



## DELIVERING FROM THE CENTRE

Strengthening the role of the centre of government in driving priority strategies





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## **STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT IN DRIVING PRIORITY STRATEGIES**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

**DRAFT OCTOBER 2015**

## OVERVIEW

**The 2013 OECD report Centre Stage: driving better policies from the Centre of government identified the key roles and functions of the centre of government (CoG). One of the key findings of the report was that “the centre is now a key vehicle for driving policy priorities”. This report looks in more detail at the challenges that centres of government face in taking up this expanded role and suggests some steps to help guide a more proactive role in driving policy delivery.**

This is a preliminary draft. The aim is to develop it into a practical guide for centres of government. It will be finalized on the basis of additional ideas, insights and examples provided through the Centres of Government network over the coming months.

The centre of government has largely operated as a support system to the Head of Government (i.e. support for Cabinet meetings etc.) and as a vehicle for managing the machinery of government (i.e. the civil service). Each new government comes in with an ideology, preferences for certain solutions to perceived problems, and a need to show progress on the key elements of their political mandate.

Traditionally, the role of the centre of government in co-ordinating policy has taken the form of inter-ministerial bodies and standing committees, used as a way to level differences of opinion, rather than arbitration by the Head of Government. The increase in wider implementation agendas, such as climate change and public sector restructuring has also meant that a strong centre of government is vital to co-ordinate a coherent whole of government response. This has signaled a clear shift in roles from reactive to proactive, and with it, different responsibilities and functions.

Promoting delivery from the centre of government can signal a shift in culture change, embedding within the public service a focus on citizen based-outcomes. It adds legitimacy to the delivery agenda “showcasing” the impact managing performance can make to priority areas, and promoting an overall performance management system within line ministries.

To understand how a centre of government can better support performance it is necessary to understand the factors that can make a government programme successful which include, for example:

- 1) An agenda** – a clear vision and set of strategic objectives and priorities;
- 2) A plan** – identifying early the programmes and policies required to fulfill the agenda and planning the delivery of identified policies;
- 3) A system that can deliver** - clear organisational structures to support the delivery of the identified priorities; and,
- 4) A communication/engagement strategy** – active engagement of stakeholders to better understand obstacles to delivery; building a coalition of delivery.

This report looks at the challenges faced by the centre of government in driving the delivery of policy priorities; and offers suggestions on how the centre of government can be strengthened to take a proactive role in supporting the government to achieve successful performance on priority strategies.

## SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN DELIVERY FROM THE CENTRE

### Set the foundation for delivery; identify the priority areas

- **Establish a foundation that** includes a cohesive vision and set of strategic objectives;
- **Identify a limited number of priority areas** and define them by outcomes to be achieved; and,
- **Demonstrate visible political sponsorship at a high level** that includes, where necessary, a clear mandate for the centre to operate across government.

### Plan in advance to monitor and performance manage implementation as part of the policy design process

- **Understand early on, in close cooperation with departments, what the delivery challenges are or might be;** evaluate past and current performance and the underlying drivers of weak performance;
- **Use data** to develop the right set of indicators and or/success measures and regularly monitor them; and,
- **Evaluate progress in real time** and use evaluations to refine priorities where necessary; go beyond task-based or “passive” monitoring and reporting.

### Organise government structures to help ensure priorities are effectively implemented

- Use the centre of government to **unblock obstacles to delivery** by setting up a dedicated delivery team that actively manages the performance and leads problem solving of priorities;
- **Signal the importance of key priorities** using the centre of government to communicate clear and consistent messages about Head of Government/Executive priorities; and,
- **Embed a culture of delivery across government structures,** share expertise and knowledge from the centre of government; offer tailored support to develop techniques within line ministries to their own delivery agendas.

### Build communication and engagement into the role of centre of government

- **Engage early and communicate** to each line ministry what the role of the centre will be in delivering priority strategies and what will be expected of them;
- **Build a coalition** and get the buy-in of key actors; centres of government should be seen as working with and not imposing themselves on others; and,
- **Drive innovation in delivery** and involve people outside the central government structures. Engage with all delivery agents, citizens, groups etc. to understand how things work currently and communicate not only the desire to change but also how they can be improved.

## CHAPTER 1

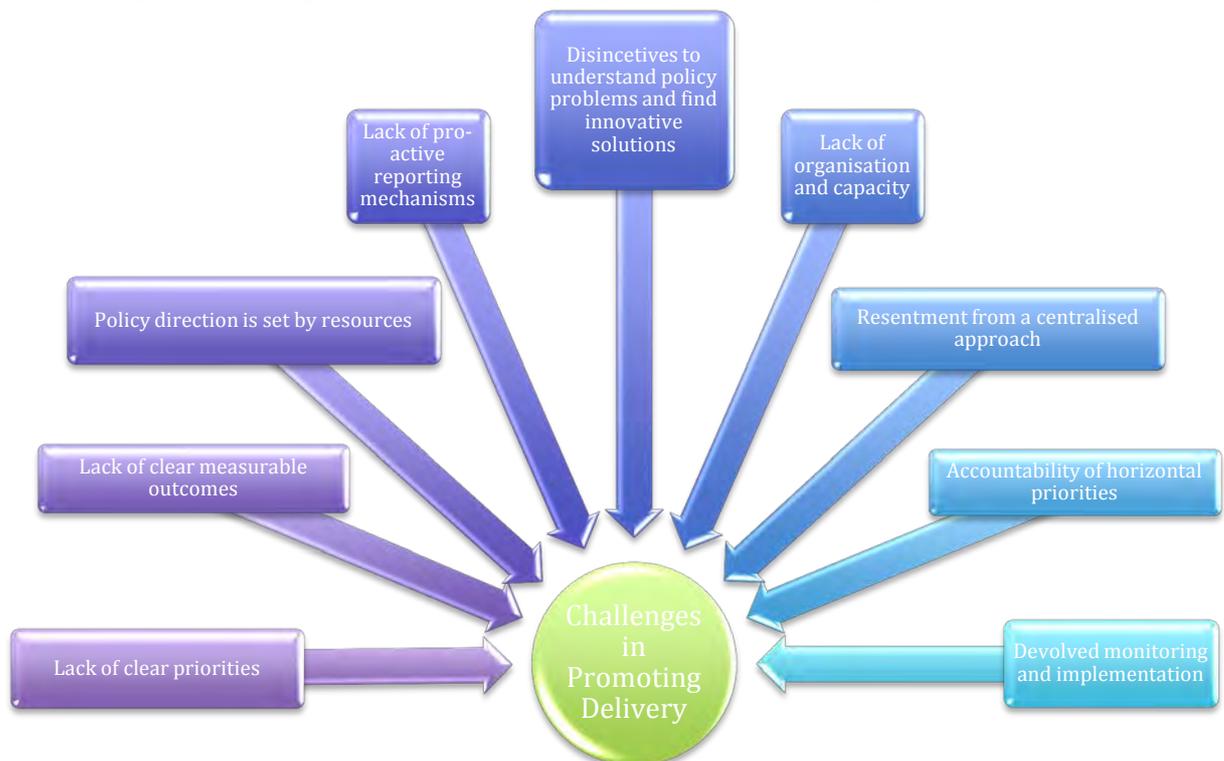
### UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING DELIVERY FROM THE CENTRE

Across OECD countries, a variety of constitutional models exist that define the decision making process at the centre, from highly collegial Cabinet systems such as those of the Netherlands and Sweden to Presidential systems such as those of Chile and the US. However, the common need shared between all countries is the ability of the Head of the Government to make effective policy decisions. The Head of Government can only make decisions based on information received and it is within this context that the role of the centre of government becomes one of facilitator and enabler.

The Centre of government's role is necessary in ensuring that high quality, evidence based, reviewed, and verified information is gathered and presented in a format that clearly defines the different options and their implications. The areas upon which advice is required can be a) *reactive* i.e. crisis or news headlines driven, b) *pro active* i.e. a government may have a set strategy and priorities, or c) *process driven* i.e. fulfillment of consultation process, areas that legally or administratively require Head of Government/Cabinet approval, or a programmed update on a particular area etc.

Most OECD countries are set up well to support reactive and process driven policy implementation, with an understanding of what the role of the centre of government is within this process. The ongoing challenge and one of the key factors in successful delivery performance is *what challenges does the centre of government face to become pro-active facilitators of performance delivery?*

**Figure 1. Challenges faced by the centre of government in promoting delivery**



### **Challenge 1: Clear priorities with defined outcomes are not set from the outset.**

Policy-making and politics are not separate entities and rely on each other to inform decision-making and set direction. Most government programmes are set from the top, and this usually takes the form of a mandate or manifesto, which is then translated into policy commitments. There are limitations of electoral mandates: they can be high level, driven by populist policy demands and sometimes written in opposition and therefore a mandate built on “everything that is currently wrong”.

By definition you cannot prioritise everything, but priorities are not set in a vacuum either. Priorities might not be evidence based, can rely on ideology or personal bias and will certainly reflect complex political climates. As such, the priority setting process will always slip towards too many diverse headline items. The role of the Head of Government in identifying and communicating the “real” priorities is vital. The challenge for the administration is then to build consensus around realistic policy responses to address these priorities.

### **Challenge 2: Priorities can remain high-level and visionary and are not underpinned by clear measures of success.**

Setting priorities is a vital part of demonstrating what is important to the Head of Government, but this needs to be supported by clarifying pace and ambition, most commonly through indicators or targets. Planned measures of success are important in demonstrating two things: 1) what the government is planning to achieve over a set period of time; 2) a clear measure that determines whether the government has been successful or not. For a variety of reasons, these targets might not always be clearly defined at the outset. If not set early enough, the policy process can lose focus. political ambition, scale of the problem and capacity of the delivery agencies.

### **Challenge 3: Policy commitments are defined by budgetary resource allocation rather than outcomes to be achieved.**

Policy “announcements and initiatives” are often made on the basis of resources available i.e. “10 million will be given to Ministry of Health”. Allocation of funds rather than clear outcomes to be achieved or planned can become the guiding factor. Once priorities are set attention turns immediately to resourcing and the question of additional funding arises. Resources alone do not lead to successful delivery and should not be the limiting factor in defining the outcomes, yet disagreements over allocation of resources can sometimes cloud the real issue.

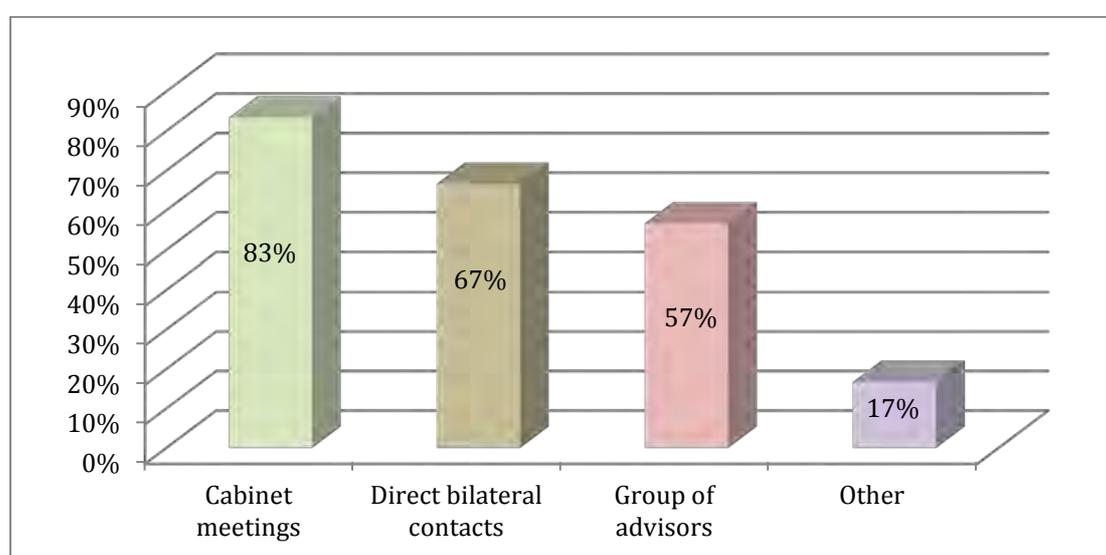
### **Challenge 4: Policy makers do not clearly define the problems they are trying to solve and consequently the administration struggles to identify solutions.**

Successful policy implementation emerges from a combination of the political (setting an overall vision and strategic objectives) and the technocratic (policy design, evidence and plans). If the problem and necessity is not well understood, the solutions presented will be limiting. This will ultimately affect the quality of decision-making by the Head of Government/Executive and can lead to disconnects between the political level and civil service because the latter is perceived as not trying hard enough to find innovative solutions.

**Challenge 5: There are no clear set systems or data mechanisms that pro-actively report directly to the Head of Government on priority issues.**

When a government programme is not driven by a defined set of priorities, the decision-making process is usually driven by a bottom up information flow from departments to Cabinet that lacks a global view. Sometimes, even where there are clear priorities, the system lacks the flexibility to handle reporting at the level of the initiative as a whole. Ad hoc reporting combined with no clear feedback loops can mean that the success or failure of an initiative is only apparent at the end of a budget cycle. The result being very limited time or opportunity for the Head of Government to be intervene on key priorities (and perhaps the policy output being declared a success regardless of the outcome).

**Figure 2: What are the principal channels through which the Head of Government discusses policy issues?**



**Challenge 6: Government structures are organised to deliver in silos rather than on horizontal priorities, with the capacity of delivery partners unknown.**

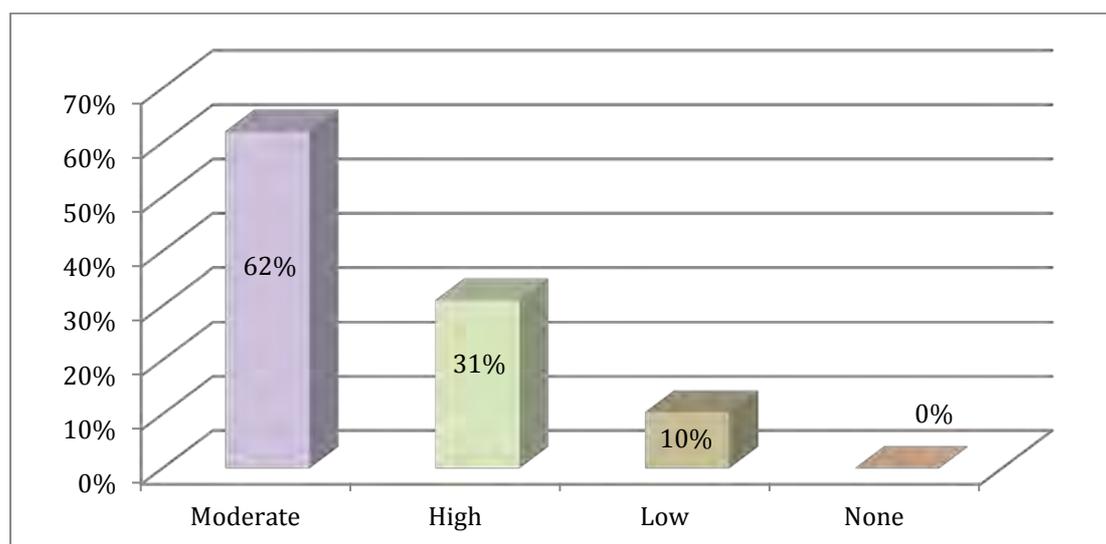
One of the most important questions, rarely asked when implementing policies, is: is the government set up to deliver this agenda? Often, ministries are structured in silos with a clear understanding of their operational responsibilities for core services, such as health and education, but struggle to flex themselves to engage with other ministries in delivering a horizontal priority. While the centre of government already plays an important role in co-ordinating the wider policy agenda, there are a huge number of structural factors that inhibit real coordination and that are not immediately apparent; hence despite good intentions, departments and agencies find themselves unable to respond as they would like to.

**Challenge 7: Taking a centralised approach to setting the government agenda can lead to resentment across wider government.**

While the centre of government may be responsible for co-ordinating policy implementation on priority issues, operational delivery itself will always be through others. The OECD survey showed that whilst 70% of countries responded that their centre of government was responsible for co-ordinating policies, only 31% of the countries surveyed felt they had high influence over ministries to actually co-ordinate (see fig 3). Building a

coalition through communication and engagement is important in driving delivery and relationship building and is a core skill requirement for those in the centre of government. Part of building a coalition is about identifying the right people within the ministries to engage with (especially at a senior level), but it is also about embedding a culture of delivery throughout government structures - supporting line ministries to understand the methods being used.

**Figure 3: How much influence can the centre of government exert over line ministries to encourage them to co-ordinate with each other?**



**Challenge 8: Lack of clear accountability on cross-cutting priorities allows departments to “dump” agendas back on the centre.**

Lack of clear lead accountability and little established co-ordination experience across ministries on cross cutting priorities have led to a more prominent role for the centre of government. The challenge is that ministers often end up focusing on their own objectives and plans, with cross cutting priorities becoming an afterthought rather than a core activity. Without clear systems to assign lead responsibility and accountability, the centre can become the lead “by default” rather than by design. Lack of clear delivery plans also tends to allow departments to step back from complex agendas.

**Challenge 9: Monitoring policy implementation at the centre of government is largely a “passive” information gathering exercise and performance assessment is framed in the context of tasks to be checked off a list.**

While priorities and policy commitments are determined at the national level, implementation will be devolved to line ministries and agencies. The role of the centre of government then becomes one of monitor. Work plans are widely used to implement government programmes and generally developed at ministry level. They often set out detailed work streams; i.e. consultation processes, timetables and identify responsible owners, however what defines these plans as limiting is the very level of detail.

But receiving an update as to whether detailed actions are being taken doesn’t always allow for a true assessment of whether the intended outcome will be met. The centre is supposed to be actively supervising implementation but ends up being swamped by detailed reporting information.

**Challenge 10: Using standing committees and inter-ministerial bodies as primary tools to resolve policy delivery issues alone is a habit but not always the most effective option for complex projects.**

In a “large number of countries including France, Germany and Italy the expectation is that disagreements should be resolved at the level of ministerial committees, and that differences of opinion should come to the Head of Government and Council of Ministers to be reported and noted, rather than being arbitrated by the Head of Government”. The role of the centre in this context is practical, managing the standing committees in the form of agenda setting, scheduling and ensuring that procedures have been followed.

There are a number of limitations with using ministerial and standing committees as the forum for addressing performance on policy. Firstly, formal structures like ministerial committees are highly procedural and limited in scope by not allowing for detailed discussions or data analysis of particular policy issues. The committees are time sensitive and discussions take place on information with a different focus each time, making it harder to track priorities. Secondly, there is a missed opportunity for discussion with senior officials and those who are actually developing and implementing policies, with only 40% of countries holding pre-cabinet meetings with ministry officials. Thirdly standing committees are often made up of people who are there to represent the views of their line ministries and therefore may not feel direct responsibility/ownership of the priority area.

**Challenge 11: Centres of government have a limited role (or limited capacity) in challenging the substance of policies, with their role confined to policy co-ordination.**

Challenging policy-making is an important function of the centre of government. Some countries, for example Australia, address this through specialised units with a remit to assess the feasibility of medium to high-risk policy proposals. There is clearly a role for the centre of government in supporting the design of policies in relation to strategic objectives and priorities. Planning the design of policies early on and as a means of delivering the strategic objectives and priorities of government allows for alignment of different structures and delivery across government. At the same time, playing this role fully requires analytical skills that many centres of Government might not have in house, which can consign them to less active role in the policy development process and limit their ability to lead on delivery of policies that they have not influenced.

## SUMMARY

### CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING DELIVERY FROM THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT

- 1: Clear priorities and outcomes expected are not set from the outset.
- 2: Priorities remain too high-level and visionary and are not underpinned by clear measures of success.
- 3: Policy commitments are defined by budgetary resource allocation rather than outcomes to be achieved.
- 4: Policy makers have no incentives to explore innovative solutions.
- 5: There are no clear systems or data mechanisms that report directly to the executive on priority issues in an integrated, cross-sectoral way.
- 6: Government structures are organised to deliver in silos rather than on horizontal priorities, with the capacity of delivery partners unknown and knowledge sharing difficult.
- 7: Taking a centralised approach to setting the government agenda can lead to resentment across wider government.
- 8: Lack of clear accountability on cross-cutting priorities can lead departments to “dump” complex agendas on the centre.
- 9: Monitoring policy implementation at the centre of government is largely an information gathering exercise and performance assessment is framed too narrowly as “completion of tasks”.
- 10: Using standing committees and inter-ministerial bodies as primary tools to resolve policy delivery issues is not dynamic enough for complex strategies.
- 11: Centres of government have too limited a role in challenging policies, with their role confined to policy co-ordination, and/or they have too little analytical skill in-house.

## CHAPTER 2.

### KEY ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE CENTRE'S CAPACITY TO DELIVER PRIORITY STRATEGIES.

This chapter sets out how countries can use their centre of government to enhance the performance of priority strategies, taking into account existing institutional frameworks and structures and bearing in mind the challenges already highlighted. It has been compiled based on identified challenges in delivery and current practices in different countries.

Of course, there is no “one size fits all” solution and the delivery function within centres of Government should be developed according to national contexts - but there are some areas where due consideration would result in more successful delivery of policies. This paper identifies four areas where the centre of government needs to be actively involved and recommendations for action:

- **Priority setting**- set a strong foundation for delivery and choose priorities that are outcome focused and will make a difference to citizens lives;
- **Planning** - plan to monitor and performance manage implementation as part of the policy design phase; understand the drivers of change required;
- **Organisation of government**- organise the centre of government and Civil Service to progress the strategic objectives and priorities; and,
- **Communication and engagement** - have a strategy that builds buy-in and support from delivery agents to achieve priorities.

Figure 4: Areas of influence for the centre of government in supporting delivery of priorities



These four areas appear in some form in the structural organisation of centres of Government across OECD countries. However, the opportunity for success in driving priority policies lies in the explicit involvement of the centre of government in each of these areas.

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## 1: Identify the priority areas reflecting the vision and strategic objectives – stay focused!

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**1.1 Establish high-level national strategic objectives.** An overall vision is an important part of setting the government's agenda and signals their contribution to the country's long-term prosperity -- these are normally politically led. However, greatest success lies in supporting the overall vision with strategic objectives, (medium term), and priorities (short to medium term). Taking some time to think about what the government's strategic objectives are is an important planning tool. It allows for the whole of government to plan at the beginning of a budget cycle and/or parliamentary term the delivery of these objectives.

**1.2 Choose the priority areas – make them outcome based.** The priorities should reflect the strategic objectives, but may also include: high profile topics, areas that are failing or areas of personal interest to the Head of Government. They should be small in number without over-burdening the civil service. What is apparent is that where clear priorities are set, everyone's role and objective becomes clear -- working towards the delivery of the same outcomes. But, centres of government can only be effective when the Head of Government stays fully focused on the short - medium term priorities (3 years at least), and does not lose interest after quick wins.

**1.3 Strong political leadership in setting the priority areas.** One of the key questions for the centre of government is whose priorities will be monitored? In practice, priorities can have different origins. Is it the *Head of Government* (e.g. Brazil, Minas Gerais), the *Cabinet* (e.g. in Malaysia, priorities are set through Cabinet workshops), *Coalition government* (e.g. UK Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister jointly decided on the priorities) or *Ministries* (e.g. Netherlands Delivery Unit used to monitor goals set by line ministries).<sup>1</sup>

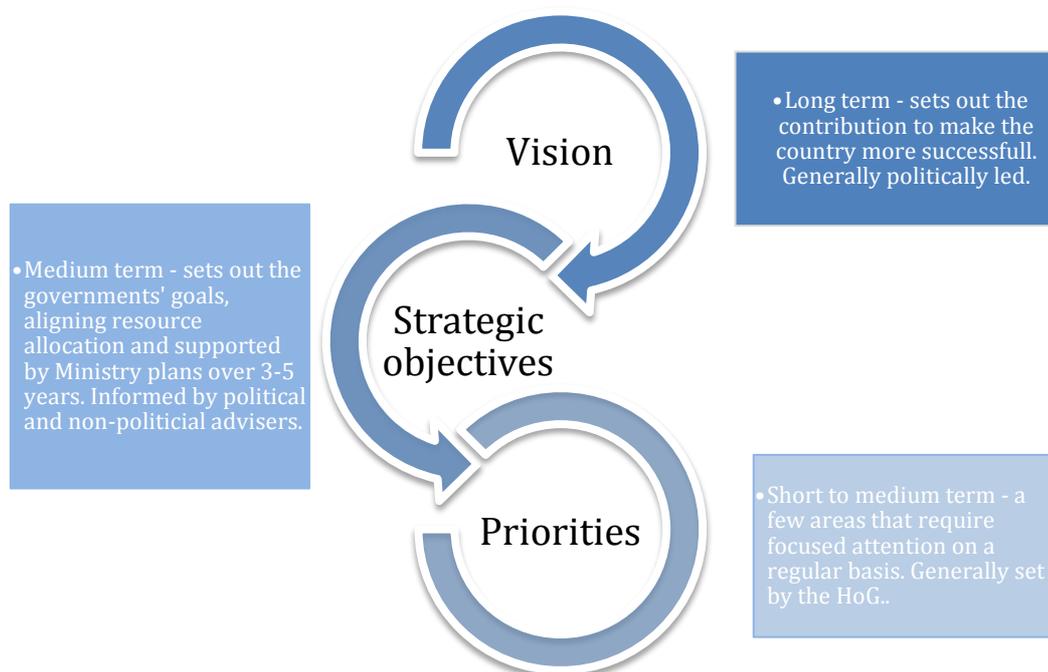
Notwithstanding whose priorities are being tracked, a visible and strong political leadership in setting priorities signals *internally* (i.e. civil service, delivery agents) the areas that the Head of Government/Executive requires focus on. Strategic objectives on the other hand send a clear signal *externally* (to citizens) of areas where citizens should expect improved outcomes overall. Using the Centre of government to focus on delivery of priority areas should not translate into a gap in oversight on other policy/service areas, which should continue through other government management structures.

**1.4 Link the high-level agenda setting process to performance management.** In countries where Heads of Government/Executive have shown a strong emphasis on setting the strategic direction, there is an equal interest in managing performance on these areas. For example, in Australia the Department of the Prime Minister has both a Strategy and Delivery team at the centre of government, working on creating high level plans for the priority strategic areas that are credible with departments and influence how they work.

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<sup>1</sup> Gold, Jennifer, 2014, Institute for Government, International Delivery: Centres of government and the drive for better policy implementation.

Figure 5: Ideal government approach to setting the delivery priorities



#### Key actions for the centre of government:

- Support the Head of Government to develop the strategic objectives and priority areas, possibly via dedicated strategy and delivery teams that work together but with different responsibilities;
- Identify and include areas of service failures to the Head of Government (using data performance) to signal where real impact can be generated for citizens; and,
- Build a support coalition around the priorities and strategic objectives, both technocratic and political.

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## 2: Develop and design policies to deliver the priorities

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**2.1 Plan how the outcomes will be achieved.** Once the government agenda is set (overall vision, strategic objectives and priorities identified) it needs to be translated into potential programmes and policies. Not all priority areas will require new policies and it may be that a change is required instead to existing policy. Whilst developing policies is largely a function of line ministries, the centre of government should take the role of monitoring implementation and ensuring delivery is planned for in the policy design phase.

To ensure a cohesive story between the strategic objectives and policy-making, policy development should always start with assessing the need for the policy by asking questions such as: how will this policy support the government's strategic objectives and priorities?

What problem is this policy trying to solve? What outcomes for the citizen will this policy achieve? How will this policy be delivered?

## **2.2 Use policy and delivery labs to drive innovations in planning and delivery of priorities.**

Delivering cross cutting priorities requires the involvement of a number of different line ministries, agencies and wider stakeholders, but competing agendas and different ways of working can inhibit the process of working together to deliver. At the same time creating a culture of innovation requires a safe space to allow collaboration, ideas generation, and analysis of complex problems.

Dedicated labs at the Centre of government are one of the ways countries have successfully chosen to address these issues, bringing together relevant experts and stakeholders in one space for a set period of time.

The lab concept can be used at key points and operated by the Centre of government to:

*Identify the priority agenda* – set up open days inviting a significant number of participants across society (media, opposition the general public) to a series of open days to gather opinions on the proposed targets and plans;<sup>2</sup>

*Plan the delivery of the priority* – develop key deliverables (incl. clear targets), delivery plan (with clear actions), achieve stakeholder buy-in and establish funding; 6-8 week process, 20-30 people from all relevant line ministries, full time, co-location; and

*Innovate during the implementation of the priority* – find innovative solutions to obstacles in delivering the priority areas. The lab should include the same people that developed the plan – who understand the reasons and purpose behind the key deliverables. Ideally, implementation responsibility remains with the same people that created the plan. This creates an exceptional investment of the participants in the delivery of the plan that they worked so hard to develop<sup>3</sup>

### **Key actions for the Centre of government:**

- Support the development of policies for priority areas - build an evidence base of citizen experiences; understand requirements of different groups and what the current issues are; and
- Facilitate large policy and delivery labs – use them at different points.

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<sup>2</sup> This approach was successfully used by Malaysia who invited up to 20,000 participants.

<sup>3</sup> Daly Eoin, Seelan Singham, 2012, "Delivery 2.0 The new Challenge for governments"

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### 3: Plan the delivery of priorities at the policy design stage

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**3.1 Use delivery plans to focus attention on each priority area.** Formalising the delivery of priorities and creating internal transparency is an important part of focusing attention of government structures. One of the ways is to formalise the ambition and pace of delivery through the development of a delivery plan. The plan needs to be developed in a timely manner and needs both high level political and technocratic lead sponsorship. There is always the danger with plans that once developed they are forgotten, however, when developed with managing performance in mind they play an important part.

It is important to remember that the delivery plan is not the goal in itself rather it is the development of the individual components that is important, for example the delivery chain and performance indicators.

At a minimum the plan should include:

- *Articulate its purpose* – which priority area is the focus and why?
- *Delivery chain* – who are the main actors and do they have the capacity to deliver?
- *Success indicators and performance measure* – how will performance be assessed?
- *Key actions and stakeholders* – what needs to be done, by whom and what relationships matter the most?
- *Data collection* – how will the data be collected to track performance?
- *Leadership and governance* - who is in charge?<sup>4</sup>

**3.2 Establish ambition by setting measure of success from the start – supported by data streams.** Most countries have a system that manages the whole of government performance and this is mainly demonstrated through high - level ambition setting, for example some form of Public Service Agreements externally, linked to resource allocation internally. This approach works at a high level and is important in showing the overall direction of the Government over the budget cycle - giving taxpayers a clear overview of how their money is going to be spent. However, to actively manage the delivery of priority strategies more specific measures are necessary. Most commonly countries have set targets and identified indicators of success, and using these as a means to assess performance of the priority strategies.

When establishing measurements of success they should be developed with a clear focus on:

- *Relevance* – what outcome is the organisation trying to achieve;
- *Attributable* – the activity measured must be capable of being influenced by actions of delivery partners/agencies/line ministries;
- *Well-defined* – clear, unambiguous definition of what will be measured so data can be collected consistently;
- *Comparable* – with either past periods or similar programmes elsewhere;
- *Timely* – produce data regularly enough to track progress<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from UK Delivery Unit Template.

### Key actions for the centre of government:

- Support the development of a delivery plan – but ownership remains with line ministries. The role of the centre is to ensure a robust plan is set in place and their role thereafter is one of assessing performance against success measures, through data; and
- Build an assessment framework that includes clear measurable elements, with trajectories, targets and other relevant success indicators.

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### 4: Ensure the capacity exists and the system is set up at its best to deliver the identified priorities

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**4.1 Strengthen the delivery chain at all levels.** Capacity building often focuses on internal central government structures and reforms to the civil service. However, it is just as important to strengthen the supporting delivery chain, i.e. the people who actually deliver the policies. Part of this picture building process involves questions like a) what is the existing capacity to deliver? b) What is currently being done well and c) what needs improving? Where capacity is weak it may be necessary to build new capacity, for example.

**4.2 Set up a dedicated delivery team - focusing on a few priorities only.** At the same time as strengthening the delivery chain it is necessary to embed a culture of delivery across line ministries; moving from process driven policy implementation to outcome-focused performance management. Most countries' Centre of government monitor implementation of some priority policies, however the weakness lies in the lack of active performance management of these areas.

Setting up a dedicated team in the centre of government that employs specific strategies in performance management is an important tool. This structure may not be permanent and over time the function of this team may change according to the agendas of different heads of government. One of the key features of these teams is that they do not replicate the overall government performance management system but focus on a few priorities only. Often their location (at the centre) and set up (reporting directly to the Head of Government), allows them to operate outside of the formal confines of government structures, giving them increased flexibility to operate.

For a delivery unit to be successful they should be built on the following factors:

- *Clear remit* – focus on performance managing a few priorities and success measures (6-12 max);
- *Size* – they should be small and each priority should have dedicated leads. Large delivery units may cause resentment if they begin to “creep” in to the work of the civil service and start getting the credit for it;

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Battye, Jonathan, 2009, “Ten lessons from the performance management framework in England and thoughts for the future”.

- *Leadership* – that is credible with a track record in delivery, has the ability to access the Head of Government/Executive and can build coalitions and work through others;
- *Staffing* - mixture of seconded and civil service staff; allocated specific responsibilities and with key skills of problem solving and collaboration;
- *Political sponsorship* – they should report directly to the HoG; without HoG sponsorship a delivery unit cannot challenge performance and navigate potential conflicts with line ministries;
- *Data driven* – to credibly challenge delivery partners on progress of priorities, performance assessment has to be based on concrete data, otherwise it just becomes subjective opinions; and,
- *Location* – the delivery team should be in the same building as the HoG for ease of day-to-day interaction. Arguments are often made for delivery teams to sit in the Ministry of Finance; however, this confuses the role of the team. The delivery team is not there to monitor the use of resources but rather the delivery of priorities.

**4.3 Ensure credible technocratic leadership at the centre of government.** Civil service leadership is an essential part of ensuring continuity in services and in pulling everyone in the same direction across different ministries and strategic objectives. Countries use both formal and informal structures to appoint leadership to head the technocratic structure i.e. civil service. These posts are generally civil servants but appointed on temporary contracts, for example in Australia and New Zealand. A good working relationship between the technocratic and political leadership is essential for delivering the government's agenda. Even where institutional frameworks require civil service appointments, in reality the PM has an informal role in approving these appointments, for example in Canada.

**4.4 Make sure the centre of government is resourced with a mixed skills set.** The capability of the centre of government to engage and provide sound advice, and challenge other ministries also requires staff with mixed skills sets. For example, in Spain there is a 50/50 split between civil servants and political appointees and in Denmark most of the professional staff are seconded on 2-3 year contracts. Bringing in varying skills set at different times of a government programme is an important step in ensuring fresh perspectives to performance. The UK delivery unit took the approach of co-location during the development of the delivery plan, where a member of the line ministry physically sat in the team, rather than consulting on the plans via set meetings and email. The biggest advantage of this was the lead ministry had investment in the plan and therefore ownership.

**4.5 Align the allocation of resources to deliver the strategic objectives and priorities – create a seamless delivery system.** Priorities are not always new government agendas: they are often just areas highlighted for extra attention. Where a funding stream is not obvious for a priority area there should be scope to use existing resources more flexibly; governments often allocate resources to departments for broad initiatives rather than specific projects. Allocating resources for the strategic objectives rather than line ministries creates an invaluable focus for government structures to work towards the same objectives.

For example, the US government required agencies to develop 5 year strategic and annual performance plans and submit them for review to the Office of Budget Management (set up in the centre of government). In the past, the UK has used a dual system of external

accountability through published Public Service Agreements at the high level and internally through individual Ministerial business plans, submitted to the Treasury.

#### **Key actions for the centre of government:**

- Assess the capacity of organisational structures to deliver, conduct a capacity review - but do it quickly (4-6 weeks);
- Set up a small dedicated team to focus delivery issues with a role to monitor and drive policy implementation/service change in priority areas;
- Align the existing monitoring and challenge capabilities of government institutions i.e. finance ministries, budget offices, and management boards with the centre of government on priority areas;
- Commission high-quality information that is data driven from line ministries to inform the decision-making process; and
- Embed a delivery culture across government by involving others in the methods used by the centre of government and holding specific training days and using methods such as co-location.

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### **5: Actively manage the implementation and performance of the identified priority areas**

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**5.1 Create reporting systems that are efficient and as light touch as possible.** There is a need for more active involvement of the Head of Government and wider decision makers in monitoring policies during implementation. Current practice limits involvement to the end of the policy cycle i.e. implementation is complete. Of course, there is always the danger that centre of government involvement in managing and monitoring performance just adds an extra layer of bureaucracy and overlaps with other management reporting systems. However, the role of the centre of government should be to supplement existing systems and not duplicate - with clear roles and functions defined from the start.

**5.2 Set up structures for regular meetings and develop short but useful information notes.** Clearly, the centre of government can play a more active role in sourcing the right information for the Head of Government to evaluate performance. One approach used in some countries is the commissioning of regular notes that shows progress of priorities, based on established data streams. For example, in New Zealand one of the roles of the Policy Advisory Group at the CoG is to update the PM on a 6 monthly basis, assessing the progress of specific policies. The UK used a simple traffic light system for bi-annual reports (to the HoG) on progress of priorities.

One of the advantages of this approach is that the centre of government can pre-determine what information the Head of Government needs and will receive. More regular updates also allows for the Head of Government to understand where intervention is necessary to refine and review policies.

**5.3 Monitor the progress of priorities using data; don't wait till the end of implementation phase; use data to predict, monitor and manage performance.** Establish an assessment

framework to measure the delivery of priority areas understood by all involved, with real time data that shows the impact of policies in real time. Building trajectories of expected performance based on data offers a useful way to understand performance during implementation, both what works and what doesn't work.

**5.4 Build a data picture -- don't expect it to just exist.** Information and data that supports decision making for the Head of Government/Cabinet usually comes from line ministries, with the role of the centre being limited to quality control. As such, the information can be very fragmented. However, to credibly assess performance and challenge those accountable for performance you need to develop and identify the right data streams — consideration needs to be given to: a) what information will accurately show performance of the priority areas? b) how can this information be collected? This argues for strong skill sets within the centre's delivery teams, possibly seconded from departments or from outside government.

**5.5 Problem solving and unblocking obstacles to delivery during implementation - make use of the data.** If the data shows that the priority is not progressing as expected and discussions with delivery partners reveal there are obstacles in delivery, then there should be a process for refining and reviewing the policy. There is a role for both a) the Head of Government/Executive in taking decisions to change the direction of the policy, and b) the centre of government to develop a more detailed picture of why the policy is not progressing as expected. The centre of government should use its own delivery team to support the line ministry in conducting a review to understand what the limitations are with the existing policy and develop solutions.

#### **Key actions for the centre of government:**

- Develop an assessment framework, and collect relevant data; assess the administrative burden of the data collection and agree with departments on what is really essential;
- Provide performance assessment of priority areas regularly: monthly, quarterly and bi annually – make it interesting, short and useful;
- Problem solve early by using the data to highlight potential issues early on in implementation - review and refine policies if they're not working;
- Support delivery ministries by conducting in depth, time specific reviews to understand and remove obstacles to delivery where data is showing weak performance; and,
- Set regular ministerial meetings to manage performance on each priority, starting with setting the agenda and agreeing on information requirements. If possible, the meeting should be chaired by the Head of Government and attended by the leader of the delivery team and accountable political and civil service leaders.

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## **6: Build a coalition and actively engage with people to deliver the priorities**

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**6.1 Manage conflicts with key players i.e. Line Ministries and Ministry of Finance.** The centre of government often faces accusations of being heavy handed and getting involved in

areas that they don't understand, or creating unnecessary work. Part of the response to this is strong political sponsorship and a clear operating framework with no mission creep. However, due attention should also be given to the credibility of the leadership of the centre of government in both technical expertise but also "soft" skills of being able to build relationships and manage conflicts. This is an important issue as a credible leader with contacts will be able to communicate directly with his/her counterpart in line ministries to resolve issues quickly.

One possible conflict that should also be actively managed is the relationship with the Ministry of Finance, who are often "guardians" of performance management in public expenditure. For finance ministries the immediate concern is always that "new priorities" will translate into "more money", however the centre of government should not get involved in resource allocation and lobby the Ministry of Finance for additional resources. The starting point for the centre tends to be that money has been allocated and exists, as the priority areas should be derived from or support strategic objectives that also guide budgeting.

**6.2. Make friends and get support – from the highest institutional levels.** When trying to obtain change and accelerate service delivery it is important to not create unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles by criticising existing efforts. Often the priority areas are the most difficult and approaching the delivery issues as a "critical friend" with aligned objectives is a useful tact. Such an approach will also help to find champions and supporters - both political and technocratic - of efforts from the centre of government. This can be further enhanced by reaching out to those outside of government who are/will be affected or have an interest in the policy area.

**6.3 Communicate early and create transparency and accountability – but not blame.** One of the most important aspects of performance management from the centre of government is that line ministries should know how and what they will be held accountable for when performance managing priority policies. There should be named accountable leads, both ministerial (for example Secretary of State) and technocratic (for example Permanent Secretary of line ministries). Part of this process is about being transparent about the assessment framework and sharing regular assessment and update notes from the centre to the Head of Government.

While the centre of government should be transparent about the final assessment they should remain firm in their assessment of priorities and not be influenced by protests from line ministries. No doubt, there are sensitivities to be managed and a line ministry seeing their lead priority flagged as "red" can cause resentment. But highlighting problems in delivery should not be about assigning blame, rather it should be about gathering the right people to think about what needs to be done to achieve the desired outcome.

Involvement of external stakeholders should also be considered, although judgment will be required as to which information can be disclosed - particularly if it compromises delivery with Ministries. But keeping stakeholders in the loop is an important part of the process. Indeed delivery may be dependent on some of their actions and therefore communicating progress could assist in affecting their behaviour.

#### **Key actions for the Centre of government:**

- Identify senior key players in government both political and technocratic and build a coalition;
- Communicate early how line ministries will be held accountable and make the process transparent; and

- Assessment of performance on priorities should be transparent but the final assessment decisions should remain with the leader of centre of government/delivery team.

## **SUMMARY**

### **KEY ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT'S CAPACITY TO DELIVER GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

- 1: Identify the priority areas from the vision and strategic objectives – stay focused and keep reminding those involved why these were chosen!
- 2: Develop and design policies to deliver the priorities.
- 3: Plan the delivery of priorities at the policy design stage.
- 4: Ensure the capacity exists and the system is set up at its best to deliver the priorities.
- 5: Actively monitor the implementation and manage the performance of the priorities – make a difference in real time, don't wait till the end of implementation!
- 6: Build a coalition to deliver the priorities – make friends, assign responsibilities and hold people accountable – avoid blame!

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