toward the goal of a more strategic style.

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Table 1a

	Integrated	Differentiated
Centralized	<i>Command</i>	<i>Corporate</i>
Decentralized	<i>Collegial</i>	<i>Conglomerate</i>

Table 1b

	Integrated	Differentiated
Centralized	<i>Command</i>	<i>Corporate</i>
Decentralized	<i>Collegial</i>	<i>Conglomerate</i>
Externalized	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Chaotic</i>