Institutionalized Partisan Advisors in Canada: Movers and Shapers, Buffers and Bridges

by

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Abstract

The study of professional policy workers abounds with examinations of non-partisan public service policy actors, but offers much less systematic empirical study of appointed political staffs. This dissertation provides a comparative analysis of a subset of appointed political staff, termed herein as partisan advisors, whose primary functions are policy related. It documents the historical rise and contemporary policy activity of partisan advisors working in ministers’ and first ministers’ offices in three Canadian cases at the federal and sub-national levels (British Columbia and New Brunswick). Partisan advisors are important subjects of study given their privileged position in close proximity to ministers and at the very nexus of political-administrative relations but also due to their unique potential contributions as partisan-political policy workers.

The dissertation offers a new theoretical framework to model and explicate partisan advisors as one of many sources of policy advice that circulate within ‘advisory systems’ and as privileged policy actors able to participate in policy formulation. Two models flowing from the framework facilitate the examination of the substantive and procedural aspects of partisan advisors’ policy formulation and advisory activity respectively. Interviews conducted with ministers, deputy ministers, and partisan advisors in all three cases reveal that, to varying degrees, partisan advisors have emerged as policy professionals who engage in important but often overlooked policy activity. Partisan advisors were found to be consequential to the provision and distribution of policy advice within their advisory systems as well as the specification and refinement of policy during development. Important variance was reported both within and among the cases that provides new insights related to how partisan-political actors within government engage in policy formulation, the configuration and operation of advisory systems, and the impact partisan advisors can have on the traditionally bilateral political-administrative relationship.

Keywords: Political-administrative relations; partisan advisors; policy advice; policy formulation; complementarity; policy success
To my family and friends
who make me the richest of men.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADM</td>
<td>Assistant Deputy Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.C.</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Deputy Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECO</td>
<td>Executive Council Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMO</td>
<td>First Minister’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon.</td>
<td>Honourable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEDS</td>
<td>Government Electronic Directory Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Ministerial Assistant in minister’s office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Memorandum to Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of Legislative Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Minister’s Office</td>
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<td>N.B.</td>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPM</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPG</td>
<td>New Political Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP’s</td>
<td>Operations Committee of Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAM</td>
<td>Public Administration and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCO</td>
<td>Privy Council Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMO</td>
<td>Prime Minister’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;P</td>
<td>Priority and Planning Committee of Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSB</td>
<td>Public Service Bargains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rt. Hon.</td>
<td>Right Honourable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBS</td>
<td>Treasury Board Secretariat</td>
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

The equilibrium among political and administrative actors in Westminster style government is suggested to be in jeopardy. Canadian and international scholars alike have argued the fundamental 'bargain' underpinning the relationship is broken or adapting (Lodge, 2010; Savoie, 2003a). Others suggest governance arrangements are evolving towards an altogether new model of 'New Political Governance' (Aucoin, 2008a; 2010, 2012). Appointed political staffs, particularly those in the employ of first ministers, figure prominently in these claims. They are institutionalized components of contemporary core executives and key instruments of the 'political arm' of government (Aucoin, 2010, p.73-77; Osbaldeston, 1987; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2011). As such, they benefit from privileged access to decision makers and have emerged as potentially influential policy actors in their own right. Yet, little theoretical or empirical Canadian policy scholarship has been undertaken to explicitly examine these actors. We know little about the nature and scope of their policy work or how that activity may impact political-administrative relations (White, 2005; Benoit, 2006). In Canada, political appointees at the federal level working in ministers' offices are known as 'exempt staff' due to their exemption from public service regulations governing the standard hiring and employment of public servants. Ministers, as set out in the Public Service Employment
Act¹, are entitled to hire ministerial office staff from outside of the public service to assist them in the discharge of their duties. As their various titles at federal and provincial levels allude to - ‘Executive assistant’, ‘ministerial assistant’, ‘press secretary’, ‘senior policy advisor’ and ‘chief of staff’ – they perform various communications, administrative, and policy advisory functions. Those politically appointed staff who serve in policy advisory capacities, termed herein partisan advisors², are the subject of this dissertation.

Partisan advisors are important subjects of study in part because of their privileged position in close proximity to ministers and at the very nexus of political-administrative relations (Halligan, 1995; Zussman 2009; Hood, 2000). Their place within the core executive compels a re-evaluation of several foundational aspects of political-administrative relations. Partisan advisors have precipitated a shift from the traditionally unmediated bilateral relations between ministers and senior public servants to a tripartite structure (Zussman, 2009b, p. 13), or what has been more colourfully termed the ‘ménage a trios Canadian’ (Hood, 2000, p.196; Bourgault, forthcoming). Partisan advisors have also reinvigorated the debate about the appropriate degree of ‘neutral’ versus ‘responsive’ competence in public administration. That is, on the one hand they serve as instruments to potentially increase responsiveness of public servants to the will of elected officials through an ability to “buttress the capacity of politicians in relation to public servants” (Aucoin & Savoie, 2009). On the other, they represent potential sources

¹ Public Service Employment Act (S.C. 2003, c. 22, ss. 12, 13, s. 128(1)) “A minister, or a person holding the recognized position of Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons or Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, may appoint an executive assistant and other persons required in his or her office”. The respective provincial terms are set out in Chapter 3.

² For the purposes of this dissertation the term ‘partisan advisors’ will be used to define remunerated political appointees employed by a minister of the crown at the federal or provincial level with an officially acknowledge policy advisory role. It excludes other types of ‘exempt’ political staff who do not play a primary policy advisory function (i.e. clerical staff, communications staff etc). The term also excludes political staff employed in non-ministerial offices such as the Senate (save those who work for a senator appointed to cabinet), for private members of legislatures, or in the constituency offices of elected officials. The term ‘partisan’ is used to distinguish between policy workers (including the public service) that may engage in ‘policy-politics’ whereas non-partisan public service cannot engage in ‘partisan-politics’ (Kernaghan, 1986; Overeem, 2005). The term partisan as it applies to this study is further specified in chapter 2 of this study. Campbell (1988b, p.267) styled Canadian partisan advisors as ‘amphibians’ to capture their combined partisan and policy making activities.
of politicization through the displacement of public services in policy making or its ability to provide ‘free and frank’ non-partisan policy advice (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a, 2007b; Hood, 2000, p.187; Zussman, 2009a; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Aucoin & Savoie, 2009).

Greater study of partisan advisors is also important for reasons beyond their impact on political-administrative relations. As core executive actors they benefit from unique opportunities to proffer policy advice, participate in policy formulation, and interact with a broad range of policy subsystem actors. The study of partisan advisors can thus be usefully extended beyond its traditional focus on accountability regimes (or lack thereof) to considerations of their functions and impacts as policy workers (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2011). Finally, partisan advisors are important subjects of study precisely because they are partisans. As so-called ‘statutory orphans’ (Benoit, 2006) they are exempt from public service statutes that prohibit public non-partisan service policy actors from engaging in partisan-political policy work. As such, they provide opportunities to gain insight into how partisans within government approach policy work, participate in governance activity, and potentially contribute to policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a; McConnell, 2010b). The need and paradoxical benefit of partisan actors within government is aptly summarized by a former principal secretary to a Canadian prime minister who explained:

Partisans bring creativity; public servants provide perspective. The political arm makes things move; bureaucratic routines prevent errors. Both kinds of counsel are necessary but in Canada we are now in danger of doing permanent damage to the concept of a neutral civil service. Paradoxically, a strongly partisan personal office is the best way to defend an apolitical public service. Good advice necessitates different kinds of expertise. (Axworthy, 1988, p.248, emphasis in original)

This study takes a comparative approach in examining partisan advisors as policy actors. It explores such actors in three cases, at two levels of government (federal and sub-national), as well as at multiple institutional locations within those cases. Interviews were conducted with ministers, deputy ministers, and partisan advisors from ministerial and first ministers’ offices. This facilitates comparative assessment and ‘triangulation’ of the policy advisory and formulation activity of partisan advisors and their potential impacts related to political-administrative relations. The information collected is also contextualized by theoretical and empirical insights from
extant Westminster studies. The principal arguments advanced in this dissertation from analysis of the data collected are that:

a. From a historical perspective partisan advisors in all three cases, to varying degrees, demonstrate a pattern of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization.

b. Current models of policy advice fail to capture the partisan-political dimensions of policy advice, notably the policy advisory activities of institutionalized partisan advisors termed here as ‘partisan-political policy advice’.

c. Partisan advisors’ policy advice is frequently applied as an overlay to existing advice from the public service or other sources and plays a significant and under-examined role in ‘advisory systems’.

d. Partisan advisors can be important contributors or impediments to complementarity between political and administrative elites and can be effective linkages and resources for both components of modern democratic polities.

e. Institutional location is a key determinant of how partisan advisors engage in policy formulation, but must be coupled with considerations of the content and processes by which such formulation activity is undertaken.

f. With respect to (e), Partisan advisors’ often serve as key interfaces for the integration of exogenous policy inputs into government but such activity is subject to variation by institutional location.

g. Partisan advisors are important contributors to formulation activity that extends beyond determinations of political feasibility to include a broad spectrum of substantive and procedural formulation activity.

h. Partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activity is a means by which ‘process’ and ‘political’ types of policy ‘success’ can be facilitated (McConnell, 2010a).

Each of these arguments is examined in detail and their elaboration forms the basis of the dissertation.

**Prevailing Models of Political-Administrative Relations**

Any study of the policy activity of partisan advisors is well served to pay due attention to the larger political-administrative framework within which they exist and operate. Governance arrangements at the elite level have been a focal area of study in the field of public administration and politics and continue to animate key debates today
(Agere, 1999; Aucoin & Savoie, 2009; Campbell, 2007; Connaughton, Sootla, & Peters, 2008; Demir & Nyhan, 2008; Jahan & Shahan, 2008; Larson, 1999). This introduction does not provide an in-depth examination of the numerous approaches and models that have been advanced. Full texts continue to be devoted to the subject and particular approaches (see Overeem, 2012). Rather, the objective here is to situate readers within the literature, to contextualize the study of partisan advisors, and to acknowledge the framework and assumptions that guide the particular approach underpinning this dissertation.

One of the longest standing approaches casts political-administrative relations as dichotomous (Svara, 1999). The respective spheres are to be separate with a clear division of labour between the two sets of actors. In theory, the dichotomy is parsimonious, straightforward, and highly functional. Elected officials are the decision makers and career public servants provide non-partisan policy advice and loyal implementation. The works of early American public administration pioneers are ritualistically cited in the dichotomy’s gospel as a core component of Progressive era reforms designed to remove excess partisanship, patronage, and political corruption from public administration (Goodnow, 1900; Wilson, 1887). The dichotomy for some is a ‘founding myth’ of public administration (particularly American public administration) based on a misreading of early scholarship (Svara, 1999; 2001). Others employ it as a straw man argument against which to offer revised approaches aimed at improved depictions and explanations of the ambiguity, overlap, and porous boundaries that characterize political-administrative relations (Svara, 2006; Van Ripper, 1984). For some the prescriptive value of the dichotomy remains despite the concepts clear descriptive and empirical limitations (Overeem, 2012). There is however little doubt that dichotomy has been thoroughly weakened and the search for alternative models that better capture the complex and differentiated interaction patterns of the two sets of actors has been ongoing for some time (Carboni, 2010; Mosher, 1968; Putnam, Aberbach, & Rockman, 1981; Hansen & Egersbo, 2002; Jacobsen, 2006). The dichotomy’s specific applicability in the Canadian case has been questioned due to the Canadian hybridization of U.S. and U.K. approaches to government. As Campbell (2007:380) observes, “public service tradition in the United Kingdom did not place anywhere near this degree of emphasis on the dichotomy of policy and administration”.

5
Others suggest that while problematic the dichotomy’s ethos remains of value (Aucoin and Savoie, 2009). In his comprehensive review of the leading alternatives to dichotomistic approaches Overeem (2012, Chapter 5) usefully groups a voluminous body of alternatives into four principal challengers:

- Quasi-alternatives
- Typologies of political-administrative relations
- Unifying concepts
- Reconciling strategies’

Quasi-alternative approaches confirm duality in political and administrative spheres but offer new specifications or revisions to how that separation should be understood. A good example is the emphasis on ‘policy’ versus ‘operations’ advanced as part of the New Public Management (NPM) suite of reforms in substitution of distinctions of ‘politics’ and ‘administration’. Another example being approaches rooted in principal-agent terms (Waterman & Meier, 1998). The second category ‘typologies of political-administrative relations’ groups approaches that allow for variation and potential reversal of traditional hierarchy between politics & administration and can be grouped into two main sub-groups. Overeem (2012, p.115) subdivides this category into two groups. The first, those based on the allocation of tasks among the two sets of actors (see for example Aberbach et al., 1981); the second based on multiple dimensions typically consisting of (a)symmetries of power, hierarchy, and distance/closeness or fusion/separation between politics and administration (see for example Peters, 1987). To this group we can also add those of the ‘public service bargain’ (PSB) approach that assess the explicit or implicit arrangements arrived at to govern relations between the two sets of actors (Schaffer, 1973; Hood, 2001; 2002a; Hood & Lodge, 2006; Lodge, 2010; Savoie, 2003a; Hondeghem, 2011; Politt, 2009). The third category of ‘unification’ approaches are argued to involve models that reject the practical and conceptual distinction of a dichotomy and deconstruct such distinctions seeking to fuse politics and administration through concepts such as ‘governance’ (Overeem, 2012, p.107). The argument being, boundaries that previously demarcated the political from the administrative have collapsed along with others (e.g. public/private) when considered as part of ‘governance’ or ‘government’ activity rather than based on discreet politics/administration terms. The final category is that of so-called ‘reconciliation’
approaches. These reject the dichotomy and seek to replace it by other relational concepts that are less antithetical (Overeem, 2012, p.107). The leading example in suggested to be Svara’s ‘complementarity’ approach which understands the politico-administrative relations as consisting of both overlapping and separate activities and values (Demir & Nyhan, 2008; Demir, 2009; Svara, 1999, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). This study adopts the complementarity model to anchor its study of partisan advisors as actors within the political-administrative relationship.

Complementarity is based on a typology that sees prevailing models of political-administrative relations as a product of potential combinations along two dimensions: (1) level of political control of administrators by elected officials; and, (2) degree of distance and differentiation between elected officials and administrators. The ‘political control’ dimension refers to the capacity of politicians to set direction/maintain oversight\(^3\). The second dimension relates to the professional and independent capacity of bureaucracy in policy formulation/implementation (Svara, 2001; Carboni, 2010). Svara’s (2006a) operationalization of potential models along these twin dimensions produces what he terms the ‘standard ‘and ‘extreme’ configurations of political-administrative relations. He situates complementarity within these options as the product of discreet and overlapping activity undertaken by both sets of actors (see Figure 1 below, with complementarity represented by the dotted circle). Complementarity draws largely on the idea of overlapping roles but incorporates elements from three other basic political-administrative configurations (autonomous, separate, and responsive) as surveyed by Svara (1999; 2001; 2006a, b; 2007). Svara (1999, p.678) explains:

> The complementarity of politics and administration holds that the relationship between elected officials and administrators is characterized by interdependency, extensive interaction, distinct but overlapping roles, and political supremacy and administrative subordination coexisting with reciprocity of influence in both policy making and administration.

\(^3\) Aucoin (1990:121) explicitly points to political appointees as an instrument to secure political control over the bureaucracy suggesting them one of the “initiatives to control bureaucracies in order to ensure that their policies are implemented as intended".
Complementarity means that politics and administration come together to form a whole in democratic governance.

The approach thus acknowledges the existence of discreet spheres of activity as captured by some separation of roles and values and autonomy in the activities that both sets of actors undertake. It however allows for duality, with both spheres overlapping and interacting in both policy making and administration (Demir, 2009, p.877). For Svara, complementarity results from the simultaneous co-existence of control of administrators by elected officials and distance and differentiation between elected officials and administrators. Public servants shape policy by giving it specific content and meaning and politicians monitor bureaucratic performance (Carboni, 2010, p.92-93; Svara, 2001, p.179).

Figure 1. Potential Models Political-Administrative Relations: Standard (shaded) and Extreme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Distance and Differentiation Between Elected Officials and Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulated Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucratic Regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicized administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Svara (2006a, p.956, p.968).

The complementarity model was chosen for a number of reasons. Svara (2006a, p.969) cites the Canadian system as one of two examples used to illustrate the blending of the two key dimensions that combine to produce complementarity. Quoting at length from the Government of Canada’s Guidance for Deputy Ministers (2003), he notes the document’s strong reference to independence and responsiveness in the provision of public service advice to ministers. Campbell contends Canadian public administration and management scholars have long characterized the relationship between
administrative and political elites as one of ‘synergy’ (Campbell, 2007; 308; c.f. Porter, 1965; Granatstein, 1982). As support, he cites former Clerk of the Privy Council Gordon Robertson who in defending the presence and participation of senior officials at cabinet committees suggests it fosters a “blending of roles” between the political executive and senior officials which strengthens “that requires mutual confidence and awareness of their differences” (Campbell, 2007, p.380; c.f. Robertson 1973, p.449-451). Most importantly, complementarity’s twin dimensions, ground this study’s examination of partisan advisors in a strong theoretical foundation. As Savoie reminds us the terrain between political and administrative actors remains disputed. With the bureaucracy “expected to be both independent and subordinate to elected officials and, as well, politically sensitive but not politicized. Thus the territory is fraught with uncertainty, if not pitfalls” (Savoie, 2003, p.3). Complementarity is thus well suited to examining how such seemingly paradoxical needs are reconciled and how partisan advisors contribute, if at all, to that reconciliation. Complementarity has been criticized as too elastic for empirical study or for failing to account for power relations between the two sets of actors (Harmon, 2006; Overeem, 2012). However even its critics acknowledge it has emerged as the strongest alternative to dichotomistic approaches (Overeem, 2012, p.124) and has proven its utility for empirical study of elites (Carboni, 2010; ‘t Hart et al., 2003).

Canadian Political-Administrative Relations
Currents of Change

While the above points to longstanding debates related to the normative or empirical state of political-administrative relations, debates must increasingly take place against the backdrop of an argued shift from public administration to ‘governance’. There is little disputing that Canadian public administration is in flux. Globalization, increased complexity of policy issues, media and advanced communications technologies, and a seemingly endless number of non-state actors are just some of the factors complicating the milieu in which government governs in the 21st century (Peters & Savoie, 2000; 2003; Aucoin, 2010). Canada is not alone, noted scholars of public administration and management both here in Canada and abroad have argued that public administration and management (PAM) has in fact evolved through three dominant modes – public administration and management, new public management,
and new public/political governance (Aucoin, 2008b; 2012; Gow, 2009; Osborne, 2006). This slow drift has seen traditional PAM models based on Weberian notions of hierarchy and command and control give way to modes of governance characterized by greater interactivity in socio-political public policy-making (Kooiman, 1993), policy making through networks (Atkinson & Coleman, 1992; Howlett, 2002; Lindquist, 1992; Montpetit, 2003b; Rhodes, 1996), a 'hollowed out' government (Howlett, 2000; Milward & Provan, 2003; Weller, Bakvis, & Rhodes, 1997). In short, the argument is that traditional models of governing are being supplanted if not entirely replaced by governing through post-bureaucratic modes of governance (Campbell & Peters, 1988; Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Kernaghan, 2000; Page & Wright, 2007; Peters & Savoie, 1995; Pierre & Peters, 2000).

The so-called ‘Canadian model of public administration’⁴ represents the mainstream and prevailing view that sees public administration as hierarchical, accountable, transparent, and oversight-heavy whereby “elected officials are purported to be in charge, and the state plays a transcendent role in defining the public interest on the basis of shared values” (Hubbard & Paquet, 2010:2). Gow (2004) argues four key features characterize the ‘Canadian model’ public administration:

• strong political control, restrained by the federal system, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, autonomous parliamentary agents and public opinion, a strong legal framework, backed up by the Charter and the courts;
• an autonomous non-partisan, professional public service;
• a tradition of moderation and pragmatism with both political and public service leaders; and,
• fairly strong tolerance for ambiguity, as present in federal–provincial relations, equal opportunity for minorities and new forms of government for the northern territories and self-governing native communities.

This provides the contours of a ‘Canadian model’ of public administration but there has been a seemingly endless parade of fashionable public sector reform movements of the twentieth century. The litany of reforms introduced with the aims of

⁴ For a review of the ‘Canadian’ model see (Gow, 2004), for a critique see Hubbard & Paquet (2010, p.2).
improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector in the late 1980s and early 1990s under what is frequently labelled NPM have been well documented both internationally and here in Canada (Aucoin, 1995). While its shape and form varied by jurisdiction, NPM can be broadly characterized as a public management reform essentially rooted in achieving efficiency and economies in public sector management and service delivery (Politt, 1990). The key elements of the NPM can be summarized as (Osborne, 2006):

- an attention to lessons from private-sector management;
- the growth both of hands-on ‘management’ – in its own right and not as offshoot of professionalism – and of ‘arm’s length’ organizations where policy implementation is organizationally distanced from the policy makers (as opposed to the ‘inter-personal’ distancing of the policy – administration split within PA);
- a focus upon entrepreneurial leadership within public service organizations;
- an emphasis on inputs and output control and evaluation and upon performance management and audit;
- the disaggregation of public services to their most basic units and a focus on their cost management; and the growth of use of markets, competition and contracts for resource allocation and service delivery within public services.

This suite of reforms included significant efficiency and managerial reforms but was not wholeheartedly embraced in Canada (Aucoin, 1995). It was, however, accompanied by a push from the political executive of the day, both in Canada and abroad, for greater political control over the formulation of public policy and service delivery (Aucoin, 1990; Savoie, 1994). As stated above, NPM reforms were adopted in part to avoid bureaucratic capture and to reassert political control. This involved an expansion of the political arm of government through institutional redesign including restructuring of cabinet committee structures but also featured the expansion of the use and function of partisan advisors. As Aucoin put it, political executives felt they needed to “end the bureaucracy’s monopoly position in giving advice to ministers by bringing in political staff as alternative or competing sources of advice” (Aucoin, 2008a:25). In short, institutionalized and expanded, partisan appointees became ‘counterstaffs’, an added source of advice and mechanism for political control (Peters, 2001, p.246).
Aucoin’s thesis is that such a search for responsiveness and greater political control of the machinery of government has continued unabated. Aucoin argues it has now reached an apogee and forms part of what he calls New Political Governance (NPG)\(^5\) (Aucoin, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2012). NPG includes a blend of ‘governance’, centralization of power, increased political involvement related to senior public service appointments, and a more pronounced and influential role for partisan advisors at the centre and line levels. The NPG approach has been advanced to capture the type of governing arrangement said to have emerged as a consequence of attempts to ensure political control as part of the larger ambit of the NPM agenda and subsequent reforms. Aucoin’s argument is in part that with NPG “Political leaders seek to reassert their democratic right to govern by taking control of the state apparatus. The structures of government everywhere are thus subject to pressures that serve to concentrate power at the centre” (Aucoin, 2008a, p.27). What is of particular salience for this study is that Aucoin’s model represents the first explicit attempt to relate manifest changes in modes of governance to a more pronounced function for appointed political staffs - particularly as a tool of the first minister’s office. Aucoin (2008a, p.27; 2012) set out the following key features of NPG\(^6\):

- The concentration of power under the prime minister and her or his court of a handful of few select Ministers, political aides, and public servants;
- The enhanced number, roles and influence of political staff;
- The increased personal attention by the Prime Minister to the appointment of senior public servants where the Prime Minister has the power to appoint;
- The increased pressure on the public service to provide a pro-government spin on government communications;
- The increased expectation that public servants demonstrate enthusiasm for the government’s agenda; and
- Integrating governance and campaigning.

\(^5\) Originally termed New Public Governance, Aucoin modified the name of the approach likely to avoid confusion with another model called New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006).

\(^6\) In his 2008b paper Aucoin did not include the integrating of governance and campaigning which does however appear in a revised work (Aucoin, 2012). For the purposes of this dissertation they are both included as part of the NPG model.
Moreover, Aucoin (2008b, p.15) goes as far as to argue that:

[It has] now reached the point where the most trusted political staff are as influential, if not more influential, with the prime minister in the determination of government policy as senior ministers or senior public servants, and as influential, indeed often more influential, with their departmental ministers as departmental public servants.

The NPG model is an approach aimed at understanding how political actors may attempt to dominate their public service counterparts, or at the very least, ensure responsiveness to their policy and operational will. However, Aucoin’s NPG model suffers from two key limitations. Firstly, it is virtually silent on the relationship of government (including the political arm) to actors exogenous to government proper. Hitching its wagon to the current policy chic notions of governance the NPG model’s is surprisingly bare in its reflections or understanding of how exogenous actors, through networks or other means, exert influence. Secondly, and of particular interest to this study of partisan advisors, Aucoin does not fully detail how influence is acquired or utilized. On the question of influence, Aucoin (2008b, p.16) suggests:

In addition to the increase in numbers of political staff, which by itself increases the number of interactions with public servants, the NPG has exacerbated the extent to which political staff are tempted to push their relationships with public servants to the point where they are, in effect, directing them whenever the exigencies of political management intersect with public administration.

The above review points to the ongoing quest for political control that has increasingly involved the deployment of partisan appointees and the expansion of the political arm of government. This study is precisely aimed at setting out a framework to examine how partisan advisors at first ministers’ and ministerial office levels are contributing (or not) to shifts in equilibrium as understood by the twin dimensions of complementarity as set out above.

Previous Canadian studies assessing the functional nature of political-administrative relations have taken a variety of approaches. Most have tended to focus on relations between key elite actors and institutions of government - cabinets, prime ministers, or public administration ‘mandarins’ (Aucoin, 1991; Granatstein, 1982; Peters
& Savoie, 2000; Punnett, 1977; Rhodes & Weller, 2001; White, 2005). Others have used comparative methods examining the state and perceived health of Canada’s Westminster system as compared to its British, Australian, or New Zealand counterparts (Campbel & Wilson, 1995; Peters, et al., 2000; Peters & Savoie, 2000; Rhodes et al., 2010; Savoie, 2008). Other students of Canadian government and public administration have sought to explore evolutions in cabinet decision-making ‘systems’ or ‘styles’ in Canadian governance (Bernier et al., 2005; Dunn, 1995; Dunn, 2002; Dupre, 1985; Savoie, 1999; Schacter, 1999). Others have directly set their sights on evolutions within Canadian political-administrative relations explicitly and/or called into question the workability of traditional model or ‘bargains’ (Savoie, 2003a; Savoie, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Zussman, 2008). Regardless of their preferred approaches these reviews have generally all reported significant changes to the patterns of interaction between cabinet, prime ministers, parliament, and the public service. Two related aspects of political-administrative relations in Canada have received significant scholarly attention. The first involves an argument that power has gravitated towards the ‘centre of government’, particularly the political-administrative apparatus around the first minister7. Secondly, attention has been cast to the nature of advice provision in the public sector. In particular, that the public service has lost a long-held monopoly on the provision of policy advice in contemporary governance. Partisan advisors, as policy workers, are germane to both of these strands of the literature.

Most fully developed by Savoie (1999, 2008), the concentration of power thesis8 suggests that the twentieth century has seen the steady displacement of parliament by the executive, followed by the displacement of the executive by the Prime Minister and a few select other ‘courtiers’ in what has been termed ‘court government’ (Aucoin & Savoie, 2009; Savoie, 1999, 2008, 2010). While not unique to its Westminster companions, Canada is argued to be even more susceptible to such a concentration of

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7 This center includes a handful of senior deputy ministers, central agencies like the Privy Council Office, as well as the first minister and their staff (Savoie, 1999).

8 As noted by White (2005) the theme of powerful first minister’s in Canadian political science has a long history that predates Savoie ‘court government model'.
power due to the limited restrictions placed on the Canadian executive and Prime Minister (Aucoin, 2010; Bakvis & Wolinetz, 2005; Bakvis, 2001). Scholars have however noted the presence of strong countermeasures to the dominance of the first minister and voiced scepticism of the thesis more generally. However, one analysis ranked Canadian Prime Ministers at the top in terms of their influence compared to their Westminster counterparts (O’Malley, 2007). Provincial government in Canada has also been subject to claims that it also is moving towards first minister centric governance. There exists substantially less analysis and empirical study of provincial cabinet and government in general. Existing studies have however documented an uneven pattern of centralization and concentration of power throughout Canadian provinces (Bernier et al., 2005; Dunn, 2006; White, 2005; Savoie, 2010). As the spotlight shifts towards examinations of first ministers and their ‘courts’, increased attention has focused on the potential accretion of influence to appointed political staffs at the federal and provincial levels (Aucoin, 2008a; Benoit, 2006; Dutil, 2006; White, 2001; 2005). NPG suggests that governance has become increasingly subject to partisan-political pressures. Appointed political staffs, particularly those around first ministers, are frequently used to buoy such arguments. Yet, little direct and systematic study has been undertaken to evaluate such contentions.

The second key theme that has emerged as a principle narrative in the evolution of Westminster and Canadian governance relates to perceived shifts in the sources and use of policy advice by elected officials. The argument being that any monopoly the public service may once have held related to the provision of policy advice has been thoroughly weakened (Rhodes & Weller, 2001:238, Prince, 2007; Campbell & Wilson, 1995). Extant studies emphasize the complex web of policy advisory sources that now dot the policy advisory landscape; an increasing number of which are located outside of government (Dobuzinskis, Howlett, & Laycock, 2007; Perl & White, 2002; Weller &

9 Some have astutely pointed out that while prime ministerial power in Westminster systems can be great, there are particular limits in the Canadian case, notably federalism, the charter of rights and freedoms and the day to day need for support from a cabinet and caucus in a parliamentary system (Bakvis, 2001; Thomas, 2003-4; White, 2005).
Bakvis, 1997; Wellstead, Stedman, & Lindquist, 2009). Policy advisors have been defined as an individual or group of persons employed by government to “investigate an area of critical public concern and to recommend a suitable course of action” (Jackson & Jackson, 2006, p.352; Verrelli, 2008, p.4). This definition is broad enough to allow for partisan advisors who are remunerated with public funds and as reviewed in greater detail in this study - are formally acknowledged sources of policy advice. This second key current of change is explored in greater detail in the next chapter. For introductory purposes these two currents of change underscore that partisan advisors are intimately connected to arguments that suggest political-administrative relations are adapting.

**Studying Partisan Advisors:  
Existing Approaches and Canadian Findings**

Canadian partisan advisors have typically been studied through qualitative interviews, historical examinations, and ex-post practitioner reflections (Aucoin, 2010; Axworthy, 1988; Benoit, 2006; Brodie, 2012; D'Aquino, 1974; Goldenberg, 2006; O'Connor, 1991; Savoie, 1983)\(^{10}\). The focus of the vast majority of studies has been on issues of accountability and the effect of political staff on the politicization of the public service (Aucoin, 2010; D'Aquino, 1974; Savoie, 2004a, 2004b; Sutherland, 1991). The limited studies that have in some way examined political staffs as policy workers paint a mixed and evolving portrait at the federal level. Campbell and colleagues early studies detailed limited partisan advisory policy capacity, even in the PMO (1988b; c.f. Campbell & Szablowski, 1979). One oft cited assessment claims by Westminster standards “as sources of policy advice political staff in Canada probably rank among the weakest. By and large a typical minister’s office tends to be unduly pre-occupied with picayune political matters” (Bakvis, 1997, p.114). King (2003) simply cites Savoie (1999) in explaining ministerial executive assistants as “a relatively junior position and enjoys

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\(^{10}\) It should be noted that the Savoie (1983), Plassé (1994), and Jeffrey (1978) studies also include basic quantitative survey analysis but primarily of a socio-economic nature.
neither the salary nor the status that the chief of staff position enjoyed in the Mulroney years (King, 2003, p.40)

Contemporary studies, almost exclusively federal, are significantly more generous in their interpretations of Canadian partisan advisors’ purchase in advisory and formulation activity. Benoit (2006, p.146) finding, exempt staff are “well placed to influence both the bounce and bobble of bureaucratic political interface and the pace and progress of public policy in Canada”. Additionally, Zussman (2009), Aucoin (2010) and Thomas (2008; 2010) all underscore significant advisory and policy related activity as well as influence. Their findings deal particularly with prime ministerial advisors but also to a more limited degree ministerial political staffs. Official documents from both the Privy Council Office (PCO) and the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS), as later examined in detail, formally recognize and clearly articulate ‘exempt staff’ as having various advisory and policy functions in official guidelines and ‘job descriptions’. How exactly these play out in the cut and thrust of policy development is however poorly understood. Further, little work has sought to comparatively examine Canadian partisan advisors in international context (Bakvis, 1997; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a). Finally, no systematic inter-provincial or federal-provincial Canadian comparative work on partisan advisors or even political staffs could be found11. In comparison, a growing body of studies in Westminster jurisdictions examines the policy and advisory functions of such actors. These studies generally rely on qualitative field interviews of current and former appointed political staffs, ministers, and public servants. Some have utilized survey-based quantitative analysis to supplement such qualitative methods (Connaughton, 2010a; 2010b; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a, 2011; Maley, 2000, 2011).

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11 Some studies do exist in relation to individual provinces political staffs but by and large do not focus on policy advisory or formulation activity (See Dutil, 2006; Marley, 1997). The largest body of province specific scholarship in this area examines chiefs of staff in the province of Quebec. Several historical studies and one contemporary study were found but these studies focus primarily on the socio-economic backgrounds of chiefs of staff and provide limited descriptive and exploratory analysis of their various ‘functions’ (See Maltais & Harvey, 2007; Plassé, 1981).
Zussman (2009b) offers a useful point of departure for this study through his review of ‘political advisors’ and the machinery of government in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Synthesizing various approaches and cases he offers four idealized analytical models to understanding the ‘fit’ of partisan advisors within political-administrative relations. These are: the collaborative, gatekeeper, triangulated, and hybrid (see Figure 2 below)\textsuperscript{12}. These models are clear advance on previous scholarship as they conceptualize partisan advisors within the executive of government. They were included in this introductory chapter to provide a base against which descriptive and analytical assessments undertaken herein can be compared against. Each flows from what Zussman terms ‘models of governance’, the various arrangements between ministers, public servants, and partisan advisors. The collaborative model hinges on a cooperative team style relationship between professional public servants and politically appointed partisan advisors whereby advice is tendered to the minister jointly. Zussman explains, “This model encourages political advisors and public servants to merge their expertise and collaborate in the development of policy advice, political strategy and managerial expertise” (2009b, p.14). Citing France’s cabinets ministeriels as a leading example but also Italy and Belgium, the collaborative model sees partisan advisors playing strong roles in policy development and advice including representing ministers at various stages of policy processes, speaking in the name of the minister, and even holding the right to sign official documents on the minister’s behalf. Zussman does however point out that in the majority of cases where the collaborative model is practiced, political advisors have no official authority over their public service counterparts (Ibid).

\textsuperscript{12} It should be noted that Canadian scholar Baccigalupo (1973) provided similar models over thirty years prior in a pioneering study on the role and functions of ‘chiefs of staffs’ in Québec. He set out three possible configurations of ‘écran’ (akin to Zussman’s ‘gatekeeper’ model) ‘braintrust’ (akin to Zussman’s collaborative model), and ‘staff spécialisé’ (akin to the triangulated model). Baccigalupo also provided graphical representations which reflect similar points about the various potential configurations as those of Zussman’s respective gatekeeper, triangulated, and collaborative models.
Figure 2. Three Models of Political Advisors and the Machinery of Government

A. Collaborative

B. Gatekeeper

C. Triangulated

Adapted from Zussman (2009b).

The gatekeeper model sees partisan advisors playing a ‘middleman’, or blocking function, restricting access to the minister as seen in Figure 2.B. Zussman does not elaborate at length on this model, he indicates it is “Characterised by a chain of command between political advisors and public servants. While not common as an institutional approach, the gatekeeper model tends to emerge in occasional bursts” (Ibid, 15). The gatekeeper model presents significant concerns related to accountability as well as the independence and neutrality of the public service often used to describe a healthy Westminster style public (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007b). Thirdly, the triangulated model represented by figure 2.C, of which Canada is said to operate under, involves public servants and partisan advisors acting as independent sources of advice flowing to the minister. Zussman (2009, p.14-15) explains that this particular approach is rooted in a belief that ministers benefit from ‘neutral’ public service advice as well as political advice in the discharge of their duties. These two types of advice are presented as compartmentalized and separate. Combining only when mutually beneficial but typically confined to their respective spheres of expertise. Zussman also provides a fourth and final ‘hybrids and outliers’ category to which various configurations that do not neatly fit the aforementioned categories or blended versions can be placed. Zussman notes that the hybrid variety has also been used in Canada with ministers’ offices using seconded public servants (particularly subsequent to a new government taking office) or permanent advisors in addition to their compliment of partisan advisors (Ibid). As ideal
types these models remain open to further specification and/or revision based on empirical study.

Scope and Structure of Dissertation

This small-n comparative study’s unique scholarly contribution relates to specifically assessing Canadian partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activity within the political-administrative nexus. This study does not aim to investigate and address all of the various activities appointed political staffs may perform. It proceeds through 8 chapters, and is broadly divided into two sections, focusing on partisan advisors at first ministers and ministers’ office levels respectively. This structure was adopted in light of the widely held scholarly position, as noted above, that first minister’s office partisan advisors are the most influential category of partisan advisors in terms of their policy activity (Savoie, 1999; Aucoin, 2010, 2012; White 2001, 2005).

Chapter 2 details the study’s research design, methodology, and theoretical framework. It situates partisan advisors within the broader literature on policy formulation, policy advice, and the twin currents of change foreshadowed above. Building on Svara’s (1999, 2001, 2006a, 2006b) complementary model and extant policy scholarship, four theoretical propositions are introduced. These propositions are used to generate a framework with two models elaborated for the analysis of the formulation and policy advisory activities of partisan advisors respectively. The chapter concludes by detailing the case selection rationale, data collection, analysis, and validation techniques used in this dissertation. Chapter 3 provides a concise but fulsome historical overview of the evolution of Canadian partisan advisors as a subset of political staff more generally. It does so in relation to first ministers and ministerial office level institutional location for the aforementioned reasons. The chapter documents the historical evolution of partisan advisors in the three cases included in the study arguing that in all three cases, to varying degrees, partisan advisors demonstrate a pattern of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization.

Chapter 4 deploys the first two propositions developed, buffers and bridges, to examine the policy advisory activity of first minister’s office partisan advisors. It
examines their potential direct contribution of content-based policy advice (buffering) as well as their integration of other sources of policy advice (bridging) within their ‘advisory system’. Chapter 5 deploys the second set of propositions, movers and shapers to examine first minister’s office partisan advisors process and substance-based policy formulation activity. Chapter 6 and 7 then apply the same propositions to an assessment of ministers’ office level partisan advisors’. Chapter 6 examines their policy advisory activity while Chapter 7 focuses exclusively on ministers’ office level partisan advisors policy formulation activities.

The concluding chapter distils the findings detailed in this dissertation with a focus on the implications they raise for the configuration and operation of advisory systems, policy formulation, complementarity, and notion of policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a, 2010b). The findings provide new insights that are used to refine the approach to modeling advisory systems, with a particular emphasis on improving their utility regarding the activity of partisan advisors therein. The considerable differences in advisory and formulation activity documented in the three cases are reviewed and are argued to represent stylistic preferences in how partisan advisors are used to secure complementarity. The chapter concludes by presenting some areas for future research.
Chapter 2.

Study Design and Method

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design utilized in this dissertation. The study centres around four overarching research questions. These questions motivated the development of theoretical propositions, case selection, and the semi-structured interview questions. This chapter introduces these four questions and links them to the literature on policy making and policy advice from which they were derived. Partisan advisors are situated within the larger literature on policy advice and formulation as well as the twin currents of change sketched out in the introductory chapter. Four theoretical propositions are then set out to facilitate the analysis of partisan advisors’ policy advisory and formulation activity. These propositions underpin the development of a framework consisting of two models generated to examine partisan advisors’ policy advisory and formulation activity respectively. The chapter concludes by detailing the study’s case selection rationale, data collection, analysis, and validation techniques.

Four Research Questions and Four Theoretical Propositions Concerning Politico-Administrative Relationships in Contemporary Policy Making

The principal aim of this study is to understand if and how partisan advisors are participating in policy work and the implications such activity raises for political-administrative relations. This study draws from the wider public policy, political science, and public administration and management scholarship in developing theoretical propositions and research questions. Theoretical propositions are used to narrow the
scope of inquiry and to frame the research undertaken (Yin, 2009, p.28). The four research questions driving this study are:

1. What, if any, policy making activities do institutionalized partisan advisors in Canada undertake?
2. To what extent is their participation in the policy making process affecting political-administrative relations?
3. Are the policy advisory and formulation activities of partisan advisors the same federally as provincially, and within first ministers’ offices versus ministerial level offices?
4. How do partisan advisors provide policy advice and how is that advice reconciled with professional public service policy advice used by elected decision makers?

A good research design stems from its relevance to the research questions (Yin, 2009). The use of qualitative methods for this dissertation derives from both practical considerations and normative assumptions. Quantitative statistical analysis leading to generalized findings is certainly legitimate and even desirable in some cases. It can however mask more in-depth qualitative findings related to meanings of actors’ responses. A qualitative research design will facilitate a 'deep' investigation of elite behaviour and opinion related to political advice and advisors’ policy work13. This study follows the method used by several Canadian scholars of elite political and administrative behaviour (Benoit, 2006; Savoie, 1999; 2003a; White 2005). This research project is interested in the lived experiences of political advisors themselves as well as those political (ministers) and public service (deputy ministers) elite with whom

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13 From a more pragmatic perspective while some international research on political advisors has utilized the survey research method (Connaughton, 2010a; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007b; Plassé, 1994), this research has been supported by the government under study thus facilitating greater access to political and administrative elites. This study did not benefit from such official government support.
they most frequently interact. Thus, the data gathering method most suited to this research was in-depth interviews\textsuperscript{14}. 

The complementarity approach to political-administrative relations presented in the introduction to this study guides the development of the framework for analysis detailed below. The framework includes four theoretical propositions arrayed along substantive (content) and procedural (process) dimensions for the analysis of partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activities respectively. Buffers (content-based advisory activity) and bridges (process-based advisory activity) facilitate the modeling and empirical study of partisan advisors policy advisory activity. The second set of propositions, movers (process-based) and shapers (content-based) are elaborated to facilitate separate and discreet analysis of these actors policy formulation activity beyond policy advice. Each of these propositions along with their derivation and utility is set out in detail below.

**Policy Making and the Function of Partisan Advisors Therein**

*Policy Making and Formulation*

There is a large and growing literature focused on developing frameworks, models, and taxonomies to better understand and explain the development of public policy which underpin more specific analysis of the role various kinds of policy advisors - including partisan advisors - therein. The vast number of approaches can usefully be grouped into two general categories of approaches the ‘rational comprehensive’ or the ‘network participatory’ (Scott & Baehler, 2010, p.26). The former emphasizes the nature of the policy making process and its relationship to applied problem solving. It typically

\textsuperscript{14} This particular dissertation involves comparative case studies of federal and provincial government’s further complicating issues of access related to large N survey research. Furthermore, the aforementioned quantitative studies have applied a mixed approach, which has generally supplemented survey data by in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews.
includes a heuristic device, such as the presence of specific ‘stages’ or a certain configuration of policy activity organized in a ‘policy cycle’ to usefully disaggregate policy making into discreet and sequential stages linked to the stages of problem recognition, alternative generation, decision-making, implementation and post-hoc evaluation. Policy making from this perspective is generally presented as a more or less rational and linear process involving some combination of issue identification, suggestions and deliberations on policy options, decision making, implementation of the selected course of action, monitoring, or evaluation of outcomes (Bardach, 2009; Brewer & DeLeon, 1979; Howlett et al., 2009; Laswell, 1971; Simmons & et al., 1974). The various stagist models are acknowledged as simplifications of the complexity of policy making in practice. Stagist policy process scholarship has certainly received many criticisms pointing to its inability to model the role of power in shaping the policy process, path dependence or oversimplifications, and overlaps among supposedly discreet ‘stages’ within the cycle (Dobuzinskis, 1992; Sabatier, 2007; Werner & Wegrich, 2007). However the model persists as a useful heuristic for approaching the policy making process and for its ability to provide much needed conceptual and organizational clarity. While debates continue as to the advantages and disadvantages of such models and various configurations of components therein, clarity can be gained through acknowledging the operative principle of applied problem solving that (explicitly or implicitly) underpins the various models (Howlett et al., 2009, p.12).

Each of the stages in the policy making cycle involves a range of actors, both inside and outside of government. The formulation stage is particularly germane to investigations of partisan advisors’ activities. This is because formulation is a stage in the policy process that is restricted to a small group of actors with the requisite knowledge and/or authoritative decision making powers to generate feasible policy options to be presented to decision-makers (Sidney, 2007, p.79). The input of various sources of policy advice may be marshalled from inside or outside of government on any given issue; however, policy formulation is dominated by elite decision makers within government including ministers and their partisan advisors in addition to their public service counterparts. As Jann and Wegrich (2007, p.49) explain:

Whereas the final decision on a specific policy remains in the realm of the responsible institutions (mainly cabinet, ministers, Parliament), this
decision is preceded by a more or less informal process of negotiated policy formation, with ministerial departments (and the units within the departments), organized interest groups and, depending on the political system, elected members of parliaments and their associates as major players. Numerous policy studies have convincingly argued that the processes in the preliminary stages of decision-making strongly influence the final outcome and very often shape the policy to a larger extent than the final processes within the parliamentary arena.

The formulation stage is thus a key conjuncture for political-administrative interactions related to the adjudication of potential policy options. It is also understood as the key phase during which the various sources of political and non-partisan ‘administrative-technical’ policy advice are reconciled and brought to bear in the formulation of potential policy options. As Birkland (2001, p.150) notes, formulation is “the process by which policies are designed, both through technical analysis and the political process, to achieve a particular goal”. Or, as Howlett et al. put it, “Policy formulation involves identifying the technical and political constraints on state action. It involves recognizing limitations, which uncovers what is infeasible and, by implication, what is feasible” (2009, p.112). Policy formulation has long been acknowledged as a key conjuncture for assessment with respect to what options may be most politically feasible and acceptable (Althaus, 2008; Majone, 1975; May, 2005; Weber, 1986). In terms of the general features and activities of policy formulation, Knoepfel et al. (2007) argue that policy formulation, or ‘programming’ as they call it, involves a range of general activities including:

- More precise definitions of policy objectives;
- Operational elements, which include the ‘instruments’ to be used to make the policy effective, a topic discussed further below;
- Political-administrative arrangements’ which involve the specification of the authorities whose duty it will be to implement the policy and the notion that such authorities need money and other resources to do this follows self-evidently from that point; and,
- Procedural elements, namely the rules to be used in the implementation of the policy.

Jones (1984:78) outlines some of the broad features of this stage, involving:
• Formulation need not be limited to one set of actors. Thus, there may well be two or more formulation groups producing competing (or complementary) proposals.
• Formulation may proceed without clear definition of the problem, or without formulators ever having much contact with the affected groups.
• There is no necessary coincidence between formulation and particular institutions, though it is a frequently activity of bureaucratic agencies.
• Formulation and reformulation may occur over a long period of time without ever building sufficient support for any one proposal.
• There are often several appeal points for those who lose in the formulation process at any one level.
• The process itself never has neutral effects. Somebody wins and somebody loses even in the workings of science.

The broad strokes of formulation outlined above clarifies that significant political and administrative interactions are undertaken during formulation. It also underscores that the potential for involvement of partisan policy advisors looms large given their privileged subsystem positions. Returning for a moment to the overarching framework of relations between the two sets of actors, the formulation stage also then allows for unpacking the complementarity approach to understanding interactions between the two sets of actors (Svara, 2006a, 2006b; 2001). As Hill notes, “attention to policy formulation is also important to avoid falling into the dichotomization of the policy process in which just two stages are highlighted: one in which politicians make policy and the other in which civil servants merely implement it” (2009, p.172, emphasis in original).

Inroads have also been made to further specify and group formulation into sub-stages. Policy scholars have usefully subdivided formulation into four stages including: appraisal, dialogue, formulation, and consolidation (Howlett et al., 2009, p.111, Thomas, 2001). The appraisal sub-phase consists of the identification, creation, collation, and appraisal of various forms of data and information related to a particular policy issue at hand and development of potential policy options in response. At this sub-stage, a variety of government and/or non-government actors may be involved. This sub-phase involves taking stock of existing policies and official positions related to an issue and setting a loose structure related to the parameters of the issue under consideration. The dialogue sub-phase consists of a range of potential structured or unstructured communications between the various policy actors related to the issue and solutions,
again this dialogue can occur both within and outside of government. This sub-phase can involve town halls, stakeholder engagement meetings, or more formal presentations from experts or consultants. The formulation sub-phase is the sub-phase at which public officials interpret the advice and information garnered from the previous stages. A more pronounced role for the given political context is taken into consideration and at this sub-stage initial options or responses to policy issues are initially developed. These options may take the form of draft legislation or regulations or the suggested use or adoption of other instruments. The consolidation sub-phase is the final sub-stage of the policy formulation process whereby dissent to the initial policy options may be vetted through formal or informal channels. Again, it is of note that the seemingly rational and linear formulation process is also subject to political interpretation and adjudication. It is precisely this political aspect of the formulation process that this study is interested in unpacking. These sub-stages empower further comparative assessment and greater specification as to partisan advisors’ potential involvement in formulation.

The second general category of approaches to policy making, so-called ‘network participatory approach’, focuses less on the process of policy making within government alone according greater emphasis to the interactions of ideas, actors, and institutions both within and outside of government in a policy system. As Scott (2010, p.26) puts it, “these approaches reflect an emphasis on participatory democracy and horizontal networks of influence rather than the vertical exercise of authority”. From this perspective, actors and the policy system within which they operate are the key variables. Various models have been developed based on which variable - actors, ideas, or institutions policy scholars argue to be most salient or based on various configurations that attempt to explicate their interactions within the larger policy system. For example, Scott and Baehler (2010, p.32-33) cite Sabatier’s advocacy coalition and Howlett et al. (2009) models as key examples of approaches from the network participatory category. This study adopts the former approach to enable exploratory analysis of the analytically discreet formulation stage for examination of if, how, and with what impact partisan advisors policy work may hold for that stage of policy making (Stebbins, 2001).
**Approaches to Policy Advice**

The second component of the framework advanced below moves the discussion of policy advice forward by combining ‘locational’ models of policy advice ‘systems’ (Halligan, 1995) with the aforementioned ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979) and ‘sharing truths with multiple actors of influence’ (Prince, 2007) models of policy analysis and advice. The latter two ‘ideal type’ models add to the ‘locational’ approach offered by Halligan (1995; 1998) by forcing greater analysis of how porous and pluralized advisory environments may impact substantive ‘content’ of policy advice as well as locational considerations. Policy advice more generally has been conceived of from two dominant perspectives. The first views policy advice as part of a larger policy making process, specifically, as part of the policy formulation stage of policy making explored above. As Halligan (1998, p.1686) puts it, this view sees policy advice as “covering analysis of problems and the proposing of solutions. It specifies structuring the problems, gathering information, analyzing, formulating options, and communicating the results. In this case policy advising has been equated with the policy formulation process”. This view motivated early scholarly attempts to classify and categorize advisory sources and components related to their position relative to government decision makers and policy making more broadly.

This ‘locational’ approach to policy advice was used to conceive of policy advice giving in market based terms, with three separate components - the supply of policy advice, demand via authoritative decision makers, and ‘brokerage’ consisting of matching supply and demand (Lindquist, 1998; Weaver & Stares, 2001). In this approach, the analytical activities and participants in the policy advice market are linked to the position held by actors in relation to the ‘market’ for policy advice more generally. The first set of actors, ‘proximate decision makers’, as authoritative decision makers act as consumers of policy analysis and advice. This group would include cabinets and executives as well as parliaments, legislatures and congresses, and other senior administrators/officials with delegated decision-making authority. The second ‘knowledge producers’ component located in a range of bodies internal and external to government including but not limited to academia, statistical agencies, and research institutes who provide the basic scientific, economic and social scientific data upon which analyses are often based and decisions made. The third set is composed of
those ‘knowledge brokers’ who serve as intermediaries between the knowledge
generators and proximate decision makers, repackaging data and information into
usable form (Lindvall, 2009). Thus, understanding the location where policy advice was
generated and interpreted for consumption by policy-makers was fundamental to early
attempts to categorize the activities of different actors.

As per Table 1, Halligan (1995) uses the twin dimensions of location and
government control to array the various potential sources of policy advice developed the
‘policy advice systems’ model. Of particular interest to this study, Halligan explicitly
includes the traditionally dominant sources of policy advice (professional public service)
as well as institutionalized sources of ‘political’ policy advice as important components of
‘good advice systems’. Outlining the standard approach to advisory systems Halligan
(1995, p.162) points out:

The conventional wisdom appears to be that a good advice system
should consist of at least three basic elements within government: a
stable and reliable in-house advisory service provided by processional
public servants; political advice for the minister from a specialized political
unit (generally the minister's office); and the availability of at least one
third-opinion option from a specialized or central policy unit, which might
be one of the main central agencies.

Halligan is not clear on whether the location of the third-opinion component is
necessarily exclusively administrative or partisan/political, or whether it could in fact be a
combination of both. However, he is clear to underscore that such political advisory
functions vary considerably by jurisdiction and by how senior such advisors are
considered within established machineries of government (Ibid). Nonetheless, the
potential role for political policy advisors (for instance, partisan advisors within central
first ministers’ offices or ministerial offices) is understood as a key component of the
policy advisory system. The policy advice systems model echoes early thinking about
the nature of policy advice that often contrasted ‘political’ or partisan-ideological, value-
based advice with more ‘objective’ or ‘technical’ advice and stressed the ‘technical’
nature of much advice (Radin, 2000). While the advice systems model explicitly
separates the political policy advice, it does account for both types of location-based
advice giving.
Table 1. Location of Policy Advice and Degree of Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Government control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service</td>
<td>Senior departmental policy advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Agency advisors /strategic policy unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal to Government</td>
<td>Political Advisory systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary advisory policy units (Ministers’ Offices,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Ministers’ Offices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parliaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. a House of Commons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Private sector/NGOS on contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community organizations subject to government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal international organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: adapted from Halligan, 1995).

In the Canadian context, this traditional approach of clearly compartmentalized political and administrative streams of policy advice is reflected in scholarship that is quick to point out that both federal and provincial cabinet’s “receive both partisan – Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) type – and policy/technocratic – Privy Council Office (PCO) type” input (Dunn, 2002, p.312). Moreover, Peters (1996, p.32) also notes in his review of policy capacity in Canada that political policy advisors are an increasingly common tool of advising systems with “The creation of political appointed officials to ‘shadow’ top career officials in Canada and elsewhere”. Halligan’s advice systems model was a significant improvement over existing approaches that tended to assess individual components or sources of policy advice. The model’s strength lies in the clear attention paid to the institutional location of the advisory source and relative levels of government control. Reflecting on shifts in the combinations and relative influence of the various locational components of advice, Halligan notes that while modern governing draws on all three streams of advice, “In terms of overall trends, the internal government category has expanded at the expense of the internal public service”(1995, p.58). Based simply on Halligan’s locational model partisan advisors can be theorized to be influential sources of policy advice simply based on their proximity to government and susceptibility to government control. Thus, again pointing to a need to better define,
conceptualize, and link political dimensions of policy advising to other types and
locations of policy advice.

The second principal perspective on policy advice takes a broader and open-ended
knowledge utilization approach focusing not only on the locational aspects of
advice giving but also the content dimension of policy advice. As Peters and Barker
(1993:2) explain, policy advice can be conceived of as a means by which government
“deliberately acquire, and passively receive … advice on decisions and policies which
may be broadly called informative, objective or technical” but also, as MacRae and
Whittington note, as “the introduction (and justification) of criteria for policy choice and is
thus not limited to ‘knowledge’ of empirical causal relations” (1997, p.12). This approach
adds an emphasis on the substantive content of advice in addition to the location and
process issues raised in the above models. To expand the utility of the policy advice
systems approach, greater emphasis on the content or substantive dimensions of advice
giving is imperative (Craft and Howlett, 2012). A comprehensive analysis of partisan
advisor’s potential policy advisory and formulation activities must therefore include
considerations of both content as well as location.

**Canadian Policy Advice in Motion: Shifting Sources and Patterns of Use**

From either of the broad approaches to policy advice set out above, sweeping
changes to the sources, content, and patterns of use of policy advice in Canada have
been well documented (Prince, 2007; Savoie, 2003a). The shift from the so-called ‘truth
to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979) model has been replaced by ‘sharing truths with many
actors of influence’ (Prince, 2007). The ‘truth to power’ model of policy advice has been
is a mainstay of Canadian political analysis and common parlance in both scholarly and
practitioner worlds (Doern & Phidd, 1992; Good, 2003; Hubbard, 2009; Savoie, 2003a;
Sossin, 2005; Zussman, 2009a). Fundamentally it characterises policy advice in largely
bilateral terms as the flow of expert evidence informed advice from public servants to
elected decision makers. In Wildavsky’s words “speaking truth to power remains the
ideal of analysts who hope they have the truth, but realize they have not (and, in a
democracy, should not have) power” (1979, p.12). In the context of Canadian
government this has traditionally involved “public servants tendering professional, non-
partisan advice to a leader, minister, or government of the day, advice that may well be critical of government thinking but which, nonetheless, public servants offer in a forthright and fearless manner” (Prince, 2007, p.170). The model is often associated with the so-called ‘golden age’ of the Canadian public administration from approximately the 1940s to the early 1970s (Granatstein, 1982; Savoie, 2003a). Elected political actors are seen to be the bearers of legitimate power flowing from democratic elections while a ‘truth’ however contentiously defined, was provided by a professional public service with years of experience, expertise, and technocratic mastery of government process. Savoie (2003b, p.62) describes ‘truth to power’ as based on a clear division of labour and differentiation between political and administrative elites based on a healthy respect for the responsibilities and obligations of each sets of actors. As he puts it:

Ministers knew that they were in charge, and they welcomed the advice of the senior mandarins. Senior officials, meanwhile, sought to serve their ministers well and did not hesitate to be forthright in their advice, even if the advice was not always welcomed.

Again, under this approach the public service is conceptualized as the primary if not sole source of policy advice to elected political actors. Prince’s review, like that of other leading Canadian and international scholars underscores the growing plurality of voices that populate the contemporary policy advisory landscape (Aucoin, 2010; Hoppe, 1999; Page & Wright, 2007; Page, 2010; Rhodes & Weller, 2001; Savoie, 2003b; Weaver & Stares, 2001). Prince argues that policy advice has evolved in concert with Canadian policy making practices and governance more broadly. He describes the contours of the modern policy advisory model in which senior public servants (2007, p.176-177):

inhabit a less anonymous and not so much career setting, offering advice, as one source among several others inside and outside government, to their ministers as well as to other federal departments and central agencies and perhaps to various external stakeholders. The advice senior officials give is generally palatable and responsive to their superiors’ wishes and commitments.

Prince’s adaptation of leading scholarly attempts to tackle advice systems summarized in Table 2 yields an insightful contrast of the two ideal models and their
theorized implications for advice giving and political administrative relations more broadly.

Table 2. **Two Idealized Models of Policy Advising in Canadian Government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Speaking truth to power of ministers</th>
<th>Sharing truths with multiple actors of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of policy making</td>
<td>Departmental hierarchy and vertical portfolios</td>
<td>Interdepartmental and horizontal management of issues with external networks and policy communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of Senior Career Officials</td>
<td>Knowledgeable executives with policy-sector expertise and history</td>
<td>Generalist managers with expertise in decision processes and systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of policy processes</td>
<td>Relatively self-contained within government, supplemented with advisory councils and Royal commissions</td>
<td>Open to outside groups, research institutes, think-tanks, consultants, pollsters, and virtual centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister/deputy minister relations</td>
<td>Strong partnership in preparing proposals with ministers, trusting and taking policy advice largely from officials</td>
<td>Shared partnership with ministers drawing ideas from officials, aides, consultants, lobbyists, think-tanks, media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Nature of policy advice       | Candid and confident advice to ministers given in a neutral and detached manner  
Neutral Competence | Relatively more guarded advice given to ministers by officials in a more compliant or preordained fashion  
Responsive competence |
| Public profile of officials   | Generally anonymous | More visible to groups, parliamentarians, and media |
| Roles of officials in policy processes | Confidential advisors inside government and neutral observers outside government  
Offering guidance to government decision makers | Active participants in policy discussions inside and outside government  
Managing policy networks and perhaps building capacity of client groups |


While advanced as abstract constructs of actual practice, the comparison effectively sketches some of the key trends shaping the ‘art and science’ of policy analysis and advice in Canada. The shift from bilateral ‘speaking truth’ towards the diffuse and fragmented ‘sharing of influence’ approach to policy advising paints a picture of policy advising that has become much more contested, involving a plurality advisory inputs with varying degrees of influence. It also represents a pronounced increase in the use and influence of exogenous sources of advice. Prince (2007), like Halligan (1995,
1998), includes partisan advisors (as ‘aides’) as one of several actors now sharing truths and influence in policy advice. He does not however detail or theorize on how such actors’ gain influence, undertake their advisory activities, or their relationship to other components of the model. This is due to his focus on the larger currents of change. Further, as his review is focused only on the federal advisory landscape readers are left to draw their own conclusions about the applicability of the ideal types to other cases. Lastly, Prince’s model only provides an outline of how the content of policy advice may have changed in addition to processes by which it is created and utilized.

**Partisan-Political Policy Actors and Policy ‘Success’**

As argued above, explicit study of partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activity holds potential for improved understanding of the sources, configurations, and operation of advisory systems. It may also represent an under-explored mechanism to facilitate of policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a, 2010b; Marsh and McConnell, 2010). Students of government and public policy have long noted how and if policies secure material or electoral fortunes for political partisans can influence assessments of success and failure (DeLeon 1988; de Vries 2000 & 2010). Scholars of policy failure like Boven’s, T’hart, and Peters (2001) specifically include a political dimension in addition to a ‘programatic’ one as a potential source of policy ‘failure’. They argue that political dimensions of failure consist of “the way policies and policy makers become evaluated in the political arena”, whereas the focus in programmatic assessments is “on the effectiveness, efficiency and resilience of the specific policies being evaluated” (Bovens et al., 2001, p.20). McConnell’s work investigating policy ‘success’ builds on the programmatic/political model adding a third ‘process’ dimension that he argues might also lead to policy success/failure (Marsh & McConnell, 2010; McConnell, 2010a, 2010b).

Program level failures relate to the substantive terms - as objectively or perceived to be delivering or failing to deliver expected material outcomes – as is typically the case with program failures. Programs, as McConnell (2010a, p.353) puts it, “are what governments do” … “They give concrete form to the generalized intentions of statements of policy. For example, health policy involves dozens of programs dealing with everything from ante-natal care through preventive medicine to death” (Ibid). The
second general source of policy success/failure that McConnell identifies is process based. That is, policies can only succeed as a result of policy being able to proceed from idea to implementation or successfully complete the policy ‘process’ (Bovens’ et al., 2001; Brandstrom & Kuipers 2003). Conversely, a policy may fail despite being successful on substantive ‘programmatic’ grounds. For example failure in legislative process in policy making unrelated to substantive components. As McConell (2010b, p.42) argues, “it has been clear that public policy is about more than just policy decisions or their impact on society, it is also about the process which produces policy”. A third and final source of policy failure/success identified by McConnell is ‘politics’. McConnell (2010b, p.47-49) categorizes successful policy tied to the politics level as that which enhances electoral prospects/reputation of governments and leaders; helps control the policy agenda and ease the business of governing; and/or sustains the broad values and direction of government. As he sums up on the relationship of politics and policy ‘success’:

It would be naïve to think that the processes of policy making, or the types of policies chosen, are devoid of the political interests of parties or government. Success and failures of programmes can have a bearing on elections (campaigns, support, outcomes), strategic direction of government (helping keep policy trajectories on course or knocking them off course), and leadership career pathways (helping turn leaders into ‘heroes’ or ‘villains’). (Ibid, p.31)

This study seeks to use the theoretical framework developed herein in an empirical examination of partisan advisors formulation and policy advisory activity for an assessment of its implications for political-administrative relations, policy scholarship, and policy ‘success’.

A Framework and Four Propositions for the Study of Partisan Advisors Policy Advice and Formulation Activity

The above review points to two critical issues. Firstly, the contemporary policy advisory landscape has been argued to have become increasingly contested. A plurality of advisory sources now dots the advice giving landscape. Consultants, stakeholders, think tanks, and various other sources of policy advice readily contest any public service
policy advisory monopoly that may once have existed (Prince 2007; Weller, 2000: Savoie, 2003a; Parsons, 2004). Partisan advisors are one such source of contestation. They are however a privileged actor due to their institutional location and relationship with decision-makers. As Zussman (2009b, p.25) argues:

They provide a challenge function and an element of contestability within the policy development cycle. Many other actors play this role as well, but only political advisors have the advantage of operating at the very centres of power. The norm is now for a minister to welcome and demand multiple channels of policy advice and political advisors are one manifestation of this trend.

How exactly partisan advisors contest public service advice is empirically unknown. For example, are partisan advisors contesting the ‘technical’ or ‘program’ considerations of policy advice or the ‘fit’ of departmental policy advice with the partisan-political objectives of the minister and/or government? At what point in policy advisory or formulation does contestation occur? Gaining an improved theoretical and empirically tested understanding of how partisan advisors contest policy advice is a principal aim of this study.

Secondly, policy advisory and formulation activity involve integration and coordination activity (Boston, 1992; Peters, 1998; Hamburger et al., 2011; Dahlström et al., 2011). That is, actors in policy subsystems can not only serve as direct sources of policy advice or input in formulation, but may also undertake integration and coordination functions in relation to other actors engaging in policy advisory or formulation activity. This type of coordination can involve activity within one sphere or the other, or involve activity that overlaps both political and administrative spheres. This is increasingly common and complex due in part to the proliferation of available sources of policy advice both endogenous and exogenous to government proper (Pedersen et al, 2011; Verhoest et al., 2010). Again, there is a dearth of empirical evidence or theory building.

Coordination is used in the Peters (1998:16) sense of ‘policy coordination’ that is more oriented towards policy formulation as opposed to ‘administrative coordination’ which pertains more towards implementation.
related to if, how, and with what impact Canadian partisan advisors are engaging in such integration or coordination functions. This applies equally to studies of advisory and formulation activity, despite mounting evidence from Westminster based studies pointing to such activities as core function of core executive actors including partisan advisors (OECD, 2011; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2011; Peters et al., 2000; Connaughton et al., 2008).

Using the four theoretical propositions of buffering, bridging, moving, and shaping Table 3 below introduces the conceptual framework that guides this study. An initial step towards greater specificity in the study of partisan advisors can be achieved by arraying their policy activity along substantive and procedural dimensions. This distinction figures prominently (implicitly and explicitly) in various extant studies of partisan advisors (See for example Connaughton, 2010; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a; Maley, 2000). Eichbaum and Shaw (2008) explicitly used such categories to operationalize their analysis of political appointees and politicization in New Zealand. The authors contend that appointed political staff can procedurally politicize public service advice if their activity, “intended to or has the effect of constraining the capacity of public servants to furnish ministers with advice in a free, frank, and fearless manner” (2008, p.343). They suggest procedural politicization of advice can manifest itself in two ways, first when “the advisor intervenes in the relationship between a minister and his or her officials” or secondly, when their conduct “is intended to or which has the effect of constraining the capacity of officials to tender frank, and fearless advice by intervening in the internal workings of a department” (ibid). Substantive politicization the authors explain, deals specifically with “an action intended to, or having the effect of coloring the substance of officials advice with partisan considerations” (Ibid, p.343-344). This study argues that this substantive/procedural differentiation is useful not only for analysis of potential politicization of public service advice, but can be extended to investigate policy advisory and formulation activities more generally. The distinction allows for categorization based on the substantive ‘content-based’ aspects of advisory and formulation activity as well as the procedural ‘process-based’ aspects of how that advice or formulation activity is undertaken.

Existing studies have documented partisan advisors engaging in various procedural activities such as coordinating, steering, delivering, monitoring, and funnelling. Conversely they have also been found to engage in substantive policy
activities including ‘coloring’, contesting, and initiating. This is by no means an exhaustive list but is indicative of a range of process and content-based activities that are readily identifiable in studies of partisan advisors in the Westminster literature\textsuperscript{16}.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Table 3. Conceptualizing Partisan Advisors Policy Work} & & \\
\hline
\hline
“Advisory” (One of many other sources of policy advice) & Buffers & Bridges \\
& Provide additional input into and commentary upon policy options provided to elected officials & Integration or ‘gatekeeping’ of policy advice from disparate sources \\
& (e.g. Provide partisan-political or ‘technical’ evidence-based policy advice) & (e.g. Integrating advice from public servants/experts to inform decision making) \\
\hline
“Formulation” (Actor with special access to elite decision makers) & Shapers & Movers \\
& Direct contribution to content of policy alternatives & Direct contribution to management of formulation processes \\
& (e.g. Explicit rejection of options based on political feasibility) & (e.g. Coordination of cabinet documents with public service) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Conceptualizing Partisan Advisors Policy Work}
\end{table}

Source: Author.

It confirms the utility of these dimensions as an appropriate point of departure to guide an investigation into the Canadian cases. The overall and individual components of the framework are elaborated in detail in the remainder of this chapter and subsequently used in the study to analyze partisan advisors’ policy activity.

Buffers and Bridges: Partisan Advisors Policy Advisory Activity

The Government of Canada’s top bureaucratic office, the Privy Council Office (PCO), in setting out the raison d’être of ministerial exempt staff underscores that ministers require both professional public service advice as well as political advice. PCO’s Governing Responsibly: A Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State explains:

The purpose of establishing a Minister’s or Minister of State’s office is to provide Ministers and Ministers of State with advisors and assistants who are not departmental public servants, who share their political commitment, and who can complement the professional, expert and non-partisan advice and support of the public service. Consequently, they contribute a particular expertise or point of view that the public service cannot provide. (Privy Council Office, 2011, p.45, emphasis added)

Thus, institutionalized partisan advisors are an officially recognized component of the policy advisory system. As this guide puts it, they are a complementary source of advice to that provided by the public service. The guide implicitly paints their advisory activity as political and not ‘administrative’ and states that the advice they provide is distinct from that of a non-partisan public service. However, the guide later suggest, the advisory role of partisan advisors includes a blend of both ‘traditional’ policy analysis functions as well as politically oriented policy work listing a range of activities such as “reviewing briefings and other advice prepared by the department; assisting the Minister in developing policy positions, including those that reflect the Minister’s political perspective” (Ibid). Similarly, TBS guidelines for ministers’ offices detail that a ministerial Director of Policy “is also responsible for advising and briefing the minister on all relevant policy issue” (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.66). It is clear that partisan advisors are thus potential sources of policy advice along both partisan-political as well as ‘administrative-technical’ dimensions.

As Weller (1987, p.149) points out, more generally advice is typically distinguished between policy and political types:

By ‘policy’ is usually meant technical and professional alternatives or the outcomes of ‘objective’ or ‘rational analysis. ‘Political’ is taken to refer to consideration of the likely electoral or media consequences of a course of action. The former is seen as substantive while the other is often regarded as more self-interested.
This study argues that, as Weller implies, such an approach to advice masks considerable policy advisory activity undertaken by partisan advisors within the core executive that is political and/or ‘administrative-technical’ in nature. In his study of policy advisory practices in Australia, Prasser (2006a, p.36) sets out the various characteristics of what he conceives as short-term ‘hot’ (political) and longer-term ‘cold’ (rational) forms of policy advising.

**Table 4. Comparing Rational (Cold) and Political (Hot) Advice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rational (Cold) Advice</th>
<th>Political (Hot) Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Based</td>
<td>Relies on fragmented information, gossip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Used</td>
<td>Opinion/Ideologically based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/neutral and problem solving</td>
<td>Partisan/biased and about winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Short Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive and anticipatory</td>
<td>Reactive/Crisis Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic and wide range/systematic</td>
<td>Single Issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealistic</td>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public interest focus</td>
<td>Electoral gain oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Processes</td>
<td>Secret/deal making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective clarity</td>
<td>Ambiguity/overlapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek propose best solution</td>
<td>Consensus solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Reproduced from Prasser, 2006a, p.36).

Although Prasser categorizes advice along two distinct categories ‘political’ vs. ‘rational’, the general situation he describes is one in which neither partisan nor civil service actors has an exclusive monopoly of one type of advice over the other. Applied to the Canadian cases included in this study, partisan advisors are theorized to potentially engage in (partisan-political) and/or (‘administrative-technical’) types of policy activity. That is, they may engage in ‘hot’, or as this study defines it below partisan-political policy advice, that the non-partisan Canadian public services cannot. Partisan advisors may also very well engage in ‘rational’, ‘cold’, or what is termed herein ‘administrative-technical’ policy activity. The latter is expected as a product of their policy related interactions with various non-partisan policy actors, such as but not limited to public servants.
As the TBS guidelines suggest ministers’ office ‘Directors of Policy’ are, “responsible, in collaboration with the department, for overseeing policy development on behalf of the minister” (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.66). This study seeks, in part, to test whether Canadian partisan advisors are involved in partisan-political and/or ‘technical-administrative’ types of policy advisory activity along substantive and/or process-based dimensions. The term ‘partisan-political policy advice’ is introduced here to set out the separate and distinct partisan-political form of policy advice that partisan advisors are theorized to provide. This type of policy advice involves the application of a political lens to policy analysis (Head, 2008; McConell, 2010). That is, policy advice activities that differ from the traditionally conceived policy advisory activities involving non-partisan, primarily technical, bureaucratic, rational and/or analytical policy analysis (Head, 2008; Radin, 2000)\footnote{The degree to which senior public servants are aware of political context and poses ‘political acumen’ has long been recognized and debated in studies of elites and policy making (See for example Campbell & Szablowski, 1979; Heclo & Wildavsky, 1974; Simon, 1957; Suleiman, 1984). Even allowing for such political awareness, appointed political staffs are hired to provide policy advice that is explicitly political and partisan (Prasser, 2006; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a).}. Partisan-political policy advice is posited to consist of the provision of policy advice to elected officials by financially remunerated actors involving: Input of new, or commentary upon existing courses of policy (in)action by way of analysis of such activity based on its feasibility, desirability, and consistency with stated partisan-political objectives, commitments, and/or its anticipated political/operational consequences.

This definition does attempt to address the potential range of actors potentially involved in the informal provision of political advice such as that provided by friends, so-called ‘kitchen cabinets’ and the like (Bakvis, 1997; Plowden 1987). This definition is limited to sources of policy advice that are partisan-political and remunerated. Admittedly this constitutes a broad definition. However, this is indicative of the breath and scope of explicitly partisan-political policy advice that is currently excluded by narrow traditional definitions of policy advice oriented solely towards policy advice provided by professional public servants. Again, it must be emphasized that this study is
limited in scope to partisan-political policy advice provided by institutionalized, non-elected, partisan advisors working within the offices of ministers’ at the executive level of government.

The policy advisory activity of such actors has potentially important implications within the broader political-administrative setting related to the twin dimensions of complementarity. Partisan advisors were in large measure institutionalized and expanded in Canada in the 20th century to secure greater control of the machinery of government for elected political actors. Partisan advisory capacity was built up to combat ‘bureaucratic capture’ and break the perceived public service monopoly over policy advice (Savoie, 2003a, chapter 3; Peters, 1996). The ability of such so-called ‘counterstaffs’ to provide policy advice whether partisan-political or ‘technical-administrative’ to elected decision makers serves to increase political control (Peters, 2001, p.246; Dahlström et al., 2011). Eichbaum and Shaw (2007a, p.454) found that politically appointed advisors were perceived by public servants to play a role in “broadening the advice base, increasing ministers’ options, testing officials’ advice, and democratizing processes by providing an additional point of entry for external policy actors” (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a, p.457). Such uses are not merely theoretical exercises but formed a key motivation for the redesign of the partisan advisor from ‘executive assistant’ to ‘chief of staff’ during the Canadian Mulroney administration in the late 1980s (Aucoin, 1986). Chiefs of staff were instituted to shore up political control and “… acted as a mediator between the minister and permanent officials, screening advice going up to the minister and issuing policy directives going down to officials, much to the dismay and objections of deputy ministers” (Savoie, 2003a, p.124). The chief of staff model was a manifestation of the search for a more responsive public service and greater political control. As one of the only studies of the role of chief of staff put it, “A key role of the chief of staff is to ensure that ministerial directives are carried out within the department. In this way, the chief of staff assists in increasing ministerial control and accountability” (O'Connor, 1991, p.24). Moreover, ministers’ offices at the federal level include political appointees in such capacities as ‘Directors of Policy’ or ‘Policy Advisors’. Yet, as noted above these actors actual policy work has not been empirically examined despite the existence of broad ‘job descriptions’ (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011). Partisan advisors thus represent important actors for examinations of how alternative
sources (and content-based types of policy advice) may serve to increase political control and/or public service responsiveness.

The buffering activity provided through partisan-political policy advice is also argued to potentially strengthen complementarity by safeguarding the non-partisan and independent values of Westminster style public services. Aucoin argues that partisan advisors are useful as “They are also useful to the public service to the extent that they attend to matters of political management that are beyond the scope of a nonpartisan public service” (20012, p.186). This is supported by empirical studies of New Zealand political appointees who were found contribute to protecting the public service from politicization (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007b, p.624). In sum, partisan advisors may contribute to complementarity via buffering in two related ways (1) buffering ministers from ‘bureaucratic capture’ through diversification of available policy advice strengthening political control, and (2) insulating public servants from partisan-political policy advisory activity contributing to the differentiation and distancing of the roles and values of both sets of actors.

The policy activity framework set out here also includes process-based bridging activity. Bridging captures the integration by partisan advisors of various other sources of policy advice (or its prevention) within the policy advisory system. At a basic level, partisan advisors are well positioned to serve as uni/bi-directional channels for the integration of policy advice among political and administrative spheres. The PCO Guide to Ministers describes precisely this type of process based policy advisory activity. Explaining that while partisan advisors have no statutory authority to delegate or direct public servants, “it is normal for ministerial staff to transmit instructions or gather information on behalf of the Minister” (PCO, 2011, p.44). The 2011 TBS guidelines detail that partisan advisors engage in various ‘liaison activities’ with departmental officials, the first minister’s office, and external stakeholders (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.66). These documents clearly indicate that partisan advisors engage in transmission and integration of policy advice. Zussman comes to similar conclusions in his study of OECD advisors underscoring that public servants can benefit from positive working relations with partisan advisors. He suggests that partisan advisors serve as a vehicle for officials to access the minister (or ministerial thinking). He suggests advisors are able to:
[S]hed greater light on the priorities, mind-set and expectations of the Minster. The political advisor has the advantage of a close working relationship with the minister and it is often easier for a public servant to gain access to the political advisor rather than the minister. (Zussman, 2009b, p.22)

Such bridging thus involves ‘administrative-technical’ dimensions in that it may serve to facilitate the development of non-partisan public service policy advice. For example, partisan advisors may advise departmental officials during their ‘liaison’ activities that their minister has recently undertaken unofficial consultations with various experts, international counterparts, or stakeholders. A partisan advisor may share policy advice that was proffered by such actors to the minister. The advisor is not directly providing advisory content of their own, rather they are engaging in bridging by integrating policy advice from other sources into the policy advisory system. Such bridging serves to inform the public service of the sources (and content) of policy advice the minister may have received and may serve to benefit their development of official departmental policy advice. The 2011 TBS guidelines for ministers suggest exactly such integration, referencing various ‘liaison’ activities partisan advisors may undertake with endogenous or exogenous actors. For example, the guidelines explicitly document that minister’s office ‘Policy Advisors’ “should liaise with key stakeholders in order to inform and/or consult on important policy initiatives within the minister's purview” (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.68).

A second form of ‘partisan-political bridging’ can also be theorized relating to integration activity with other partisan advisors or political actors within advisory systems. Again, this would involve uni/bi-directional integration activities but in this instance relate to partisan-political policy advice as defined above. For example, integrating partisan-political policy advice within a minister’s own office or amongst variously located partisan advisors related to regional political implications of policy advice or determinations of prospective cabinet support (Maley, 2011). Bridging may also serve to limit or block integration of such disparate sources of policy advice through ‘gatekeeping’. Extant studies of partisan advisors have noted the potential of a ‘funnelling effect’ that essentially sees the number of policy alternatives reduced by partisan advisors to meet anticipated political criteria (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a; Walter, 2006). Eichbaum and Shaw (2007a, p.456) explain funnelling and its implications regarding political-administrative relations and Westminster style governance as:
The argument is that if ministerial advisors successfully constrain the capacity of public servants to contribute to debates about policy, aggregate capability will be reduced. By shielding ministers from the public service, for instance, or by privileging partisan imperatives in the crafting of advice the introduction of ministerial advisor variable into the capacity equation may to some extent represent a failure to fully exploit and capture the benefits of core public service capacity. That would suggest a form of capacity displacement, or the non-realization of public service capacity, such that overall government (and governance) capability is compromised.

Their study found that such funnelling practices were rare. The public service itself, as cited above, reported that partisan advisors broadened policy advice and were considered a net benefit to overall policy advisory capacity. The buffering and bridging of partisan advisors as developed in this chapter are set out in Table 5 below.

**Table 5. Conceptualizing Partisan Advisors Policy Advisory Activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Advisory Activity (one of many sources of policy advice)</th>
<th>Nature of Policy Advisory Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffering (Contestation of 'content' of policy advice)</td>
<td>Partisan-Political policy advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contestation of policy advice by partisan advisors based on partisan criteria (e.g. Advocating for policy option ‘a’ over ‘b’ for partisan-political advantage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging (Process-based integration of advisory activity)</td>
<td>Partisan-Political policy advice integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration or ‘gatekeeping’ of policy advice among partisan sources of policy advice (e.g. Integrating policy advice from the first minister’s office or external partisan-political stakeholders)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.
The policy advisory activity of partisan advisors can be theorized to have potentially important impacts on complementarity. Buffering may contribute to dimension one - strengthening political control – through greater contestation of policy advisory inputs for ministers and broadening the availability of alternative sources and content of policy advice. Partisan-political policy advisory activity may also contribute to complementarity’s second dimension - the differentiation and distancing of public service and political actors through distancing non-partisan public servants from partisan-political considerations in policy advisory activity. Bridging may also serve to broaden the availability of administrative-technical or partisan-political sources of policy advice for decision makers. This extends to sources of policy advice located variously within the advisory system that may be marshalled to increase political control through avoidance of potential ‘bureaucratic capture’. Bilateral bridging among political and administrative spheres facilitated by partisan advisors may also strengthen political control. It may facilitate avoidance or reduction of information asymmetries as well as increase or improve interactions in areas where political and administrative actors necessarily overlap.

Movers and Shapers: Partisan Advisors Policy Formulation Activity

The second set of theoretical propositions movers and shapers are advanced for modeling and analysis of partisan advisors’ formulation activity. Empirical Canadian studies lag behind a growing body of Westminster studies and official Government of Canada documents that indicate partisan advisors as active formulation participants. The 2011 TBS Policies for Ministers’ Offices cited for example describes that a ‘Director of Policy’ in a minister’s office:

- needs to work closely with the Prime Minister’s Office and other ministers’ offices in order to co-ordinate the development of policies and programs within the government;
- must ensure that policy development within the minister’s responsibilities is consistent with the broad policy goals of the government, as laid out in key documents, such as the Speech from the Throne and the budget;
- should work closely with the department to ensure that policies and policy development are consistent with the minister’s objectives and the government’s mandate; and
• should liaise with key stakeholders in order to inform or consult on important policy initiatives within the minister’s purview.

(Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.66)

To what degree and with what consequence such activities are actually occurring in contemporary policy formulation remains empirically untested. Westminster studies have long noted partisan advisors could extend policy options, ‘pay attention’ to the policy agenda, act as policy ‘mobilizers’ in the face of policy vacuum, or play a ‘catalyst’ role (Walter, 1986). Again this underscores procedural activity in formulation versus substantive ‘content-based activity’. Dunn (1997) found that Australian advisors played a role in shaping policy by overseeing the policy development process, providing direction, evaluating policy proposals, and monitoring implementation. Maley (2011) in addition to Dunn (1997) has also pointed to ‘horizontal’ policy function such actors can play for example in coordination and brokerage of policy positions among ministerial offices. Maley having previously developed a typology of ‘active’ ministers political staff from empirical study of the Australian case finding such actors participate in “agenda-setting, linking ideas, interests and opportunities; mobilizing, bargaining; and ‘delivering'”(2000, p.449). Zussman also finding ‘a key responsibility’ for OECD partisan advisors related to policy including “commenting on policy options developed by the public service, providing a source of new policy ideas, and putting together policy proposals in specific areas of interest identified by the minister”(2009b, p.35).

More recently, Connaughton (2010a, 2010b) working from within the Irish context, has offered a set of four ideal-type ‘role perceptions’ for classifying advisors’ policy roles: Expert, Partisan, Coordinator and Minder. As per Figure 3 below, Connaughton (2010a) arrays these roles based on two dimensions, ‘policy formulation/implementation’ (ranging from policy advice to policy steering) and ‘communications’ (from technical/Managerial to political). This approach moves the study of partisan advisors forward considerably by offering a means to conceptualize variance in the types of appointed political staffs may play in policy making. Connaughton explains, “Type I is the expert which embodies the role of adviser as an individual working in isolation or as part of the government machine assisting with, contesting and promoting policy advice in a specific sector”(Ibid, p.351). Whereas Type II can be understood as a more partisan advisor who is appointed for their association
with a minister and in situations where political-administrative relations are tenuous, she explains, “These advisers are responsive and are sometimes best placed to anticipate ministerial demands” (ibid). A Type III advisor, the ‘coordinator’ who is primarily involved in monitoring programs as well as liaising with government officials and stakeholder groups with the aim of facilitating the ministerial agenda.

**Figure 3. Configuration of Advisor Roles**

![Diagram of Advisor Roles]

Source: Replicated from Connaughton (2010a, p.351)

The final Type IV partisan advisor role is the ‘minder’, which is characterized by close minister-advisor relations. This role involves advisors playing protection function of ministers, guarding for potential political and reputation harm. Connaughton’s (2010a:366) research leads her to conclude Irish advisors fall into the ‘minders’ category. She offers some general conclusions about the collective and individual roles and functions of advisors:

It is asserted that the strength of their collective role lies in their efforts to coordinate and push the governmental agenda (coordinator role) while maintaining coalition relations (horizontal dimensions). In terms of an individual role their onus is on serving as ‘an extension of the minister’ in the government department (vertical dimensions).
The model implicitly deploys the substantive versus procedural categorization through its use of ‘steering’ (process) versus ‘policy advice’ (content) for the classification of formulation activity. Ideal-type roles like ‘expert’ and ‘partisan’ are imbued with substantive dimensionality and aim to capture content-based advisory and formulation activity. Conversely, the ‘coordinator’ role-type emphasizes procedural activity. Connaughton’s approach has some limitations that, this study suggests, can be overcome through the adoption of an ‘activity-based’ approach in lieu of a ‘role-type’ approach. Connaughton (2010a; 2010b) captures important distinctions related to the location of policy-making activity along so-called horizontal (collaborative, cross-cutting coordination) and vertical (political–administrative tasks within ‘the department’) dimensions. However, this distinction is lost in her ‘roles’ approach with the exception of a single ‘role’ type captured by the ‘coordinator’. Moreover, by Connaughton’s own admission the various role-types presented are not mutually exclusive and may overlap. The expert could also be a partisan or the coordinator could a minder and so on, this reduces the utility of the approach to array and compare how partisan advisors are engaging in formulation and/or policy advisory activity. The approach also combines policy formulation and implementation stages. This may conflate or muddy activities that are traditionally (at least analytically) been understood as discreet ‘stages’ of policy making (Howlett et al., 2009). Finally, while the model enriches the study of advisors by setting out partisan versus technical (read administrative) dimensions, this differentiation is limited to communications as opposed to policy formulation.

This study uses the proposition of movers and shapers to offer an alternative task-based approach focusing on partisan advisors policy activity versus ‘ideal-type’ roles. It includes the procedural/substantive and partisan/administrative-technical dimension noted above but adds vertical (intra-ministerial) and horizontal (inter-ministerial) dimensions of formulation. A key distinction must be emphasized in that the propositions focus on two distinct but related activities, (1) policy advice and (2) policy formulation. That is, a distinction is made between partisan advisors ‘pure’ policy advisory activities (as one of many potential sources of policy advice in relation to any number of policy issues); and secondly, their potential contributors to policy in formulation, given their privileged status as ministerial political appointees. The buffering and bridging propositions are advanced to capture partisan advisors contributions to the
provision of policy advisory content (buffering) and process-based integration of various other sources of policy advice (bridging). Moving and shaping facilitate modeling the content-based and process-based activities of partisan advisors in formulation – as actors with special access to decision makers and policy formulation (Gains & Stoker, 2011; Walter, 2006). While formulation involves the generation and use of policy advice it also involves a range of other activities such as tool/instrument selection, ‘design’ activity as well as interactions between various actors in policy subsystems (Sidney, 2007). As the sub-stages of formulation make clear, it involves but is not exclusively limited to, policy advisory activity. Further, as scholars of policy making have noted, policy advice can be applied or provided in relation to discreet policy making activity such as implementation or formulation (Halligan, 1995, p.139; Shaw, 2003)

As set out in Table 6 below the process/substance distinctions are further refined through the inclusion of vertical (intra-ministerial) and/or horizontal (inter-ministerial or exogenous) dimensions of formulation. These dimensions have been explicitly used in the analysis of partisan advisors policy activity (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2011; Maley, 2000, 2011; Campbell, 1988b), as well as in studies of policy formulation more generally (Colebatch, 1998; Matheson, 2000). The ‘technical’ rubric used by Connaughton (2010a) is revised to ‘administrative-technical’ to broaden the category to more aptly capture the ‘administration’ of policy specific activity in keeping with the traditional notions of policy analysis and advice giving. These may, but are not exclusively limited to ‘technical’ aspects. For example, partisan advisors’ may participate in formal departmental policy development mechanisms such as the development of commentary upon memoranda to cabinet or other formal briefing materials generated by the public service for ministers. Similarly, the ‘political’ metric used by Connaughton’s (2010a) model is replaced with ‘partisan-political’. This is argued to better capture policy activity

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18 Administrative policy advisory activity is used to connote the traditional approach to policy advisory contributions typically associated with rational, technical, and/or evidence based policy making (Dobuzinskis et al., 2007; Radin, 2000; Weimer & Vining, 2010).
that is not just ‘political’, but more specifically partisan-political in nature. Students of
government have long recognized that senior public servants are engaged in political
activities, broadly conceived, as policy making is itself an intrinsically political exercise
(See Campbell & Szabowski, 1979; Campbell, 2007; Heclo & Wildavsky, 1974;
Suleiman, 1984; Peters, 2001; Plumptre, 1987). As the eminent Canadian scholar
Kernaghan (1986, p.642-643) aptly summarizes:

Partisan politics should be separated from the administration of
government policies and programs. In practice, a very large number of
public servants are unavoidably involved in politics in the broad sense of
the authoritative allocation of scarce resources. This involvement takes
the form of providing policy advice to political superiors and making
discretionary decisions in policy implementation. Thus, in the normal
course of conducting government business, politicians and public
servants cannot easily separate politics from administration. This kind of
political involvement is not, however, politics in the partisan sense.
Partisan politics can more easily be separated from administration.

19 Partisans and partisanship have been various used within the political science and policy
literatures (See for example: Lindblom, 1965; Duverger,1965; Rosenblum, 2008). Following
Esselment (2009, Chapter 2) the term partisan is used in this study as it pertains to politically
appointed staffs of ministers’ offices. Defining such actors as a subset of political party actors,
professional activists. That is, it shares Esselment’s (2009) adoption of Webb and Kolodny’s
(2002, p.338) categorization of political professionals who are remunerated by the state but
engage in work inside of government that is considered partisan. The notion of partisan
advisors as professional activists in this study does not however draw Esselment’s distinction
between ‘expert’ and ‘novice’ categories of professional activists. Following Kemp’s
(1986:57-58) general outline of partisan politics, partisans within government assist with “The
preservation of the decision-capacity of the existing leadership either as individuals or as
representatives of a political party. This includes maintaining the necessary organizational
frame, interest and public support to win elections”, “The expression and implementation in
policy of the values, beliefs and objectives of the party or its leadership. This value-setting
component of partisan politics may involve the determination of priorities among subjects of
policy; the supervision and monitoring of the implementation process for developed policies;
the development of new policies in response to changing circumstances including the
consequences of past policies; the integration or coordination of various policy fields to ensure
that the various policies of government harmonize in coherent programs.” And, “Linked with
the above function, the use of leadership to provide purpose and direction to the policy
process, to coordinate the activities of government and to communicate to and persuade
those whose support is necessary for policy success and the maintenance of decision-
capacity that the government's policy course is correct".
Thus, the introduction of a ‘partisan-political’ versus ‘political’ distinction adds greater specificity to model and analyze the partisan advisors partisan-political policy activity as it excludes the policy-politics that public servants may engage in (Kernaghan, 1986; Overeem, 2005; Fry, 1989; Rosenbloom, 1984).

Table 6. Conceptualizing Partisan Advisors Policy Formulation Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formulation activity and dimension</th>
<th>Nature of Formulation Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shapers</strong></td>
<td>Vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Direct contribution to content of policy)</td>
<td>Horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movers</strong></td>
<td>Vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Process oriented contribution to policy formulation)</td>
<td>Horizontal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

As privileged actors within policy subsystems partisan advisors moving and shaping raise direct implications for complementarity’s twin dimensions. Moving as specified in the model above may serve to strengthen political control through process
based formulation activity such as monitoring, ‘steering’, sequencing, or coordination of multiple policy actors during formulation. Process based formulation activity is a key vehicle by which partisan advisors can increase public service ‘responsiveness’ and strengthen political control (Dahlström et al., 2011; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007a; 2007b; Brans et al., 2006). Shaping may also serve to strengthen political control by improving alignment of governmental policy formulation with the substantive policy direction or preferences of ministers/government. For example, it may involve administrative-technical calibration or refinement of options in development based on evidentiary or consistency preferences. Alternatively, partisan-political shaping may increase political control through improved alignment of government policy with stated partisan-political preferences communicated during elections, in platforms, or with key political ‘stakeholders’.

Moving and shaping also raise potential implications for complementarity’s second dimension, the degree of distance and differentiation between elected officials and administrators. They may eliminate the real or perceived politicization of public service actors and activity through confinement of partisan-political formulation tasks to ministers and their staff. Such as: restricting determinations of political feasibility, procedural brokerage of support for cabinet items, and politically motivated stakeholder consultations to partisan advisors working within ministerial offices. A recurring justification for the deployment of ministerial ‘political staffs’ is that, when properly used, they strengthen democratic governance through avoidance of bureaucratic capture, improved minister-caucus relations, and promote democratically mandated policy activity (Aucoin, 2010:81; White, 2005). However, the opposite is equally plausible. Partisan advisors may negatively affect public service independence or ‘de-professionalize’ the policy formulation services provided to ministers. For example, ‘funnelling’ or ‘colouring’ public service policy options before transmission to elected officials or usurping the public services ability to consult on proposed policy development, or provide other

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20 Alignment here is understood as the degree to which priorities and policy are consistent across/within different levels of an organization (Hofer & Schendel 1978; Kellermanns et al. 2005; Andrews et al., 2012 ).
professional public administration duties (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2008; White, 2005: 161; King, 2003). As Svara (2006, p.976) explains in outlining the duality of the separate and overlapping activities at the heart of complementarity, “For politicians, complementarity reflects in part the accommodation elected officials make to the substantial resources that administrators possess, but it also entails at least some respect by elected officials for the competence, commitment, and contributions of administrators”. In short, moving and shaping hold potential to facilitate or constrain complementarity. Partisan advisors are thus important policy actors not only for improving our understanding of partisan advisors formulation activities, but their implications for political-administrative relations and policy ‘success’.

**Case Selection**

The objective in this study is to engage in the systematic analysis of a limited number of cases to evaluate the policy related functions of partisan advisors within the Canadian political-administrative nexus. This is an understudied area in need of systematic critical analysis, as White (2005, p.157) states, “Political staff, beyond those in the first minister’s office, may constitute the core executive’s least examined component”. In a sense, the questions tackled in this dissertation are about the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ questions of partisan advisors policy activities and functions. This, it is argued, can be effectively accomplished via in depth qualitative research through which conclusions can subsequently be tested against a larger number of cases. This has motivated the choice of three cases including two at the provincial level as well as the federal level in Canada. The goal here is not to draw out generalized findings that apply to all cases, or all partisan advisors everywhere, or all temporal periods. Given the paucity of studies examining Canadian partisan advisors policy activity, particularly at
the sub-national level\textsuperscript{21}, this study is by its nature primarily conceptual, exploratory, and descriptive (Stebbins, 2001; Brady & Collier, 2004).

The federal government has the largest number of political and administrative employees. Its institutions, including cabinet (White, 2001) and government departments are comparatively larger than any provincial government. It also employs the greatest number of Canadian political staffs. The federal government also prompted the Savoie centralization thesis as well as Aucoin’s NPG thesis. For these reasons it is a sensible choice related to the investigation of the partisan advisors as policy workers. Provincially, the most systematic study of the Savoie’s centralization thesis found such a model to be:

much more pronounced in the largest Canadian jurisdictions, with pronounced moves in this direction over the last decade at the federal level and in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Most of the smaller Canadian provinces retain a system of institutionalized cabinets… (Bernier, Brownsey, and Howlett, 2005:11)

Thus, the selection of New Brunswick offers a case where court government has yet to fully mature, continuing to function under the institutionalized cabinet mode (Hyson, 2005). The inclusion of the British Columbia case allows for the examination of partisan advisors policy functions in a more centralized provincial jurisdiction (Ruff, 2005). This is significant because it allows for study of the role of first minister’s office partisan advisors in a sub-national case where they are argued to be highly influential, overtaking even the collective decision making authority of cabinet, as well as a case where cabinet is seen to continue to dominate executive level politics and policy making. Additionally, it also permits to provide some examination of whether any evidence of an NPG type shifts is detectable at the provincial level (as it relates to partisan advisors).

\textsuperscript{21} For a general assessment of federal and some provincial staff (primarily from British Columbia) see the unpublished Master’s thesis (Marley, 1997). An Institute of Public Administration of Canada executive brief was also prepared by Dutil (2006) related to political staff in Ontario.
The provincial level generally suffers from a dearth of policy related study. Little is known about the public service aspects of policy making in most provincial jurisdictions, let alone partisans advisors as policy workers. As McArthur (2007, p.242) contends the provincial unit of analysis is important:

Arguably, it is at the provincial level of government in Canada that the complexities and even contradictions involved are most intensively played out. The smaller size, the tendency for governments to change frequently and for the changes to involve significant ideological shifts, and the absence of a prevailing elite view about the proper place of government in society, such as has existed for so long in Ottawa, all mean that it is at the provincial level that we can observe most clearly the complexities of the relationship between analysis and politics.

The three cases were chosen in keeping with the research questions aimed at examining partisan advisors in small, medium, and large institutional settings and in political-administrative contexts characterized by different levels of centralization and whose administrations that have been in power for various lengths of time. Case selection was designed in part to provide variance with respect to institutional size. This is a relevant consideration for the study of partisan advisors and the overarching political-administrative context within which they operate for several reasons. As White (1990) notes in his review of the impact of institutional size for the analysis of Canadian government institutions differences in size (both of cabinet and the public service) affect patterns of interaction of political and administrative elites. This has direct implications for their respective policy formulation activities. He concludes his analysis of the impact of size on federal-provincial jurisdictions by noting:

Whether ministers ought to be intimately associated with the details of policy development and delivery is perhaps an open question, but the conclusion is inescapable that size can and does make for important, qualitative differences in the ways that politicians and bureaucrats interact. (White, 1990, p.546)

White notes that in smaller institutional settings there is more frequent and unmediated interaction between ministers and their deputy ministers. Not only do larger cabinets logically lead to larger contingents of political staff, White (Ibid, p.545) explicitly points to the role of political staffs in larger institutional contexts arguing:
Bureaucrats’ access to ministers is not simply a function of available time; it also reflects the larger political staffs in ministers’ offices in larger jurisdictions, since they tend to impose themselves between the minister and the public service. Deputy ministers see their ministers less often in larger governments, but the difference is much more pronounced at lower levels of the organization.

The case selection thus allows analysis of how the use of partisan advisors may vary based on the institutional size and complexity as well as perceived ‘centralization’ of power within and across cases. As set out above, emphasis was placed on intra-case comparison as well as comparative assessment across cases. Interviews were sought and conducted with both ministers and first minister’s office partisan advisors for the purposes of comparative assessment based on the location of partisan advisors within government. Following Heffernan (2003), Eichbaum and Shaw (2011, p.595) note, “the distribution of power within the core executive is both relational and locational, the effectiveness of a ministerial advisor is partly a function of the institutional proximity in which advisors stand relative to their ministers”. Moreover, as noted above, the ‘institutional location variable’, has figured prominently in scholarly studies of Canadian public administration, policy making, and executive government. For example here in Canada, Savoie (1999), Aucoin (2010), and White (2001) all point to the greater influence and policy formulation roles of first minister’s office political staff as compared to ‘line’ or minister’s office level political staff. The inclusion of both sets of participants allows for testing along such locational considerations. Finally, institutions have also been identified as a salient variable with respect to determinations of ‘administrative styles’; that is, “a more or less consistent and long-term set of institutionalized patterns of politico-administrative relationships, norms and procedures” (Howlett, 2003, p.474; Bernier et al., 2005).

New Brunswick, representing the smallest of the three cases included in this study, allows for the analysis of a jurisdiction characterized by a proportionally smaller machinery of government and thus ‘intimate’ political-administrative space within which
partisan policy advisors operate\textsuperscript{22}. There are typically a limited number of cabinet committees, and ministers historically employ one partisan advisor in their ministerial offices (with the exception of the minister of health who has two ‘executive assistants’, and regional ministers who occasionally employ a second partisan advisor). Moreover, the premier’s office in New Brunswick is also fairly small and with the election of the Graham Government (2006-10) had restructured the premier’s office creating the position of principal secretary in addition to the traditional role of chief of staff. At the time this study was being designed, New Brunswick was the only smaller case available with this binary chief of staff/principal secretary structure common in other larger Canadian provinces (Ontario) and at the federal level. This binary structure is important as it created a clearly demarcated and operationally acknowledged division between political work and policy work conducted by the first ministers’ office\textsuperscript{23}. Finally, the New Brunswick case also represents a case where the government is in its first term. Conversely, the two other cases represent administrations that have been in office for multiple terms, and in the federal case a series of minority governments (Paul Martin Liberal minority (2003-06); Conservative Minorities of Stephen Harper (2006, 2008) followed by a majority government secured when this study was in progress (2011-)).

The third case of British Columbia represents a mid-sized provincial government in Canada offering a level of institutional complexity and cabinet size that fell in between the smaller case of New Brunswick and the federal case with the largest cabinet size and larger number of partisan advisors both at the centre and minister’s office levels. During the qualitative interviews carried out for this case, the three-term Premier Gordon Campbell resigned abruptly, and Christy Clark was sworn in as Premier of British Columbia in 2011. As partisan advisors work at the pleasure of their ministers, the departure of the Campbell regime saw new staff at all levels be brought into the

\textsuperscript{22} At the time of taking office the ministry had nineteen cabinet ministers.(Executive Council Office, Government of New Brunswick, 2006).

\textsuperscript{23} This structure was adopted on the advice of noted public administration scholar Donald Savoie and the division of labour was acknowledge in interviews conducted with senior partisan advisors and ministers in New Brunswick.
premier’s office. Moreover, a shuffle of ministers and deputy ministers took place, with partisan staff also undergoing change.

Within each case, four departments were targeted and sent interview requests. Those departments consisted of a central agency and three ‘line departments’. To further ensure anonymity of participants they will not be delineated in this research design specification. The departments were selected as they allowed for literal replication among cases. Moreover, they allowed for control of variance along sectoral policy lines. The choice of cases was also motivated by the practical realities of field research related to political elites. Notably, the potential difficulty in securing agreement from the various prospective political and administrative interview subjects sought for completion of this study. As has been experienced by several other scholars who have researched appointed political staff more generally, access to interview subjects can be a significant barrier (Maley, 2002; Tiernan, 2006). With this in mind, the initial selection of cases was informed by tentative agreement from a significant number of political and administrative elites (ministers/deputy ministers) from the respective federal and provincial governments.

**Data Sources and Collection**

In order to trace detailed portraits of all three cases, this project relies on in-depth semi-structured interviews with political elites. In each case, 1 hour not-for-attribution interview requests were sent to ministers, senior partisan advisors, and deputy ministers from the same policy sectors (i.e. departments) as well as all first ministers’ office level partisan advisors and the senior most central agency public servant(s). The study included a total of 60 interviews. This included interview with 4 chiefs of staff (or provincial equivalent), 4 ministers, and 4 deputy ministers per case. With only two exceptions they were also conducted the same policy sectors as outlined above. The two sub-national cases also included interviews with the senior partisan advisors from each case first minister’s office. One interview was conducted with the deputy minister.

Again, these sectors are not disclosed to ensure the confidentiality of participants.
to the premier in B.C. Their N.B. equivalent had agreed to participate in the study but was subsequently unavailable to participate. At the federal level the greater number of political staff at both the ministerial and first ministers’ office levels with ‘policy advisory’ duties compelled a greater number of interviews. In that case additional interviews were conducted with ministerial ‘Director’s of Policy’ as well as one junior ‘Policy Advisor’ from each ministry. Additional interviews were also conducted with senior partisan advisors from various periods of the Harper Prime Minister’s office. This included two former PMO chiefs of staff, PMO ‘Director’s of Policy’, and PMO ‘Policy Advisors’. Finally, four senior PCO officials (two former and two current) also participated in the study. The specific breakdown of PMO level interviews is not provided to increase the anonymity of participants. While all interview requests across cases were for not for attribution interviews, several ministers, partisan advisors, and officials requested or agreed to attribution. Those individuals are cited accordingly. A handful of interviews/consultations were also carried out with former PMO senior partisan advisors from the Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien and Rt. Hon. Paul Martin PMOs. These are cited accordingly and were conducted to confirm clear changes in longstanding practices pertaining to the federal case that arose during fieldwork.

For current interviews, individuals within each department were identified using a combination of techniques. First, at the federal level the Government Electronic Directory Services (GEDS) was consulted. This directory provides comprehensive, reasonably up-to-date contact information for ministers, deputy ministers, and exempt staff in ministers’ offices. This facilitated the identification and contact of senior deputy and assistant deputy level officials within the identified departments. The directory was also used to identify the relevant ministers of the crown as well as their senior partisan appointees (at the federal level known as Chief of Staff). The same process was used to identify administrative and political interview subjects from the respective provincial jurisdictions. Where possible interview subjects were identified via electronic internet-based government directories or were requested from existing political or administrative elites who had agreed to participate in the study.
**Data Analysis Technique**

This study uses an inductive qualitative technique. Typical interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour but given the schedules of ministers and DMs some interviews were shorter and others longer. Interviews with partisan advisors also ranged in length with some sessions with senior first minister’s office partisan advisors exceeding three hours. The interviews formed the ‘data’ used in this study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed using QSR internationals’ NVIVO qualitative research software. Raw interviews were reviewed multiple times and initially coded as basic ‘nodes’. This consisted of setting out very specific activities that produced a large volume of specific categories such as ‘coordinated policy work with department’ or ‘provided advice on policy options to minister’. These basic ‘nodes’ were then aggregated as sub-categories under broader ‘hierarchical’ nodes. These ‘parent’ nodes such as ‘policy advice’ or ‘policy formulation with first minister’s office’ were then finally grouped under the moving, shaping, buffering, and bridging propositions subsequently used to structure the dissertation. The study followed many of the techniques set out by Yin (2009) and utilized the pattern matching logic to compare data (the coded interviews) with the propositions and research questions developed for the study.

**Validity and Reliability**

Several techniques were employed to increase the validity and reliability of the study’s data and findings. First and foremost the utilization of multiple cases and multiple sources of data from each case including the triangulation of responses provided through interviews with ministers, deputy ministers, and partisan advisors. Transcription of interviews (with limited participant feedback), software data coding, pattern matching, and presentation of raw data in the form of quotations throughout the dissertation help to strengthen the validity and credibility of the study’s findings in relation to the observations. As this study is based on the embedded case study method, findings cannot be assumed to apply to all other contexts. However, the exploratory and descriptive nature of the project allows for findings to be used in conjunction with further studies to determine generalized applicability.
Conclusion

This chapter has presented the study’s research design and developed a framework for conceptualizing and understanding the policy formulation and advisory activities of institutionalized partisan advisors. It does so with reference to the overarching political-administrative context as understood through complementarity. The framework developed herein includes two models that focus on the substantive and procedural aspects of partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activity respectively. While political appointees have long been recognized as advisory system actors, this chapter argues a more robust understanding of their advisory functions and impact can be secured through focusing on their substantive (buffering) and procedural (bridging) dimensions. Such a focus offers opportunities to go beyond spatial and control-autonomy considerations to a focus on tasks undertaken and content dimensions that can be coupled with longstanding locational factors.

The chapter has also argued that partisan advisors are not just one of many sources of policy advice within advisory systems, but privileged actors who participate in the much more confined world of policy formulation. Based on international studies of similar actors, the formulation model developed herein argues that partisan advisors formulation activity can also be better understood through similar attention to their procedural (moving) and substantive (shaping) dimensions of formulation. It also suggests that attention must be paid to the additional dimensions of intra-ministerial (vertical) and inter-ministerial and exogenous (horizontal) dimensions of their formulation activity. The chapter concluded by providing the case study rationale and data collection methods. The study of partisan advisors must however take into account the historical context of their evolution as policy workers in any given case. Chapter three will now provide this context, reviewing the existing literature and providing new data related to key developments for partisan advisors in each of the three cases included in this study.
Chapter 3.

The ‘Political Arm’ in Canada

Introduction

This chapter was spurred by the research conducted for this dissertation that found no definitive study on the historical evolution of ‘political staffs’. This chapter seeks to combine the readily available historical analysis from multiple key texts with new figures and findings generated by this study. There has been marginal change from Plassé’s read of the landscape some twenty years ago when she concluded: “Little research has been done on ministers’ offices or on their staff, even though these ministerial support units occupy a central position in the decision-making process of our governments” (Plassé, 1994, p.iii). While the expanded use of politically appointed staff in Canada can be seen to varying degrees at both federal and provincial levels (Benoit, 2006; White, 2001) the growth has largely been in clerical and administrative support staff categories not the partisan advisor category (Aucoin, 2010, Axworthy, 1988). This chapter traces the key milestones in the historical evolution of partisan advisors as a subset of political staff. It provides (where available) new data as to their contemporary numbers and officially stated functions in the three cases. In keeping with the identified importance of institutional location this chapter reviews such actors by first ministers’ and then ministers’ offices by case.

The principal argument advanced in this chapter is that partisan advisors, as a subset of appointed political staffs more generally, are the product of a three-step evolution consisting of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization. Despite the dearth of data and literature (particularly at the provincial level), political staff in each of the three cases clearly demonstrate a pattern of bureaucratic growth (Meyer, 1987). As a class of institutionalized government actors they have become subject to much greater
‘rationalization’, specialization, and hierarchical organization. There is widespread agreement that the institutionalization of partisan advisors was prompted by attempts by elected officials to secure greater responsiveness from the public service, enable a more activist state, and in response to increasingly complexity of the policy making and concern of ministerial ‘overload’ (Savoie, 1994; 1999; Aucoin, 2006c; 2010). The second and third stages of the evolution are argued to be part of the larger overarching processes of professionalization (Evetts, 2003a; Evetts, 2003b) and bureaucratisation of the political arm of government (Fawcett and Gay, 2010; Osbadelston, 1987). This study examines in detail one aspect of that professionalization and specialization – the advent of partisan advisors as formal participants in policy advisory and formulation activity.

The Federal Government

Prime Minister’s Office (PMO)

The PMO is an appropriate office with which to begin as it continues to be the largest and most well resourced ‘political office’ in Canada in financial and human resource terms (White, 2005; Savoie 1999). Meeting the needs of various first ministers, and the contexts in which they governed, prompted some of the most important innovations that have been implemented federally and at the provincial level. Chief among these was the shift from the employ of seconded public servants towards the use of politically appointed partisan staff. In his review of the ‘Prime-Ministerial Bureaucracy’, Punnett (1977, p. 74-75) argues that a PMO provides three main functions:

[F]irstly, secretarial and administrative capacity; secondly, a source of political advice to the prime minister of the day; and, thirdly, it provides a supply of factual information about the affairs of government, to enable him to face his ministers from an informed base. If he is to be free from dependence on departmental civil servants, this factual information can only come from a private bureaucracy.

From confederation until the 1930s, the PMO was successively and successfully managed by prime ministers themselves helped, if at all, by a small coterie of seconded
public servants (Punnett, 1977, p.75). It is difficult to imagine but an entourage did not
surround early Canadian prime ministers, they had no chiefs of staff let alone ‘policy
shops’. In describing the support systems in place Mitchell Sharp (a deputy minister in
the 1940s) explains that most ministers had few staff and even “Prime Ministers King
and St. Laurent had only a handful of people in their offices, nearly all of whom (like
Pickersgill, who served both King and St. Laurent) had originally been selected by the
Public Service Commission for departmental jobs” (Sharp, 1995, p.112). The PMO staff
numbers are reported to have stayed constant during the Diefenbaker (1957-1963)
government but PMOs from St-Laurent to Diefenbaker is difficult to assess given the
significant number of staff seconded from the public service to work in the PMO
(D'Aquino, 1974; Lalonde, 1971).

As per Table 7 below the PMO staffing complements and budgets subsequent to
Diefenbaker have grown. This growth, as noted above, was administrative rather than
for related to policy or political advisory capacity a trend that continues (Aucoin, 2010;
Axworthy, 1988; Goldenberg, 2006). The modernization of the structure and staffing of
the PMO began in part under the Prime Minister Pearson who brought Tom Kent into the
PMO in 1963 as special policy advisor (Aucoin, 2010; Doern, 1971). Previously Kent
had served as Pearson’s principal policy advisor in opposition and was intimately
involved in the party’s 1960 policy conference (Sharp, 1995). Doern (1971, p.49) writes
of Kent’s presence in the PMO:

It represented a policy and a policy presence in a much more visible and
direct sense than ever before. Kent was an active initiator and transmitter
of policy ideas, with an authority derived directly from the Prime Minister,
to negotiate with, and prod other cabinet minister’s and deputy minister's
respecting policy issues.

Aucoin (2010, p.78) notes, Kent’s role was to provide policy direction to officials
in the policy development process and monitoring its progress not to act as a
counterweight to public service advice writ large. Pearson, however, followed the British
of having a principal secretary drawn from the ranks of the public service (D'Aquino,
1974). It would be the Trudeau PMO that would revolutionize the configuration and
functional nature of the PMO to its modern form. At task to which upon assuming office
he set himself to with vigour. Trudeau explicitly aimed to build up the PMO as part of a more robust executive. He stated famously:

One of the reasons why I wanted this job, when I was told that it might be there, is because I felt it very important to have a strong central government, build up the executive, build up the Prime Minister’s Office. (Radwanski, 1978, p.146)

The tracking of the ‘principal secretary’ role listed in 1967-68 as a PMO staff member captures the shift towards a partisan advisory capacity within PMO. This record represents a clear shift in the staffing practices from seconded public servants to politically appointed principal secretaries in the PMO. Trudeau formally institutionalized partisan advisors into the Prime Minister’s office in 1968 and is the architect of ‘modern’ PMO structure and division of labour that largely remains today (Schacter et al, 1999, p.6). As Trudeau’s former principle secretary noted:

A new category of official was created – the political advisor. Their role was different from that of public servants who had for years served Prime Ministers they would advise on the interaction of policy and politics and not be subject to the formal rules of the public service. (Axworthy, 1988, p.258)

The reforms to the PMO were linked in large part to two factors: to meet the need for support grown out of the increasing complexity of governing; and, to support the empowerment of the cabinet and PMO over departments as part of the ‘rationalization’ exercise embarked upon by Trudeau (French and Van Loon, 1984; Doern, 1971). As Aucoin (1986, p.11) summarizes:

In a somewhat similar fashion, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was strengthened and reorganized. The number of advisors was increased, greater policy specialization was introduced and regional responsibilities were differentiated by way of the creation of ‘regional desks’. The PMO was also to co-ordinate the activities of the senior political staff of ministers in order to promote adherence to the political objectives of the government as a corporate body. In short, even these political/partisan functions were to conform to the paradigm of rational management
Table 7. Political Staff and Expenses for Prime Minister’s Office (1962, 1967, and 1970\textsuperscript{*})

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PMO Staff</th>
<th>1962-63\textsuperscript{*}</th>
<th>1967-68</th>
<th>1970-71</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Secretary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press office</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Desks</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretaries</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency office</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMO Staff Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Budget</td>
<td>$181,550.00 (approximately)</td>
<td>$331,585.00</td>
<td>$900,839.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Lalonde, 1971, p.532).

This is thus a clear watershed not only in terms of the structural organization of the Canadian PMO but also the institutionalization of partisan advisors as well. Lalonde is quick to point out that both political and policy specific advice have been staples of PMOs past. Interestingly, he observes a de-politicization of the public service as a result of institutionalizing partisan advisory capacity in the PMO stating, that it “represents a shift in that, while the PCO may have had a more active political advisory role than the PMO in the King and St Laurent period, the important contributions of some PMO figures since that time clearly establish the political ascendancy of the latter Office” (Lalonde, 1971, p.520). The principal secretary position has been retained in some but not all prime ministers with varying degrees of policy advisory roles.

\textsuperscript{*} Figures are for fiscal years April 1 – March 31st.
\textsuperscript{\textdagger} Lalonde notes that the figures do not include seconded public servants working in PMO.
The institutionalization of partisan-political appointees within the PMO also included the creation of regional ‘desks’ and use of special assistants. Trudeau’s PMO numbered sixty in 1969 and by his last year in office 1983-84 the Trudeau PMO had grown to twice the size of that of Prime Minister Pearson with a budget of approximately $4.2 million and a staff of 87 (Axworthy, 1988, p.258; Punnett, 1977, p.77). Again, it is important to note that though twice the size of the Pearson PMO, most of the new Trudeau PMO staff were clerical, with only 20 or so considered senior advisors (Axworthy, 1988, p.258). The need for greater support via a more muscular PMO is a consequence of a desire to match a busier prime ministerial calendar and the search for greater political control over the expanding apparatus of government. Indeed, these are recurring themes cited by those who study the early development of the political executive both federally and provincially (Savoie, 1999; Savoie, 2008; White, 2005). For all the attention that this new and more muscular PMO received, its policy influence was constrained. D’Aquino (1974) in his reflections on the PMO called for greater policy capacity in the PMO while keen observers of the machinery of government noted key limitations to PMO’s policy influence. Key limitations were cited regarding the limited number of policy specific PMO staff, strong ministers whose policy advice Trudeau trusted, and his reliance on various sources of advice, including strengthened central administrative agencies staffed by chosen close associates (Aucoin, 1986, p.16-17). As Campbell (1988, p.269) notes, during its first term (1968-72) the Trudeau PMO lacked a formal policy unit with only Lalonde and others playing a major role. Even when one was established in the later majority government its ability to effectively provide policy capacity was meagre. Subsequent PMOs have continued to be shaped by the various prime ministers ‘styles’ (Aucoin, 1986; Doern, 1971) under which they have served as well as the ‘styles’ of the lead PMO political staff charged with their organization and operation (Aucoin, 2010). PMOs have hovered around the 100 staff member level since the late 1970s but the advisory capacity of the PMO has fluctuated and been deployed in various ways.

It wasn’t until the Mulroney administration (1984-1993) that several noteworthy reforms to the traditional workings of the PMO were introduced. It expanded in 1985-86 with a budget of $6.6 million and a staff complement of one hundred and seventeen (Axworthy, 1988:258). Part of this increased cost can be explained by the explicit
emphasis by Mulroney placed on beefing up the policy capacity of the PMO. With a 50% larger budget than the final Trudeau year in office, the Mulroney PMO staff grew by one. As Aucoin (1986, p.22) puts it, “More important, perhaps, the number of professional staff concerned with policy advice, broadly defined, went from three to four under Trudeau to over a dozen”. The strengthened PMO was in part a consequence of attempts to support Mulroney’s transactional brokerage decision-making style and also, as a result of efforts to reduce the role of other central agencies, notably the PCO (Aucoin, 1986). The principal secretary position remained the top political staff position in the PMO filled by Bernard Roy during the majority of the first Mulroney mandate but was replaced with that of chief of staff with the appointment of Derek Burney in March 1987. In his memoirs Burney (2005, p.106-107) provides a summary of what he saw as the key functions of the PMO Chief of Staff:

The major task for the chief of staff is to focus the prime minister's time and his message on key issues and to ensure consistency between the message and the delivery of government action. As well, there is a major control function, resolving or containing disputes and crises as they inevitably but unpredictably arise in government. The proactive element, giving shape and direction to the prime minister's agenda, was challenging; the firefighting or crisis management was often frustrating but also stimulating. The combination was very demanding, mentally and physically, but the pressure of it all paled in comparison to that on the prime minister himself.

Additionally, the creation of a Deputy Prime Minister’s Office (DPMO) was another innovation. The office was first headed by Minister Eric Nielson and later Minister Donald Mazankowski. Their prominent roles and influence during the Mulroney administration, for example in chairing key cabinet committees has been well documented (Aucoin, 1986; Savoie, 1994). Lastly, the practice of some PMO office involvement in overall political staffing has been longstanding but reached new heights in the Mulroney PMO. As former Mulroney PMO chief of staff Bernard Roy summarized:

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25 Prime Minister Trudeau appointed the first ever deputy prime minister in 1977. The position was expanded and formalized with the creation of its own ‘office’ under Mulroney.
At first, the Prime Minister’s Office wanted to ensure that no appointments would be made without the PMO being informed and agreeing. The PMO was quite insistent that the rule be observed in the beginning of the government’s mandate, but afterward it was not consistently followed. (Plassé, 1994, p.25)

Overall, the size and the cost of the PMO increased under Mulroney and he has the dubious honour of running the most expensive PMO since 1975 at a cost of between $8.8-million and approximately $12-million per year in inflation adjusted dollars (Davis, 2010).

The election of the Chrétien government (1993-2003) saw another Prime Minister put his stamp on the structure and operation of the PMO. As a long-time parliamentarian and cabinet minister in various portfolios in the Pearson and Trudeau administrations he brought first-hand experience working with PMOs past. Chrétien’s PMO has received detailed treatment by students of public administration and journalists with regards to its operation and the continued centralization or ‘court government’ style (see Bakvis, 2000; Savoie, 1999; Savoie, 2008; Simpson, 2001; Goldenberg, 2006). As per Table 10 below, the size of the PMO was reduced during the early years of the Chrétien government but increased during his final mandate. The Chrétien PMO saw a reversion to ministerial Executive Assistant model in lieu of Chiefs of Staff, the exception being the PMO itself retaining a chief. Studies point to a much less PMO involvement in the selection of ministers’ staff. At least until the latter years of his final mandate when tensions with leadership rival Paul Martin escalated. According to one observer, “Chrétien’s PMO had reserved the right to veto a minister’s choice for this top position, but only one example of this occurred during the first two mandates” (Jeffrey, 2010, p.450). The PMO had no Principal Secretary but long-time senior Chrétien political aide Edward Goldenberg served that function when Chrétien was leader of the opposition and performed the same general function but under the title of Senior Policy Advisor (Goldenberg, 2006). Goldenberg explained that Chrétien:

[E]xpected me to focus on his major policy priorities, and to work with cabinet ministers and deputy ministers to implement them. In addition, because of our long experience together, he told me that my role would include providing advice on overall political strategy, federal-provincial relations, and much else as circumstances required. (Goldenberg, 2006, p.96)
In his aptly titled *The Way it Works*, Goldenberg dismisses the popularized accounts of a controlling PMO or ‘court government’ preferring to characterize the PMO role as one of ‘oversight’ and ‘coordination’, advice giving and communication, and ‘gatekeeping’ (Ibid, Chapter 5). From a policy perspective his account makes clear his self-perceived role as policy actor in select files of interest to the PM or himself. The PMO policy team Goldenberg (2006, p.96) explained:

> Were responsible for how the PMO managed and coordinated government policy priorities and that the policy director and their staff took responsibility for making sure that all the cabinet ministers followed through on election campaign commitments; they also carefully monitored the agendas of all cabinet committees, identified problems between departments and ministers, offered advice, and worked to fix problems.

As a senior Chrétien PMO staff explained when consulted, the ‘policy shop’ was typically staffed by approximately seven policy advisors structured along policy lines (social policy, economic policy, etc.) who reported to the PMO policy director. Their job was, as aforementioned, one of monitoring, liaising, and coordination between PMO and ministers’ offices26. This account is consistent with Jeffrey (2010, p.249) who found “the role of Hosek’s [PMO director of policy] policy group was to staff the two cabinet committees, liaise with the respective PCO and departmental officials, and troubleshoot on upcoming legislation or other policy proposals”. As part of this study, consultations with long-serving former Chrétien PMO partisan advisors confirmed that PMO staff provided their policy advice via oral briefings. This was either within PMO up to the prime minister or in consultation with PCO who would subsequently draft up ‘Clerks Notes’ or other written memoranda for the Prime Minister. Those consulted from that era characterized the overall PMO policy advisory function as oral and informal. This resonates with the published accounts as presented by Goldenberg (2006, chapter 5). Those consulted and Goldenberg’s published account indicates a level of policy capacity within PMO but policy-making was in general ‘text book’. That is, it was most often produced collaboratively with the public service as lead pen on official documents.

26 Consultation with senior Chrétien PMO staff, September 15, 2011.
integrating partisan advisors input and then issuing them to the PM and Cabinet. PMO staff assumed the lead in some but less frequent policy files (Goldenberg, 2006; Savoie 1999).

The Paul Martin minority government PMO (2003-2006) saw a vastly different organizational and operational style. Two recent accounts of the Martin years emphasize the impact of the large group of close Martin advisors known as ‘The Board’. Furthermore, the organizational and management style has been labelled as much more horizontal and ‘flat’ than that of PMOs past. Journalist Paul Wells (2006, p.84) cites Martin’s own style as well as the ‘The Board’, which he describes as “the emotionally tight knit but organizationally amorphous band of loyalists who would accompany Martin for every moment of his time in power”, as reasons for this difference. This large group of advisors went from running a decade long quest for leadership to running the Martin PMO. By all accounts, even those of ‘board members’, it was a much more horizontal and consultative PMO. As noted by Jeffrey, “In a striking departure from the standard hierarchical structure of his predecessors, Martin’s PMO as a loose horizontal organization. It contained no fewer than four deputy chiefs of staff” (Jeffrey, 2010, p.452). A consultation with Tim Murphy, who served as PMO Chief of Staff for the administration’s entirety, confirmed this flat horizontal structure. Mr. Murphy also confirmed that the PMO and ministerial partisan-political policy advisory process continued to be largely informal and oral. While some written notes were produced, they were focused on events or were for media use. In short, the public service still carried the pen on all written advice going to the PM but partisan advice from senior PMO advisors was sought out and integrated into that advice. Martin had close to ten senior advisors who bypassed the chief of staff and reported to him, another departure from the Chrétien practice with the exceptions of Goldenberg and Penny Collenett, Director of Appointments (Jeffrey, 2010). Accounts describe the policy advice and making process in the Martin PMO as fluid, chaotic, disjointed, and quite simply unorganized (Wells, 2006; Jeffrey 2010). As one board member bluntly put it, “For sure, at a minimum we

27 Consultation with Tim Murphy, October 20th 2011.
never got the policy function right” (Jeffrey, 2010, p.454). The Martin PMO was assessed overall to be light on policy capacity. Its policy leads were seen as less capable than those of PMOs past with principal secretaries playing limited roles. The flat organizational structure saw ‘board members’ weighing in on policy items creating a loss of policy coherence and influence flowing from the policy shop (Jeffrey, 2010, p.533).

Two final points also deserve some mention. First, Martin created a political cabinet committee that included formal partisan advisors as members. Martin’s chief of staff, principal secretary, and senior PMO Deputy Chief of Staff (operations) participated in addition to regional political ministers on the committee chaired by the Prime Minister. This committee was primarily designed to deal with the political positioning and strategizing rather than policy making per se, but formal inclusion and reliance on partisan advisors is a striking organizational shift (Jeffrey, 2010, p.451). Secondly, while former PMs undoubtedly used external sources for policy advice, Martin’s Board institutionalized outside advisors as key PMO sources of policy advice; of note were long-time advisors like Elly Alboim, John Duffy, and David Herle (Jeffrey, 2010). The policy advisory system thus included a much more overt exogenous political component that was formally integrated into the PMO advisory ‘court’ as compared to PMOs past. While the Martin PMO reverted back to the practice of including a principal secretary it was not considered to be very policy specific, rather it was designed to deal more with Francophone and Quebec related issues. Murphy recounts that as chief of staff he was the point person who would meet with the Clerk and the PM as well as chair the ‘all staff’ PMO meetings28. Martin also continued the trend of seconding public servants adding the positions of national security advisor and science advisor to the roster of officials brought in to PCO to advise the PM. Finally, reverting to practices introduced in the Mulroney years, the PMO was described as much more involved in the staffing of ministerial offices. Jeffrey explains that the PMO created a list of acceptable candidates for positions of chief of staff “providing ministers with approved lists of individuals from which to choose” (ibid).

28 Consultation with Tim Murphy, October 20th 2011.
The Contemporary PMO

The majority of this study’s fieldwork for the federal case was completed during the Stephen Harper minority government (2008-2011). Some interviews were conducted subsequent to his winning a majority (2011). The continued minority context makes this case unique compared to the two sub-national cases, but structurally, the PMO has been organized in a similar fashion to previous majority governments. Organizationally, many changes introduced during the Martin PMO were immediately scrapped. Upon taking office in 2006, long-time Harper ally, Conservative party executive, and political scientist Ian Brodie was appointed PMO Chief of Staff. Brodie was given the task of organizing the first Conservative PMO in over a decade. Several interviews with Harper PMO staff described the early days as chaotic. The team was finding their footing and processes were being put in place. It was explained that Stephen Harper having been Leader of the Official Opposition was helpful as several positions and processes could simply be transferred or slightly amended at the PMO. Much of Harper’s opposition office staff migrated over to PMO jobs or was dispatched to staff ministers’ offices.

The PMO was immediately organized under more traditional hierarchical terms with all staff reporting through the PMO chief of staff. There was no principal secretary during the first minority government. Ray Novak, Harper’s long-time executive assistant, was later promoted to principal secretary during Guy Giorno’s term as PMO chief of staff. Significant changes were introduced to the regional and communications team structure of the Harper PMO however they are not covered in this overview. The focus of this study (and brief overview) is the formal partisan-political policy advisory system in the PMO. The newly elected Conservatives assembled a policy team under the direction of Mark Cameron, a former Liberal exempt staffer. This study’s interviews with Cameron and others from the early Harper PMO revealed that its structure and processes, as well as staffing, were largely left to Cameron.

29 Interview with former Harper PMO Director of Policy, September 2, 2011.
30 Interview with former Harper PMO chief of staff, Ian Brodie, October 14, 2011
assembled along traditional lines with PMO policy staff assigned to support the four existing cabinet committees designed along broad policy sectors (i.e. economics, social affairs), as well as the powerful Operations (OPs), and Priorities and Planning (P&P) committees.

A watershed reform involved the deployment of a written formal political briefing note system. This is in direct contrast to oral and informal partisan-political policy advisory practices as reported from those of PMOs past (Goldenberg, 2006; Jeffrey, 2010). This system was implemented over time within the first minister’s office and eventually ministerial offices as well. It involved formal written partisan-political policy advice being provided separately from official PCO or departmental policy advice31. Ministers and the Prime Minister received two types of written policy advice - one partisan-political and one non-partisan public service source of policy advice. Another substantial change introduced was the staffing of the PMO foreign policy advisor through partisan appointment, a position that had traditionally been occupied by seconded public servants32.

The workings of the PMO policy shop and its policy advisory and formulation processes are detailed in subsequent chapters but essentially more junior PMO policy advisors would manage and coordinate policy for their cabinet committee and/or various policy sectors. This was described by those interviewed as involving significant interaction with their PCO counterparts (at the level of assistant secretaries to cabinet, as well as policy directors and advisors at ministers’ offices). Administrative-technical and partisan-political policy advice was coordinated and managed by the PMO Director of Policy who reported to the PMO Chief of Staff. There have been changes in both the organization and operation of the Harper PMO as two chiefs of staff headed up the PMO over the course of two minority governments (2006-2008, 2008-2011). At the time of

31 While written memos have been used (See Mallory, 1967, p.30) the practice in place as described by Harper partisan advisors involved more than summary of the docket or policy document in question. It was intended to provide written partisan-political analysis as well as a recommendation from partisan advisors.

32 Interview with former Harper PMO chief of staff, Ian Brodie, October 14, 2011.
writing, the Harper majority government (2011-) PMO was managed by a third chief, Nigel Wright, himself a former Mulroney era PMO staffer and Toronto investment banker. Additionally, several individuals have staffed the PMO Director of Policy position since 2006. The majority of PMO interviews conducted for this study involved staff from the Brodie and Giorno periods. However, interviews with a range of senior officials, ministers, and senior partisan advisors in 2011 confirmed limited changes to the policy advisory process or policy function of PMO staff in the ensuing Nigel Wright led PMO.

PMO continues to involve itself in the staffing of ministers’ offices. Savoie, contends that it reached new heights under Harper explaining “Harper’s PMO went so far as to ask exempt staff working for cabinet ministers to ‘secretly provide’ an assessment of their bosses’ communication skills” (Savoie, 2008, p.238). Interviews conducted for this study confirm heavy but not universal involvement. More importantly however, the practice of PMO oversight in ministerial exempt staffing was formally institutionalized in TBS government documents in 2008. That is, TBS guidelines were amended to explicitly include PMO sign-off on ministerial chiefs of staff as well as “the appointment of the Regional Affairs Director is subject to prior written approval by the Prime Minister’s Office” (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2008, p.5). Harper and his various chiefs of staff, like those before, have left their mark on the organization, process, and policy development and advisory practices of PMO. Comparisons with the staffing and budgetary numbers of PMOs past are complicated by various changes to reporting procedures. At the time of writing the most recent published public accounts (2010-11) combined with data received from Treasury Board Secretariat Officials (See Table 8 below) indicate the PMO employed 99 staff with a personnel budget of $8,107,771 in 2010-11.

**Ministers’ Offices: The Other Political Arm**

Ministers’ offices, like the PMO, have undergone fairly significant transformations in the twentieth century. The same pattern of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization that can be observed with the PMO also applies to the ministerial level. In the first scholarly assessment of political staff in Canada, Mallory (1967) explains that federal ministers’ offices were even more basic than the first minister’s. Explaining that prior to 1950 a minister’s office “It consisted of one ‘secretary to the executive,’ two
stenographers, one messenger, and the Minister’s private secretary” (Mallory, 1967, p.27-28). His description of the evolution goes on to note that an Order in Council of 1950\textsuperscript{33} raised the allowable number of ministerial staff to eight and in 1958 a new category of ‘special assistant’ was created for ‘press officer’ duties (Mallory, 1967). Other students of the minister’s office have noted that a ‘typical’ minister in the St. Laurent Government (1948-57) “seldom had the services of more than a single political confidant” (Lenoski, 1977, p.166). Lenoski footnotes Pickersgill’s remarks on ‘Bureaucrats and Politicians’ pointing to the fact that “In Canada, the private secretary, under whatever designation, is a personal nominee of the Minister, almost never a civil servant, and usually identified with the Minister’s career and often with party politics” (Pickersgill, 1972, p.420). This is the reverse of the PMO where the private secretary to the Prime Minister was historically a seconded public servant until the first Trudeau administration and the arrival of Lalonde.

Historical accounts of their functions paint a picture of limited policy development and underdeveloped political-administrative relations. Reflecting on the ministerial staff in the 1940s and 1950s Mitchell Sharp, former deputy minister and later minister in Pearson and Trudeau governments, recalls limited roles for ministerial staff for the Ministers of Finance James Ilsley (1939 – 1946) and Douglas Abbott (1946 – 1948, 1948-1954). He explained:

Ilsley was content with a secretary and assistant secretary and a messenger, Abbott had a male executive assistant and as well as secretarial staff and a messenger, Howe had a male executive

\textsuperscript{33} Mallory (1967:28) cites P.C. 30/1188, dated March 8, 1950. It allowed for Executive Assistant to the Minister, Head Clerk, Secretary to the Executive, Clerk Grade 4 or Stenographer Grade 3, Clerk Grade 3, Stenographer Grade 2B, Stenographer Grade 2A or Clerk Grade 2A or Messenger, and Confidential Messenger.
assistant\textsuperscript{34}, a couple of secretaries and a messenger. (Sharp, 1995, p.112)

The available literature points to much more clerical and administrative functions for exempt ministerial staff up until the 1960s. Lenoski cites government phone directories (without providing a firm number) as evidence of the Diefenbaker (1957 – 1963) governments increased use of political staff in ministers’ offices (Lenoski, 1977, p.167). The potential for dramatic changes to the complements of political staff working ministerial offices was made possible through the exclusion of the minister’s private office staff from the 1963 Civil Service Act. It served to negate the previously established limits established through Treasury Board Minutes (Ibid). Moreover, the Public Service Employment Act (1967) codified the ‘special assistant’ category of exempt staff and the classification of various other positions in a section dealing with the minister’s exempt staff\textsuperscript{35}. Aucoin (2010, p.71) underscores in a more recent review of their evolution, the number of authorized staff in ministers’ offices went from 5 in the 1940s to 12 in the 1970s. Lenoski (1977, p.169-170) outlines the sub-categorization of the special assistant category of ministerial political staff (including parliamentary relations, constituency relations, legislative assistant) in the late 1960s. This ushered in the period of specialization of political staff with clear and discrete functions (if in title only). Citing the growth of ministerial duties writ large as a principal cause Lenoski (1977, p.170) explains at length this specialization:

The continuing diversification of responsibilities assumed by ministers in large measure has accounted for greater role specialization on the part of their bigger staffs. Whereas the executive assistant at one time could take care of virtually everything single-handedly, the necessity of providing additional assistants for varying reasons has led to a fairly strict differentiation of duties amongst many minister’s staffs. Moreover, together with the executive assistant and several special assistants for

\textsuperscript{34} An astute reader of an early draft of this study noted the reference to gender of executive assistants and not secretarial staff in this description suggesting secretarial positions were usually staffed by woman with the more ‘senior’ executive assistant positioned filled by men. This is no longer the case.

\textsuperscript{35} Statutes of Canada, 166-67, Chapter 71, Section 37.
designated purposes, the staff compliment backing up a representative minister at the present time, will include some research, administrative and/or departmental assistants. Under these latter, and still other, classifications can be subsumed political operatives who concentrate on anything from press relations to speech preparation, policy analysis and a host of other requirements which must be met to help the minister fulfil his various duties.

In general, budgets for ministerial offices out of which exempt political staff are paid have increased. Beginning in the late 1960s and while Benoit (2006, p.159, p.165) quotes Williams (1980) and O’Connor (1991) respectively stating that increases were implemented in 1968. In fact, cabinet records\(^\text{36}\) reveal that the ministerial office budget was first set at $72,000 and subsequently rose to the $78,000 limit in 1966 under Prime Minister Pearson. These limits were fairly stringently upheld. A cabinet conclusion of 1967 details the Minister of justice having to seek cabinet approval to retain an additional long serving political staff\(^\text{37}\). During this period private ministerial offices received increased resources and began to specialize along functional lines such as clerical, media and communications, or regional ministerial work. A cohort, the ‘executive assistants’ to ministers, emerged as potentially influential actors in their own right in the Pearson administration. Benoit’s excellent study (2006, p.152) of federal ministerial staff notes:

It was not uncommon for political staff to take a lead role in many of the governments most controversial and innovative policy initiatives, among them such memorable programs as the unification of the armed forces.

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\(^{36}\) See Cabinet Conclusion ‘Exempt Staff from Minister’s Offices, meeting date 1965/12/22 reference number: RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6271 for a review of the minutes where the policy is outlined as “the generally accepted policy had been to establish certain limits on the numbers of exempt staff allowed to individual ministers and the pattern had developed that each minister was provided with an establishment of 11 exempt positions with a considerable degree of variation in grades and salaries of the positions at the lower level”. The Cabinet Conclusion also notes that this matter was referred to an ad hoc committee for review. See cabinet conclusion ‘Exempt Staff from Minister’s Offices, meeting date 1966/10/13 reference: RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6321 for the cabinet agreement of the increase to ministerial office budgets to $78,000.

\(^{37}\) See Cabinet Conclusion ‘Exempt Staff from Minister’s Offices, meeting date 1967/12/21 reference: RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6323.
and the creation of the Company of Young Canadians. So established had many of these young politicos become on the Ottawa scene that it was occasionally the EAs [executive assistants], rather than their Ministers, who would make announcements to the press and be the focus of media scrums.

Lenoski’s subsequent characterization of ministerial political staff through the late 60s and early 1970s is generous with respect to their non-administrative duties. He is, however, astute in pointing to the clearly contingent role that such staff play in relation to an array of factors such as the minister’s wishes and capacities, as well as the appointees own skills et cetera. He quotes an Executive Assistant of the times to illustrate the point with the exempt staff describing the role of exempt staff as:

The Ministerial Executive Assistant can be anything from an extremely powerful policy-influencing, unelected official to a glorified, overpaid baggage-handler … His actual place in this spectrum depends on many things; his breadth of responsibility and authority the Minister wishes to have him assume; the background and capabilities of the aide; plays such other associated matters as the nature of the Department, the attitude of co-operation or intransigence of the Deputy Minister and other senior civil servants; and the ability and capacity for work of other ministerial staff members. (Lenoski, 1977, p.171)

What emerges however from the Lenoski characterization of exempt staff at the federal level until the 1970s is one marked by expansion, and the onset of increased role specialization. The academic debate had also been launched on the appropriate role of the executive’s political staff with the Mallory (1967) and Tellier (1968) exchanges. With the benefit of hindsight we now know that debate also made its way to the cabinet table of the day. A 1971 cabinet meeting echoes the academic debate. As recorded, the recently released Cabinet Conclusion states:

‘The following points arose during discussion:

(a) It was the view of some ministers that ministers should not be limited in the salaries they could pay within their exempt staff budget; the point was made in this connection that the salary ceilings prevented ministers from hiring competent staff, particularly in the advisory capacity, at a higher salary.
(b) It was the view of some others that ministers should rely on their departmental officials as advisors, not on highly paid assistants in their own offices.\textsuperscript{38}

Those ministers in favour of looser guidelines and higher salaries are recorded as having won the day. Such cabinet deliberation points out that the ongoing tension of exempt staff and departmental officials as sources of policy advice is anything but new. Echoing concerns of the Pearson era regarding the influence of political staff during a cabinet discussion in 1973, exempt staffs were recommended to be included under the existing conflict of interest guidelines. According to the Cabinet Conclusion one reason for this suggestion was:

The recommendation that Executive Assistants be included immediately under guidelines in force for Cabinet Ministers stemmed from the fact that not infrequently people in that category exercised a great deal of influence over decision making and had access to highly classified information\textsuperscript{39}

The record indicates that the process was anything but standardized with ministers agreeing but subject to whether they thought their exempt staff aught be covered. By 1978 ministers' budgets had increased to $175,000 and were intended to cover a larger contingent of ministerial staff, often in addition to seconded public servants (Williams, 1980). However, ministers were quite capable of circumvented established budget limits through 'personal service contracts'. These would allow ministers to secure additional staff up with expertise or skills found outside the public service (Ibid). The oft cited example is then Minister of Transport Lloyd Axworthy whose ministerial office in the 1980s was staffed by 75 employees of which 16 were exempt staff and the remainder seconded public servants and term civil service staff (Savoie, 2003a, p.127). Responding to requests for greater flexibility and in an attempt to curtail the 'personal services contract' phenomenon, cabinet approved the new exempt position

\textsuperscript{38} See Cabinet Conclusion ‘Exempt Staff from Minister’s Offices, Meeting date 1971/11/25 reference: RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6381 (emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{39} See Cabinet Conclusion ‘Exempt Staff from Minister’s Offices’, meeting date 1973/12/13 reference: RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6422.
of ‘Special Assistant – Policy Advisor’ in 1978 (Williams, 1980, p.219). From available cabinet documents and aforementioned cited secondary sources this appears to be the first explicit recognition of the partisan advisory role. It certainly confirms the further specialization of Canadian political staff towards that of partisan advisors.

Mulroney government (1984-1993) cabinet documents are not yet publicly available. However the record is clear that it significantly expanded of the function and number of politically appointed staff across the federal government. The Executive Assistant position was replaced by the Chief of Staff position in ministers’ offices, a change that had consequences beyond that of simply title. Chiefs were classified at a rank comparable to that of Deputy Minister, with accompanying increases to the level of pay, and signalled to the bureaucracy that increased political control was the order of the day. As Savoie (2003a, p.124) bluntly puts it, “Mulroney’s decision had one purpose – to check permanent officials influence on policy”. Chiefs of Staff and political staff more generally were explicitly used as a means to contest or counterbalance the perceived influence of the entrenched bureaucracy. As Bourgault (2002, p.433) writes when Mulroney took office:

[H]e issued warnings to the DMs who were holdovers from previous governments and installed powerful COSs [chiefs of staff] to make sure ministers would not be captives of their departments. Conflicts were numerous in the first two years, until politicians and chiefs of staff gained more experience and confidence, roles were reorganized, and new people were brought in.

With an expanded cabinet including 40 ministers the number of ministerial staff increased correspondingly. It was not uncommon to find a group of 30-40 people working in a minister’s office under the direction of a ‘chief of staff’ (Larson, 1999, p.57). Such changes were considered revolutionary. As Deputy Minister Arthur Kroeger put it, “When Mulroney arrived there was lots of fear in the bureaucracy over the increased power of the Chief of Staff displacing the DM” (Benoit, 2006, p.161). Overall, by 1990-1991 the total number of exempt staff sat at 460 (99 of whom staffed the PMO). This expanded contingent of exempt staff was rolled out in ministers’ offices across government with the intention of ensuring a more muscular overall political management and to provide greater political and policy advisory capacity to ministers (Bakvis, 2000,
As O’Connor (1991, p.23-25) explains, the chief of staff position was created to “offer policy advice over and above that provided by the department he or she could achieve this in part by soliciting opinions different from those held by the departmental advisors”; and that that chiefs of staff “provided an interesting challenge to the deputy minister and the department in terms of policy development and control”.

Plassé’s (1994, p.30) study of federal Mulroney chiefs of staff (n=19) found that chiefs self-reported their most frequent duties to involve providing advice to the minister, managing the office, ensuring liaison with the minister and review of departmental policies. Plassé found that chiefs did not replace ministers or believe themselves to have inappropriate levels of discretion. Rather, foreshadowing the Svara’s (1999) language of complementarity, she found a system that was based on “rapprochement and complémentarité” (Ibid, p.338). A former Mulroney PMO staffer described the chief of staff position under Mulroney as follows:

The chief of staff is, first and foremost, the senior political advisor to the minister. He or she is also the director of operations and controller for the minister’s office. The chief of staff must provide leadership and coherence to the operations of the minister’s office, and should bring sound knowledge to both governmental decision making and the policy process. A key role of the chief of staff is to ensure that ministerial directives are carried out within the department. In this way, the chief of staff assists in increasing ministerial control and accountability. (O’Connor, 1991, p.24)

O’Connor’s review of the Chief of Staff role also included a delineation of the various tasks performed including (Ibid)40:

• the monitoring of progress of departmental and ministerial priorities;
• the management of the minister's political profile and communications priorities;
• the management of the minister’s paper flow;

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40 For an earlier delineation of the activities of exempt staff in two Canadian governments see Lee (1971). See also Flemming (1997).
• the administration of the minister's departmental, Parliament Hill and constituency offices;
• the minister's speech writing agenda;
• cabinet, Parliamentary Secretary, caucus and opposition liaison;
• liaison with the party apparatus at the national, regional and constituency levels;
• overall scheduling and travel
• industry, association and special interest group contacts; and
• Liaison with the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council office, Treasure Board and other departments.

Plassé’s study is fairly favourable finding three quarters of chiefs characterized their relations with the public service as excellent (1994, p.57). They highlighted mutual respect for roles, responsibilities and expertise along with the ability to communicate and a transparent atmosphere as essential elements to harmonious relations within the interface (Ibid, 60). The majority of chiefs found that senior public servants have too much power, with only four indicating they do not (Ibid, p.63). Yet, they also noted that they perceived themselves as participating in decision-making in various forms such as departmental management committees and projects, and advice to the minister on all matters (Ibid, 70). In her concluding remarks, Plassé sums up the relations between politicians and public servants at the time to be in fairly good health. She suggests that chiefs had found an appropriate place for themselves within the system. She highlights that “there does not appear to be a phenomenon of osmosis or cross-breeding between the two groups, but rather one of connection, or communication” (Ibid, 79). Savoie’s (2003b, p.124) later assessment of that period is however not quite as laudatory:

The chiefs of staff, however, had a mixed reception, often dependent on the quality of the incumbent. They introduced a new level between ministers and permanent officials, which gave rise to misunderstandings and complications. In some instances, the chief of staff acted as a mediator between the minister and permanent officials, screening advice going up to the minister and issuing policy directives going down to officials, much to the dismay and objectives of deputy ministers. Many chiefs of staff took a dim view of the competence of permanent officials, who took an equally jaundiced view of them.

The Chrétien government’s election in 1993 saw the pendulum swing in the other direction. Cabinet was significantly reduced in size going from 40 to 23 ministers and
political staffs were reduced across the board (Kernaghan & Siegel, 1995, p.382). This was seen as a response to growing criticisms related to powerful and unelected political staff (particularly in the PMO), a signal of renewed trust in the public service, and a commitment to expenditure reductions through reductions to the political arm of government (Aucoin, 2010). Savoie’s assessment was that relations between exempt staff and senior officials had changed but “only at the margins” (2003a, p.127). Savoie (ibid) contends that while their titles may have changed EAs functions were essentially similar to that described by O’Connor:

There is little in her description that does not apply to executive assistants in the Chrétien government. An executive assistant, like a chief of staff, is the senior political advisor to a minister, acts as director of operations and controller for his or her office, and ensures that ministerial directive are carried out within the department, so as to increase ministerial control and accountability.

By 2003, the Treasury Board Guidelines provided a budget allotment of $828,000 per year for exempt staff in ministers’ offices with an additional $480,000 for the secondment of public servants41. The Martin minority government (2004-2006) put its own stamp on the ministerial office structure and function returning to the chief of staff structure in favour of the executive assistant model. As Benoit (2006, p.164) notes, a PMO spokesperson of the day reported that the change and accompanying pay increases were as a consequence of the increased responsibilities falling to ministerial offices in general, which “are being asked to do much more, dealing with parliamentary secretaries, dealing with parliamentarians …the whole role is enhanced…”. As per Table 8, the Martin government (2003-2006) saw a reduction in PMO staff but an increase in the overall number of political staff with the exception of the 2006 election year. As per Table 8 below, and as noted by Aucoin (2010, p.73), by 1999-2000 the number of partisan staff across the board began to increase. The largest increases were at the ministerial office level and not in the PMO that has maintained fairly stable staffing levels.

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<td>Total: Ministerial Exempt staff</td>
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**Contemporary Federal Ministers’ Offices**

The 2011 figures included in Table 8 above indicate that, at the time of writing, 421 political staff worked in federal ministerial offices. The 2011 figures for ministerial office budgets were not publicly available when this study was underway. The most recent publicly available figures, for 2007-2008, document an allotment ranging from $410,870 to $978,150 depending on the nature and composition of the Ministry (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2007, p. 64). The ongoing increases to ministerial office budgets from which exempt staff are funded continued in large measure since the Trudeau administration. With the passing of the Federal Accountability Act (S.C. 2006,

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1 Adapted from a larger table provided to the author in correspondence with the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, October 24th, 2011 in response to request No. 31029. Figures include employees on leave without pay. See Appendix A for full table.

2 Correspondence with Treasury Board Secretariat officials who provided the data for the aforementioned table indicated the figures were not available. At the time this study completed the 2011 costs of ministers’ offices were not available.

3 Annex B however notes, “Budgets are set through written communication based on the Prime Minister’s instruction. The ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Human Resources and Social Development, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Finance, the Environment and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform have received exempt staff salary budgets in excess of the figures indicated above. These range from $1,075,760 to $1,575,760 for 2006–2007 and $1,078,150 to $1,578,150 for 2007–2008” (Treasury Board, 2007, p. 64).
c. 9), ministers have (since 2006) been forced to disclose their ministerial office budgets. As reported in the published Public Accounts and Table 9 below, the expenses of ministerial offices have been in flux of late.

**Table 9. Total Expenditures for Federal Minister’s office Staff (2006-2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (Personnel Only, Millions $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>46,549,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>48,226,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>55,959,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>51,556,842</td>
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</table>

Compiled from the annual Government of Canada's Public Accounts, Volume III, ‘Additional Information and Analyses’ section for the years in question.

The Harper government expenditures for ministerial office budgets saw a reduction in 2011 compared to previous years. Additionally, as aforementioned, a clear evolution towards much greater specialization and division of labour within ministers’ offices can now be observed. This is formally articulated through the Treasury Board Secretariat’s classifications of potential positions included the 2011 *Policies for Ministers’ Offices*. The document includes a variety of positions by which ministers can organize and classify their exempt staff, many of which have explicitly stated policy functions. Such as: Policy Advisors, Senior Policy Advisors, Directors of Policy, and the Chief of Staff. Contemporary ministers’ offices have thus become much more sophisticated in terms of their internal division of labour and exempt staff specialization. Of particular relevance for this study is their inclusion of exempt staff with clear policy and advisory related functions. As per Table 8 above, the number of political staff overall has increased throughout the Harper government in minority (2006-2008, 2008-2011). The

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most recently published Public Accounts (2010-11) indicate that the total (personnel costs only) for all categories of ministers’ offices over that year totalled 51,556,842.  

**Partisan Appointees at the Provincial Level**

This section provides some context to the development of the political arm of government at the provincial level for the two sub-national cases. The same pattern of bureaucratic growth in the political arm is detectable, however occurring much later. An initial institutionalization of political staff can be gleaned as occurring in the late 1980s, followed by a period of modest expansion, and subsequent and ongoing specialization in both cases. Few official government documents were available, or of any use, in attempting to document historical or current figures pertaining to political staff in either sub-national case. Correspondence to the legislative libraries, executive council offices (ECO), and other pertinent sources were met with replies no figures were readily available. Only in the British Columbia case was it possible to generate figures via reports created from the British Columbia Public Service Commission payment system. As such, this section relies heavily on secondary sources for a basic overview of the structure, function, and evolution of personnel in the offices of the respective first ministers. Where fruitful findings were made related to the use of political staff at the ministerial level they are also reported.

**British Columbia**

The development of the ‘political arm’ in British Columbia (B.C.) was much slower to emerge than its federal counterpart. It wasn’t until the 1980s that the use of politically appointed staff in premier’s office and ministerial offices in B.C. began the process of institutionalization, expansion and specialization. If you had to characterize the history of British Columbia’s administrative style it would be one of ‘laggard insularity’.  

45 This figure is drawn from the 2010-11 Public Accounts (Volume III).
(Ruff, 2005, p.226). This description characterizes the ‘center’ of government including both political and administrative central agencies in the early to-mid-twentieth century. Ruff argues that until the 1970s, B.C. premiers governed in a less complex system of government which facilitated personal governance through the premier themselves. The long run of the William Andrew Cecil (W.A.C.) Bennett government (1952-1972) was an administration characterised by the ‘unaided’ cabinet style (Tennant, 1977). British Columbia was much slower to adopt the cabinet committee system and strong central agencies that characterized the ‘institutionalized cabinet’ that had developed in other larger provinces46. In terms of public service central agencies, they were meagre by today’s standards. Dunn (1995, p.211) does however credit the “institutionalized Premier’s Office” to W.A.C Bennett with the payment of L.J. Wallace. Wallace was listed as the deputy minister to the premier and starting with the 1970-71 public accounts paid by the Premier’s Office appropriation and not the public service Department of the Provincial Secretary. Young and Morley sum up W.A.C’s premier’s office as consisting of skeletal staff: “he did not have an elaborate office staff; indeed he did not even employ an executive assistant” (1983, p.63). Further explaining that W.A.C. “received his political advice from outside advisors and public relations experts” (Ibid).

On the political side of the ledger, until the 1980s, the Premier’s office served as personal support office and played little policy or advisory role. Various administrations have, however, not escaped observations of dictatorial leadership styles and the highly centralized premier’s office models (White, 2005; 2001). Tracing the evolution of the political arm is more difficult as less is generally known about the ministerial level staff. Attempts to secure historical information related to the number of political staff in British Colombia were met with mixed success. As per Table 11 below, figures were only provided for the 1996-2011 period due to a change in how that data is collected and maintained by the British Columbia Public Service Commission. This data is supplemented with available information from secondary sources to provide a fairly robust account of the ministerial political staff usage in general. The political arm in

46 See (Dunn, 1995) for a detailed overview of the evolving British Columbia cabinet system.
British Columbia really took shape with the election of Social Credit Premier William Richards Bennett (1975-1986). By 1982, Bennett had modernized both the political and administrative ‘center’ of government in British Columbia. A Deputy Minister to the Premier’s Office was established (1981) and the Premier’s Office restructured along Ottawa PMO structural lines with an eye towards overall policy coordination (Ruff, 2009, p.211). This included the first-ever appointment of a principal secretary from outside the public service who essentially performed the chief of staff function, a title he would later adopt. As Ruff points out, this dual institutionalized structure of a chief of staff and deputy minister to the premier would prove lasting. It has been maintained through nine successive premiers over the last twenty-five years (Ruff, 2005, p.227)47.

The 1990s were characterised by more frequent changes in the Office of the Premier with each successive Premier bringing their own administrative style and mark to the design and operation of government. The frequency of change consequently led to higher degrees of turnover and varied use of the chief of staff to the premier48. With the Chief of Staff playing a less significant policy role during the Clark (1996-1999) administration due in part to the close working relationship of the premier to his Deputy Minister (Ruff, 2009). Strong central administrative units like the Cabinet Policy and Communications Secretariat were key sources of support to Premiers Harcourt and Clark administrations. The continued development of central agency institutions and the expanding role of premier’s office over the 1990s has led to some arguing that by the 1990s, B.C., like its federal counterpart, was ‘governed from the centre’ (Ruff, 2009, p.205; Savoie, 1999). The decade long administration of the Campbell administration saw the role and activities of partisan advisors at the centre continue to evolve.

47 Ruff (2005:229) does however note that Premier Vander Zalm (1986-1991) only had a chief of staff and no deputy minister to the premier. The 9th premier Christina Clark’s Premier’s Office adopted a more elaborate Premier’s office structure a principal secretary located in the legislative precinct and a senior policy advisor and other senior staff located in her Vancouver office in addition to the complement under Campbell (Government of British Columbia, 2011).

48 See Ruff (2005:228) for an account of the various ‘styles’ of such premiers.
The Contemporary Premier’s Office in British Columbia

Incremental increases to the political arm of government, notably the premier’s office, were undertaken up until the 2001 election of the Campbell government. The Campbell government’s election brought dramatic reorganization to both the public service and political arm of the premier’s office. The traditional design of one deputy minister to the premier’s was altered with the appointment of a second deputy minister to the premier (Ruff, 2005, p. 229). These positions are noted in the B.C. case as opposed to the federal and New Brunswick cases as while physically located elsewhere, they are considered part of the B.C. premier’s office. One deputy minister retained the traditional role of secretary to cabinet and the other was charged with leading a ‘core services review’ of government-wide restructuring. That deputy was given the apt title of Deputy Minister, Corporate Planning Restructuring. As per Table 10 below, in its inaugural year, the Campbell premier’s office appears much larger in staff terms than subsequent years due to inclusion of the executive council office and large Public Affairs Bureau staff.

In 2001 it included 470 staff and a budget $2,882,000 for the operation of premier’s office staff proper. Considerable reorganization of the premier’s office was also undertaken with the chief of staff position maintained but significantly expanded in scope. Campbell appointed Martyn Brown, his Chief of Staff, who would remain in that position for the decade in which Campbell served as premier – the longest tenure for a provincial chief of staff in recent Canadian history⁴⁹. Brown performed the traditional role of strategic advisor, ‘fire fighter’, and support to the premier but was tasked with the additional responsibilities of caucus liaison and management as well as external stakeholder management (Ruff, 2005, p.229).

The organization of the premier’s office went through three acknowledged iterations, as recorded in various iterations of the various service plans of the Office of the Premier. Annex B presents the 2001 organizational chart which includes the

⁴⁹ Due to the shortage of information related to the Chief’s of Staff in various provinces it is generally accepted that Mr. Brown was the longest serving chief of staff in the modern sense.
Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations directly under the premier, between the chief of staff and deputy ministers, but this position was subsequently removed in the 2005 and 2011 service plans from the Office of the Premier.

Table 10. **British Columbia Premier’s office Expenses and Staffing Level (2001-2011)**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expenses ($000)</td>
<td>2,882</td>
<td>2,818</td>
<td>2,818</td>
<td>2,786</td>
<td>3,104</td>
<td>3,549</td>
<td>3,676</td>
<td>3,810</td>
<td>3,319</td>
<td>2,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Staff (FTE)</td>
<td>470*</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40∞</td>
<td>39±</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from department service plans, Office of the Premier. Unless otherwise indicated revised and final figures as presented in subsequent service plans were used for accuracy.

Secondly, all three designs offer a clear illustration of the chief of staff/deputy minister to premier configuration. Additional policy advisory capacity was brought to bear from outside of the public service through the twin additions of the Premier’s Technology Council and the British Columbia Progress Board. As per a revised version of the organizational chart for the Office of the Premier, these bodies were included in the policy advisory system available to the premier in addition to the usual suspects.\(^{50}\)

Such structural changes are insightful in terms of how the Office of the Premier structured the sources of policy advice it is less informative on the substantive ‘content’

* The staffing figure for 2001-2002 includes five other central administrative agencies and secretariats in addition to premier’s office. No figures were available for premier’s office staff alone. Revised figures drawn from 2002-2003 service plan, Office of the Premier.

∞ The staffing level for the Premier’s Office is reported as estimated in the 2009/10 – 2011/12 Premier’s Office service plan. Figures for 2009-2010 and 2011 were not listed, even as estimates in the yearly service plans likely due to a change in premiers.

± This figure is listed as ‘planned’ in the 2009/10-2011/12 Premier’s office service plan.

\(^{50}\) These two advisory bodies would remain housed in the Office of the Premier until 2009 when they were moved to the Ministry of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development (Ruff, 2009). See Office of the Premier (2002:5).
dimensions of that advice. The Office of the Premier certainly benefited from the policy coordination and advisory services of these new non-governmental advisory bodies, and the continued presence of the twin deputy ministers located within the premier’s office. The revised 2002 premier’s office service plan organizational chart documents the removal of the Minister of State for Intergovernmental Affairs from the premier’s office. It also sets out new direct accountability relationships to the premier for the premier’s chief of staff and twin premier’s office deputy ministers. Staffing levels and premier’s office budget were fairly consistent with 2008-09 being the most expensive year on record for the Campbell government. By 2011, estimates of the Premier’s office indicated a staff of 39 and overall budget of $2,878,000. Organizational charts and budgets are useful for track major organizational or resource allocation shifts but are less informative related to the actual policy functions of partisan advisors ‘at the centre’.

Further clarification on this can be gained through the most recent 2010/11-2012/13 service plan that provides for the third and final organizational diagram and also provides the most up to date explanation of the “purpose” of the premier’s office. The document explains the purpose of the office is to:

• articulates government’s goals, commitments and priorities
• works with ministries and Crown agencies to ensure communications of those goals, commitments and priorities and to track and monitor the implementation of them;
• leads the public service and, with the Deputy Minister’s Council, leads implementation of the corporate human resources plan for the BC Public Service, Being the Best;
• provides support for the operation and decision making processes of Cabinet and its Committees; and
• works directly with the federal government and with all ministries and Crown agencies to ensure that relations with federal, provincial, municipal, territorial and international governments advance British Columbia’s interests.

(Office of the Premier, 2010, p. 8)

Also of note, the revised premier’s office organizational chart included in the 2011 provincial budget (see Annex C) now provides a more detailed breakdown of the premier’s office staff. Germane to this study, the chart lists the deputy chief of staff for issues management and policy coordination. As Ruff (2010, p.213) describes, this deputy chief of staff “advises and briefs the premier on policy and legislative objectives
and coordinates issues among Cabinet ministers' offices”. During interviews with senior premier’s office staff this role was explained as ongoing since 2001 but that the policy coordination had been added to the issues management title in more recent descriptions of the premier’s office staff structure. Senior partisan advisors in the B.C. case also reported active participation in cabinet committee business but explained that their roles were as ‘unofficial members’ of such committees as representatives of the premier. This stands in contrast to other practices used recently in both the federal and New Brunswick cases where first minister’s office partisan advisors were at times formal cabinet committee members.

An additional position of Senior Coordinator, Issues Management is also represented which was reported to have also existed for several years and includes some policy coordination and was designed to assist the Deputy Chief of Staff and permit greater attention to strategic issues management and policy coordination. The chief of staff involves the “protective oversight of policy and its messaging takes an unabashedly governing party political perspective on activity at the centre” (Ruff, 2009, p.213). Both secondary sources and interviews with senior premier’s office staff confirm that these two political staff positions are the policy positions of the premier’s office. The historical expansion of the use of political staff, particularly at the premier’s office level in terms of their role in the policy and cabinet process is underscored. As Ruff concludes in a recent review of the dominance of the executive in B.C: “The Office of the Premier is inherently potent itself with commanding institutional sources that have been expanded in recent times” further stating that “the premier is in every sense the first minister, and his office and its staff visibly dominate the policy direction and management of provincial government” (Ruff, 2009, p.208). This study is precisely aimed at understanding how that dominance is achieved from a policy perspective. What role partisan advisors in the premier’s office play related to policy-making? How are partisan advisors involved in policy making or policy advice at the ministerial office level?

51 Interview with senior premier’s office staff, May 11, 2011.
B.C. Ministers’ Offices Past and Present

As per Table 11 below, B.C. ministers’ office staffs also demonstrate a discernible pattern of growth and specialization. The 1983 government of W.R. Bennett featured ministerial offices allotted with an administrative staff of five and a complement of three political staff with an overall budget of approximately $75,000 (Marley, 1997). Those levels and structure were reportedly maintained for the subsequent Vander Zalm (1986-1990) and Harcourt governments (1991-1996) (Morley, 1993, p.201; Marley, 1997, p.6). The ministerial office budgets were $115,000 in 1986 and $158,000 under Harcourt in 1991 (Marley, 1997, p.7) In the selection of their ministerial political staff, Harcourt ministers were given free reign but the Office of the Premier maintained the ability to exercise a veto over such appointments but such practices were rare (Morley, 1993, p.201).

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<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from a table provided to author November 8, 2011 by the B.C. Public Service Commission.

While previous governments may have played a role in the recruitment or placement of political staffs at the ministers’ office level, the Campbell government explicitly documented such practices. In a 2001 letter of instructions to all ministers, the Campbell government advised ministers on their staff and its relationship to the political and administrative actors in the system. As Ruff (2005, p.234) explains:

It informed all twenty-eight cabinet members on the appropriate organization of their offices and also on their relationships with their

For the full table including departmental breakdown and classification see Annex D.
executive staff, with the premier’s officials, and with the new cabinet structures, plus specific references to their own particular sets of policy responsibility. The carefully defined parameters began with a reminder that this was to be a lean and efficient government and that the structuring and staffing of each minister’s office (confined to a single ministerial and a single executive assistant) would be arranged by the premier’s chief of staff.

The classification of political staff underwent a change in 2006. This change was the result of an overhaul to the pay scales for political staff. A press release issued by Premier Campbell’s office at the time indicates that the increased salary levels for ‘senior political staff’ that includes ministerial assistants and executive assistants and senior premier’s office staff were reported to be:

>M]ore competitive with other jurisdictions and to help attract and retain qualified employees. Consistent with other public sector workers, the new maximum achievable salaries for political staff will place British Columbia’s compensation levels typically third or lower among all provinces, not including the federal government or territories. (Office of the Premier, 2006b)

These new categories included: Band A - representing Ministerial Assistants with a salary range of $66,150-$94,500; Band B – Executive Assistants with a salary range of $51,300-$68,400; Premier’s office Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of staff captured by Band C (range $146,361-$185,390) and Band D ($108,000-$144,000), respectively (Office of the Premier, 2006a). By the final year of the Campbell government in 2011, the political arm in British Colombia was composed of approximately 40 staff in the premier’s office and a complement of 26 ministerial assistants who served as the primary partisan advisors to ministers. It must again be noted that these numbers will likely be affected by transition to the leadership of new premier Christina Clark (2011-).

New Brunswick

The final case examined is the government of New Brunswick with fieldwork having been completed during the Graham government (2006-2010). The smallest of the three cases in terms of the provincial population, size of government, and ‘political staffs’ New Brunswick provides an interesting comparative case. As Bouchard (1999,
p.94) notes the province had only three premiers from 1960-1999 (Robichaud 1960-70, Hatfield 1970-87, and McKenna, 1987-97). It has subsequently seen more frequent change with Premier’s Frenette (1997-98), Terriault (1998-99), Lord (1999-2006), Graham (2006-2010), and Alward (2010-). Compared to the two other cases there is little scholarly assessment of provincial politics or the core executive in New Brunswick. Savoie (1989; 2000) underscores that Premiers Robichaud and Hatfield respectively went to great lengths to ensure the development of a professional public service in New Brunswick. For example, they looked to leading professionals from other jurisdictions and recruited them to key public service positions. Savoie’s (2000, p.277) characterization of the various governments from Robichaud to Lord is that of a group of political elites who worked with the public service seeing them as a solution, not a problem. A review of the literature on the provincial political arm and political administrative relations reveals a very small and intimate executive governance style. Savoie’s (1989, p.37) description of the Hatfield government would seem to stand equally for that of the Graham government examined in this dissertation, he writes:

All in all, the entire New Brunswick government is only slightly bigger than an average federal department and, in fact, is smaller than several of them. This means that relations between politicians and administrators are much more intense and frequent than they are in larger governments, where cabinet ministers are compelled to delegate considerable decision making authority to their departmental officials

New Brunswick’s political arm is first and foremost quite small. In historical terms, for most of the early twentieth century the Premier’s office consisted of just one secretary. Arthur Doyle documents the first full-time executive secretary having been appointed in 1935 (Doyle, 1984, p.vii, p.viii). One can infer that ministers’ offices during the same period would have been even more skeletal. For most of late twentieth century, ministers’ offices operated with only two political staff, one executive assistant and a secretary. Bouchard (1999, p.104; forthcoming) characterizes the small and relatively untrained modern political arm in New Brunswick as resulting in a category of political staffs who in no way ‘rival’ the deputy cadre. Rather, they are described as primarily concerned with the ministers’ constituency issues. The exception is first minister’s office partisan advisors who in a later review are noted as influential sources.
of advice and policy formulation activity, particularly the chief of staff (Bouchard, forthcoming).

Whereas the evolution of the political arm in B.C. as well as at the federal case includes clearly demarcated expansionary and specialization phases, neither of these two periods can be confirmed for the New Brunswick case. While there has been a small increase in the number and specialization of first minister’s office political staff, the same cannot be confirmed for departmental ministerial offices. Detailed historical or contemporary data regarding first minister’s or ministers’ offices are not available. Repeated attempts to secure such data from officials were unfruitful. Correspondence with senior human resource officials was met with the simple pronouncement that such data was not available. It was explained that such figures were not readily available and resource constraints prevented any research to generate such data, if even possible. The official was able to confirm that, as of September 2006, there were 22 Executive Assistants and 20 Executive Secretaries at the beginning of the Graham administration. As of November 22, 2011 the same official confirmed the new Alward government employed 18 Executive Assistants and 15 Executive Secretaries. It was explained this continued the long tradition of ministers employing one Ministerial Executive Assistant and one Secretary.

While official figures are not available, scholarly and biographical documents have noted sources of politically appointed policy advice. For example, a strong role for political appointees as sources of political and policy advice has been reported in the Hatfield and McKenna administrations (Hyson, 2005; Lee, 2001; Savoie, 1989). More recently, Dunn (2006, p.242) found that under the Conservative Lord government partisan advisors were official members of cabinet committees in a similar fashion to Prime Minister Martin’s organization. Dunn noted that the Executive Committee included

52 As provided in correspondence to the author by the Director - Compensation, Classification & Corporate Research; Office of Human Resources, Government of New Brunswick. November 22, 2011.
53 Ibid.
the premier, his chief of staff, the secretary to cabinet, secretary to Policy and Priorities Committee, president of the Regional Development Corporation, 8 ministers and their deputies, and the deputy minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Interviews completed for this study confirmed a somewhat similar arrangement existed under the Graham government. Ministers, deputy ministers, and the chief of staff all participated as official members of an ad-hoc cabinet committee. Bouchard (forthcoming) notes the important policy functions that rest with first minister’s office partisan advisors notably the chief of staff. His explanation of their policy function highlights the important substantive and procedural advisory and formulation activity attributable to first minister’s office partisan advisors. He explains:

Traditionally, when seeking policy direction, Deputies turn to the Chief of Staff who represents the ideal route for accessing the Premier and who is authorized to speak for him. Indeed, it is from the Premier’s Office, directed by the Chief of Staff (today called Directeur général in French), that they receive their mandates and requests for policy development. It is also this political office that carries out the Deputies’ performance appraisals.

A policy function is also explicit in the New Brunswick Civil Service Act section 27.2(1) which sets out that those working in a central agency e.g. premier’s office that are “politically restricted employees” include duties and responsibilities such as, “providing advice, opinions, proposals, recommendations, analyses or policy options to the Premier, a Minister, Executive Council, a member of Executive Council, a committee of or a member of a committee of Executive Council or a deputy head”. Bouchard’s most recent characterization of the DM-minister relationship in New Brunswick points to the political control exercised by the premier as the only viable means for responsiveness. Based on interviews he claims, “Deputies come to view the Minister as a work colleague at best, sometimes an employee, a spokesperson for the Department, but very rarely do the Deputies view their Minister as a supervisor” (Bouchard, Forthcoming).

54 Interviews with two long serving deputy ministers, Fredericton, New Brunswick, August 6, 2010.
55 See section 27.2(1)(a).
Conclusion

This chapter has argued that partisan advisors have evolved through a slow three-staged process of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization. This evolution was discernible in the federal and British Columbia cases. However, a lack of historical and contemporary data makes firm judgements in the New Brunswick case more difficult. This historical perspective gained through the above examination of the evolving nature of the political arm allows greater nuance and context to be applied to subsequent chapters. It contextualizes the policy advisory and policy-making functions of partisan advisors in the three cases examined. As this chapter has made clear, there continue to be historical differences in how formal divisions of labour have been struck between partisan advisors, as well as variations in configurations of partisan-political policy advisory systems and capacity across the cases. Additionally, new data has been presented on the number of ‘political staff’ in two of the three cases and some federal cabinet conclusions that have been omitted from the exiting literature.

The overview presented for each of these cases also confirms that politically appointed staffs in Canada were introduced, in part, as a response to the increasing complexities of governance. They were also clearly deployed as a means to counterbalance, for elected officials, what was perceived to be an overly influential bureaucracy. The genesis of partisan advisors can be traced to the modern PMO architecture put in place by Prime Minister Trudeau as part of his so-called ‘rationalization’ of the policy-making system. This was intended to empower the cabinet as a collective but also strengthen the prime minister’s office. This suggests that partisan advisors are in part an institutional adaptation to exogenous and endogenous pressures facing government (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a, 2010b). That is, a response to the complexities of governance and policy-making as well as a tangible tool for increased political control and public service responsiveness. Hindsight makes clear the significant potential variance in the number, configurations, and policy functions partisan advisors undertake. This further emphasizes the need for improved assessment of such actors based on empirical study of their policy activity, the contexts in which they occur, and the implications such activity holds for policy work and governance arrangements.
Chapter 4.

Buffering and Bridging at the Centre

Introduction

Complementarity was introduced as an alternative means to understand and assess elite political-administrative relations. As Svara (2006a, p.966) points out, a key feature of the approach is an emphasis on sharing and interaction between the two sets of actors. However, the model’s utility is limited both theoretically and empirically due to an implicit assumption of bilateral political-administrative relations. As we have seen the political-administrative nexus is now characterized by trilateral if not multilateral relations (Hood, 2000; Zussman, 2009). This chapter uses the first two theoretical propositions, buffers and bridges, to array and evaluate the policy advisory activities of first ministers’ office partisan advisors and their implications for complementarity. This analysis is undertaken within the overarching framework of complementarity by linking these activities to complementarity’s twin dimensions - political control of the public service and differentiation of roles between the two sets of actors (See Table 12).

This study examines first ministers’ office partisan advisors in isolation of their ministerial office counterparts for two reasons. First, existing Canadian, Westminster, and core executive studies argue that the institutional location of the first minister’s office results in a greater degree of overall policy influence (Dahlström, Peters, & Pierre, 2011b; Savoie, 1999; Savoie, 2010; Aucoin, 2010; Bernier, Brownsey, & Howlett, 2005; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a; Peters & Savoie, 2000; Peters, Rhodes, & Wright, 2000). As reviewed in Chapter 2, partisan advisors ‘at the center’ are argued to be key drivers of purported shifts towards New Political Governance (Aucoin, 2008b; Aucoin, 2010; Bakvis & Jarvis, 2012). Of note, Aucoin’s NPG model is explicitly cast in terms of a growing influence of the Office of the Prime Minister - not just Prime Ministers.
themselves. The following two chapters were thus conceived as a means to add to the study’s comparative aims through an assessment of these actors policy advice (buffering and bridging) and formulation (moving and shaping) activity as compared to ministerial office counterparts.

Table 12. Complementarity and Partisan Advisors Buffering and Bridging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Complementarity</th>
<th>Buffering Activity</th>
<th>Bridging Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Control</td>
<td>Provision of alternative source of policy advice</td>
<td>Improving access to/integration of public service policy advice for minister</td>
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<td>Improving access to/integration of variously located partisan-political policy advice</td>
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<td>Increasing access/integration of exogenous sources of policy advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiation/ Distancing of political and administrative actors</td>
<td>Insulating non-partisan public servants from partisan-political aspects of policy making</td>
<td>Increasing access to/integration of ministerial positions or preferences related to policy for public service actors</td>
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Source: Author.

Overall, in all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors were found to engage in ample buffering activity rooted in the direct provision of policy advice. Respondents in each of the cases described engaging in policy advisory activity that was at times partisan-political or at times consisted of proffering administrative-technical forms of policy advice. The latter was typically reported as part of their interactions with senior public servants but extended to varying degrees to the provision of policy advice to cabinet ministers and other actors within their advisory systems. Buffering activity was also confirmed to have resulted in the insulation of public service actors in all three cases, and was particularly underscored by a spectrum of respondents interviewed in the federal and New Brunswick cases. Senior public servants across all cases acknowledged that partisan-political policy advice was a part of policy making and governing. The presence of partisan advisors in first ministers’ offices was described as a viable means to contain such activity in the political sphere of government.

Bridging activities at the first minister’s office level were described as consisting of both partisan-political and administrative-technical advisory activity. This was
universally described as involving the integration and synthesis of disparate sources of policy advice and increasing their accessibility for actors in the advisory system. Bridging was consistently described as ongoing, formal, ad hoc, and tied to various types of short to medium-term policy development activity. It was frequently described in conjunction with various policy advisory activities beyond those of formal policy development activity. For example, bridging was often characterized as consisting of the integration of policy advice related to various current political and international events or unrelated to specific policy in development. In all three cases it was however consistently reported in largely endogenous terms with all three first ministers’ office explicitly stating the practice of ‘pushing out’ stakeholder bridging to ministerial and departmental levels. This chapter examines these various bridging activities in detail and argues that first ministers’ office partisan advisors are consequential to the operation of advisory systems, and by extension complementarity, and notions of policy ‘success’.

First Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors’ Buffering

**PMO Partisan Advisors Buffering**

A range of interviews conducted with past and present senior Harper PMO and PCO staff\(^{56}\) revealed an increasingly formal policy advisory system involving significant input and integration from parallel partisan-political and public service policy advisory sources. PMO partisan advisors described buffering activities as the provision of partisan-political policy advice that increased the availability of a more partisan-political form of policy advice for the Prime Minister and cabinet. It was explained that when it was being set up, the Harper PMO policy advisory process was chaotic, informal, and primarily oral. Many recounted a bumpy transition period when the policy shop was

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\(^{56}\) Throughout the study design and data collection phases of this study, the Harper PMO underwent major staffing changes. As set out in chapter 2, this study includes a range of interviews conducted with two former Harper chiefs of staff, multiple PMO directors of policy and ‘junior’ partisan advisors from various junctures in the Harper PMO. Interviews were also conducted with four current and former senior PCO officials.
established but spoke of its maturation and capacity building over time. They benefited from an initial director of policy Mark Cameron with experience having served as a partisan advisor to ministers in a previous Liberal government. The policy shop, then numbering five junior policy advisors and a director of policy, divvied up various policy areas along broad themes (i.e. economics and social affairs) and cabinet committees similar to accounts of recent PMOs (See Goldenberg, 2006; Savoie, 1999; Jeffrey, 2010). Junior policy advisors interviewed explained their purviews included several policy areas at times numbering eight or more. They worked with ministers’ office partisan advisors on policy in these areas. They also worked, typically in conjunction with the PMO Director of Policy, with senior PCO staff for policy work tied to the powerful Priority and Planning (P&P) and Operations (OPs) cabinet committees.

Multiple respondents at various levels of seniority described the partisan policy advisory process as consisting of a mix of oral and written advice. However, there was universal agreement that overall the majority of advice to the prime minister is provided in writing. This finding came very much as a surprise. PMOs past have historically relied solely on oral advisory practices. Practitioners and students of the Canadian political executive have argued this to be a consequence of increased media scrutiny and a growing emphasis on transparency and access to information legislation (Savoie, 1999; 2003a). It was explained by several participants that the development of the formal written briefing system was to ensure that PMO could directly provide the Prime Minister with partisan-political policy advice without it being interpreted or passing
through PCO. Senior PMO policy staff emphasized that all policy items flowing up to the Prime Minister included a written policy advisory overlay from the PMO policy shop. Various respondents also made clear that informal oral policy advice was also frequently provided within the PMO policy ranks up to the Chief of Staff, or as required, by senior PMO officials directly to the Prime Minister. Senior PMO partisan advisors typically provided the latter during regularized morning meetings and via more ad hoc policy specific meetings. This more informal oral advisory process is in keeping with accounts identified in studies of PMOs past (Campbell & Szablowski, 1979; Jeffrey, 2010; Savoie, 1999, 2010, 2011).

Most candidly acknowledged they were but one of many sources of policy advice that were sought out and utilized by Prime Minister Harper or other political actors (e.g. ministers, or other partisan advisors). Various senior PMO partisan advisors’ described their advisory activity, regardless of method, as aimed at ‘adding value’. Buffering was predominantly described as involving challenging policy advice to ensure its ‘fit’ with existing political goals and objectives. However, many also noted that they would challenge policy advice flowing to decision makers related to technical aspects or with respect to its logic or comprehensiveness. The following responses from two PMO directors of policy are illustrative of how partisan-political and technical-administrative types of policy advice were proffered:

Their [public service] advice is more technical and it’s deeper in terms of the policy specifics. As I say, we wouldn’t try to out bureaucrat the

Documents written by partisan advisors or used within ministerial offices only, including those drafted and/used in PMO are not subject to access to information legislation. Ministers (and their offices) are not deemed ‘institutions’ and thus any documents under their control are not subject to access to information legislation. Great care is thus taken to ensure partisan-political policy advice is drafted, utilized, and maintained strictly by partisan advisors to ensure it does not become subject to access to information provisions. This was notably confirmed in a 2011 Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding access to then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s PMO scheduling agenda (Supreme Court of Canada, 2011). Court rulings have noted however that Access to Information Act could be amended to explicit include Minister’s offices as subject to the provisions of the act. As noted by Thomas, Stephen Harper’s government did not adopt such revisions when the Act was amended to include additional non-departmental organizations in 2006 (2010b, p.109).
bureaucrat. You know they would write an analysis of what we should do this or that based on it, and there would be a technical argument they would have all the information on what was done before, and what was done elsewhere and all of that stuff, and they would put it all together into you know a detailed analysis. Then, we would come along and say much more superficially you know, yes we agree with this and we should proceed. Or you know, no, we don’t and here are the reasons why. Sometimes our comments would be technical or what we saw as deficiencies in their analysis and sometimes it would be more political. You know, that’s a great factual analysis, they’re recommending a course of action but it doesn’t take into account like I said, last week the minister said we were going to do something else, or even more last week the prime minister said we were going to do something else. Or you know this is not the way the election platform happened to go. Or, you know this is going to throw a whole region of the country out of work and that might not be the best thing to do. So we could introduce those things. But there’s not, there’s significant congruence between the advice. Often, as I said I have a lot of respect for the public service. Often what they’re bringing forward is very good and we would find ourselves supporting it and reinforcing it. Because by having both places agreeing it often gave more weight to it. So you know we did not disagree with them on everything and we didn’t disagree with them easily. Because it was always better for everybody if we were all in agreement but you know obviously sometimes we were sometimes we weren’t. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

Well yeah you provided advice all the time. You know you’d be meeting with stakeholders who’d be looking for things and you’d say yes I know you’re looking for these 16 things but you’re not going to get 15 of them and if you have any hope of getting #16 you’re going to have to do it in a different way. You know, would be providing advice all the time with chiefs of staff. A chief from a department would call you and say I’m supposed to do this but every time I try and get something done public servant X or minister’s office staff Y you know always jump up and down on this and I’m not making any progress. What would you say? We’d be providing advice to the Privy Council staff all the time. If you were to word things differently the prime minister would be much more accepting of that because we really agree on this thing but the way you presented it, it doesn’t look that way. And then you’d also provide direct advice to the prime minister as well. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

Senior PMO partisan advisors described their policy advisory practices as providing an extra voice that was more political and tantamount to ensuring consistency with the stated partisan-political agenda and electoral mandate. Again, the emphasis in the Harper PMO was on providing ongoing written and oral policy advice for the prime minister to consider among other sources of advice he consulted. This tended to involve
the communication of advice flowing up from the PMO policy shop or from PMO chiefs of staff related to any number of policy items. Junior PMO partisan advisors reported that their policy advice to the Prime Minister was almost always conveyed via the formal briefing system. The more informal oral types of advice were generally restricted to the PMO chief of staff director of policy. When asked to speak to the informal versus formal advice two directors of policy made clear that in the Harper PMO policy advice is usually written:

That’s a good question. I mean there was a lot more formal advice going on. You know the Privy Council office has 1000 people working with the departments to generate notes so there was an unending flow of stuff to deal with. So the volume was greater, the question was whether the proportion of formal to informal? I guess I would have to say that there was significantly more formal advice. But on the other hand, we did meet with the Prime Minister every day. There was opportunity for, the Prime Minister typically sought a lot of informal input and he was also very detailed and if he didn’t get formal input from you on something he might put you on the spot in a meeting and say, by the way, I’ve been waiting on your note for this for three days where is it and what do you have to say about it. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

Eddie Goldenberg’s book [Goldenberg, 2006] makes it sound, I think kind of left me with the impression that they did a lot more oral briefing on issues. We didn’t have a lot of time to sit around and chat with PM Harper. I mean that’s kind of not the way he does things. I mean we would certainly have meetings and talk to him in person but we you know would certainly send him notes on most things. That tended to be the ways things were done. I would say with other ministers too it would be much more common to send them… to send them a note if you had time because then they could read it at their leisure in their night package. As opposed to, you know, trying to squeeze in something. Oh they’re running off to a meeting can I have five minutes to tell you about this that’s an emergency measure in my view and should be the normal way of doing business. But you know I know different offices have different practices. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

The formal written policy advisory system was described as operating in parallel to the public service policy advice system. Junior partisan advisors in concert with the PMO director of policy would take the lead in developing written partisan-political policy advice that would be provided up the chain of command and be provided at the same time as public service advice. These written, formal, routinized partisan-political briefing notes were reported to accompany virtually all policy advice from the public service. The
process was initially managed by the PMO director of policy but was later transferred to a deputy chief of staff level PMO partisan advisor. This written policy advisory system was supplemented by oral briefings which occurred formally in a daily morning meeting, or as needed, with multiple PMO chiefs and policy directors reporting providing policy advice during cabinet meetings. This same system was instituted at the ministerial office level. Former PMO Chief of Staff Ian Brodie outlined the genesis of the written briefing system:

So, PCO would prepare a note for signature by the Clerk to go to the PM. And in parallel to that PMO staff would produce, usually a shorter note, that we would usually try and time it so it so they would both reached the PM’s overnight reading binder at the same time. It took some time to work that out, a little more than a year.

Both former PMO chiefs interviewed explained that while they did provide written briefings to the Prime Minister, they also frequently provided advice orally. With respect to the totality of PMO advice giving however, they noted that the majority of advice was provided through the written briefing system. The various PMO directors of policy queried on their policy advisory practices presented more mixed results. Mark Cameron for his part elucidated that the majority of his advice was provided orally as the written briefing system was still being developed. Conversely, other directors of policy interviewed described predominantly providing formal written policy advice. When asked if the policy shop’s advice giving was oral or written, more recent senior PMO staff explained:

The latter I mean you know I probably …you know I don’t know I might have written, myself personally, maybe 300-400 notes during the time. But that’s actually a fairly small proportion of the notes that went through. Typically I had, I always built a strong policy team so I would generally meet with my policy team in the morning, we would divide up the notes then they would do a draft, it would come through me, and then I would send it up to the prime minister’s people. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

58 Interview with former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno.
I can simply say that the primary vehicle for providing advice in the prime minister’s office under me and right now under Nigel Wright is written. All make that … we have processes to make that happen. I’m not going to; I don’t think it’s fair to go into anything more than that. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

Again, this type of policy advice is related at least in part preferences of those receiving the advice. Both PMO and ministerial partisan advisors, in addition to deputies, noted the importance of understanding the advisory preferences of ministers. Some were ‘readers’ who preferred to receive written briefs, while others wanted to sit and talk through policies or operational issues. In the case of Prime Minister Harper, all respondents universally described his preference was for reading. Many commented on his mastery of policy files as a consequence of his desire and ability to read through all briefing materials, originating from his political team as well as the public service. One senior PMO partisan advisor recounted how a cabinet minister, after a cabinet meeting, could not believe that the Prime Minister was even very familiar with cabinet ‘Annex items’^59. Additionally, PMO staff interviewed all stated that there was a significant amount of oral policy advice but that it was more informally provided. On substantive policy files or major political issues there would be more ad hoc advice giving. One PMO policy director explained:

The other thing is that there are regular meetings in the prime minister’s office on important bills. So prime minister’s policy person would call a meeting of all the five or six implicated people, departments, ministers’ offices and the thing. Go through them, go through the cabinet agenda. What’s your perspective on this, what’s your perspective on that, what’s your perspective on this and try and sort out any difficulties and let them know where the prime minister is coming from on these things as well. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

^59 Schacter (1999,p.9) explains that upon cabinet committee approval, a Memorandum to Cabinet’s recommendation is passed to full cabinet in the form of a ‘Committee Report’ (CR) which is attached as an annex item to the agenda of a meeting of the full Cabinet. Cabinet would normally accept the committee’s recommendation without significant discussion. The minister in the anecdote was surprised that the Prime Minister new detailed aspects of the Annex items in question that day in Cabinet.
It was explained that then Clerk of the Privy Council Kevin Lynch’s desire to give his (and PCO) advice without integration of political advice from PMO, as had traditionally occurred, was in fact a precipitating reason for the development of a PMO written partisan-policy advisory system. Mr. Lynch was widely respected as a seasoned and capable public servant and worked effectively with former Harper PMO Chief Ian Brodie. Political-administrative relations were however contentious and strained under PMO Chief Giorno. When asked about his dealings with PCO Giorno described relations as follows:

There was also a desire to centralize everything [at PCO]. Well I don’t think that government’s or any organization work well when everything is funnelled through one person. When that was changed (Wayne Wouters was appointed Clerk of the Privy Council on July 1, 2009) and you know, the Clerk was someone who had actual line departmental experience and not just central agency experience but actually worked at you know Fisheries and Oceans and different places and understood that there could be a positive relationship between a minister’s team and a deputy’s team and that’s how you got things done working collaboratively. I think things have worked quite well. I’ve come to realize that the way I thought things would work in Ottawa is how they do work and it was just personalities. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

Buffering, as a means of securing additional political control, was a principal cause of the advent of the formalized written political briefing note system utilized both at the PMO and ministerial levels. A spillover effect of this development was the greater isolation of the public service from more partisan aspects of policy advice. In short, political policy advice is now (formally) provided independently of PCO, who in turn could provide their ‘professional’ policy advice. It remains astute to the political ‘tone’ but could leave the partisan-political advisory aspects to others. Interviews with current senior PCO officials confirmed that there are ongoing interactions on a policy level and that

See Clark (2009), Macdonald (2009). Interviews with Guy Giorno and other senior PMO partisan advisors made clear that Mr. Lynch favored a centralized PCO approach. Both senior PMO and PCO respondents consulted described his preference for PMO-PCO interactions to be run strictly through his office. A formal interview request was extended to Mr. Lynch’s for participation in this study but was declined.
PCO was aware that PMO was providing policy advice in parallel to PCO. In fact, more than one official commented on the normative benefit of such a system. There was recognition that political calculations were an understood part of policy advice but having partisan advisors served exactly the purpose of keeping the public service out of the partisan-political aspects of policy advice. A senior PCO official explained, “It’s really important that theirs is a separate channel of political advice and knowing that that’s happening does make it easier”. When asked to comment on the separate briefing system the same senior PCO official explained:

So for every major cabinet meeting the PM is chairing we do the notes, we do the speaking points for the PM, we do the background briefing for the PM. We know that the PMO is doing, and they should be doing, and thank God they’re doing the political advice. Because then there’s no issue for us about how to in a nice way say you know there may be considerations in the context for governing to consider think about. No, someone needs to say this may be a complete firestorm with this stakeholder, with this MP, with this region, at a purely partisan level … that makes it easier for us to do our job knowing he has his own separate channel of advice. And again if they’re weighing in, and they don’t, but in an extreme if they were weighing in without ever looking at the policy stuff or without regard to the substance of it that would be a problem, but that’s not a problem at all. (Senior PCO Official)

This type of response indicates that partisan advisors are not only recognized sources of policy advice, but are in fact providing policy advice that spans partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. Public servants interviewed at the central agency level readily acknowledged partisan considerations were a reality in the policy advisory system. While partisan advisors could interact with officials or other actors on administrative-technical policy advisory terms, their partisan-political advisory activity was beneficially restricted to ministers’ offices.

**Buffering from the West Annex**

First minister’s office partisan advisors in British Columbia described considerable buffering activities. Senior partisan advisors at the center interviewed from the Campbell administration (2001-2011) characterized their role as primarily about policy advice, policy development, and issues management. Respondents explained that the majority of their time was spent on policy related activity related to formal
cabinet and cabinet committee activity as well as informal and formal briefings to both the premier and the cabinet. Buffering in the B.C. case involved a high degree of commentary on various existing sources of policy advice within and outside of government. Buffering was explained to consist of contestation activity involving the scrutiny of public service advice. In this case, partisan advisors described their advisory role as serving as a ‘public interest check’ on proposed bureaucratic policy advice.

When asked to describe their activities in the premier’s office, one senior partisan advisor explained “In our premier’s office I saw my primary role as a strategic advisor to both the premier and the executive council on both issues and matters of public policy. And so I was the primary point person for political council on issues and policy”. A senior partisan advisor stated that the majority of their time was spent on policy and advisory related activity. When asked the about their general role they responded:

In the [partisan advisor] role, fundamentally, it was policy advice, policy development and policy coordination. Because I was unique in so far as, including the politicians didn’t even sit on that many cabinet committees. So I got a very holistic view of government. Fundamentally, it was reading information, reading binders, interviewing and meeting with deputies, ADMs, and other senior civil servants … analyzing policies and developing policies, that was the fundamental tasks. Second would be issues and crisis management, day to day. House readiness, house preparedness, preparing for all of the goings on of the legislature from question period to the legislative debates, to debates of bills, and overseeing of course the political staff in the building. The sixty or so political staff in the building. Hiring and coordinating those staff. Those would be the fundamental tasks. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Buffering at the first minister’s office in British Columbia was, as with all cases, focused on ensuring the first minister and executive council (cabinet) had the ‘complete’ picture and was well informed. First minister’s partisan advisors reported engaging in a mix of formal and informal advisory activity. Formal policy advice in this case was not, as described above, produced via a parallel written political policy advisory briefing system. Rather, partisan advisors described their advisory and policy formulation activity as typically occurring in conjunction with institutionalized and routinized cabinet activity. One senior premier’s office advisor explained, “The policy side, which is in that case acting as the main liaison between the premier and the executive council and the
public service around ensuring that there was … that the ramifications of policy decisions were well thought through”. Later explaining:

So that was a big part of what I did on the policy side. Was to gather that collective wisdom and make sure it was known to the executive council or the premier and played a role in ensuring that the right policy decisions were made. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The first minister’s office advisors interviewed in B.C. made it quite clear that they not only provided ‘content’ themselves, but that they often commented upon the advice that provided by others. They also made it quite clear that they were one of many sources of policy advice. They would provide their own advice in addition to the various sources of advice actively being communicated vertically up the public service channels, and in concert or response to exogenous sources of policy advice. Another first minister’s office partisan advisor described their advice giving was primarily through briefings and those would tend to be organized in conjunction with either formal cabinet committee work or on an issue specific basis. Some of the briefings would be delivered only to the premier others would be shared with a wider group that could include both ministers as well as other first minister’s partisan advisors. Explaining:

And then policy advice, those would be prolonged sessions or meetings with him and/or with others present cabinet ministers. Briefings on the budget, briefings on health, briefings on the cabinet agenda, etc., which would be scheduled, those would be predictable, routine. That’s mostly when I met with and gave advice to him. But in terms of proportion of the time, it was very dependent on the nature of what issues were breaking on a given week, what’s before the cabinet, how much time he needs in preparation. He [Premier] chaired a number of the committees that I also sat on, climate change, clean energy, agendas and priorities. So that would be briefing him in advance, during and after those committees as well. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Those interviewed from the first minister’s office explained that while they rarely penned formal briefing notes on their own, they would often comment either in writing or orally on notes prepared by the public service. The more political forms of policy advice were provided orally after having gone through a briefing note prepared by the public service. These notes would then be revised incorporating that feedback into a ‘master’ note by senior officials. The policy advisory system in B.C. was thus more orthodox in
the sense that the public service remained the steward of the formal policy advisory process integrating political input into the ‘official’ policy advice that would form the final advisory mechanism (i.e. decision notes, information notes, cabinet submissions). This was the practice from the start to end of the Campbell administration. One respondent explained the process:

But on more complex public policy questions extensive briefing notes are already prepared by the public service so we didn’t replicate that process. The lens that we applied to it was often to read the note we might provide some input back to the deputy based on things we’d heard or on questions that were likely to come up, or to whoever was drafting the note. And then we’d often address those in the note. But that would become the one master public policy note that would be written. And then the advice would be provided in conjunction with the note, verbally. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Quantitatively, the amount of advice provided was by itself a clear instance of buffering. It provided a diversification of available policy advice to premier and cabinet that had been buffered by partisan advisors but was based on public service research and recommendations. The first minister’s office advisors’ descriptions of their advisory activity were consistently presented as ‘administrative-technical’ in nature. That is, they were adamant that they did not provide ‘partisan’ advice, but were rather a second opinion – again a public interest check – for elected political decision makers. As Chapter 6 details, partisan advisors at the minister’s office level described their advisory activity in much more explicitly partisan-political terms. In the two other cases, at the first ministers’ office level, a decidedly more explicit focus on applying a political lens to all policy issues was clear, particularly in the federal case.

Interviews with various deputy ministers and central agency officials confirmed that the first minister’s office in British Columbia was ‘policy heavy’. When asked about the political arm of government during his time, Allan Seckel, then deputy minister to the premier explained:

Martyn [Martyn Brown, Premier’s Chief of Staff] is, interestingly, extremely interested in policy. And he’s always wanting to know what the right policy was. As opposed to what, I mean, he would put understanding policy first and partisan manoeuvring and strategy second. I think in
terms of his priorities, in terms of how he would think about things.
(Former Deputy Minister to the Premier Alan Seckel)

Seckel went on to say, “It was interesting to see the degree to which he got involved in policy. In fact you could argue, I think some would argue that he had that balance the wrong way, around, from a political perspective”. Again, this type of response confirms that first minister’s office partisan advisors in this case were engaged in buffering via active participation in policy advice. This was predominantly, on a general level, more administrative-technical than partisan-political. This is in direct contrast to minister’s office level partisan advisors in this case who, as will be explored in chapter 6, were also clearly engaged in providing partisan-political form of policy advice.

**Buffering from the ‘Centre’ in New Brunswick**

Interviews revealed that first minister’s partisan advisors in this case are active sources of buffering. Respondents from across the political and administrative spectrum identified first ministers’ office partisan advisors as important sources of policy advice within the New Brunswick policy advisory system. Their buffering was found to span the administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions, and was described as occurring almost universally in a direct fashion with the premier, ministers, or senior officials. Across the spectrum of respondents many directly referenced the small size of the province as an important contributor to fostering direct and close working relationships among political and administrative elites. First minister’s office partisan advisors universally acknowledged that they were one of many sources of policy advice. Unsurprisingly, the first minister’s office partisan advisors interviewed characterized their buffering as principally geared towards major issues that were playing out on the political landscape or in relation to any number of priority policy issues at play. They described engaging in advisory activity with deputies and ministers in an ongoing fashion as well as directly with the premier on a host of partisan-political and administrative-technical items. One first minister’s office partisan advisor interviewed explained how they, much like those interviewed in the previous cases, saw their buffering function as contesting policy advice on a number of fronts. On the one hand it involved the scrutiny and contestation of advice being proffered based on its merit and logic. On the other, clear
attention was paid to the partisan-political considerations of policy advice. At the risk of stating the obvious a partisan advisor explained:

So in a lot of ways you’re working backwards. In a lot of ways and you almost, something can look fine on paper and then when someone is explaining it to you, especially the how it’s going to happen you think: I don’t think so, no no that’s not going to work. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The advisor went on to explain that buffering in their case was a matter of contesting policy advice on both partisan-political and administrative-technical grounds. Did it make sense? What would the implications be politically? As the advisor explained:

Premier trusts that what I’m, if I say to him Premier I think you should really listen to this because that’s it’s the right thing to do, it’s a good thing to do, that I think you’re going to like it. He would know that I’m telling him that not only because I thought it was a good idea but that I thought it would sell politically. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The first ministers’ office partisan advisors interviewed made clear that they principally engaged in buffering related to policy advice being presented to ministers and the premier, but also engaged in buffering with officials. That is, they provided content-based policy advice in relation to existing policies and programs as well as a host of issues that were not necessarily related to policy in development. Their buffering was explained to involve pushing back or contesting policy advice with officials or providing content-based clarifications about what the expectations were about policy. Senior officials who interacted regularly with the first ministers’ offices corroborated this as will be explored in the next chapter. When asked about their interactions with public servants related to policy advice, first ministers’ office partisan explained that it involved ongoing exchanges at the very core of reconciling politics and administration. Two first ministers’ office partisan advisors make this quite clear in their descriptions of which public servants they interacted with why:

Where I have to be, probably in contact with most of, with most of the deputy ministers myself is when they seek some political direction on stuff, when they seek advice, when they have important decisions to
make or recommendations they would come through my office, through our office to deal with that. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

I would always listen to their [deputy ministers] advice, that I would always seek their advice. And that they were free to give me more advice if they didn’t think I had gotten it. But in the end, that me or the ‘royal we’, with all the advice that they had given might make another decision. And that that was no kind of inference that their advice wasn’t good. It’s just that that’s just the way it was. I think most understood that but I think that it was important that they understood that I understood that. That there was a difference between our functions … that I respected what they did. I respected that they work for the people, that they had been here before we got here and they’d be here after we left. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Buffering in this case demonstrates similarities to the other cases in that it involved providing direct content-based policy advice that spanned partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions of policy advisory activity. However, first minister’s office partisan advisors in the N.B. case described more explicitly engaging in partisan-political policy advisory activity similar to their federal counterparts. A key difference, explored in greater detail throughout this study, was the greater frequency of deputy minister- first minister’s office policy interactions reported in the New Brunswick case.

First Ministers’ Office Bridging Activities

Prime Minister’s Office Bridging

Bridging activity at the PMO level was described as frequent and intensive. Differences were again apparent in how such activity was undertaken by the various PMO partisan advisors. For their part, chiefs of staff describe a more predominant integration of endogenous policy advice involving ‘administrative-technical’ policy making issues with the Prime Minister, senior PCO officials, as well as chiefs of staff. The two former Harper PMO chiefs interviewed for this study also described bridging activity involving their partisan counterparts in ministers’ offices consisting of both partisan-political and administrative-technical policy advisory integration. For example, discussions about the policy options being developed by departments or related to issues that had arisen in any given policy sector, or items flagged by key stakeholders. Both PMO chiefs accentuated that while they could and at times did interact with line
department senior officials; their administrative-technical bridging activity was almost exclusively with PCO. As they put it:

I didn't spend much time speaking to line deputies. I didn't see a need for me to do that in doing my job. I spent most of my time with ministers or their chiefs of staff. I don't consider, as some might, consider that as forbidden territory for the prime minister's office to call a deputy I wouldn’t see that as a problem if that happened. I just didn’t happen to do that much to do my job. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

So I dealt with Kevin [PCO Clerk Kevin Lynch] and the deputy secretaries [PCO] frequently and then some of the deputy ministers. Over time I would get out, when the PM was on the road, to try to meet the deputy ministers and their department. What I would call my field trips. Time to leave the Langevin block and go see actual people doing actual work in a real world environment. But for the most part deputies would be in to see the PM on something for a briefing and that's when I would meet them. But in PCO it would be Kevin, Angel who was his assistant, and the deputy secretaries. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Ian Brodie)

PMO policy directors and junior partisan advisors reported similar patterns of interaction. One director of policy explained, that his patterns of interaction with the public service tended to be primarily with PCO. He explained:

Well almost all, almost all with PCO. No that’s, I suppose that 75% or your dealings would be with PCO. But the PCO people were responsible for working with other departments. So, if I wanted to know something from foreign affairs I could call up the deputy and I did sometimes. But you’d also just talk to the PCO deputy because all of the PCO assistant secretaries are really deputy’s level. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

The same policy director went on to explain that both himself and his junior policy directors interacted both with PCO officials on an ongoing basis, but that they also had ongoing interactions with ministers’ office’s partisan advisors. Of the policy team, he stressed their role in bridging to ministers’ offices what the PMO position was on any given policy stating, “[F]or my policy advisors at PMO their job would be to be in close though with the minister’s staff on a pretty much daily basis to know what was going on and to help them out”. Directors of policy from PMO emphasized two-way patterns of interaction with both their partisan colleagues and also with PCO. This bridging was most often characterized to revolve around the dissemination and integration of information throughout the advisory system. Two such partisan advisors explained:
But you know as policy director it was not at all uncommon for me to get a call from ministers’ chiefs of staff saying [PMO director of policy] just wanted to give you a heads up there’s an issue coming down the pike here you know. We’re on it, here’s where we’re headed on this just wanted to get some guidance from you guys and make sure you’re not blind-sided. So that would be a common thing too. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

You know there were two elements to that. One was dealing with caucus and cabinet concerns. It’s the role of the center to ensure that things move smoothly that people are aware of what the center is thinking. So I would deal with chiefs of staff on a regular regular regular basis, letting them know what our concerns were. But I would also deal with the Privy Council office we worked very closely that the flow of business through cabinet and through the prime ministers suite went smoothly. So I would say you could probably divide it equally between Privy Council office on the one side and other chiefs of staff and caucus on the other side. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

It was explained that such bridging was useful as a tool for increased integration of various sources of information and policy advice to and from ministers’ offices and PCO. PMO partisan advisors would then use this in their interactions with PCO as a means to counterbalance what policy advice was coming from the central agencies with what their colleagues in ministers’ offices were telling them. Bridging involved integrating PMO’s position on contentious policy, or conversely bridging back into PMO information related to the status of policy development or red flags from ministers’ office partisan advisors. As one junior PMO policy advisors highlighted:

Yeah it was definitely both ways more often I was reaching out to them [ministers’ office partisan advisors] to ask them for information, to ask them about the status, you know how is your department doing are they getting the policy proposals together and so on. So you know the majority of the time I’d say probably 75% of the time I was going to them. 25% of the time they were coming to me for information and it was information about you know what does the prime minister think about this policy proposal? Does the prime minister support it or not? Or does PMO support it or not? So when they were coming for information it was largely about that. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

PMO partisan advisors also described engaging in some bridging activities related to the integration of exogenous sources of policy advice. Both former chiefs of staffs in the PMO reported limited stakeholder engagement on a policy level. In general, much like the two provincial cases, the federal chief of staff in the first minister’s office
preferred, as a general rule of thumb, that stakeholder engagements be managed at the ministerial and department levels. Former PMO Chief of staff Guy Giorno explained that during his tenure the general practice was for stakeholder interactions on policy to take place at the minister’s office level. He went on to explain that the PMO and prime ministerial stakeholder relations would be focused on groups rather than policy item specific matters:

Most of the primary responsibility for stakeholder relations on a matter we would say rested with the minister and the department. So the prime minister’s office interaction and his interaction with stakeholders would be special. We would count on them to do that. I would think that the next thing I know is that because we weren’t responsible for stakeholder on, the primary stakeholder engagement that we did would be not topic specific but would be community specific. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

He further explained that during his tenure he had in fact institutionalized the directors of stakeholder relations and directors of policy as the key avenues for stakeholder engagements. He stressed that while he took the role of external advice seriously, and thought it essential, he was simultaneously very mindful of the ethical and media hazards around stakeholder/lobbying activities. Others interviewed from the PMO policy shop generally confirmed these practices. From the PMO director of policy down to the junior level policy advisors, those interviewed reported frequent interactions with stakeholders as part of their policy advisory activity. More than one former PMO director of policy remarked candidly about the value of meeting with stakeholders and the value of diversifying policy advice from sources outside of the public service. As two explained:

Certainly it’s valuable to have meetings from the outside because it does provide a check on what the public service is telling you. It just means that you’re not then completely at the, well at the mercy of your bureaucrats of what they want to tell you. So you know there are times you would meet with someone from the outside and they would have a very different take on an issue and it’s like oh well fine nobody’s mentioned that to me before. So then you could go to meetings with the bureaucrats and you could raise that. So here’s an angle you know I hadn’t heard about before what about this? You know that was always useful. So we did keep in close contact with stakeholders (Former PMO Director of Policy)
No I mean we drove very hard to pick up policy ideas from outside. You know in general, I won’t say completely, but in general the best ideas came from outside. If you’re working in the system you know you can be very very smart and very committed as a policy analyst. But there’s very few what I would call original thinkers in the departments. They tend to have the originality beat out of them. Or they tend to, people who would be, it’s just not the nature of the bureaucracy to cut against the grain. It just doesn’t make for good you know evaluations and good bonuses and all of that sort of thing. There are a few and we came across a number of them and worked quite closely with them. But generally speaking when we were doing platforms or doing policy agendas we would consult widely outside and scoop up you know the best ideas we could. And then present them to the public service. Knowing that half of them they’d you know find ways to shoot down, and half of them they would find ways to sideline or a quarter of them, and a quarter of them would get through. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

This type of response was also common with more junior PMO partisan advisors who frequently cited bridging exogenous sources of policy advice as a means to increase the availability of policy options for the PMO policy shop. The exogenous bridging reported in the federal case was however heavily driven by activities at the ministerial office and department levels. That is, it became apparent that ministers’ office partisan advisors served as feeder mechanisms to provide additional exogenous policy input into the advisory system. Thus, at the center, partisan advisors were one of many sources of policy advice. They engaged in bridging that consisted of integration of central agency, ministers’ office policy advice, and exogenous policy advice principally integrated from ministerial offices as well. Negative forms of bridging or so-called gatekeeping were also reported, but less frequently than at the ministerial office level. There was much less gatekeeping internally particularly with ministers or their chiefs of staff. PMO directors of policy and chiefs of staff reported having ‘open door policies’. Moreover, many reported that they actively reached out to ministers and their ministerial counterparts. As former PMO chief of staff Guy Giorno put it:

Well I mean something that I didn’t do is, some people have written that the chief of staff as a gatekeeper I never saw that as my role. I never saw my role as to be the Prime Minister’s top policy advisor. I certainly would give him advice on political matters. I didn’t need to see him as, I didn’t see myself as his only advisor I saw myself as running a team and that’s what I did.
Most ministers and chiefs explained that they tended to only go to PMO for policy reasons if it was absolutely necessary. In general, they tried to deal with matters themselves. As two former Harper ministers explained when asked about access at PMO:

There was an understanding, or ministers should have had an understanding through discussions with the prime minister what’s expected generally or in some cases specifically on the file. If they were important enough you’d talk to the prime minister. I, for one, wasn’t one that liked to burden the prime minister with a lot of questions that maybe didn’t have to be dealt with at his level. So, sometimes you deal directly with the prime minister, other times sometimes you deal with his chief of staff, or it could be a policy person or a communications person sometimes. A communication from the chief of staff to your chief of staff, you get the communication that way so it’s a mix. (Hon. Stockwell Day)

You mean as a minister? Well most of the interaction is between [partisan] staff. You know like staff members talking to staff members about the timing of announcements, the sequencing of events, making sure you don’t show up on another minister’s pet project, PMO is a clearing house for all of that, for all of those things and more. So, typically the interactions are between staff who check those things out and then would just say here’s how this is likely to roll out or whatever. But sometimes I would meet with or talk to staff that I needed to. There was nothing to prohibit that but most of the time I would just leave it to my staff to check that part of it out. (Minister)

This was, by and large, the typical response from ministers. They had access to the Prime Minister or PMO staff if they needed it. The general practice was however to use their partisan advisors to keep in touch with PMO, and for bridging policy advice back and forth related to particular files, emerging issues, or to alert counterparts to exogenous actors policy advisory inputs.

**First Minister’s Office Bridging in British Columbia**

Partisan advisors at the center in B.C. characterized their bridging functions as one involving the transmission of policy advice and information within the policy advisory system. A wide spectrum of those interviewed in the B.C. case emphasized the synthesis and distillation of disparate sources of advice as a key advisory activity for first ministers’ office partisan advisors. A premium was placed on their abilities, tied to their institutional location, to integrate various sources partisan-political and administrative-
technical policy advice flowing within the advisory system. When asked about their patterns of interaction with other actors in the government a first minister’s advisor explained that this type of synthesis and integration was fundamental. Explaining:

My job was primarily about taking large volumes of information and synthesizing them down to an understandable amount of information. Politicians and senior public servants are incredibly busy. The public would be shocked at the amount of hours that the politicians and senior public servants put into their jobs. It really is insane, they start early and end late and it’s constant decision making. The decisions aren’t small they’re big and they’re complicated and the reading that goes along with supporting those decisions is intensive. Back to your questions about advice there is a large amount advice provided. The challenge with the advice is that there is so much of it it’s tough to digest or even read in the time that’s available. So I think you need someone who can take a large amount of information because there’s so much reading and the fact that you may not be able to read it all. You develop relationships with people and you can talk to them, get the input, synthesize down what the arguments for and against are and relay that to a decision maker and allow them to hopefully make a well-informed decision. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The internal bridging in British Columbia was marked by a strong division of labour and structure that resulted in the chief of staff serving as lead on almost all policy activity, but supported by a deputy chief of staff. The latter a vital source of bridging and coordination particularly related to ‘firefighting’ or policy advisory needs tied to issues management. It became clear however that partisan advisors ‘at the centre’ were engaged in policy advisory activity that spanned ‘administrative-technical’ and partisan-political dimensions. One first minister’s partisan advisor described bridging in relation to their work with senior officials as follows:

The bureaucrats similarly, and my dealings were almost always with deputies and assistant deputies, senior civil servants including crown agency CEOs. They too, the smart ones that had a desire to reconcile the cabinet or premier’s policy direction, that was inherently something that they were pushing for, worked closely with us from early on right through the cabinet approval process. And they would be sensitive to their need to rely on us for political acumen and political support including at the caucus level because that’s a body that the civil servants typically don’t interact with at all. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)
Partisan-political bridging was explained to occur on an ad hoc and ongoing basis with senior premier’s office staff playing key functions, relaying information gleaned from various locations within the advisory system. The smaller size of the first minister’s office meant that all partisan advisors at the centre dealt directly with the premier and cabinet, as well as senior executives at both the central agency and departmental levels. Interviews were replete with references to ongoing bridging between first minister’s office partisan advisors and ministers related to a number of issues, departmental concerns, and operational considerations. Additional bridging was also reported to occur through a formal daily ‘morning meeting’ that included all political staff. While similar meetings were held on occasion in the other two cases, the B.C. case was unique in terms of the routinized occurrence of such meetings. When asked about these meetings both central and minister’s office level advisors confirmed they were free flowing and involved the transmission to and from premier’s office of policy advice but were notably oriented around the identification of issues and reinforcing short to medium term policy priorities.

Similar to the federal case, less gatekeeping was reported at the first minister’s office level than at the minister’s office level. When reported, it was, as noted above, almost exclusively in the context of preventing various exogenous actors seeking to do ‘end-runs’ around the responsible minister or department. Most ministers in B.C. noted having access to the premier if needed, but also referenced frequent interactions with partisan advisors at the center. When asked why they would interact with the first minister’s partisan advisors, most ministers outlined it as a product of policy coordination. One minister stated:

Although it can be on a file that relates to the specific portfolio it may be on a file that relates to, that crosses multiple ministries, where there are different ministers that share responsibility for it, or it may be a file that has nothing to do with your specific ministry but want to be engaged in the discussion. So those would be the normal reasons why you would do that. (Minister)

Most ministers agreed, or noted that their interactions centered around ‘big’ policy problems or in relation to cabinet activity. One first minister’s office partisan
advisor in describing his cabinet related activity made clear the frequent bridging related to the exchange of information and its integration:

There was a lot of informal interaction with the cabinet, which would have been done just over the phone because these things come up rather unexpectedly and you’re just trying to navigate your way through them. So that was a big part. Was probably the most significant piece of involvement with cabinet is these sort of one off meetings that happened regularly with various ministers. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Bridging of exogenous sources of policy advice was also reported amongst first minister’s office partisan advisors in B.C. In a similar fashion to the federal case, interactions with stakeholders were described as much broader sector or group-based in nature. Senior first minister’s advisors rarely engaged in policy specific stakeholder integration activities. As was the situation in the federal case, a clear preference was articulated for ‘pushing out’ policy specific consultation and integration activity to ministers and their partisan advisors, and departmental officials. However, first minister’s office advisors did report bridging to seek external sources of policy expertise or test the validity of policy advice provided by the public service. When asked how frequently they went outside of government proper for advice, one partisan advisor at the centre stated, “It was frequent. You always have to be cognizant when you are seeking external advice that you are tipping the hand that you are thinking about change, so it would depend on the subject you are talking about”. Another senior partisan advisor in the first minister’s office confirmed this view. The advisor explained that they didn’t spend much of their time dealing with stakeholders. The office did, however, frequently seek out either expert advice on particular issues or consulted with large associations as a means to get a sense of a broader policy issues or sectors. The advisor stated: “not often” because “the ministries were the primary people that interacted with stakeholders”. The advisor did offer the following caveat:

Occasionally though you know if I was particularly interested in an area of public policy or we were working on something in public policy I might seek out the council of people, various stakeholders would be the wrong word it would be experts. The nature of the type of information I was looking for was not so much that I would go and talk to one specific company. The public policy issues that we grappled with normally aren’t targeted at one company. So industry associations were of value to try and understand how the sector worked and they were someone good to
talk to. And really it was more of an educational process than anything else. There are a lot of good people who work at those associations who play a big role in public policy. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

In a recent ‘e-book’ long-serving former Campbell administration Chief of Staff Martyn Brown suggests the Campbell administration improved its ability to integrate exogenous policy advisory inputs, primarily through more robust consultative policy making processes in its second term. As he puts it:

The Campbell administration did far more to properly process contentious policy issues in its second term, which helped immensely. It took more time to lay out the nature of the issues it was aiming to address, and it did more to inform and engage the public in shaping those policies. Consultation efforts became more substantive and genuine. Policies were often adjusted to reflect public input and feedback, as opposed to being just more artfully imposed. (Brown, 2012, Chapter 2)

However an interview with former deputy minister to the premier Alan Seckel revealed that from his perspective while progress may have been made the first minister’s office had overall not been very effective in this regard. When queried about the first minister’s office ability to undertake exogenous inputs he was rather candid in his assessment explaining:

My frank assessment would be that it didn’t function particularly well. I think one of the criticisms I would have about the premier’s office in British Columbia was that it did not have a consistent approach to dealing with stakeholders. Most of the stakeholder relations were pushed out to the ministries and ministers so they would be relatively more hit or miss. (Former Deputy Minister to the Premier, Alan Seckle)

It should be noted that the premier’s office includes the deputy minister to the premier who is a non-partisan public servant. However, as a political appointment they are selected for their ability to support and drive the current administrations agenda, and have close working relationship with the first minister and their staff. Further, they usually change when the government and/or first minister changes (Ruff, 2009; Lindquist & Vakil, forthcoming). Determinations of how well integration activities were handled
may be debatable, but there was general agreement by all parties that the bridging of exogenous policy advisory inputs were ‘pushed out’ to departments and ministers’ offices. The cascading effect being that first minister’s partisan advisors would bridge in exogenous sources of policy specific advice that had been previously bridged into advisory systems by ministerial counterparts, or departments.

**First Minister’s Office Bridging in New Brunswick**

The bridging activity reported at the first minister’s office level in this case was marked by a predominance of more direct interaction between first minister’s partisan advisors and deputy ministers. The deputies interviewed explicitly noted that premier’s office staff played important roles in the bilateral exchange of policy advice and information amongst political and administrative elites. Deputies in this case described interacting on a regular basis with first minister’s partisan advisors related to formal policy work (e.g. cabinet submissions) and informally on an advisory basis. The bilateral exchanges were reported to involve the provision and communication of policy advice as well as its solicitation. A great deal of informal policy advisory bridging was described as involving first minister’s partisan advisors providing policy advice to ministers, deputies, and the premier, or vice versa, on a range of current policy issues, actors, or policy sectors.

First ministers’ office partisan advisors described engaging in administrative-technical bridging activity that flowed from interactions with deputy ministers. For example, it was reported that first minister’s office partisan advisors would often be utilized by public servants to reinforce or supplement previously delivered briefings or presentations provided to ministers, cabinet, or the premier directly. This was explained to involve officials engaging in discussion with first minister’s office partisan advisors to highlight the benefits of or validity of their policy advice or to clarify any confusion. One first minister’s office partisan advisor explained such activity and also underscores the cacophony of voices that now echo throughout advisory systems:

And also, afterwards [after a briefing] too if there’s something that Premier has not, has missed or whatever. Something like the deputies can come
back to me and say I think he has got this and that and this, but can you talk to him again about this because that's a really important piece and I don't want him to lose it. And meanwhile he could have the deputy minister of finance in his other ear saying I don't know Premier. I don’t know if we can.

Another partisan advisor when asked to explain their function in political-administrative relations and the policy process described their function as a link. Their response points how partisan-political bridging can play an important function in the multilateral environment that now characterizes governance arrangements. As the advisor explained:

I’m kind of the link there. As a matter of fact, on behalf of the Premier, I’m the only one who interlinks both with the political and the non-political. You know it’s quite clear that there is no line of authority between a deputy minister and a minister in a department. Everyone kind of responds, answers to the Premier. So sometimes, if there’s a difference between the two I’m in the middle of that. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Partisan-political bridging at the first minister’s office in this case was far more limited than in either of the two other cases in this study. As will be seen in chapter 6, N.B. ministers’ office partisan advisors universally pointed to their interactions with the first ministers’ office as occurring through the premier’s executive assistant, and for administrative or logistical items such as announcements or constituent requests. Partisan advisors at the center confirmed this to be the case. A first minister’s office partisan advisor, when asked about their policy advisory interactions with ministers’ office staff, makes clear it is generally negligible. Explaining:

I would not, most of the time I would not directly deal with them. We have in our office, the premier’s executive assistant. Which part of the job is to be the contact with the EAs. This being said, sometimes an EA will call me. Not very much. For most of the stuff they need to go, to either sanction through the premier’s office or ask about something they would do that request in between EAs. To the rare exception some EA’s will call me, and I will return their calls, for most of them it’s for the right reason. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

All ministers interviewed in this case reported dealing with the Premier’s senior partisan advisors directly if not the premier himself. This was a different modus operandi than that of the federal case reviewed above which saw far more active partisan-political
bridging among ministers’ offices and PMO. In the B.C. case, such interactions were typically related to vetting policy options with premier’s office staff, or to provide advanced notice of policy issues or advice related to specific departmental items that the first minister’s office may be seeking. In New Brunswick, ministers interviewed universally suggested that premier’s office staff were influential, but did not report that they felt they were gatekeeping them or their ministerial staff. All ministers interviewed reported the ability to access the premier if needed. However, most also made clear they went through senior premier’s office staff as preliminary step, to avoid unnecessarily going directly to the premier. One minister, when asked if he interacted with premier’s office stated:

Principal Secretary not that much, because I don’t think in [departmental portfolio] she’s knowledgeable in that field. But the chief of staff I deal a lot. And if there’s something like [chief of staff] thinks that I should be doing he’ll be the one to hit me with it first. And kind of, you know I kind of have a chance to think about it, and get ready for premier because I know that’s next, that’s coming next. Which is good, which it’s great. Because you have a chance to think about it. I’m not always ready I mean you know, I love to have challenges where you know well maybe if you looked at it like right now, we’re into a dilemma with the [policy sector]. And I have a tendency to lean towards [one policy solution] and premier against, which is great. He brings up his arguments and I bring up mine and we then we kind of work it out together which is good.

(Minister)

Ministers frequently explained that the small size of the province meant a close, collegial, and direct relationship with the premier. They also made it clear that this created a climate where senior partisan advisors could play pivotal bridging functions related to the transmission of policy advice to or from the premier. Deputies also noted this. One deputy referencing their interactions with the premier’s advisors to alert the premier of potential politically sensitive matters, explaining:

Ok, sometimes there is an issue I’ve had ministers who the premier has said be careful if these issues come up in the files that you keep the ministers away from them. Because they have maybe some business connections indirectly and if they get involved this could become you know a political sort of issue, so you deal with the premier on that. And so you deal with the Premier on that you say, you know you get that sort of thing. If there is a sensitivity with something the minister is doing and
I’m really not sure I would give the premier’s office through [chief of staff] a heads up. (Deputy Minister)

Premier’s office partisan advisors like their counterparts in the other cases made explicit their preference for ministers and departments to deal with stakeholders. However, first minister’s partisan advisors in this case, as with the others, noted that they engaged in both formal and informal bridging with external stakeholders and experts related to policy matters. This was described in the context of the diversification of policy advice and policy ideas. Senior partisan advisors explained that external actors were a key source of the ‘questions’ they would then bridge in to officials to contest the comprehensiveness and validity of the policy options being considered:

I still try to keep in contact with stakeholder groups out there. Enough at least so that they will still send me things and keep me in their loop. But then I would ask for verification from the departments, and their very good about that. They send you the facts, right. They send you briefing material on whatever. And then you know if you don’t believe them or don’t like their slant you can always check it out yourself or challenge it or whatever. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Stakeholders were seen as a valuable source of new policy ideas in terms of their ability to point the government towards issues requiring resolution. Moreover, it was explained that partisan advisors could precipitate issues being addressed that otherwise might not garner the attention of the public service as part of that ‘ongoing’ policy work. A senior premier’s office advisor explained that part of their role was to bridge in policy advice that alerted the public service to items that may not be on their policy ‘radar’. That is, while first ministers were most concerned with the implementation of their platform and policy agenda, their bridging could be used to diversify the public services views on policies or flag opportunities. As one advisor stated:

Same as more individual or stakeholder types of problems that we can help to solve. They wouldn’t get solved if there was no interest from the political arm. Because it’s just not big enough, or because it just doesn’t fit well enough, or for whatever reason it’s not on their radar. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Lastly, a higher number of respondents cited negative bridging or gatekeeping of policy advice occurring with first minister’s level partisan advisors compared to their
ministerial counterparts. Both of the first minister’s partisan advisors interviewed referenced gatekeeping of exogenous sources of policy advice and stakeholders. Partisan advisors in the first minister’s office also underscored that accessibility was part of the New Brunswick political culture and executive style. Again, the smaller and more direct political-administrative style means that the premier himself serves as the final arbiter of potential conflict either between ministers, or between a minister and his deputy. Thus, in the New Brunswick case partisan advisors stressed their role in mitigating the number of resolutions that required the first minister’s intervention. Gatekeeping in this case involved control of political and administrative access to ‘the center’, both physically and for policy advisory reasons. As one senior first minister staff stated:

That’s another part of my job. As I said I’m kind of the center of the hub, the hub. If MLAs aren’t happy it’s ending up on my desk. Or worried about something, or want to meet with the premier, I’m always in the middle. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

From a policy perspective partisan advisors at the center agreed that while accessibility was important, they acted as gatekeepers to ‘push out’ stakeholders to ministers and departmental officials. Asked about how policy related requests or input from stakeholders are managed, one senior premier’s office staff explained that they have formalized mechanisms for dealing with some regularized stakeholders, notably organized labour. In all, the advisor explained that significant portions of the stakeholder requests are deflected to ministers and departments first. The advisor noted a gatekeeping role to prevent stakeholder groups from trying to perform end runs around departments and ministers. The advisor puts it plainly, “So we’re saying no as much as often as we’re saying yes. I’m trying to control the traffic some times, I’m saying no the Premier won’t meet with that guy or that group, but send him to the minister”.

**Conclusion: Assessing First Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors’ Buffering and Bridging**

The evidence presented in this chapter supports the high degrees of policy influence ascribed to first ministers’ office partisan advisors. In all three cases these
actors were consequential sources of buffering and bridging serving to broaden the available quantity and qualitative content of advice within their respective advisory systems. They were clear participants in the direct provision of content-based policy advice and engaged in ample integration of other sources of policy advice within their advisory systems. The findings detailed above support the importance of locational factors as a determinant of advisory systems activity and influence. Respondents explicitly referenced the institutional location of first ministers’ office partisan advisors as providing them with unique opportunities and resources to engage in buffering and bridging. However, as underscored in this chapter important differences emerged in relation to how, the type of, and with whom first ministers’ office partisan advisors undertook advisory activity. This suggests caution in attributing policy advisory influence to such actors based solely on their locational proximity to the first minister, and suggests differences in their abilities to impact the operation of advisory systems.

The cases shared some basic similarities in that partisan advisors buffering and bridging activities were generally described in similar terms. Respondents from across the political and administrative spectrum in all three cases reported that first ministers’ office partisan advisors engaged in proffering policy advice. First ministers’ office partisan advisors were seen as clear sources of content-based policy advice that served to contest policy advice from various sources on partisan-political and/or administrative-technical grounds. Bridging was also described similarly across the cases, with partisan advisors described as integrating and synthesizing policy advice flowing throughout the advisory system. In all three cases, first ministers’ offices were also found to engage in bridging activity along both content-based dimensions, but primarily of an endogenous nature. That is, they shared an explicitly preference for ‘pushing out’ exogenous bridging to departments, minters, and their partisan advisors.

Comparatively the cases demonstrated some pronounced differences in the buffering and bridging activities undertaken. This chapter makes clear that the federal case involved much more intensive and frequent buffering and bridging, along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. In particular, the federal case stood out related to the intensity and degree of institutionalization of partisan-political advisory activity. Greater buffering and bridging along both dimensions was a consequence of the larger contingent of PMO partisan advisors, their explicit and
undivided focus on policy activity, and the existence of a parallel written partisan-political advisory system. The two sub-national cases were found to have much less capacity at the first ministers’ office level to dispatch partisan advisors to contest policy advice on partisan-political grounds, or to challenge, scrutinize, or offer policy advice as an overlay within their respective advisory systems. In the two sub-national cases these activities were clearly occurring, but were restricted to the senior most first ministers’ office partisan advisors. Further, as examined above, these activities were more directly undertaken with ministers and deputy ministers. The federal case benefited from additional capacity through multiple layers of partisan advisors who could leverage resources at the ministers’ office level to supplement direct interactions with senior officials or ministers. These differences suggest three implications for the operation of advisory systems.

First, the orientation of partisan advisors policy advisory activity with other actors in the advisory system is susceptible to variation. As documented above, federal administrative-technical bridging was PMO-PCO heavy, supplemented by additional partisan-political bridging within PMO and with ministerial counterparts. In contrast, the N.B. advisory system was marked by a stronger propensity for ‘direct’ administrative-technical bridging with deputies and partisan-political bridging with ministers. Additionally, preferences in orientation can extend to variation in endogenous or exogenous orientation. All three cases in this study demonstrated a preference for ‘pushing out’ stakeholder related advisory activity ministers, their staff, and departments but other alternatives are clearly possible. Secondly, partisan advisors can differ in the instruments they use to engage in buffering or bridging. This was most vividly demonstrated by the unique presence of a written partisan-political advisory system in place in the federal case. This provided additional formal channels for buffering in addition to the oral advisory practices utilized in all three cases. Thirdly, while institutional location was important, it too can be impacted by spatial configurations. Again, the federal case demonstrating a ‘layered’ or hierarchical configuration of multiple partisan advisors can greatly enhance first minister’s office buffering and bridging capacity.

While varying in its partisan-political or administrative-technical intensity or instrumentation, the cumulative effect in each case was an increase in political control
through diversification of the quantity and/or qualitative content of policy advice. Partisan-political buffering, as described above, also served to insulate public servants from the explicit partisan-political aspects of policy advice. In the federal case in particular senior officials explicitly referenced the separate written partisan-political briefing note system as having an insulating effect. The sub-national cases also included officials reporting that they were insulated from potential politicization through the separate channel of partisan-political advice. However, the lack of a separate written partisan-political policy advisory system reduced the insulation of public servants and there was compelled the more traditional practice whereby partisan advisors inputs had to be implicitly contextualized into the public service policy advice. Table 13 below summarizes the buffering and bridging activities reported in all three cases, and their corresponding implications for the twin dimensions of complementarity.

**Table 13. Complementarity and First Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors Buffering and Bridging**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Complementarity</th>
<th>Policy Advisory Activity and Complementarity Effect</th>
<th>Cases and Frequency (Federal, B.C., N.B.; H= High, M= Moderate, L= Low)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Control</td>
<td><strong>Buffering</strong> Providing alternative source of policy advice</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bridging</strong> Providing access to/ Integration of public service policy advice for minister.</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing access to/ integration of variously located partisan-political policy advice</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing access to /integration of exogenous sources of policy advice</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation/ Distancing of political and administrative actors</td>
<td><strong>Buffering</strong> Insulating non-partisan public servants from partisan-political aspects of policy making</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bridging</strong> Increased access for officials to first minister’s positions /preferences related to policy advice</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gatekeeping related to policy advice</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.
Bridging was also found to have implications for complementarity. As summarized in Table 13, first ministers’ office partisan advisors in all three cases were involved in high degrees of administrative-technical bridging. This increased access for elected officials to policy advice within from the ranks of the public service, and increased political control through the reduction of potential information asymmetries.

Federal first ministers’ office partisan advisors were found to be in a position to increase political control to a much greater extent through more robust partisan-political bridging activity. This included comprehensive bridging within the first minister’s office and with their ministerial counterparts. While some partisan-political bridging was reported in the two sub-national cases, it occurred directly with ministers and was not reported at similarly high frequencies. In all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors sought much less political control through the integration of exogenous policy advice. Finally, the PMO and B.C. first ministers’ offices reported low levels of negative bridging or gatekeeping. The most frequently reported instances were in New Brunswick. This is likely due to stakeholder relations staff in both of the former cases. It is certainly in part explained by the longstanding expectation of a high degree of accessibility to premier’s office in New Brunswick (Hyson, 2005; Bouchard, forthcoming).

The findings point to first ministers’ office partisan advisors as uniquely able to contribute to policy ‘success’ on procedural and political levels (McConnell, 2010a, 2010b). Across the cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors described being uniquely able to contest and challenge various sources of policy advice for ministers and cabinet. This, in part, involved identification of explicit partisan-political risks, rewards, and contexts. Comparatively, the federal case demonstrated a greater ability to do so through more frequent and intensive partisan-political buffering and bridging as reviewed above. The two sub-national cases also included policy advisory activity that was clearly designed to contribute to policy ‘success’ politically. However, as this chapter has detailed, it was limited by the smaller compliment of partisan advisors and a greater reliance on ministerial interactions for partisan-political advisory activity. Bridging activities also suggest partisan advisors at the centre are uniquely able to contribute to policy ‘success’ on process levels. Through the integration of policy advice from other actors within the system, first minister’s office bridging served as a procedural instrument to broaden and deepen the pool of available policy advice for elected officials. As we
have seen, in all three cases partisan advisors at the centre were described by political and administrative elites as actors who increased the transmission and integration of policy advice among political and administrative spheres. Officials noted they could use partisan advisors as conduits to transmit policy advice or reinforce policy advice that has already been directly provided to cabinet or the first minister. Partisan advisors at the centre in all three cases underscored their ability to integrate policy advisory feedback or direction into the administrative sphere. Further, partisan advisors all noted the overwhelming flow of policy advice within their respective advisory systems. In each of the cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors described bridging activities in relation to their ability to facilitate the avoidance of ministerial overload. That is, partisan advisors at the centre saw their advisory system functions as one of management, prioritization, and synthesis. For example, in the B.C. case references to synthesis and integration activities were framed in large measure as a means to make the advisory system manageable for cabinet and the first minister. Another example was the shared practice of ‘pushing out’ stakeholder bridging to ministers’ offices and departments. This is another potential procedural contribution to policy ‘success’. Serving to improve coordination through the avoidance of so-called cross threading between central agencies and departments, and reduce the ability of exogenous actors to attempt ‘end runs’ around departments and decreasing the risk of first ministerial ‘overload’.

This chapter leaves little doubt that first ministers’ offices are important advisory system actors. The evidence detailed above adds specificity and new findings related to the content and processed-based nature of their influence and participation in advisory systems. Moreover, it points to such actors as engaging, albeit to varying degrees, in administrative-technical and partisan-political types of advisory activity. A principle argument advanced in this study has been that partisan affiliations do not disqualify political appointees as potentially important policy actors. Rather, their ability to engage in partisan-political advisory activities, in addition to administrative-technical based advisory interactions, presents partisan advisors with unique opportunities to contribute to a broader range of content and process-based advisory system activities. As of now we only have a partial understanding of how, as policy workers, first ministers’ office partisan advisors may be influential within policy subsystems. Chapter 5 now turns to an examination of first ministers’ office partisan advisors formulation activity.
Chapter 5.

Movers and Shapers at the Centre

Introduction

Deploying the second set of propositions, moving and shaping, this is the second chapter to focus exclusively on partisan advisors ‘at the centre’. It examines these actors content-based ‘shaping’ and process-based ‘moving’ formulation activities. It does so by applying the formulation model developed in chapter 2 (see Table 5 above) and plotting activity by formulation sub-stages (appraisal, dialogue, formulation, consolidation). A key argument advanced in this study is that partisan advisors are not only one of many sources of policy advice in ‘advisory systems’, but also privileged actors in formulation due to their special access to resources and decision makers. This is all the more germane for investigations of first ministers’ office partisan advisors activity as such actors are repeatedly characterized as the most influential partisan advisors (Aucoin, 2010; 2011; Savoie, 1999, 2011; Doern, 1971). Understanding if, and particularly how such actors engage in formulation is essential for improving our ability to model, analyse, and understand formulation. It also offers considerable opportunities to improve our understanding of how, through formulation activity, first ministers’ office partisan advisors may impact complementarity’s twin dimensions as well as facilitate or impede policy ‘success’.

In all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors were reported by all categories of respondents to be active movers and shapers, across many of the dimensions used to array their formulation activity. Universally, respondents across political and administrative spectrums pointed to such actors as pivotal to ‘front-end’ formulation activity. For example, appraisal and dialogue sub-stages activity along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions involving translating platforms
into actionable government policy items, planning and sequencing, process management, coordination, and ‘steering’. All three cases also included ample evidence of ongoing and iterative moving and shaping activity with various actors at various formulation sub-stages.

This chapter also details the similarities and differences related to the horizontal and vertical orientation of their formulation activity. Formulation activities were often characterized as horizontal in nature. Respondents frequently described working ‘across government’ or in a ‘whole of government’ capacity. Universally horizontal administrative-technical formulation activity was often described as pronounced in appraisal, dialogue and formulation sub-stages. For example, substantive shaping involving the establishment of initial parameters of policy direction, or ongoing shaping via collaboration with senior officials as policy was formalized or dialogic activity centered on consultations with officials on policy in development. In the two sub-national cases, this administrative-technical horizontality involved greater department level deputy minister interactions, whereas in the federal case such activity was consistently framed as occurring between PMO and central agency actors. First minister’s office partisan advisors across the cases also noted some degree of horizontal partisan-political formulation activity. It was typically reported as involving dialogue, formulation, and consolidation sub-phase activity associated to cabinet and cabinet committee activity. In the two sub-national cases this type of moving and shaping involved more direct first minister’s office to minister interactions. As this chapter details, the federal case saw a much greater frequency and intensity of vertical moving and shaping along all dimensions and sub-stages. The comparatively more muscular contingent of PMO partisan advisors and their layered configuration were key drivers of additional verticality in formulation.

First Ministers’ Office Procedural Formulation Activity

PMO Policy Movers

PMO partisan advisors reported a range of moving activity that was distinct to them as PMO partisan advisors. Particularly, horizontal moving activities along both
partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions tied to overall coordination and oversight activity. Moving was often described as involving coordination and monitoring of MC development occurring at the department level, as well as process management for cabinet and cabinet committee business. Additional vertical intra-PMO moving activities were commonly reported. The federal case involved by far the greatest degree of vertical moving. Again, this was likely a product of greater number and the layered configuration of partisan advisors in PMO and the participation of all PMO policy staff in formal public service policy making mechanisms (e.g. cabinet/committee). PMO Partisan advisors reported moving activity along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. While pronounced at several sub-stages it was highlighted at dialogue and formulation sub-stages. However, interviews also revealed that PMO policy team members undertook much more appraisal and consolidation sub-stages moving than their minister’s office counterparts. This involved coordinating policy specific information and providing feedback in the appraisal sub-phase, setting the framework or parameters of policy development, or coordination for cabinet related business involving brokering support for items and monitoring formal policy development processes.

Former PMO chiefs of staff interviewed described their policy work in process heavy terms. It was described as consisting of significant strategic planning, consultation, process management, and sequencing activity undertaken through long-term exercises to design and implement the government’s strategic policy agenda. This was in part achieved through the establishment of the key cabinet items that were required and planning and sequencing activities flowing from those activities. It was also reported to involve considerable day-to-day process management activities to deal with emerging policy items and coordinate and adjust as required. When directly questioned on whether they spent more time on the substantive or procedural aspects of policy formulation former PMO chief of staff Ian Brodie was quick to reply, “Process for sure, but process rules”. Both former Harper PMO chiefs explained at length the importance of various procedural aspects of formulation including monitoring, coordination, sequencing and consultation. As they put it:

So you know when I say I spent most of my time on process, which really I spent an enormous amount of time on process, process is how things
get thought through and brought to conclusion. And if the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff are not out there reminding people that this has to come to a conclusion because we need to get this to cabinet agenda by next Tuesday or January sixteenth or whatever. I go back to our annual priority setting exercise in the spring and into the early summer. That’s where the influence on the cabinet process and cabinet agenda for the Chief of Staff, at least in my time, was clearest. Because you’d have an idea at the end of that of when there would be a cabinet discussion needed to make a decision. That process was what basically set the major subjects for cabinet or P&P to discuss that year. And then after that, the combination of the bureaucracy and the PMO policy staff sort of takes over and manages things from there so I’d say I had very little to do with that. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Ian Brodie)

But what are some of the political imperatives of policy making. That policy making must be complete and that all voices must be heard. So there’s a political interest to do that, there’s a public service interest to do that too. But the political interest is ensuring that all points of view are canvassed. That the views of the caucus are taken into account, that the realities - at my time, a huge factor in minority parliament - that the realities of minority parliament are taken into account, that the record of the government, sorry the record of the party, now in government - its commitments, its electoral promises, things that it has said - all of those things are taken into account. So I’m not quarrelling with your distinction [process versus substance], I’m just trying to understand it. I think that you would’ve described all of those as process-related, right? Ensuring that caucus was consulted. Ensuring that there was proper attention paid to what the commitments of the party were. Ensuring that there was balanced consultation with stakeholders. Ensuring that regional differences or interests were taken into account. Considering how this would be communicated and marketed. Ensuring there was a sound plan to explain the policy to the public. That should be the bulk the vast majority of a political staff member’s interaction, intersection, with the policy process. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

Vertical moving was a significant part of the chief of staff’s reported activities by sheer virtue of their role as head of the PMO. Both chiefs interviewed reported a high degree of delegation to their staffs to manage detailed aspects of policy formulation but noted important functions for themselves in the most salient policy development
milestones of government (speech from the throne, mandate letters, budget, etc.).

Their vertical moving tended to be linked closely with the Prime Minister and then back down into the PMO staff. Part of this was achieved through the continued use of regular morning meetings similar to PMOs past. This involved partisan advisor only sessions, but also commonly featured PMO/PCO joint meetings were officials from both offices would meet with the prime minister. An additional avenue of vertical partisan-political moving was through the well-explored transmission of partisan-political policy advice up the chain through the PMO briefing system. With respect to formulation the key difference being that such policy briefings were explicitly aimed at policy items in development rather than general counsel or policy advice that could span any number of issues, topics, or events.

Directors of policy described typically holding a morning meeting to review any pressing policy-related issues and apportion the political briefing notes that required completion. Junior staff would then set about completing these and would draft up their partisan-political policy briefing notes, and consult with various ministerial level partisan advisors and/or director of policy in the PMO. Junior level PMO advisors also reported vertical partisan-political moving and universally emphasized the PMO policy shop’s hierarchical structure and processes as a key precipitator of vertical moving. As one advisor put it, in terms of PMO “I interacted most often obviously with my boss who coordinated you know overall policy. So we were a team of I think we were 5 policy advisors. So I interacted most often with my boss in PMO”. When asked to describe

61 Mandate letters are centrally (PMO/PCO) created documents given to new or reassigned ministers and deputy ministers. They outline the general parameters ministerial (and departmental) priorities, key deliverables, budgets, and identifies other departments/ministers they will need to work with. These documents figure prominently in chapter 5 on the role of first minister’s office staff federally. For a short history of the origins and importance of mandate letters see (Savoie, 1999, p.137-139). At the sub-national level, the N.B. case revealed that mandate letters were a new practice and these documents were issued for the first time in the Graham government (2006-2010). In B.C. respondents indicated they are known as letters for departmental service plans. Throne speeches are documents delivered as a speech by the British monarch’s representative to a legislature which “reports the programme of legislative measures that the government intends to enact in the next session of parliament as well as providing more general statements about executive priorities” (John & Jennings, 2010, p.569).
what function they, and PMO more generally played in policy development, a junior level advisor explained, “Our role was to guide policy and do signal checks with the prime minister and staff [partisan advisors at PMO and ministers’ offices] to make sure that policy was going in the direction that you wanted it to go in”. ‘Signal-checking’ was commonly cited by a variety of respondents in the federal case. It was a common dialogue sub-stage activity to ensure that policy formulation items were progressing appropriately and identify any potential roadblocks or risks. The advisor went on to explain how they perceived the PMO policy shop’s role in terms of cabinet committees in very procedural terms akin to a police officer managing traffic:

I think that’s where the traffic cop analogy can be … The one part of the traffic cop is just to rewind a little bit. Is what’s coming up from the department and the ministers and is in line with what the prime minister wants? You give it a green, a red, or a yellow, right? Back to that minister’s office and say well this isn’t exactly what the Prime Minister is asking for, for you to put in your documents to cabinet. Or you say, you know, these documents in a sense these that are going to [particular cabinet] committee that’s not what the Prime Minister wanted so you should probably want to pull that off the agenda or the Prime Minister will talk to the ministers around the table and tell them it’s not what he wanted and it will be voted down and that’s not good for you. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

PMO partisan advisors also reported high frequencies of horizontal moving activity on both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. This was explained to be a product of their institutional location at the ‘center’ of government that involved moving at all sub-stages with counterparts in ministerial offices. Moreover, PMO partisan advisors in the policy shop all noted they had significant responsibility for, and involvement with, the process-based management of cabinet and cabinet committee policy development. Additionally, their moving was often described as ‘strategic’ or ‘government-wide’ in nature. That is, it involved considerable coordination of policy formulation activity occurring within PMO itself and among PMO and PCO, often tied to formal cabinet activity. Junior level partisan advisors for example, tasked with their various ministries and policy areas, reported a dual coordination function of minister’s office level and PCO centric moving. PMO partisan advisors explained working horizontally on administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions as a means to
expedite policy development or to remove identified blockages. One junior PMO partisan advisor explained:

But before we got to cabinet there were times when, you know, a particular policy piece was really difficult to move forward either because the public service wasn’t supportive of the direction we were taking or because maybe the cabinet ministers themselves had different perspectives and different views as to what the policy should be. (Former PMO junior partisan advisor)

Partisan advisors at the center more commonly reported such consolidation sub-phase moving along both horizontal partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions than their ministerial office counterparts. PMO partisan advisors could facilitate moving policy on a partisan-political dimension in light of their proximity to the prime minister and cabinet. That is, they could engage in coordination or sequencing activities with counterparts knowing (roughly) future cabinet/committee agendas or timelines, what had been said at cabinet committees, or how PCO/PMO would likely react to departmental policy work. As such, first minister’s office partisan advisors are particularly privileged by their central location. Several PMO policy shop advisors also described using PCO staff to lubricate policy formulation activity at the departmental level. A PMO director of policy emphasized that PMO actively reminded ministers’ policy teams and chiefs of staff that they were there to help. Even playing out what a typical PMO-ministerial office exchange related to policy development:

What’s going on? Can you, can you tell us from this report it seems like there’s a problem. What are you doing to fix the problem? You know and you need our help to fix the problem so if you need us to you know send signals to PCO about what you’re doing that will help you. Because you’re department might sit on their hands but if PCO is telling them no they can go ahead then you’ll get better response so we would work with them on things like that. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

PMO partisan advisors almost universally described more frequent horizontal administrative-technical moving with PCO staff than with departmental deputy ministers. This horizontal administrative-technical moving was described as occurring throughout formulation sub-stages. Junior level staff reported mixed patterns of interaction that included significant PCO oriented moving but also considerable moving occurring in
concert with ministerial partisan advisors in their policy areas. As one advisor explained, interactions with public service officials were bi-directional:

Sometimes you’d go to them [minister’s office partisan advisors] and say, hey what’s going on with this file. You know what’s the status are we going to see a note soon or are we going to see draft document soon. And sometimes they’d be coming to you because they wanted a signal check from you before they send it up to the Clerk because the last thing the Clerk wants is the PM to get mad at him, right. So there’s a big element of face saving and signal checking throughout the system because no one wants to be on the wrong side of the ultimate decision right. And so it really would depended right, I’d say it was I don’t know again maybe 60/40 but it could have been 50/50 but it again really depended on what was happening at the time. (Former PMO junior partisan advisor)

When asked why they interacted with PCO officials, the same advisor explained that it was predominantly for memoranda to cabinet or specific files. As the advisor put it, “Usually around specific pieces of policy or legislation, or you know regulation or something like that. You know it was very much that was the nuts and bolts side of it”. Various actors at the first minister’s office quite commonly reported this type of ‘signal checking’. Horizontally, administrative-technical moving was reported to be particularly salient at dialogue, formulation, consolidation sub-stages. In short, there was significant policy moving at both the ‘front-end’ and ‘back-end’ of formulation. At the front-end moving involved appraisal and dialogue sub-phase activity consisting of coordination of policy direction and process management in formulation. At the back end, signal checking, sequencing, and coordination were commonly reported activities as policy items approached formal cabinet disposition. This is well summarized by the description provided by a junior PMO policy advisor in response to a question aimed at assessing their general policy functions, they explained:

Yeah I’d say my primary role, the primary role of the policy shop as a whole was to ensure that the government’s policy agenda moved forward according to the government’s time lines. And was sort of implemented in a timely way. Breaking that down, what that meant was we would go from throne speech to ministerial mandate letters to sort of priorities within priorities. So our job was really, a lot of our job was just to ensure that ministers’ offices and their departments moved forward on the policy priorities given to them in a timely way. And then what that looked like in terms of specifics was as the various departments and ministers’ offices
developed policy proposals and you know the memoranda to cabinet we from the prime minister’s office would review every memorandum to cabinet, or MC’s as well called them, just to make sure that the were consistent with the government’s goals.  (Former PMO junior partisan advisor)

Indeed, cabinet was a focal point for many moving related activities along all four dimensions.  At the junior level PMO advisors were actively managing the process around their cabinet committees that involved horizontal moving activity with various ministers’ offices and PCO counterparts.  When asked to describe if they were engaged in the substantive or procedural aspects of policy formulation, multiple former PMO directors of policy responded both.  Procedurally, this entailed early engagement in the appraisal sub-phase followed by intense oversight and coordination activities at the formulation and consolidation sub-stages.  Two former PMO policy directors explained their procedural formulation activity as follows:

So sometimes we were involved in the idea generation but I would say that most of the ministers’ agenda is already determined.  And so our role would be on the process making sure that things were properly shepherded through the system and that there was political input and you know sort of political oversight at all of those stages.  Well the process of course was that the minister talks to his bureaucrats, his bureaucrats come up with some proposals and the minister looks at them and says those are the ones I want.  They come back with a memorandum to cabinet and it works through the system.  Well we would redraft some things and make sure that … you know the minister’s office they would be looking at it politically but in case they hadn’t you know we would be able to ask them questions and make sure there was proper oversight.  (Former PMO Policy Director, Emphasis added)

At the front-end there wasn’t as much work.  The department would go away and churn some drafts up, and churn some stuff up, and so you wouldn’t pay a lot of attention to that other than making sure that the [minister’s] chief knew what the key elements that you wanted to see in that were.  So at the front end there wasn’t as much.  You would typically then look at the material, the Privy Council office would be looking at the material too.  So a fair amount of work would be once you saw that first draft giving feedback to the department, coordinating that feedback with the bureaucrats so there was a fair amount of work there.  Then, it would go back to them.  Then, the majority of the time I would spend would be working it through the cabinet process.  Making sure that minister’s understood what the prime minister’s view were on this and what we were looking for from them.  (Former PMO Policy Director, Emphasis added)
Various partisan advisors interviewed below the chief of staff level spoke about their role in coordinating the policy work that had to be dealt with by cabinet and cabinet committees. This involved significant horizontal administrative-technical moving activity with senior PCO officials dealing with the sequencing of policy through the cabinet process. When asked to describe their role in cabinet/cabinet committees a PMO director of policy made clear moving extended to partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions:

Well we had extensive involvement in the cabinet committee system. We were consulted on the constitution of the cabinets. You know we sat in on every, we consulted regularly every week, with the Privy Council Office over cabinet agendas. Which items go forward, which items don’t, which items need more work. We would provide advice to the prime minister in the cabinet meeting itself. You know it would be not at all uncommon for the Prime Minister who had read all the briefing notes to look up and say [PMO director of policy] you know this note says this is there anything more that you need to say on this. So you’re on the spot there. Typically as [partisan advisor] it would be either I would be there, the policy person would be there, depending on the cabinet committee. Typically it would be either the policy director or the policy person whose area that was. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

More junior partisan advisors from the PMO policy shop also reported significant moving activity in relation to cabinet. They explained that when cabinet was sitting it would increase the need for them to interact with both ministerial office partisan advisors and senior PCO counterparts. This was particularly tied to the process heavy nature of the cabinet decision making system. Each memorandum to cabinet had to be sent to the cabinet papers division of PCO by a certain time thus requiring coordination by PMO and PCO to ensure items on the cabinet committee agenda were in hand. Interviews with senior PMO and PCO officials confirmed that the committee system plays a dominant role in the Harper administration’s cabinet system more generally. One long-time former senior PCO official with experience over several administrations described the comparative approaches to cabinet organization and function as follows:

[Full] cabinet hardly ever meets in this current government. Maybe once a month, cabinet is a very diminished institution. Everything is done in committees and largely two committees that run the show OP’s that is chaired by the putative deputy prime minister and Priorities and Planning which is chaired by the Prime Minister. My sense is, my recollection is
that for Harper, cabinet doesn’t exist. Already the Clerk’s role is somewhat changed. But the Clerk absolutely attended the Priorities and Planning, meeting with the Prime Minister and so did the [PMO] chief of staff. I don’t recall anyone else. Similar, someone from PCO often the Clerk and somebody from PMO often the Chief of Staff went to OPs. That was similar for the Chrétien Cabinet. With Martin there was more PMO participation more [political] staff participation in everything.

A priority role for cabinet committees was also confirmed in interviews with two current senior PCO officials. Their accounts of the activities of senior partisan advisors included pronounced activity at the ‘front-end’ in appraisal and dialogue sub-stages. This type of activity was horizontal and administrative-technical in the sense that it consisted of the larger strategic coordination involving planning and sequencing of policy work, as well as partisan-political as it involved the provision/confirmation of general political direction to PCO. Junior PMO partisan advisors were reported to engage most commonly in what they termed the ‘transactional’ type of interaction over the nuts and bolts of policy formulation. This too was along horizontal administrative-technical dimensions and was explained to involve iterative exchanges between the PMO and PCO officials (at low- to mid-levels) in the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Current PCO staff described such activity as follows:

Now that we’re up and through that process, sort of up and running we have a virtually daily and multi-daily interaction. So for my job, its [PCO cabinet secretariat] and strategic advice to the government and it’s me and [senior PCO official] or [PCO official] talking to [PMO Director of Policy] or one of the policy people on a specific policy file and that’s daily, virtually. Economic advice the Prime Minister has a senior economic advisor that’s part of [PMO policy shop] team that we deal with daily, well and right now multi-daily and on weekends. (Senior PCO official)

The greater overall reliance by Harper on cabinet committees for the triage and ‘heavy lifting’ versus full cabinet creates more potential points of access and increases the opportunity for PMO policy staff to insert themselves in and manage formal policy formulation process. Current PCO officials interviewed categorically confirmed regular interactions with PMO partisan advisors on this front.
Ministers interviewed acknowledged that PMO plays an important procedural role in the development of policy. This was evident in the comments of one minister who, when asked if he engaged with PMO staff on a policy level, stated:

There’s people there that can thwart your agenda but that expression or that attitude that if you know the right person in the PMO it will all come clicking into place I think is a far less prevalent now then it was 20 years ago. That’s not say that PMO is not powerful, because it is. Because there’s a bunch of things that matter to stakeholders and others it may not be, they may not have the ability to you know run around the minister do an end run and do a piece of legislation that they want. But it can be as simple as when it gets tabled in the House of Commons. You know it can either be soon or it can be a year from now. Because the PMO obviously controls the sequencing of a lot of the government activity. They just say we just can’t. We can’t roll that out at this time we can’t afford it or we can’t do two big controversial things at the same time or there is a bunch of reasons behind it. And an individual minister can’t know all that stuff because they’re just hunkered down in their own business. (Minister)

This again emphasizes the influence PMO can wield with respect to managing the processes around policy formulation. Senior central agency officials in PMO and PCO play coordination and control functions. Part of their role involves the adjudication of the readiness of various MCs and other cabinet business prior to them getting on the formal agenda. This has obvious implications for agenda setting stage activity. Respondents, like the minister above, also underscored that PMO is active in coordination and integration of policy formulation as it moves towards formal cabinet decision making. Former ministers speaking on the record confirmed that PMO partisan advisors are consequential procedural actors. Two recent ministers summarize well the appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity with PMO counterparts:

Generally the system was lubricated by the chiefs of staff who would communicate back and forth or constantly about what the minister was or was not doing and make sure that there was no cross threading that was going to be destructive to the government. (Hon. David Emerson)

Yeah it varied, it depended on the issue. Sometimes you wanted clarification on something or it may be something that hadn’t been discussed in previous meetings with the prime minister, it may be a new approach you’re thinking of bringing forward but in general terms you want some sense of it from the PM. You don’t want to bring something forward that doesn’t have any hope of getting cabinet or caucus support. So it could be something you initiate or something initiated by the prime
minister himself or from his office. I always found this prime minister, Prime Minister Harper, if you needed to see him he would always make sure there was ample opportunity to do that. Especially if he knew you were going to be concise get to the point and that the item was important. So for me, I never had a problem with getting a hold of the prime minister and certainly obviously he never had a problem getting a hold of me. (Hon. Stockwell Day)

These responses again point to the important ‘signal checking’ and other procedural moving functions that PMO undertakes in terms of coordination and information exchange during various formulation sub-stages, with multiple actors. It is important to recognize that the accounts and explanations provided by all categories of actors emphasized the complementarity of both spheres acting together. PCO managed the cabinet processes, but did so in part based on input from PMO. PMO derives much of its procedural moving influence, particularly along the administrative-technical dimension, from its ability to marshal, leverage, and focus PCO energies on specific government policy priorities. PMO also leverages its ministers’ office partisan advisors as instruments for improved systemic process management and coordination.

**B.C First Minister’s Office Procedural Formulation Activity**

First minister’s office partisan advisors in this case explicitly described formal policy formulation activities as a core function of their duties. They described moving activity that spanned partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions and also emphasized its linkages to formal policy formulation processes (e.g. cabinet). One respondent in unpacking their overall duties apportioned their activity as follows:

probably only 10% spent on human resources, ministerial assistants and executive assistants primarily working with them 10% of the time. Probably 70% of the time attending committees so policy development, policy participation, policy enhancement. And the other 20% percent of the time was divided by advice to the premier directly and other meetings. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

As such, their self-perceived core function was tied to policy development. Moving at the B.C. first minister’s office level was described in much more horizontal and administrative-technical terms, with less emphasis on verticality or partisan-political moving. The smaller first minister’s office resulted in reduced vertical partisan-political
and administrative-technical moving within the Office of the Premier. As such, most of their moving involved horizontal activities with ministers, central agencies, and deputies. On both fronts their horizontal moving was associated to cabinet and cabinet committee work. Horizontal partisan-political moving was cast as more frequently and intensively occurring directly with ministers and to a lesser degree with ministerial partisan advisors. Their moving activity was particularly pronounced at the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. Respondents described horizontal administrative-technical moving as involving ‘front-end’ appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity. As one first minister’s office partisan advisor put it:

They want leadership, they want direction, and they want clarity. Their expertise is in executing, where they excel is in reconciling the general direction and vision you want to embrace with how you practically do that and giving feedback saying you can’t, or saying this is how you have to modify your vision or idea. This is where I worked really well with them. Saying this is what we want to do or where we want to go and how do we get there. And then you set to the hard task of saying this is what it means to get there and then you weigh the options, the pros and cons, the impacts and you decide whether you are going to do that in some shape or form. That’s what the civil service does is it looks to the elected leaders for direction and vision, not partisanship. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Another senior first minister’s office partisan advisor described at great length their participation in formulation was fundamentally a matter or coordination of various formulation actors and options. That is, they engaged in horizontal administrative-technical and horizontal partisan-political moving with cabinet ministers related to cabinet and cabinet committee business, as well as with deputies or other policy experts outside of government. This was explained to ensure that formulation and consolidation sub-phase activity would be as informed as possible with decision makers given a full spectrum of policy options or a ‘complete picture’. An emphasis was placed on the dialogic consultation management required to ensure formulation was well executed.

A marked difference to emerge in interviews in the B.C. case was the involvement of senior first minister’s office partisan advisors in almost every facet of process related activity involving cabinet and cabinet committees. While federally, junior partisan advisors could be dispatched to monitor and coordinate with the PMO on any
given initiative or cabinet committee, such activity was the ambit of senior first ministers’ partisan advisors in B.C. Interviews also revealed that their moving activity extended beyond their participation in formal policy making processes to involve more informal day-to-day moving as policy was developed. That is, references were again made to first minister’s office partisan advisors spending time on formal priority policy items and ‘housekeeping’ or operational items that would inevitably emerge and populate the policy agenda of government. Two responses from such actors emphasize the dual nature of formal and informal moving tied to policy development:

So the policy, policy in government comes in waves. Like at the end of the day there are two types of, I guess there are different levels of policy. There’s the day to day decision making that doesn’t require legislation it may not even require regulation but it needs to be rooted in some sort of policy decision. So that is ongoing and that would consume probably 10-15% of my day. And most of that is very informal, people calling and saying I’m confronted by this situation and what do you think I should do and a discussion ensues and a decision is made. When the house is sitting or in the lead up to a legislative session through committee meetings, like legislative review committee, the amount of time I would spend on policy would ramp up because you’re actively making significant policy decisions if you’re drafting legislation and writing it. It could increase to you know 30-40% of my day. And then when the house is actively sitting cabinet met daily and part of my job was to brief the cabinet on the issues of the day and what we were doing about them. When the house was sitting I would say that policy was more like 70% of my day. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The second round of that was that if it was a particularly challenging public policy decision that was going to be subject to a lot of scrutiny that would also trigger my involvement in terms of how you move through that as well as what tools you may need to deploy to sort of get yourself through it. There was a lot of informal interaction with the cabinet, which would have been done just over the phone because these things come up rather unexpectedly and you’re just trying to navigate your way through them. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Several partisan advisors confirmed that limited horizontal moving involving first ministers’ and ministerial partisan advisors occurred via formalized ‘daily meeting’ with all political staff. It was explained that the daily meeting was a forum for the premier’s office to advise or coordinate with ministerial staff related to pressing policy issues and to hear from them on any items they thought ought to be flagged. As one first minister’s office partisan advisor explained “There’d be some dialogue about what the priorities
were that day and from there if issues emerged throughout the day they might contact me or if I heard about something coming down the pipe I might contact them. Additional horizontal partisan-political and administrative-technical moving was reported tied to firefighting involving ‘issues management’. While the federal PMO had a separate ‘shop’ to tend to such items, in the B.C. case partisan advisors also tended to firefighting linked to immediate and unexpected concerns that may emerged through the public service or in response to media on various programs or policies. The B.C. case thus also displayed ongoing moving activity that spanned, to varying degrees, the four key dimensions assessed in this study.

**New Brunswick First Minister’s Office Procedural Policy Formulation Activity**

Partisan advisors in the first minister’s office in New Brunswick reported administrative-technical and partisan-political moving as an integral part of their formulation activities, particularly at dialogue and formulation sub-stages. The N.B. case shared the B.C. prevalence towards horizontal moving along both administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions. This was again the product of the considerably smaller first minister’s office. However, the N.B. case was unique in that there was an explicit agreement between the chief of staff and principal secretary in terms of their division of labour. It was agreed by the two actors that the chief of staff would focus on all things ‘political’ while the principal secretary dealt with items that were “more policy than politics”. This division was reported as largely successful with some issues and priorities necessarily overlapping. It was described as a 40-40-20 proportion. As one respondent put it, “So 40% is [chief of staff], 40% is [principal secretary], and 20% belongs to both of us”. Such a division of labour necessitated administrative-technical and partisan-political moving as the two senior most partisan advisors coordinated strategies and priorities, managed processes related to their respective bailiwicks and to ensure everyone was ‘on side’. These activities were by their nature spread throughout formulation sub-stages. The responses from the full range of interviewees however confirmed that the vast majority of their moving was however horizontal in nature and usually associated with cabinet policy processes, particularly with the priorities and planning and management board committees of cabinet. While senior partisan advisors from the first minister’s office noted considerable interaction with
central administrative agencies, specifically the Executive Council office (ECO), interviews revealed much greater interactions between premier’s office partisan advisors and department level DMs than in either of the two previous cases.

Horizontal administrative-technical moving linked to cabinet business was reported as occurring at all formulation sub-stages, and involving interactions with officials and ministers as policy was formalized. In contrast to the two other cases, horizontal partisan-political moving was consistently described as much more direct between first minister’s office partisan advisors and ministers. Virtually no references were made to any such activity involving ministerial office level partisan advisors. Horizontal administrative-technical moving was most frequently reported in the context of participation and oversight activities linked to cabinet processes. A senior partisan advisor when asked about their interactions with cabinet ministers and senior public servants described playing a pivotal role in relation to assisting policy initiatives through cabinet processes. Explaining:

They [ministers and deputies] use me if you will, for whatever it is they would like to push forward. And good enough, because otherwise and if need be on some of these files, I don’t generally go to cabinet or [cabinet committee]. I attend [cabinet committee] every week. But, if need be, if things aren’t going the way I want them to I attend those other meetings and they know that. So when I show up somewhere at all the places they know this is serious you know and I’m not going to let it go. Or, that the Premier has said you know will you keep an eye on this for me. He’ll send me notes sometimes, on a letter or whatever, and he’ll say you know keep an eye on this for me. And they know that’s what I’m doing, because the premier can’t, there are so many balls in the air all the time that he needs to pass some of that over to people like [senior partisan advisor] and I to keep an eye for him. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

This statement is indicative of first minister’s office partisan advisors horizontal moving activity at the formulation and consolidation sub-stages linked to cabinet processes. It further points to important monitoring and coordination activity as well. These procedural types of formulation activities were a mainstay of senior partisan advisors in New Brunswick. Throughout interviews with first minister’s office staff it became clear that there was also considerable moving activity along both horizontal administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions at dialogue and consolidation.
sub-stages related to assisting items clear hurdles to meet successful outcomes in cabinet committees. As a first minister’s office partisan advisor described at length:

Generally, when they come to me they come for support – to push something that they want pushed. If they go to [first minister’s senior partisan advisor] it’s for a decision or to make something happen sometimes [laughs] to make something happen yes. And then, you know if it’s very policy related and I have, and I also want to support it, or the Premier wants to support it. Or the advisory group around the Premier wants to support it then if it’s given back to me and said well you make that happen. Then I make that happen as [first minister’s senior partisan advisor] would … but I generally don’t make the political things happen. And then I saw this draft document many times as it was being developed. If they think that they are going to get a rough ride in some way, through cabinet, through board of management, they often ask for my help in getting through board of management [laughs] simply because sometimes you get a great idea and not all the signs, or people don’t always see that it’s a wonderful idea. Or that there is a payback involved or whatever. So it depends. If it’s big or long term I will usually see a one-pager or they will have a meeting with me, they will ask for a meeting with me at the early stage of what they are developing. The one’s that I’m, that I would drive. So anything in their mandate letters which was most of our charter for change [platform] I don’t usually have to worry too much about. Unless like I say it’s the smaller issues that they feel maybe are less important and they can shove off to the side because they don’t have time or their told to tighten their belt and they don’t know where to do it. And so unless I pick those things up and drive them, they would be lost. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

This statement makes clear the important function moving can serve. It can be instrumental for the successful development of policy that, as stated above, might otherwise be ‘lost’. This case saw intense activity reported between first minister’s office and central agencies but more frequent interactions described as occurring with deputy ministers. Again, the small size of government overall, and particularly the executive, in this case was an oft cited reasons for close relationships between deputies’ and first ministers’ offices partisan advisors. Respondents often described administrative-technical moving as involving appraisal and dialogue sub-phase activity. One senior partisan advisor explained it as consisting of providing direction and setting the parameters with senior officials:

Most of the discussions that we have with both ministers and deputy ministers are more about moving forward with some stuff. You know, I’m
discussing with the deputy about natural gas exploration and this is very sensitive, because you know they dig holes all over and stuff and there are concerns. [The deputy] is working into a process, with a process involving industry and the community. And so we’re talking very often because [deputy] is keeping me informed and at the same time were giving [the deputy] general direction of where the government would like to go with that in that sense and [the deputy] is going to put that together. It’s very straightforward it’s not controversial in any shape or form. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Horizontal partisan-political moving was explained to be primarily a partisan advisor to minister activity, but included a greater emphasis on consolidation sub-phase activity. That is, multiple respondents noted that the first minister’s office partisan advisors were key actors able to settle policy disputes that entailed horizontal or government wide considerations. Further, first ministers partisan-political moving was frequently reported as involving management activities related to dialogic activities of consulting with caucus or ministers. Firefighting and resolution of particular contentious files as well as brokerage with ‘off side’ ministers were reported as common moving activities. As one first minister’s office partisan advisor put it:

if they come as a group of MLA’s like the [city] crew or the [city] crew or whatever that has a political issue and they would come to [senior partisan advisor] to help with it. Or some large policy issues that cross cut departments, and I look after [file] too so they tend to talk to me about things like that as well. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Echoing the other two cases, senior partisan advisors in N.B. reported a difference between ongoing policy work that the public service has been developing (that may have predated the government) and policy priorities of the current government. Partisan moving was also raised in conjunction with the latter, that monitoring and steering activities to ensure successful completion of the political agenda were a fundamental activity at the first minister’s office level. The first minister’s office staff interviewed pointed to their ability to keep the partisan-political policy priorities moving through the government, which was full of policy already at various stages of development. One first minister’s office partisan advisor explained, “But if that’s important to me, or if it’s important to one of the people that ran in the election, if it’s important to [senior partisan advisor] we can keep that moving or otherwise it would be
lost”. Further explaining the moving function in relation to the reinforcement of political priorities through the public service policy advisory system the same advisor stated:

As a group of civil servants tries to develop a program say that would answer, or be the answer to a political promise. It can get quite lost in translation. It could in fact be something that they had been working on before and they try to put a square peg in a round hole even and they say oh well we wanted to do this and so we’ll make this fit. We’ll just dress it up with their, with the political ends sort of wording around it. And well just make it fit and continue on. And, in a lot of ways the government continues to function with or without politicians, and good thing you know. And probably, most of what they do has very little to do with anything we would be all that concerned about. You know, and I don’t say that in a bad or nasty way at all. It’s keeping the wheels greased, like keeping the thing moving along, the train is big and there’s a lot of statutory things that have to get done no matter who’s here. A lot of those things are going to happen. You tend to concentrate on the things that wouldn’t happen if you weren’t here, right. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Interviews with all categories of participants, across the political and administrative spheres, revealed that first minister’s partisan advisors were seen as able to improve the coordination of various formal policy activities. Like the other cases, first minister’s partisan advisors moving spanned the formulation sub-stages and were significantly tied to cabinet related work. They shared the same tendency of the other provincial case towards a reduced amount of vertical activity, but as opposed to their B.C. counterparts reported considerably more explicit partisan-political activity, particularly in terms of coordination amongst various agents related to platform implementation and budget development.

First Minister’s Office Advisors
Substantive ‘Shaping’ Formulation Activity

PMO Shapers

PMO partisan-political substantive content-based formulation activity was most often described in relation to the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation, and to a more limited extent consolidation sub-phase activity. Shaping included formal ‘front-end’ policy development involving PMO partisan advisors providing input into the creation of
mandate letters, throne speeches, and one off departmental policy initiatives. It was also described by various PMO partisan advisors to occur on an ongoing basis, and was again frequently referenced in conjunction with cabinet related activity. No summary table is provided for PMO partisan advisors shaping as it was reported as ample at all sub-stages and spanning both partisan and ‘administrative-technical’ dimensions. One recent PMO chief of staff interviewed explained that the government’s policy agenda was orchestrated and planned well in advance. Echoing the principals of complementarity, the partisan advisor described policy development at the elite level as involving weaving. That is, combining the partisan-political policy priorities of the government of the day with policy work that has been percolating in the public service.

As the former PMO chief explained:

We went through an annual priority setting exercise, which the PM was very disciplined about. Driven by the drafting of the throne speech, what was going to go into the government and a few other pieces the PM’s international travel and was involved in would drive some international travel. This is an effort that started in April or May of each year and was codified in an internal priorities document, or a series of documents, we didn’t have a single fixed document for it. But each year we did it a little bit differently but priority setting exercise in PMO, priority setting exercise in the PCO and then the PM making a final decision about you know stitching the two together. Usually the two sets of documents were quite similar. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Ian Brodie)

This overarching planning and prioritizing exercise described by the former PMO chief speaks directly to the role senior PMO partisan advisors play in shaping the content of key government policy initiatives. These high level meetings were early in the mandate of the government and served to chart the course of how partisan electoral policy positions were to be fleshed out through the machinery of government. They were explained to involve intensive and in-depth appraisal and dialogue sub-phase activity among senior PMO-PCO officials. The PMO chief went on to explain that the prioritizing and planning activities shaped other key policy development milestones. He described his role as chief, along with the participation of some other senior PMO policy staff, in ‘stitching together’ the political agenda and public service policy priorities. In this description he was succinctly describing complementarity. Interviews confirmed that mandate letters remain a fundamental lever by which the prime minister and his office provide policy direction to ministers and senior public servants, and shape government-
wide policy formulation (Savoie, 1999, p.137). As Brodie further explained “Again you know the mandate letter process was then a sort of a distillation or a slicing of the priority setting exercise in the PMO but parceled out by portfolio” (Ian Brodie). Senior partisan advisors, however, took great care in noting that mandate letters are not simple or crass partisan-political manifestos. Rather, these documents are an explicit vehicle through which the substantive shaping is possible via knitting together public service policy or operational imperatives with the priorities of the government of the day. As another former PMO chief of staff described:

It’s hard for something these days to get oxygen or time if it’s not grounded in a mandate letter. But a mandate letter isn’t based entirely on political agenda. It’s based on, it is based on housekeeping things or operational things or requirements of good government that the public service has identified and initiated. So I would still say most by them (drafted by the public service). Except for the fact that the government sets the overall agenda, right? (Former PMO Chief of Staff Guy Giorno)

A range of senior PMO partisan advisors revealed that there has been some evolution with respect to how mandate letters are produced as well as the role of PMO partisan advisors in their crafting. Multiple respondents confirming that PMO’s role in mandate letter preparation and writing became increasingly ‘hands-on’ as time went on. The first series of mandate letters were driven by PCO as the new government found its footing but as time went on the PMO exercised greater influence in their drafting. As a former Chief and a PMO policy director put it:

Over time the process became much more comprehensive in the sense that [PMO policy advisors] would sit down with the guys in the P&P priorities or P&C or whatever it’s called the deputy secretary for priorities and planning and exchange drafts back and forth. Because these mandate letters became much more powerful exercise in *shaping* the government’s agenda. As we went along they sort of became more specific in the sense of you should take the lead on climate change issue but here are three ministers you must consult during the process and here’s when we want to discuss this on the cabinet agenda so work back from there but it has to get into the cabinet decision making process. Or this is an issue that’s going to come up in the budget so you must have your submission in to the finance minister and the finance department by such and such a date or whatever. Here’s money you should expect to be able spend on this or we don’t expect to spend additional new money on this, or manage within existing resources, this is a policy issue that will require legislation so keep in touch with [senior partisan advisor] and the
house leader’s office to make sure that we’re not going to blow the
government’s confidence position with your legislation if it’s poorly
considered. I mean it wasn’t put down quite like that but that was the
thinking. (Former PMO Chief of Staff Ian Brodie, emphasis added)

The Privy Council Office in theory, in theory were the ones who finalized
the letters. When this government came in basically the Privy Council
office handled the whole job. We seized a significant part of that function
back into the prime minister’s office and particularly the policy office. So
by the time the Privy Council office got the letters, the drafts of the letters,
you know they were pretty well finalized. There might be a few things that
you know the Prime Minister would look at and meet with the clerk and
say oh you know I forgot this, or this isn’t quite right. But typically you
would have a staffer [partisan advisor] in the room that would help finalize
it. But most of the drafting was done in conjunction with the Prime
Minister, in the policy department, and then would go up to PCO.
(Former PMO Director of Policy)

Shaping or substance-based policy formulation activity was not limited to throne
speeches and mandate letters. PMO partisan advisors described ongoing shaping as
an iterative activity occurring through active content-based contributions to formal policy
development. For example, many reported contributions to, and scrutiny of, various
departmental memoranda to cabinet and other policy development activity underway
both within departments as well as central agencies. When asked how they engaged in
formulation and at the ‘front’ or ‘back-end’, one junior PMO partisan advisor described
their participation in formulation as follows:

Did we do some policy creation? Yes. But it wasn’t, you know for the
most part we weren’t going out and researching things by ourselves and
developing the memoranda to cabinet. We were more, I want to say we
were more editors of the policy proposals that were submitted to us but
editors from a political process. So we would edit we would question we
would push back on the proposals that came forward. (Former PMO
junior partisan advisor)

Shaping was described as an activity that involved the adjudication of content-
based policy materials to ensure consistency or alignment of formal policy outputs with
previously articulated and democratically mandated policy positions. The advisor above
and another respondent make clear that they content based contributions largely
involved adjudicating public service policy development work for its consistency or ‘fit’
with articulated partisan-political policy direction or positions. As two PMO advisors explained:

I guess we would just have to constantly reinforce what we wanted out of the bureaucracy. You know constantly reinforcing look this government got elected to do x, we’re going to do you know to the degree it’s not completely unconstitutional, we’re going to do X. Again it was quite iterative it was always initial briefings from the bureaucracy is this is even possible, ok what are the options, then we would get policy papers so draft memoranda to cabinet. And our job in PMO was to scrutinize those policy documents as they were being drafted as well as briefing notes to the prime minister but our job was to scrutinize them and to make sure that the policy proposals that actually came forward were not being watered down so much that they no longer reflected the political commitment. I say we were editors. We weren’t looking for grammar and stuff like that what we were looking for as we were editing the proposals that came forward. We were looking at the proposal and assessing the proposal to see if it was true to the political commitments that were made. (Former PMO junior partisan advisor)

The other side of it is like when you talking about here, you get some something from staff, from the bureaucrats from PCO or whatever. And you write your own note on top of it don’t think this is necessarily, sometimes you write that note to the PM or sometimes you write that to the Chief of Staff and say you know this is what they’re advising and the Prime Minister has stated he wants this, or our platform has said this, or you know our government’ mandate is to do this and I believe that this you know this isn’t consistent with such and such and therefore my advice would be to alter it this way or speak to so and so. The risks are here. So you know we should probably do this, this, and this to assess the risks before we move forward. (Former PMO junior partisan advisor)

If policy proposals (in various draft stages or finalized iterations) were found to be inconsistent with previously articulated policy position or direction they would be returned to the department and minister for reworking. Often, it would be accompanied with precise suggestions on what was expected or suggestions to improve the content. Many PMO partisan advisors explained this was common as departments and ministers’ offices worked through the development of cabinet submission. Junior PMO partisan advisors explained their involvement in formulation activities occurring at the department level as involvement active engagement throughout formulation. Again, the emphasis was on early horizontal shaping along both administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions at the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Partisan advisors at the first
minister’s office would leverage their ministerial counterparts’ partisan-political advice and knowledge of departmental policy advice in their first minister’s office shaping activity. A PMO partisan advisor explained how this worked:

And then what that looked like in terms of specifics was as the various departments and ministers’ offices developed policy proposals and you know the memoranda to cabinet we from the prime minister’s office would review every memorandum to cabinet, or MC’s as well called them, just to make sure that the were consistent with the government’s goals. So I’ll use [policy initiative] because it was a [policy area] priority. So there you know again the conservative party makes a commitment they get into government they decide ok were going to push ahead with this priority. We would then say to officials ok tell us how to make it happen, give us some options. So what would happen on any given policy file is that the bureaucracy would come to us with some initial ideas. We got briefed in the prime minister’s office; we got briefed by the Privy Council office on the official’s side. From a political staff perspective I worked regularly with the minister’s office and so the minister’s staff would be telling me what they were thinking and the briefings they were getting from their officials. (PMO junior partisan advisor)

Additional horizontal administrative-technical shaping occurred via interactions between senior partisan advisors and PCO officials. Interviews with both sets of policy actors confirmed that PCO officials dealt primarily with PMO policy directors for briefing material headed to the prime minister. ‘Clerks notes’, as they are called, were described to be the principal instrument by which PCO, via the Clerk, could raise items for prime ministerial attention. Directors of policy would have input, often informally in the dialogue sub-phase or formulation sub-phase prior to the formal drafting of the notes. Again, signal checking with PMO as one former PMO policy director described:

So the interaction tended to come with the policy people in the production of these [clerks] notes. You know I’ve been asked to write a note on such and such [PMO director of policy]. You know just off the record what do you think the, you know what would the view of the political staff be? And I would say off the record I think it will be this. And they say well that’s helpful thanks we’re not that different and then we could save our ammunition for the things that we really disagreed on. (Former PMO Director of Policy)

Former senior Chrétien and Martin PMO partisan advisors described this type of shaping as the primary means by which they provided input (Goldenberg, 2006; Jeffrey,
PCO official interviewed commented on this informal signal checking and also noted that it was useful for them to know whether the political policy analysis had been completed. As one senior PCO official put it:

We certainly can talk to them about you know have you done the homework, is the political analysis all cooked, are you sure how you’re going to interact with this, have you reached out to the various ministers’ offices and gotten their regional input or all of that? We can certainly give advice on how it will, systems, should work. But it’s really important that theirs [partisan advisors] is a separate channel of political advice and knowing that that’s happening does make it easier. (PCO official)

In the Harper PMO it was additional to the formal written and informal oral advisory practices PMO were providing as outlined above. Another Harper PMO director of policy, when asked at what ‘stage’ of policy making they engaged in most was clear to point to policy formulation rather than agenda setting. This was a consistent finding from interviews. Mandate letters, speeches from the throne, budgets, and MCs all offered PMO partisan advisors opportunities to shape policy through front-end substantive content based policy calibration. However, all first ministers’ office partisan advisors were quite clear that they engaged in ongoing and iterative shaping as policy was developed. This latter shaping involved considerable collaboration with various public service and partisan advisors.

**First Minister’s Office Shaping in British Columbia**

First minister’s office partisan advisors in B.C. described significant horizontality in their shaping activity which was reported as occurring at various formulation substages. Some involved ‘front-end’ shaping during appraisal through speeches from the throne, but unlike their federal counterparts considerably less participation was reported in mandate letter writing (known as letters for departmental service plans). However,

62 Consultations with multiple senior partisan advisors from the Chrétien and Martin PMOs confirmed that shaping activity undertaken during those administrations was provided orally through interactions with senior PCO officials. Their feedback would be integrated into the final PCO and cabinet documents.
shaping during the appraisal sub-phase was described along partisan-political dimensions related to electoral platform development and the speech from the throne. First minister’s office partisan advisors reported engaging in the translation of key electoral and partisan-political priorities into actionable policy. Additional intensive and ongoing administrative-technical horizontal shaping was also noted in relation to formal policy development mechanisms linked to cabinet and the budget. There was significantly less vertical shaping activity in this case, much like moving, which is likely attributable to the smaller number of policy specific partisan advisors in the first minister’s office and fewer ministerial partisan advisors. The limited vertical partisan-political shaping reported generally involved appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity centered on translating the platform items into initial policy parameters.

In relation to the service plan letters, explained to be the provincial equivalent of federal mandate letters, partisan advisors described their function as supportive, peripheral, and primarily consisting of formulation sub-phase activity. As one advisor put it, “No I didn’t participate in those. I would see them and read them before hand, but fundamentally those were set and written by the deputy minister to the premier”. Another explained in greater details that:

Do you mean letters for the service plans? Those were generally, that changed over time. I think initially they were subject to much more sort of political scrutiny in terms of ensuring that they met the objectives of the premier and the government. I think that over time it became a much more public service function, the public service would base the content of those letters. Basically try to make them reflect the throne speech the platform. It tended to be, the letters would be drafted by them and they’d come to our office and we’d review them in conjunction with the premier and ensure they aligned with our thinking and then they would go out there door. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Similar to the New Brunswick case as detailed below, partisan advisors at the center in B.C. reported marked involvement in the drafting of the platform which would subsequently shape the policy agenda of government. This was described in relation to questions about their policy work in general. As one partisan advisor explained:

There’s a lot of public policy thought that goes into those in terms of drafting the platform and what announcements you make during the campaign often have public policy components to them. And those public
policy platforms that we, under Premier Campbell, were taken very seriously we tried to implement everything that we said we would do and that was taken very seriously by the bureaucracy. So political staff played a major role in drafting what those public policy statements were. Often while liaising with people around government and getting advice, it’s not like we just invented them, but we played a big role in coming up with those ideas. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

It was explained that while in government partisan advisors were looking forward to the future policy agenda of government (to be first expressed via a platform). They described engaging in shaping whereby they would consult with any number of actors inside or outside of government to generate potential ideas or look for ways to refine of calibrate existing policies. Their shaping was characterized as appraisal sub-phase heavy in that it was intended to provide the broad framework and policy direction that, subsequent to an election, could be used to underpin key policy documents. This type of horizontal partisan-political shaping would then form the basis of a guiding document to which first minister’s office staff would then engage in administrative-technical shaping, to convert the mandated policy positions into concrete policy. However, in this case first minister’s office partisan advisors reported that once the initial direction had been formulated they tended to disengage and allow the deputy minister to the premier, the premier, and the cabinet office staff to take the lead on the letters sent out to inform departmental service plans. Additional front-end appraisal sub-phase activity was reported related to the speech from the throne. While the service plan letters were seemingly less crucial, partisan advisors at the center cited the speech from the throne as a key partisan-political formulation instrument. One first minister’s office partisan advisor explained that it was a subsequent step to platform development, elaborating:

The second phase, the second place related to that is the throne speech, the most significant public policy statement from the government each year that’s driven primarily by the political staff in the premier’s office and the premier himself or herself in terms of what the content of that is with input from other people but it is a politically concocted document. So those are I think the big policy points that are done from the sort of the conceptualization idea. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Partisan-political shaping, as in the two other cases, was described as involving the application of a partisan-political lens to formal policy making activity. This was not
described as intended to politicize public service policy work. Rather, it was described as the adjudication of consistency or alignment of policy work with the articulated policy positions or commitments of ministers and the government. In the B.C. case, first ministers’ office partisan advisors were involved in predominantly horizontal partisan-political shaping through ‘front-end’ policy instruments such as the platform development and throne speech exercises as detailed above. However first ministers’ office partisan advisors were also active in ongoing partisan-political shaping fuelled by their participation in cabinet and cabinet committee involvement. Partisan advisors at the centre were described as key actors who were able to adjudicate if changes were required to ensure government policy matched the previously articulated policy positions. When asked to if, how, and when politics was reconciled with public service formulation work a minister and first minister’s office partisan advisor make it clear:

So there’s sort of a political check done to make sure that whatever they come up with actually does aligns with what the party meant. Or if what the party meant turns out to be stupid to figure out how to change it. So there’s that second phase of input there when they [partisan advisors] come forward. And then there’s two separate areas of public policy on top of that where political staff have a large amount of input. The first is on issues. Occasionally an issue will come up that shows a public policy gap and it will require a quick response. So that could be, you know perhaps I don’t know a disabled child is not eligible for whatever reason for some type of government service and it may not make sense. It just doesn’t … from a political staff perspective. Even though the way the policy is written they’re excluded it may not make sense on a practical level. In that case, political staff in conjunction with their ministers may play a significant role in how to change the policy and seeing it right through to delivery and execution. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

I’d have to go back and think about it but there were more than a few occasions when the premier’s office would have views on what they wanted to see continued in legislation or new programs. Sometimes I and sometimes my ministry thought that those didn’t necessarily add value from a ministerial perspective although you could potentially see the value from the political perspective. (Minister)

In the B.C. case horizontal administrative-technical formulation, by first minister’s office partisan advisors, was described to more frequently involve central agency officials (notably the deputy premier’s office) and to lesser degree senior departmental officials. The former particularly in relation to shaping policy items which were multi-
departmental in nature. Shaping was a key part of what partisan advisors at the center reported doing. One advisor put it succinctly when asked what their policy functions were they responded: “Fundamentally, it was reading information, reading [cabinet] binders, interviewing and meeting with deputies, ADMs, and other senior civil servants. Analyzing policies and developing policies, that was the fundamental task”. Deputies confirmed that they had occasional dealings with premier’s office partisan advisors, but that they were more regularly with ministerial advisors. Most were quick to point out that the deputy minister to the premier and their office handled the bulk of the ‘corporate’ government-wide policy work with premier’s office advisors. For example, two senior DMs responded that their interactions with the first minister’s office were limited:

You know in terms of you look at it the other way the premier’s office drives for example the throne speech and support the premier in setting the overall direction of the government and that’s really critical in us lining up our objectives. But you know my interactions with them are not on a daily basis as they would be with my minister’s staff. (Deputy Minister)

It’s very rare. And it depends on what the situation is, but maybe when you’re undertaking some major initiative or major legislative reform or if there’s a major situation it’s more common. But from a normal perspective if it were maybe 5-10% of the time. Not often at least from a line ministry perspective. Dealing with the premier’s office especially the political staff that is often done by my boss, the deputy minister to the premier. If there are those issues that are more corporate or more often pertain to the high level political direction of the premier then that’s our general relationship or understanding of how we deal with those situations. (Deputy Minister)

In a similar fashion to the federal case, senior first minister’s partisan advisors indicated that they worked at the strategic level. Similar language was used to describe ‘ongoing’ formulation within government and the need for premier’s office partisan advisors to engage in strategic direction setting and appraisal sub-stage activity. When asked where policy ideas came from in their experience, and if that had evolved, one partisan advisor simply responded overwhelmingly from premier’s office, explaining:

I mean I think the big ideas about what the government wanted to pursue or interests or passions or needs that the premier of I would identify and ministers obviously. I would say that the so-called housekeeping policies, incremental change as opposed to transformation change, mostly which originated from ministries and reactive change and policy ideas were
probably from ministries. Ministries were often given you know ... budgets and told to live within them and they were pretty tough and so they would have to figure out how to do that. So you come up with new ways to manage a program or find efficiencies, which would allow you to as they say do more with less. So that kind of idea and policy was more percolated from the system up. But the system was wholly incapable on it’s on proposing, propounding system change, it much resists that and most ministers don’t spend their time consumed with that. They spend their time executing against government direction, which is normally initiated, in our case at least, from the premier’s office whether it’s from the premier or myself, or the deputy minister to the premier and/or other senior bodies like the agenda and priorities. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Additionally, partisan advisors often described shaping activities tied to cabinet and committee work. This would involve the direct provision of content for specific policy in developed. It was described as involving activity with individual ministers in an ad hoc fashion, as well as more routine and formal content-based formulation activity in relation to the policy development occurring at full cabinet or in various cabinet committees. As one first minister’s office partisan advisor explained:

Yeah well I mean a typical week I would be sitting on committees typically as a standing basis apart from cabinet. Each of those would have a binder, a four inch binder kind of thing that would come forward with materials, a backgrounder, briefing materials and all of that. It would involve accepting the submissions such as they were or the requests or whatever they would have in them, and backed up by all the analysis that had gone into that at the ministry level and legal opinions and what not. Reading all of that and then bringing it back to the committee and saying this is where we should go – on behalf of the premier right. So on all of those committees I’d be there participating on them as the premier’s representative. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

This type of response is indicative of the degree to which first minister’s office staff engaged in shaping activity at the formulation and consolidation sub-stages. When asked to detail how they participated in policy work at various policy cycle ‘stages’, one partisan advisor provided a robust description explicitly tied to cabinet. Their response is representative of other senior first minister’s advisors interviewed who described engaging in both moving as well as shaping:

If you look at the nature of cabinet work that’s really you know there was the agenda and priorities committee which you know not only charts
scheduling and the like but sets the initial direction and decides many of
the initial policies. So that would be all at the front end. Agendas and
priorities would be fundamentally at the front end, initiating. And a small
portion of that would be, relatively speaking, would be decision making at
the back end because that where it comes through cabinet. Treasury
board [cabinet committee] which took an awful lot of my time. That’s very
cyclical budget preparation, but it’s not just the annual budget cycle which
is basically budget’s coming to Treasury Board by ministry and being
deliberated on by ministry or by government agency, but also ongoing
monitoring of all ministries for their fiscal performance. But it would be
debt planning, capital planning and the like. So it would be equally at the
front end and the back end. And legislative review committee, that’s
mostly at the latter stages, at the back end. You get requests for
legislation, initiated by cabinet or by the ministries directly. By the time it
would come to the legislative review committee you would be analyzing a
draft bill, so well into the policy process. Or finalizing a draft bill before it
would be approved by cabinet. Many other committees like economic
development, or all of the government caucus committees, or we had
reconciliation and recognition committee of cabinet, first nations issues
that those would be early stage issues generally, or late stage. Or largely
entertaining submissions before they would make it to cabinet. So it
would be across the board. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Partisan advisors reported significant involvement in ongoing horizontal shaping
activities apart from ‘front-end’ policy formulation mechanisms such mandate letters and
throne speeches. Respondents indicated being heavily involved in the appraisal,
dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. As one premier’s office partisan advisor put it,
“There would then be of course refining, editing, shaping the submissions as they would
come in to all the cabinet and cabinet sub-committees” (emphasis added). Another
described intensive shaping activity at the formulation sub-phase that in their words
consisted of adjudicating how closely the given policy aligned with the intended goal.
One senior partisan advisor explained it in the following terms:

That’s when political staff re-engage again is when it comes forward. Is
this what, does this policy proposal achieve what we said we wanted it to
achieve and is this what we want it to do. So there’s an analysis done by
political staff around whether or not it achieves what we set out to do.
So that would be sort of the second main phase of input. Is when it’s
near completion so that’s when it’s about to go into legislative review
committee, or when it’s about to go into committee processes, or even
into cabinet. Reviewing that document and making sure the full context is
explained. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)
Again, the various shaping activities described above differ from buffering. That is, first minister’s partisan advisors were not providing policy advice, as one of many actors within the policy advisory system, on any number of potential policy items. Rather, they were part of the privileged set of authoritative subsystem actors who directly contributed content to the design and development of specific policies as they were being formalized within government.

**First Minister’s Office Shaping in New Brunswick**

New Brunswick first minister’s office partisan advisors reported shaping at the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages along both administrative-technical and partisan-political dimensions. Formal partisan-political shaping was evident in descriptions of appraisal sub-phase activity related to the creation of mandate letters and budget development. It was also detailed as ongoing through formal cabinet related mechanisms such as memorandums to cabinet and informally through interactions with other actors in government. The New Brunswick case stood out as horizontal administrative-technical shaping was again more frequently cited as a product of regular policy related interaction between first minister’s office advisors and deputy ministers. This was commonly described as involving discussions with deputies about the design and implementation of policies flowing from the platform, ongoing policies being developed in departments, or policy items that deputies thought may be difficult to get through cabinet.

Much like the other cases, first minister’s office staff reported partisan-political shaping as consisting of the application of a political lens to public service policy development at the appraisal and formulation sub-stages. Their shaping activities consisted of suggesting changes or requesting amendments to particular policies during their development. At the outset of formulation for example, during the appraisal sub-phase, they described providing direction flowing from the first minister, or setting parameters of what the expected policy would look like in finalized form. Moreover, shaping was repeatedly described as involving dialogue and formulation sub-stage activity during policy development to ensure that policy reflected the stated priorities and government commitments as articulated through electoral platforms.
First minister’s office advisors repeatedly stressed the importance of translating political commitments into policy. One senior advisor described their approach to policy formulation as follows:

Well and this sort of sounds like a broken record you know but we ran on a platform and we’ve tried to be true to that platform. So, I guess the first filter is does it seem to fit? Or, is it just the right thing to do regardless and, but does it seem to fit. So if it seems to fit then you know if it’s a policy I wouldn’t necessarily clear it with anybody else if I just thought like that dog won’t hunt. It wouldn’t ever get any further than me as far as that goes, if it was coming up through this way, trying to get support for instance. If it’s something that gets all the way through into sort of the larger advisory group then it would be not only does it fit, but does the equation work. You know, is it, you know they say in French ‘ça vaut la peine’. It’s worth it, it’s worth the trouble. There is some of that. Why are you doing it? Does it fit with your agenda? You know who is going to be affected either positively or negatively. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

The platform then informed the further appraisal sub-phase shaping activity involving development of mandate letters which as the first minister’s office advised were part of what was called a ‘translation’ function of converting or integrating partisan platform commitments and policy initiatives into concrete policy measure through the public service. Mandate letters were cited as a primary vehicle through which this was accomplished. When queried about mandate letters, a first minister’s advisor stated, “Yes, we do mandate letters, particularly at the beginning. Where we took the charter for change [platform] and chunked it up and sent it off to the deputies and the ministers”.

Those interviewed explained that the transition team consisted of the premier’s principal secretary, executive council office, external academic, as well as former Liberal politicians who all assisted with the drafting. This is indicative of the diversity of external actors that can be mobilized by partisan advisors for advisory system or formulation activity.

Ministers and deputies also referenced the importance of the first minister’s office partisan advisors in policy formulation, particularly related to their formulation sub-phase activity, on a partisan-political dimension. As one minister explained when describing his perspective on policy making in general:
Well all policy driven item within my department always goes through P&P which is a board of MLA’s that discuss you know policy and the direction and how they come up with the policy and ask questions you know pros and cons before it ever gets to the executive council. So, you know everything is vetted through the premiers office, whether I go to them before it goes to public policy committee or whether it goes to them after the committee has review it, but it is always vetted by the premiers office. (Minister)

Deputies interviewed all described first minister’s office staff as being influential actors in policy formulation and reported positive relations with the first minister’s office related to policy work. Senior public servants often described their interactions in the context of horizontal policy initiatives that could be facilitated by partisan advisors at the center. Deputies were quick to point to the role first minister’s office staff could play procedurally, often related to cabinet committees, or substantively in terms of alignment with the existing political agenda. One deputy explained their interactions with first minister’s office advisors related to policy as follows:

I’m working on something and we’re about to bring something to cabinet but I’m not too sure you know we might get a rough ride, or maybe it’s not something they want to do, or it’s a tough decision. I might call [first minister’s office partisan advisor] and say look can we get together I want to bring a staff and explain something we’re working on and see if you think its got a chance of going through. I don’t want to go waste cabinet’s time on something if you tell me my god [deputy] don’t even darken the door with that thing right. Or it’s pretty good but I want more information or whatever. I kind of grease the skids that way. [First minister’s office partisan advisor] will tell me yeah I think this is something that should come forward. In fact, I want you to come sooner rather than later. Because I really like this thing, and actually because see the reason I do it because I never know what they’re strategically. You know because its like a chess game. We’ll move on this, we’ll do social policy in June and well do, well I don’t know all this so by proactively telling her look were kind of working on this we might be ready for June to announce that would that fit with your strategy. You might say oh my god that would be perfect, or might say not before the election. Good idea, but not before the election. Or I need this in three weeks. (Deputy Minister)

Ongoing horizontal partisan-political shaping activities were reported to generally involve activities at either appraisal or formulation sub-stages. At the front-end, this was salient with respect to the provision of political direction at the outset of policy development. A senior first minister’s office partisan advisor, in describing how they
engaged in policy formulation, explained very much in complementarity like language the overlapping give and take that facilitates governance:

And before it would come into executive office or cabinet, this is probably more of a practice in smaller provinces. You know, we have a relatively small government we have 22, 24 deputy ministers, and so very usual for them, and this is another 20% of my job I would say is to meet and discuss or exchange or negotiate with deputy ministers in terms of what they want to do and what we want them to do.

Horizontal partisan-political shaping was also emphasized to involve iterative ‘translation’ activity similar to that of the mandate letters but occurring on a more ongoing basis in conjunction with the operationalization of the platform through formal policy making activities. One advisor explained:

I guess my job is twofold really. One is to make sure that their interpretation is what we would agree with. Because you get a line in a in a political document and it could mean anything to anybody really. So one of my major jobs is interpretation. And not only in the front-end, but all the way along. As a group of civil servants tries to develop a program say that would answer, be the answer to a political promise it can get quite lost in translation. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

This type of response points to shaping activity throughout the formulation sub-stages. Partisan advisors in this case made it very clear that they engaged in this type of ‘interpretation’ or ‘translation’ function to ensure that policy reflected the political priorities of the government. Partisan advisors would establish and/or confirm the first minister’s priorities and direction at the appraisal sub-phase, monitor and signal check with officials during development of formal policy options, and then re-engage in the formulation sub-phase with direct emphasis on consistency with stated political direction.

Horizontal partisan-political shaping in this case was less frequently cited in relation to ministerial partisan advisors. Such interactions were reported to be rare both procedurally and substantively. The first minister’s office in New Brunswick reported much more horizontal partisan-political shaping directly with ministers. Senior partisan advisors explained that while they were informed of each other’s work, they had previously established that if items were more policy than politics they fell under the purview of the principal secretary. If they were more political than policy the chief would
deal them with. There were obvious areas and times where such matters would overlap and those cases would call for collaborative activities and first minister’s office partisan advisors were happy with that division of labour. Such sharp a distinction along political-policy lines in a first minister’s office were unique to this case.

**Conclusion: First Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors Formulation, Complementarity, and Policy ‘Success’**

This chapter confirms that first ministers’ office partisan advisors engage in a broad spectrum of policy formulation activity beyond partisan-political determinations of political feasibility. Tables 14 and 15 below plot the moving and shaping activities reported in each of the cases, by formulation sub-stage, and the dimensions developed in this study to measure them. First ministers’ offices were uniquely singled out for their ability to engage in moving and shaping explicitly at the ‘front-end’ policy formulation activity. As we have seen partisan advisors at the centre were key actors involved in appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity, involving the establishment of initial policy parameters and policy direction. In all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors were described as pivotal actors who conveyed the government’s policy direction and charted policy paths through mandate letters, budgets, and speeches from the throne. First ministers’ office partisan advisors described their policy work as fundamentally about ‘translation’ and ‘knitting together’ various priorities with the ongoing policy work bubbling up in government. It consisted of specification, elaboration, and coordination activities to operationalize the policy priorities of elected officials into concrete outcomes. For example, ensuring ‘smaller’ policy items were not forgotten or policy intensions were not ‘lost in translation’. This chapter also makes clear that partisan advisors at the centre are active in formulation in an ongoing fashion. In all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors were clear participants in the ongoing process and substance dimensions of formulation at various sub-stages. For example, engaging substantively in the specification of policy options as they were formalized through government channels or coordinating policy development among multiple departments and ministers related to a cabinet submission.
All three cases involved first ministers’ office partisan advisors engaging in high degrees of horizontal moving and shaping. Across the cases, first ministers’ office moving and shaping was heavily associated with formal public service policy making mechanisms (e.g. cabinet submissions and committee work, mandate letters). This is particularly salient for the two sub-national cases where, as will be detailed in ensuing chapters, ministerial office level partisan advisors were not active participants. This suggests that in these two cases first ministers have access to additional channels by which to contribute to policy formulation and impact complementarity. Clear differences were also reported related to how and with whom they engaged in formulation activities. The two sub-national cases were marked by drastically less vertical intra-first ministerial office formulation activity. The much smaller first ministers’ offices greatly reduced the ability of first ministers’ offices to engage in either moving or shaping within the first minister’s office itself. The federal case, as has been detailed in great depth above, saw all levels of PMO partisan actively engage in moving and shaping with multiple political and administrative elites. Further, the cases demonstrated instrument preferences in how first ministers’ offices went about their formal participation in policy development. While all three cases included a heavy use of cabinet and cabinet committees for moving and shaping, only in the federal case were mandate letter repeatedly emphasized by all respondents.

Procedurally, moving activities were an important means by which partisan advisors at the centre could exert influence in formulation. As summarized by Table 14 the greatest difference to emerge among the cases, related to moving, was the much stronger vertical partisan-political and administrative-technical moving reported in the federal case. This chapter detailed the comprehensive intra-ministerial PMO moving that characterized policy making in that case. The layered configuration of partisan advisors in a stand-alone PMO policy shop facilitated a much greater ability to engage in overall vertical process management and coordination in that case. As documented above junior PMO partisan advisors could bring to bear knowledge gained from ongoing monitoring of departments of policy files as well as interactions with PCO counterparts or items related to cabinet committees they shadowed. Similarly, PMO policy directors were able to leverage the additional capacity of a policy team to gain coordination and process management capacity. The two sub-national cases were found to involve some
vertical procedural activity but as per Table 14 below, it was limited to partisan-political activity, typically in the dialogue sub-phase.

This chapter has demonstrated all three cases included first ministers’ office partisan advisors engaging in considerable horizontal administrative-technical moving, throughout the formulation sub-stages. This was most often described as consisting of coordination, steering, and monitoring types of activity during the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-phases. Again, clear patterns of process based sequencing and planning at the ‘front-end’ were reported across the cases. First ministers’ offices engaged in ample process management or coordination with central agency officials or DMs as policy was formalized. Further, in all three cases this was heavily tied to cabinet and cabinet committee related processes and policy work. Senior officials across the board also made clear that first ministers’ office partisan advisors are important policy actors able to influence administrative-technical horizontal policy processes.

Table 14.  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PROCEDURAL (Nature of Activity)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Type A – Horizontal Partisan-Political Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal FMO: All sub phases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.C. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N.B. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type B - Horizontal Administrative-Technical Moving</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.C. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.B. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Type C - Vertical Partisan-Political Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.C. FMO: Appraisal, Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.B.: Appraisal, Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type D - Vertical Administrative-Technical Moving</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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Source: Author.

Horizontal partisan-political moving was also reported in all three cases along all of the formulation sub-stages. Partisan advisors at the centre were clearly involved in
appraisal sub-stage activity all the way through to consolidation sub-stage activity. There were actively engaged in partisan-political process management and coordination in relation to all of the stages of formulation in an ongoing manner. Differences again emerged among the federal and sub-national cases in relation to with whom partisan-political moving was undertaken. The two sub-national cases shared a more direct style of moving whereby first ministers’ offices dealt with ministers primarily. Whereas the federal case included direct interactions but was marked by extensive PMO use of ministers’ office partisan advisors throughout the formulation sub-stages. In the federal case a great deal of horizontal partisan-political coordination and process management was reported related to cabinet and for ongoing departmental policy work.

This chapter also detailed first ministers’ offices partisan advisors as active in shaping activities. Again, their content-based formulation was documented as spanning the formulation sub-stages, and partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions (see Table 15 below). Access to and participation in the elaboration of mandate letters, throne speeches, budget development, and cabinet machinery and central agencies access afforded such actors ample opportunity to insert themselves into content based formulation activities. This chapter detailed how in all three cases partisan advisors engaged in ‘front-end’ activities that served to set content-based specifications for policy development to be undertaken at the departmental level. In all three cases partisan advisors at the centre were clearly drivers of the government-wide policy agenda. Ministers, deputies, and ministerial partisan advisors acknowledged that parameters and policy direction was in large part set by the time they engaged in formulation. Universally, first ministers’ offices kept close watch on how policy content was elaborated from initial positions and ensured the policy intent was not ‘lost in translation’ through ongoing iterative shaping activity.

This required an emphasis on horizontal partisan-political and administrative-technical shaping in all three cases. This included explicit references to working with officials during the development (at various stages) or cabinet submissions. A range of activities were documented including: commenting on and suggesting revisions to various policy options, leveraging policy knowledge about other files or from other actors to contribute to the refinement or contestation of policy at various formulation sub-stages, or working with ministers and/or their staff to ensure partisan-political aspects of
policy development were being tended to. Throughout the cases partisan-political shaping was characterized as ensuring consistency and alignment with previously articulated policy goals. Partisan advisors at the centre were key actors engaged in shaping activity to minimize 'slippage' or drift of policy content in relation to initial policy intent and expectations. In all three cases horizontal formulation was described at all formulation sub-stages.

Table 15. *First Minister's Office (FMO) Substantive ‘Shaping’ Formulation Activity by Case and Formulation Sub-stages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>SUBSTANTIVE (Nature of Activity)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horizontal (Intra-ministerial)</td>
<td>Type I - Horizontal Partisan-Political Shaping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td>• B.C. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td>• N.B. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Type II - Horizontal Administrative-Technical Shaping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• B.C. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• N.B. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical (Inter-ministerial)</td>
<td>Type III - Vertical Partisan-Political Shaping</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• B.C. FMO: Appraisal, Dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• N.B. FMO: Dialogue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Type IV - Vertical Administrative-Technical Shaping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
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Source: Author.

Compared to the federal case both sub-national cases were found to involve significantly less vertical shaping activity along both dimensions, and formulation sub-stages. The limited vertical shaping activity described in the provincial cases principally involved partisan-political appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity within the first ministers’ offices. Comparatively, the federal case involved PMO partisan advisors engaging in much greater vertical shaping along partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions at all sub-stages. As detailed above, the greater number of PMO partisan advisors with a policy focus as well as their universal participation in formal policy making instruments facilitated increased intra-PMO formulation activity. All levels
of partisan advisors in the PMO detailed considerable partisan-political and administrative-technical formulation activities tied to the elaboration, refinement, and calibration of cabinet and cabinet committee business. Further, they also reported high frequencies of iterative shaping tied to ongoing departmental policy development, MC development, and flowing from PMO-PCO interactions.

These differentiated patterns of moving and shaping raise implications for the manner by which first ministers’ offices can facilitate or constrain complementarity’s twin dimensions: (1) the level of control of administrators by elected officials; and, (2) the degree of distance and differentiation between elected officials and administrators (see Table 16, below). This was most clearly illustrated by the greater vertical moving and shaping activities along both dimensions, and all formulation sub-stages, documented in the federal case. These formulation activities provided tangible mechanisms by which, through intra-PMO formulation activity, partisan advisors at the centre could seek to increase political control. Procedurally greater signal checking and intra-PMO process management and coordination facilitated PMO oversight of policy in various stages of development at various locations in government. As detailed above, vertical PMO shaping resulted in greater formulation capacity to scrutinize, calibrate, and align content-based formulation activities on partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions.

Across all three cases first ministers’ office partisan advisors explicitly described their formulation activity as in large part produced through their ability to leverage other policy actors’ resources within the policy subsystem. That is, they characterized their formulation as the product of a ‘two way street’ relationship based on mutual influence between political and administrative actors (Krause, 1996; 1999). In the B.C. case first minister’s office partisan advisors detailed their moving and shaping as a product of interactions with ministers, their staff, and a combination of central agency and DM based interactions. In New Brunswick moving and shaping at the first minister’s office level were described as heavily oriented towards interactions with deputies and ministers. Lastly, the federal case was replete with PMO references to moving and shaping empowered by interactions with ministers’ office partisan advisors and PCO officials. This is an important distinction that adds further support to this study’s principal argument that a more accurate depiction and understanding of partisan advisors as
policy workers can be gained through coupling locational and activity based considerations.

**Table 16. First Ministers Office Formulation Activity and Complementarity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementarity Dimension</th>
<th>Policy Activity</th>
<th>Cases and Frequency High (H), Moderate (M), Low (L)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Control Moving</td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political policy process coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial partisan-political policy process coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial administrative-technical policy process coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial administrative-technical policy process coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping</td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial administrative-technical policy alignment</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial administrative-technical policy alignment</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political policy alignment</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial administrative-technical policy alignment</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing and Differentiation Moving</td>
<td>Distancing of officials from partisan-political procedural aspects of policy formulation</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaping Distancing officials from substantive partisan-political aspects of policy formulation</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

As detailed above the linkages between first ministers’ office partisan advisors formulation activities and their ability to affect political control were readily apparent. Their impact on complementarity’s second dimension - the distance or differentiation of political and administrative spheres – was also apparent but paradoxical. First ministers partisan political moving and shaping served to differentiate and distance public servants from the overt partisan-political aspects of formulation. For example, distancing senior officials from determinations of political feasibility or procedural activity related to political
consultations with stakeholders, or the brokerage of support among cabinet ministers. The paradox was that while moving and shaping promoted a clearer division of labour between spheres, sharpening and clarifying the differences between the two sets of actors, it is simultaneously aimed at increasing public service responsiveness (Savoie, 2004a; 2003a). In short, the first ministers’ office formulation activities reported in this chapter underscore the ongoing tension between responsive and neutral competence that is constantly being balanced by both political and administrative elites. While the traditional perspective is that it is the public service charged with managing the balance, the findings here support Eichbaum and Shaw’s (2010b, p.217) observation, “… given the proper alignment between the regulation of political and administrative actors and institutions, political staff can assist the proper function of the political and administrative machine, respecting and even reinforcing the imperatives both of independence and responsiveness”.

The findings detailed herein also raise considerable implications for how first ministers’ office partisan advisors may potentially contribute to policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a; 2010b). As appointed political actors, partisan advisors are uniquely situated to engage in formulation activity to facilitate policy ‘success’ on a political level. As shapers, first minister office partisan advisors were clearly engaging in content based adjudications of political feasibility, serving to identify potential partisan-political pitfalls or political risks, or consequences that the public service cannot. Further, as has been repeatedly emphasized, partisan-political shaping involved ensuring consistency of policy development with previously articulated policy positions or direction. As such, partisan-political shaping serves to improve the alignment of political actors’ policy preferences with political and electoral commitments. The heavy horizontal nature of their formulation activity also suggests partisan advisors can be pivotal to improved policy ‘coherence’ through front-end and/or ongoing horizontal partisan-political shaping.

The various moving activities reported also raise potential for such actors to improve process management. Particularly in relation to processes that overlap the political-administrative nexus, such as cabinet. All three cases included ample references to policy process management activity (e.g. engaging in signal checking, sequencing, and process management). This can result in earlier identification and resolution of potential process-based impediments to policy development. Again, their
horizontal procedural functions suggest first ministers’ office partisan advisors are uniquely situated to provide lubrication, and remove system wide process blockages. This was beneficial to ministers, and particularly in the two sub-national cases, found also to be of considerable benefit for DMs seeking process assistance in identifying when to bring forward cabinet submissions, fine tuning policy pitches, or shepherding items through various cabinet/management boards. These last two chapters have surveyed first ministers’ office partisan advisors as policy workers. This however only paints a partial picture of the political arm of government. For a complete perspective and for improved comparative assessments this study now turns to their ministerial office counterparts.
Chapter 6.

Ministers’ Office Buffers and Bridges

Introduction

This chapter shifts from an examination of first ministers’ office partisan advisors to their counterparts at the ministers’ office level. Using the buffering and bridging propositions it examines if, how, and with what consequence ministerial partisan advisors engaged in policy advisory activity. Again, the focus is on their substantive direct provision of policy advice (buffering) and their potential integration of other sources of policy advice within their respective advisory systems (bridging). In two of three cases at the ministers’ office level buffering was found to be extensive and a core policy activity of partisan advisors. It was reported to involve content-based advisory activity spanning the partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. Almost universally, buffering was described as an overlay or supplemental advisory activity, provided in addition to in-depth, detailed, and technical policy advice from a range of sources.

This chapter also provides evidence that supports extant studies that have documented partisan advisors as policy actors who integrate endogenous and exogenous sources of policy advice for decision makers (Gains & Stoker, 2011; OECD, 2011; Maley 2011; Eichbaum and Shaw 2011). Across the cases ministerial partisan advisors’ engaged in varying degrees of partisan-political policy and administrative-technical forms bridging. In each of the cases partisan advisors were reported by political and administrative elites as serving to increase access to, and exchange of, policy advice between political and administrative spheres. Further, bridging of both kinds was also reported, to varying degrees, to involve the integration of exogenous advisory inputs into the advisory system for ministers and departmental officials. This
chapter details the differences in how ministers’ office staff engaged in buffering and bridging. Moreover it points to the significance of such activities as vehicles for the quantitative and qualitative diversification of policy advice within advisory systems. Suggesting that buffering and bridging are not only important for the operation of advisory systems, but complementarity (see Table 17 below) and notions of policy ‘success’ as well.

**Table 17. Complementarity and Partisan Advisors Buffering and Bridging**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Complementarity</th>
<th>Buffering Activity</th>
<th>Bridging Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Control</td>
<td>Provision of alternative source of policy advice</td>
<td>Providing access to/integration of public service policy advice for minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing access to/integration of variously located partisan-political policy advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing access to/integration of exogenous sources of policy advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation/ Distancing of political and administrative actors</td>
<td>Insulating non-partisan public servants from partisan-political aspects of policy making</td>
<td>Providing access to/integration of ministerial positions or preferences related to policy for public service actors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

**Ministerial Office Buffering**

**Buffering At the Federal Ministers’ Office Level**

There was little doubt that federal ministerial partisan advisors engaged in buffering. All categories of actors confirming such activities were in fact a core function for partisan advisors. It was described as involving the provision of policy advice that contested departmental policy advice, or inputs received from stakeholders, caucus, or the first minister’s office. In this case, the policy advisory activity of partisan advisors literally physically buffered public service advice. That is, as detailed in Chapter 4, a written partisan-political policy advisory system was in place at the ministerial office level that produced *separate* written briefing notes. These were provided as an overlay to *all* forms of policy advice proffered to ministers from either the public service or *external actors*. Ministers and their partisan advisors in this case explained that partisan advisors
contributed to policy advisory activity in four principal ways: a) working with officials during the development of their policy advice in an iterative and ongoing fashion; b) providing a formal written partisan-political policy advice as an overlay in conjunction with the formal departmental advice, or that of stakeholders; c) engaging with stakeholders during the development of policy advice related to its partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions; and, d) providing oral advice to the minister in relation to any or all of the above. Comparatively, partisan-political policy advisory activity at the federal level was much more systematic, formalized, and comprehensive than reported in either sub-national case. Ministers and deputies in that case confirmed partisan advisors engaged in written and oral policy advisory activity, that it spanned the partisan-political and ‘administrative-technical’ dimensions, and was undertaken with a broad range of policy actors.

These four types of policy advisory activity raise several implications for complementarity and the operation of advisory systems. By means of their ongoing and iterative policy advisory work with officials, typically via DM or ADM interactions, partisan advisors strengthened political control throughout policy advisory development. The formal written partisan-political policy advice provided was described as concise, typically a one or two page document – providing a general political policy overlay not in-depth policy analysis. Those interviewed explained that this partisan-political policy advice ensured: a) appropriate political context was provided, b) salient and contentious items were highlighted, c) consistency with stated partisan-political policy objectives was adjudicated, and d) a recommendation and rationale was provided for the minister(s). Two senior partisan advisors described their advisory role in the policy process:

Then the way we did it we had a grey note, so it was a different colour from the paper work that was flowing through the office. Where the political staffer, in the case of my office I had assigned policy advisors, I had given them different regions of the country and different policy files. So they followed that policy file through. They worked with the department. Once the department made a recommendation they would then give in the form of a grey note brief what their political view was on this program. How did it mesh with the, the party’s platform? How did it mesh with the mandate letter? What other things were at play that would make this successful or not? What kind of political considerations we would have to consider. What other ministers might we have to dialogue with or other members of parliament? Things of that nature. Those files would come to me as chief of staff after having been reviewed by my
senior policy advisor or director of policy. I would review those and if I
was satisfied I would then forward those to the minister for his approval or
his rejection. So what he would end up getting would be a
recommendation from the department and then a grey note
recommendation from his political staff. (Chief of staff)

Yeah well the answer is yes I absolutely provide advice. And I provide
advice both from what can crassly be called the political to sometimes I
provided policy advice in situations where the minister for whatever
reason prefers my advice to the department, or wants a counter-position
to the department, or simply for whatever reason doesn’t want to consult
the department and there are reasons for that that I won’t get into.
(Director of Policy)

Partisan advisors thus engaged in considerable contestation activity through
ongoing and direct contribution of content-based policy advisory activity. Ministerial
office level chiefs of staff and policy directors engaged in advisory activity involving the
 provision of their own direct policy advice and/or supplementing that of their junior
partisan advisors or departmental officials. All categories of partisan advisors self-
described themselves as primary sources of partisan-political policy counsel to their
ministers. Chiefs noted that they relied heavily on their directors of policy and junior
advisors for detailed partisan-political policy advice. Chiefs of staff interviewed indicated
that their advice giving was more oral then written. They may write a short note or
comments upon official’s policy advice or their own policy shop’s partisan-political policy
briefs, but most often they provided oral policy advice directly with their ministers, fellow
partisan advisors, or officials. This was in large part a consequence of the management
obligations chiefs explained having. For example, the management and oversight of the
other ‘exempt’ staff and operational requirements of a minister’s activities. Thus, the
policy advisory role of chiefs of staff was a strategic one, involving themselves in the
substantive buffering as required but overall engaging in oversight. As one chief put it:

The policy role of the chief of staff is to ensure that not one of those
dockets [departmental policy files] gets to the minister’s desk by itself
unaccompanied by a political memo from either the staff or from the chief
of staff, which had come to the chief of staff. Explaining what the political
implications of that are you know how they fit with the party’s platform,
how they fit within the particular geographic area, and you know basically
what the partisan politics of this is so that the minister is not uninformed of
the implications of this. (Chief of Staff)
Partisan advisors at all levels explained that when they did ‘push back’ or contest public service advice it was to ensure that such it was consistent with overarching partisan-political policy objectives of the minister and/or government. Most characterized their role as ensuring their ministers’ received comprehensive policy advice where all options were appropriately canvassed. Various categories of partisan advisors interviewed made clear they understood their function in the context of being one source of advice among many that a minister consulted. Departmental officials, cabinet colleagues, caucus, the first minister’s office, and external sources formed the constellation of sources of advice ministers may consult. However the content of ministerial partisan advisors policy advice was unique in that it could span the partisan-political as well as administrative-technical dimensions of policy advisory activity. Two partisan advisors responses to a question about their advisory activity versus that of the public service are revealing:

The quality [of public service policy advice], the quality is top notch. I mean they spend a lot of time and they work very hard and the quality is there. But simply because it’s a high quality product doesn’t mean it meets your objectives. Often it was a very solid policy recommendation but it was a policy recommendation contrary to our political stripes and in that case even though it was a high quality recommendation and a non-partisan recommendation it was not one that we could accept as a political office. The quality is always there. It’s a matter of whether or not the recommendation that the department makes is in line with the governments, the government’s policy bent or direction. (Minister’s office Director of Policy)

We don’t, we’re not there to add an additional layer of red tape and have a specific opinion on everything. But sometimes there’s something coming through where you read advice from the public service that comes from one perspective. Then you remember having talked to stakeholders, and having had discussions with Member of Parliament, having read interesting research and you find that there are maybe other perspectives to be considered than the one from the public service. And then you just bring that forward to the minister or you suggest him to speak to additional people who have a different perspective. It’s more about making sure that the file is complete and the minister has all the facts before making a decision. (Junior partisan advisor)

Ministers and deputy ministers confirmed that partisan advisors were active participants in the policy advisory system. Interviews revealed that ministers often received both departmental policy advice as well as their partisan advisors policy advice
at the same time. Of note, ministers at the federal level all reported that they expected their partisan advisors to work with departmental officials long before they, as ministers, became involved in the policy process. Two ministers explained:

Well, in fact the mechanics of it are that prior to receiving a power point presentation or ‘deck’ or a policy paper, prior to that, almost always my chief of staff and senior public servants will have already worked with the bureaucrats to take off any rough edges that they found obvious.

(Minister)

I always liked to, if I had any questions, political staff would usually look at the items and work on it with officials and then usually in the form of a memo would give me their thoughts or advice on the particular issue. I would then if then I had more questions I would either give them a call or meet with them or just fire something back saying I need more information on this or more information on that. The chief of staff is supposed to tie it all together and it’s a person certainly among the political staff will have the most influence on the minister because he or she would of talked with political staff on the item, talked with the officials and is ultimately there to give the final advice to the minister. So chief of staff position is absolutely critical. (Hon. Stockwell Day)

These responses illustrate the complex web of policy advice within which partisan advisors operate. Ministers interviewed clearly articulated an expectation for their partisan advisors to work in lock step with departmental officials, and stakeholders outside of government, to inform and reinforce the political policy agenda and weed out those options that were known to be politically unfeasible. Ministers also made clear that their partisan advisors reacted to the policy work of the department but also proactively kept close watch on the advice being generated to ensure it met the needs of the minister and government. In short, partisan advisors pushed for greater responsiveness from officials but served important functions in generating content-based policy advice apart from that of the public service. Reflecting on his time as a Liberal and Conservative cabinet minister Hon. David Emerson explained, “The political staff is much more reactive and interactive with public servants. They see their role as much more you know the stewards of the politics of advice”. Emerson went on to detail how in his experience the two sources of advice were used:

So when you get policy advice you’re getting it really from both sources. Predominantly the core, boilerplate advice, comes out of the public service and then it is reacted to by the political staff in the minister’s
office. So you’ll get two separate, or even combined, depending on the minister’s approach [to] briefings from public servants and political staff on any given issue. (Hon. David Emerson)

Another minister summed up, rather strikingly, when and how ministerial partisan advisors involved themselves in policy advice:

At the very beginning, personally anyway, I would make sure that when I got the briefing book to read so did my senior policy advisor [partisan advisor]. And if he or she had advice or concerns or whatever then they always gave me a cover sheet that came with it. I got the policy advice, the political policy oversight at the same time I got the bureaucratic advice. I would receive both documents at the same time. I would get a … for instances a deck, a PowerPoint presentation. Attached to it would be my political policy advisor’s overview of that presentation. It came stapled together it was a one two punch it was the same moment. I got the advice and the critique at the same time. (Minister, emphasis added)

Deputies interviewed tended to emphasize that officials provided the ‘professional’ and technical policy advice and partisan advisors typically provided partisan-political policy advice. Deputies were quite pleased to leave partisan-political policy advisory activity to the minister’s office. When asked how the various advisory components worked in their particular department a deputy minister explained:

Yeah well you know I guess we provide our advice and the political staff provide advice separately to the minister on issues. So for example here in the department we’ll do a briefing note and then political staff will do a one page you know their view on the thing and I think they take, obviously their job is to take a political view on the thing. Sometimes they will disagree, sometimes they will agree with us actually and we find ourselves in alliance on some issues with the political staff on issues. You know we perform two different functions. (Deputy Minister)

Normatively, deputy ministers interviewed did not perceive ministerial partisan advisors as encroaching on their advisory roles. Deputies were quick to dispel the myth that they alone were the sole sources of advice, readily acknowledging that partisan advisors were one of many sources of advice ministers consulted. This sentiment was captured well by one senior deputy who summed up what many described:

First of all on most policy issues, you know, the bureaucracy and the deputy minister in the department are not the only source of advice to the
minister. We’re probably a very important maybe the most important source of policy advice but everybody’s giving advice to ministers on policy issues. You know they have, we live in a world of modern communications everyone’s active. There’s associations, there’s interest groups etc. So we’re not the only people providing advice to the minister. We’re probably the only people who are providing advice consistently day in and day out to ministers and commenting on advice that ministers are getting from other people. So you know policymaking is not just the domain of the public service. (Deputy Minister)

However, deputies all noted they provided non-partisan policy advice and could not provide the more partisan-political forms of policy advice. As such, they were happy that ministers had partisan advisors to provide that dimension, and content, of policy advice. Deputies noted that they had frequent policy related interactions with ministerial staff (typically the chief and policy director). Overall, these exchanges were described as positive. When asked what, if any, function partisan advisors should play related to policy advice and how best to achieve a healthy political-administrative policy advice equilibrium another deputy responded, “I understand when there’s sometimes that the chief of staff will talk to the minister about issues and it’s not appropriate for me to be there”. The deputy went on to describe at length the policy advisory role of partisan advisors and its relationship to other sources of policy advice:

I think they always should [provide policy advice to the minister], but they have to remember their role. First of all their role is to understand the policy advice, maybe policy isn’t the right word here, the public service advice right. Then to add the political dimension to this that nobody else can. And so you know I think that when the system is working well the minister is getting my advice, signed off by me on behalf of the department, and then he’s got a political note on top of that that says minister there are these political issues and they can be managed in this way. Or this is a real problem for us and I don’t know how we’re going to this kind of thing. He should get both of that, they should be involved in the policy process but not on the technical side on the political side. (Deputy Minister)

Several partisan advisors confirmed they understood and appreciated the non-partisan status of the public service. They explained that they were cautious when it came to activities that might be construed as politicizing the public service, particularly when dealing with officials below the deputy and ADM levels. This extended to their direct dealings with public service officials in the development of policy advice as well as
when they interacted with exogenous stakeholders. With respect to the latter, many partisan advisors emphasized that they engaged in ongoing informal stakeholder consultation activities. These were described to at times be explicitly political. Such partisan-political types of policy advisory interactions with stakeholders were managed carefully to avoid undue politicization of the public service. Two chiefs of staff explain:

Within the minister’s office I think we had to do a little bit more in terms of educating officials about why we were committing to certain things. Obviously we always had to be mindful that officials were there to do non-partisan work and so we had to, we had to avoid you know pushing them too far in the direction of the political but we needed them to understand it so we could accomplish our goals. (Chief of staff)

So the meetings would generally be different and you know you didn’t want to put public servants in an embarrassing situation either so you would tend to conduct the meetings you know I mean there’s a policy component for every meeting and everyone can be part of that but there may be other aspects that public servants should not be part of and they would recognize that. (Chief of Staff)

**Partisan Advisors’ Buffering in British Columbia**

B.C. partisan advisors were found to share greater similarities to their federal counterparts rather than those in New Brunswick. All three categories of actors interviewed in the B.C. case (ministers, deputies, partisan advisors) described partisan advisors as active contributors of policy advice. When asked to describe their role in general, several partisan advisors stated their primary activity was to provide advice to their ministers. They frequently described challenging departmental policy advice from partisan-political perspectives. If they thought public service policy advice on a matter was not politically viable, then they would contest it and offer their potential options for amendment, revision, or all out rejection. When asked specifically about their provision of policy advice to ministers, several ministerial office partisan advisors explained providing a mix of policy advice. From their perspectives their advisory activity included administrative-technical policy advice related to the development of policy advice from the department, and a secondary component that was much more explicitly partisan-political. Two long-time ministers’ office partisan advisors explained:

In my case I’ve been around a little bit. I’m not shy about sharing my advice with the minister, the deputy minister, and the ADMs. On whether
it be policy or legislation and that advice centers around many things. Whether it be public perceptions, or political ramifications, or is it actually good policy. I like to think I’m able to contribute in all of those areas and through the process. Generally the advice that I would give I’m, with a few exceptions, I’m happy to give it to the minister and the deputy minister when they’re both sitting in the same room. (Ministerial partisan advisor)

It’s very unstructured I mean it’s happening continuously and it’s a little more, I would say because you’re role is political you always have that element in there. So you’re thinking about the politics of the situation. So you’ll have in many situations you’ll have a deputy minister providing advice from a certain perspective but then an MA [Ministerial Assistant] provides advice from a different perspective. It doesn’t mean that the advice is really that different in most cases it’s the same. But sometimes there can be considerations that need to be brought up and that you wouldn’t expect a deputy minister to bring them up. So it could be that this particular problem is affecting a certain geographic area of the province and guess what you’ve got five caucus members, caucus colleagues, who are going to be affected by this so we need to think about that. So I would say it’s definitely unstructured and it’s continuous and it’s sometimes it’s requested and sometimes it’s not. (Ministerial partisan advisor)

Partisan advisors in B.C. reported greater concern than their New Brunswick counterparts over the range and comprehensiveness of policy advice available to their ministers. Respondents in several instances referenced occasions when they felt like departmental officials were not providing enough options, or that the context and/or consequences of policy advice had not been sufficiently detailed, or did not reflect the political reality of the day. Moreover, they noted that there was intensive interaction and participation in the development of policy advice prior to it being formally submitted to the minister. This mirrors the activity reported in the federal case but without the written partisan-political advisory system. Without exception, B.C. partisan advisors reported that their policy related advice was oral and informal. There was no partisan-political briefing note system as reported in the federal case. The policy advisory system in B.C. involved partisan advisors providing their views to departmental officials and ministers during the development of policy advice, but with the public service remaining the final source of ‘official’ policy advice provided in written form. Partisan advisors provided an additional partisan-political overlay and ensure that their ministers were informed when it came to departmental policy, or to offer alternative forms of policy advice, all the while
ensuring context and potential political pitfalls were identified. One first minister’s office partisan advisor explained the role of ministerial level counterparts as:

Ministerial assistants were much more focused on their ministries policy development. All of the materials for house preparations, estimates for budget, bills, question period, issues management and you’d be hoping and expecting, and relying on them to be very knowledgeable about their ministry. About the issues of the day, the policies that were in the works, and able to offer to them some advice to them [minister] in similar fashion to myself and others where offering to the premier. A bit of a foil or political lens if nothing else of the advice coming from the civil service, especially in the early days. We had new deputies, many many new deputies who were also learning their jobs. Some of them from outside government who weren’t familiar with government process. So you would be hoping, or expecting, that the Ministerial Assistants were offering political advice that would be very much aimed at ensuring the ministers were well informed and the information they needed to make reasonable decisions, recommendations to cabinet, or to the public and most importantly didn’t step in the ‘goo’. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Ministers and DMs described partisan advisors as active sources of policy advice. One minister explained “The Victoria political staff are the ones that both provide assistance, they provide advice, they provide some communications skills. There is a much more personal relationship. I use them also as a sounding board”. Other ministers explained that they saw their partisan advisors as colleagues and not as subordinates. They were expected to be actively ‘on top’ of the various ministerial policy files and active contributors to the policy advice process. In short, their advice was not only sought but also expected. Ministers reported that they expected their partisan staff to raise red flags related to departmental policy options and more generally to play a challenge or contestation function not only with the departmental officials but with the minister as well. A minister explained, “My expectation is, whether we’re going through regulatory changes or legislation that they’ve read it and that they challenge the thought. Otherwise what are they doing there?” When pushed to provide greater detail the same minister explained:

My expectation is that [partisan advisor] will be on top of the files with me and that we will discuss them as peers, frankly. And we will challenge each other on different things and of course when you somebody who you strongly believe in, you think they’re very talented, and you have a lot
of confidence in, it’s pretty easy to have a relationship where you can challenge each other. [Partisan advisor will] also stay on top of the relationship with the deputy and the assistant deputies because [partisan advisor] does that level of communication with them as well. So [partisan advisor] has a very good working relationship with the bureaucracy. That’s my expectation (Minister).

Partisan advisors were therefore expected by their ministers to perform a policy advisory function that spanned both the administrative-technical and explicit partisan-political dimensions of policy advice. They commented on the specific technical or non-partisan merits of policy advice flowing from the department but were also clearly counted on to apply a political lens to all policy advice available and be the principal source of partisan-political policy advice.

DMs in this case shared their federal counterpart’s normative stance of seeing partisan advisors as accepted and required components of the advisory system. As will be explored in the next chapter deputies acknowledged that partisan advisors had, to some extent, developed expertise that enabled them to proffer administrative-technical policy advice. However, most cast the bulk of partisan advisors policy advisory work as partisan-political in nature. This was described as an important component of policy advice and one that they as non-partisan public servants were unable to provide. As such, deputies in this case frequently acknowledged the utility of partisan advisors ability to ‘cover off’ the partisan-political needs of ministers. Two deputy ministers explained:

But they [ministers] also have to weigh other factors. Sometimes I go in and say look it, this is going to be our advice but you know I’m not dumb. I can tell you what the best thing to do is. But you have got a bunch of political forces you have to weigh. I don’t even have a clue which one should win out in this case. So ministers also need to look to their political staff and that’s why they’re there to give them advice on that front as well. (Deputy Minister)

Where they [partisan advisors] don’t have any sort of involvement, and that’s a problem for a number of reasons, whether its just because you can’t be taking things directly to the minister all the time and because by and large the role of deputies and of the public service is to try and provide that balanced, independent, non-political advice to them and it’s really their political staff that are there to help provide them with the political considerations and analysis so that when you have the program options and consideration in mind, that balanced with the political considerations you always tend to arrive at, in my experience, at a more
reasoned and balanced sound decision than you do by not paying any attention to the political or program considerations. (Deputy Minister)

The aforementioned responses from deputy ministers acknowledges the advisory function of partisan advisors as serving, in part, to insulate public service officials from partisan-political policy advisory activity. That is, partisan advisors engaged in providing the political context and analysis via partisan-political policy advice that deputies could not and should not provide. Several partisan advisors explained that they engaged in providing such forms of policy advice in private to avoid placing officials in inappropriate positions. The emphasis was again placed on providing ministers with frank analysis of the partisan-political implications of policy advice being provided or of the consequences of adopting certain policy advice. Several deputies corroborated such explanations with descriptions of partisan advisors policy advisory activity as involving engaging with various stakeholders either on partisan-political or administrative-technical dimensions related to issues such stakeholders may have. Across the board deputies underscored that they saw policy making and governing as involving a partisan-political dimension. They wanted and left the explicit partisan-political policy advisory components of policy advice to the minister’s own staff.

**Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors’ Buffering in New Brunswick**

The N.B. case saw ministerial level partisan advisors engaging in negligible buffering. Partisan advisors reported low levels of direct policy advisory content-based activity. Instead, ministerial partisan advisors almost universally cast their functions as constituency focused. Summing up the role of partisan advisors in New Brunswick one partisan advisor explained, “I guess that’s the point of being an EA is to try and keep that stuff [ministerial constituency problems], to try and deflect it away from the minister so they don’t have to worry about it”. When asked to describe the typical nature of the policy specific work undertaken a seasoned ministerial office partisan advisor explained:

Some was to look at the departmental work in the sense I’m not the minister but there are things that he has to keep his eye on, that he wants direction followed. Others of course is everything from the constituency office in handling local issues to, to helping him with the planning and the day to day work on the more provincial issues (Ministerial partisan advisor)
Ministers and deputies reported much more direct interactions with each other than were reported in either of the two cases. That is, most policy matters dealing with the department or cabinet were dealt with bilaterally with little to no involvement of partisan advisors. Partisan advisors were seen by all respondents as constituency focused and used by ministers for local political needs. As one senior N.B. official put it, “In the situation I’m in, it’s [partisan advisors policy work] more bringing case specific issues not as much in policy”. Further saying, “but I would tend to say that they’re dealing more with specific issues that arise that are brought to their attention that their trying to find solutions to I guess”. Ministers reported using their partisan advisors for political tasks versus involvement in the policy advisory or formulation process writ large. Two ministers who explained the function of their partisan advisors as follows:

Yeah, some ministers would deal with their deputy ministers through their political staff. I dealt with the deputy minister directly and rarely would the political staff deal with the deputy. It depends on the personality of the minister. I was considered to be a strong type of character so I didn’t need the political staff buffering stuff or doing my bidding for me (Minister, emphasis added).

Everything goes through him [partisan advisor] like politically. Especially if there are nominations to be made, he controls all that. I don’t even want to see that. You know as long, I keep that with the staff. If they come to me and say what do you think about this guy running this section, well you know get it through my EA [partisan advisor]. What he decides goes with me. So, I leave it up to him because if you try to play too many things, you’ll get boggled. That’s you know, usually that’s the way, that’s what he does. He’ll work with the staff to make sure that politically, I do the right thing. We have communication officers which also give us good advice, what I should be saying to the media and all this type of thing. But he controls what I do, he controls my agenda, and you know and then he tries to balance it out so I don’t get overtired and things like that. (Minister)

Deputies interviewed in N.B. expected partisan advisors to provide ministers with partisan-political policy advice; this along with constituency related fire fighting was reported to be their main tasks. The direct relationship DMs and Ministers described saw partisan advisors play a less significant insulating role, but deputies described healthy and positive relationships with partisan advisors at the minister’s office level in N.B. One deputy did however note instances were clarifications on roles and protocol for dealing with officials was required, stating:
I typically insist that my bureaucracy have very open relationships with the political staff. Typically, you can get yourself in trouble if, and I’ve had them, some of the [partisan advisors] think they have more powers than they do and they tend to maybe disrespect the bureaucracy. You need to haul that in pretty fast. You need to bring them into your office and give them a little talk. You know that these people are doing the best they can. If you have got issue with people come to me. I run this department you don’t ok. (Deputy Minister)

This statement captures a broader sentiment that deputies expressed in this and all other cases. They made it quite clear that they would resolve any confusion over appropriate roles and responsibilities and were quite capable of addressing partisan advisors who may be seeking to overstep their boundaries through attempts at providing their own direction to officials.

**Minister’s Office Bridging**

*Federal Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisory Bridging*

Federal ministerial level partisan advisors reported extensive advisory activities involving bridging of various other sources of policy advice into the advisory system. Their bridging involved integration among partisan advisors themselves, with departmental officials, as well as exogenous actors. The number of policy-specific partisan advisors throughout the federal system provided a greater number of channels than the sub-national cases through which interactions on policy advisory grounds could take place. When asked why he interacted with other partisan advisors in other ministries one director of policy explained:

It was either to signal check what we were being told by the public service it was within the sort of views of our colleagues because sometimes messages get, I wouldn’t say intentionally changed, but misinterpreted. So when one of our officials would tell me that the Minister of [department] doesn’t like this. I actually want to hear it from the minister’s office. Have you seen this, have you heard about this, is it true the Minister doesn’t like it? If so why and how can we work on it? Occasionally it would come true that, or be discovered that really the Minister’s office had never really seen it. That maybe that someone in [department] in the bureaucracy didn’t like it or maybe spoke too generously on behalf of the minister and so it would come back that way. (Minister’s office Director of Policy)
This type of ‘signal checking’ was also reported when partisan advisors were asked to describe their patterns of interaction with the first minister’s office. This echoes the findings for first minister’s partisan advisors who repeatedly emphasized bridging activity with their ministerial level counterparts. For example, for signal checking related to how policy items were progressing or exchanges related to seeking out direction or partisan-political policy advice. Minister’s office partisan advisors reported seeking out PMO input as they developed policy advice for their minister, or to assist them in dealing with problematic files. Bridging activity was often but not always tied to formal cabinet business and stakeholder consultations. Of note, it was only in the federal case where minister’s office partisan advisors reported engaging in formal cabinet related policy advisory work. This spanned the ‘administrative-technical’ and partisan-political dimensions. For example, partisan advisors described working with the officials as they prepared policy documents for ministers (e.g. briefing notes, information notes etc.) and ongoing bridging with PMO partisan advisors related to their ongoing dialogue with stakeholders on policy files. Within ministerial offices themselves there was a range of bridging activities taking place. The other internal dimension of bridging consisted of bridging information between political and administrative spheres. This was a principal function of partisan advisors. One chief explained:

Equally often I’d pick up the phone and call the deputy minister’s executive assistant and just say I need five minutes with the deputy. Almost always that request would be accommodated because chances are for the deputy that there was relevant political information that they needed to know and appreciated when they got it. Even if it’s you know saying that the minister is really pissed off at something you said yesterday. Now they didn’t show it to you but I can tell you this really rankled [the minister] and we need to sort it out right now. They appreciate that because it helps them do their job. (Chief of Staff)

This type of bi-directional bridging between partisan advisors and public servants was seen as a pivotal means by which pitfalls and information asymmetries could be avoided. It must be noted however that interviews with deputies revealed that such ‘front-end’ iterative policy advisory development activities were not seen as a form of politicization of the advice that would be prepared. Deputies made clear that they ensured to continue delivering their ‘frank and fearless’ advice, but that it was useful to
consult with partisan advisors to ensure they understood the ministers expectations at the outset of the process.

Senior officials all readily acknowledged partisan advisors served as bridges within the advisory system. Bridging was explained by officials to occur for two principal reasons, the first involved access; responses from all categories of interviewee’s supports recent survey work finding that officials interact more often with ministerial staff than with ministers (Dunn & Bourgault, 2012a). One senior official explained, “We meet with them [partisan advisors], we interact with them quite frequently and typically because they have this day-to-day access to the minister”. Another explained, “You could also use the minister’s staff to test ideas or to convey messages to the minister. Because they would also have day-to-day contact with her because it’s her immediate staff. Or to give the minister heads up”. Additionally, officials noted that partisan advisors bridging was a very useful means for departmental officials to better understand the minister’s motivations and policy positions. As one deputy explained:

Well I think that the way you would, traditional way you would put it is that they [partisan advisors] provide the political advice to the bureaucracy. I think consistent with our discussion earlier it’s not black and white like that at all. In fact, I think, typically within ministers’ offices one or two people are very strong on the policy side. They usually play an exceedingly important role because they can help explain to the [departmental] policy analysts in ways that they’ll understand from a policy perspective, why it is the minister wants to go one direction or another based on the political context. And so the short answer is yeah, there’s usually is some strong policy people within the minister’s office and thank God. (Deputy Minister)

The bridging reported by officials in the federal case, as well as both sub-national cases clearly occurred at multiple levels with officials. While official PCO and TBS guidelines indicate that ‘normally’ (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011, p.3) and ‘To the extent practicable’ (Privy Council Office, 2011, p.46) partisan advisors interactions should occur through the deputy’s office – this was reported by all categories of respondents as not practical or representative of actual practice. Deputies insisted that ministers’ offices interactions were exclusively with senior level officials and that they would always keep the DM abreast of interactions. One official explained:
It is true however that there is a lot of relationship between ministerial staff and other levels of the department. You know the assistant deputy ministers and the general directors and that. Just, it’s too complicated you know you can’t have a choke point in the system you have to have a kind of a little bit of a distributive relationship between the minister’s office and the department. So not everything funnels through me or my office that would be just impossible and in particular, formal requests will come down and as I say there’s a process for that but there’s day-to-day contact you know the minister’s office will have you know a staffer assigned to each branch of our department. (Deputy Minister)

The second was the consequential function partisan advisors undertook in relation to bridging with exogenous actors outside of government. This also supports recent empirical survey work of DMs that confirmed federal exempt staffs are key actors in this regard (Dunn and Bourgault, 2012a). Partisan advisors reported frequently meeting with stakeholders and detailed how they used such interactions for due diligence regarding departmental policy. Partisan advisors reported exogenous sources of policy advice were used to supplement available policy advice and as a key vehicle for departmental policy advice contestation and validation. How might stakeholders react? Did subject matter experts outside of government agree with public service advice? Two ministerial partisan advisors make clear this type of bridging functions occurred regularly and its pertinence to policy work:

I mean some stakeholders I spoke with on a daily basis sometimes in the crunch of you know doing a specific regulation or project or something. Some you hear when there’s an issue every six months or they send you their report and it might be interesting. So no, stakeholders are crucial. (Director of Policy)

Yeah it was pretty common. It was pretty common. I mean it often took the, typically what you would do is you wouldn’t say, you wouldn’t you know go to stakeholder X and say I want you to write this policy for me. What you would do is say we’ve got three really important areas we’re working on - who are the stakeholder groups we need to get input from? Then go out or have them come in and talk to them, hold roundtables and that sort of thing. That was an ongoing thing. So getting policy advice from outside was just a regular regular thing, and the departments were doing that too. Sometimes we’d meet independently with those guys other times we’d meet together but it was ongoing, every day, every week. (Chief of Staff)
Officials acknowledged that ongoing consultation and stakeholder interactions of a policy nature were occurring. DMs saw this as appropriate and even advantageous to improving the overall quality and quantity of policy advice within the advisory system. In describing what policy advisory role partisan advisors played, one senior deputy minister specifically referenced their ability to integrate stakeholder feedback. As the DM put it:

With a few exceptions, I mean there are a few on the political side, policy advisors who really are technical experts as well and know the subject matter really well. But for the most part if they do get into our side of the house they’re amateurs. And it’s not their strength right, just like we should not try to tell you how the stakeholders in this particular constituency you know and I don’t just mean electoral constituency. I mean you know, the folks in our minister’s office are meeting with stakeholders all the time all the time right. And they’re taking their calls and that. So they should really have the pulse of that and that’s what they can bring to bear that nobody else can. (Deputy Minister)

Bridging activity as set out in chapter 2 also includes ‘negative’ integration as captured through so-called ‘gatekeeping’. That is, partisan advisors can potentially limit or prevent various sources of policy advice from reaching decision makers. Respondents across the board noted that partisan advisors can and do play a role in gatekeeping sources of policy advice from the minister. This was not typically described to involve ‘funnelling’ as understood by Walter (2006) and Eichbaum and Shaw (2007a). Rather it was described as a triaging activity whereby partisan advisors would ‘sift and sort’ priorities items for the minister. It was less about filtering what they perceived to be unwelcome or politically unfeasible policy advice and consisted more in emphasizing those priority items and policy advice that dealt with established ‘priority’ policy items. Ministerial office level chiefs, and to a lesser extent, directors of policy, reported that they exercised such control to protect or shield their bosses from overexposure or overwhelming them with departmental officials and/or external stakeholders. A chief of staff explained:

A big part of my job was controlling sort of access to my Minster. Access to the minister from the department, and access to the department from the outside world, the stakeholder world. So there I just, I needed to make extra certain we using [minister’s] time in the best and most productive way. (Chief of Staff)
This was confirmed by several ministers who clearly stated that there are more demands on their time than there is supply. This resulted in their partisan advisors having to do double bridging duty as gatekeepers but also as integrators of those sources of policy advice the ministers was unable to accommodate. Two ministers explained:

The chief is always the person who is the gatekeeper, filtering the advice you’re getting. But I would say a good chief is not the person who sits there scratching their head basically coming up with advice to give the minister. The chief is the person who is much more a conductor, so making sure the different points of view from the political advisors are sifted and sorted and weighted appropriately and so on. And making sure that we’re not getting cross threaded with the public service and so on. I see the chief of staff role as obviously a wise political counsel but also as somebody who is very much managerial in the performance of their role (Hon. David Emerson)

Usually the ones [stakeholders] he had to tell no to, he met with them or the senior policy person met with them and they just had to do their best to faithfully represent to me how that meeting went because I couldn’t meet with everybody. (Minister)

These various bridging activities confirm that the policy advisory activity of partisan advisors consists not only of buffering - or providing their own content-based policy advice – but extend to important integration, management, and prioritization of various sources of policy advice within advisory systems.

**B.C. Minister’s Office Partisan Advisors Bridging**

B.C. partisan advisors reported that their close proximity to ministers made them an effective hub for multilateral policy advisory exchanges with various advisory system actors. Partisan advisors described their bridging as involving the integration of variously located sources to inform their ministers’ decision making in relation to both strategic policy priorities and on an ad hoc issue driven basis. Several partisan advisors interviewed highlighted their ability to provide access to the minister for decisions, and expressed an ability to help move items through the system both from a political and public service perspective. One partisan advisor with experience in several portfolios explained, “I was respectful of them as professional public servants and I also helped them have access to the minister which they needed to get to achieve their goals”.

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Another senior partisan advisor stressed that a significant amount of their role vis-à-vis policy development entailed the coordination and integration of information from various political and administrative sources. The advisor’s description of their policy advisory functions abounded with bridging activity. As they put it:

So often times I’ll be actioning [the minister’s] will with the bureaucracy or with other politicians or with the premier’s office. And vice versa, the premier’s office uses me, uses my office to communicate their direction to the bureaucracy and to the minister. You know … it’s just one of the pathways of information and direction that flow. So I see myself as a … also as just sort of … almost like a hub … like the center of a wheel and on the … there’s just a lot of information that is constantly coming in and coming out of this office. From the civil servants themselves, the ministry, the policy people, the communications staff which is the public affairs bureau in B.C., and the premier’s office. And then my job is to make sure that the minister … of all the information that I’m receiving [the minister] is receiving what he needs to have and that [the minister’s] direction is being received back to all of those bodies. (Ministerial partisan advisor)

Such responses were common, and emphasize the integration function played by partisan advisors related to multiple sources of policy advice. Minister’s confirmed that overall partisan advisors were not only sources of policy advice, but served as important bridges with departmental officials in addition to a host of other actors. One minister in explaining how their partisan advisors typically engaged in policy advisory activity emphasised bridging, explaining:

So silence would be the typical response to something that made sense and worked both bureaucratically and politically. The ministerial assistant would only pop up to you know get involved if a) they had a concern and b) they would run it by the Minister and the minister shared the concern and c) didn’t want to raise the issue himself or herself directly to the bureaucracy. (Minister)

Deputy ministers also confirmed partisan advisors engaging in bridging. They universally confirmed frequent policy advisory related interactions with partisan advisors that often did not include the minister. One DM explained, “Often you are working through the political staff or subject to the political staff being able to pass on and interpret any particular issue or direction or matters that you bring to their attention”. Another stating, “So, I interact with the political staff as much as I do the minister. And often that is an easy way, an easy conduit to the minister”. Partisan advisors were seen
as bridges both with respect to ministers but also often cited as key sources of policy advice from exogenous stakeholders. As one senior official explained, their bridging served to integrate various sources of policy advice to and from officials:

A good number of them [interactions with partisan advisors] will involve the stakeholder engagement. Because they are active with the minister with a bunch of stakeholder engagements so sometimes feedback that they want to provide, sometimes they act as a conduit to the minister on certain lower level issues where I don’t need to speak to them [minister] directly. (Deputy Minister)

One senior first minister’s office partisan advisor explained at length the important role ministerial partisan advisors could play in relation to bridging. This involved considerable opportunity to foster complementarity through increasing the availability and exchange of policy advice and information across spheres. Notably, they also underscored this as a product of the institutional location of partisan advisors. Explaining:

The big advantage of being a political staff person that the public service doesn’t have is your proximity to the minister. It allows you to understand the minister’s style what the minister needs to make a decision. In a good system, the political staff works very closely with the public servant. It’s not an adversarial relationship they often become good friends and the public servant is the senior partner in the relationship. The political staff needs the public service way more than the public service needs the political staff. But where the political staff can add value for the public service is around helping facilitate the flow of information around the minister and helping the public service get decisions in a timely manner. (First minister’s office partisan advisor)

Another aspect of bridging activity was the interactions between partisan advisors themselves. Those at the minister’s office level reported frequent dealings with their counterparts but more uneven patterns of interaction with the first minister’s office. At the minister’s office level however, advisors reported two principal reasons for their interactions with direct counterparts. Several reported that overlaps and spillovers between ministries was a key reason for them dealing with counterparts. One ministerial partisan advisors explained, “You would interact because especially on the environment side and agriculture as well, and IGR [intergovernmental relations department] all the time because your issues overlap”. Additionally, several advisors reported that they
would pass on information either related to policy development in their ministry or stakeholder information that they thought would be salient to their counterparts. As one advisor explained:

You know letting them know ok our staff in the bureaucracy came to us with this decision note - how’s that impacting your stakeholders and such and so ok staff was saying they were talking to your staff does your minister know about this? Or hey you know we’re hearing some word out of some large stakeholders on this issue it could affect you can you ask you bureaucrats to look into it for us. (Ministerial partisan advisor)

Ministers confirmed such activity. As one minister put it, “You know, often as a minister I might deal with them [other minister’s partisan advisors] directly but more typically it would be the ministerial assistant that would be that bridge” (emphasis added). Partisan advisors also reported frequent bridging activities with external stakeholders and subject matter experts in B.C. Those interviewed commented on the significant importance of knowing how stakeholders might react, and using such groups effectively to diversify and broaden available sources of policy advice. One partisan advisor explained:

So stakeholder, relating with stakeholders is a big part of the MA’s job, or a part of the MA’s job. I seek their advice sometimes depending on the stakeholder group. And mostly, just making sure the door is open. Because government is here to serve people effectively so just ensuring that the relationship is such that you know, it’s easy to pick up the phone to call. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Several ministers confirmed this view of partisan advisors as key interfaces both internally on political and administrative fronts as well as externally to stakeholders. Bridging extended to both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. It included efforts to securing support from key electoral constituencies, but was also frequently cited as a means to contest or validate policy options or to seek out policy advice. When asked to explain the primary function of partisan advisors a senior minister’s response points to the extent, and importance of, bridging in relation to both officials and exogenous actors within the advisory system. The minister explained:

Right, so the ministerial assistant is really the interface between the minister’s office and the ministry. That you know obviously there is an
almost constant interaction between the minister and deputy ministers. But I think that were the ministerial assistant is invaluable is working a lot with the deputy minister but with other staff in the ministry as well. You know things where the ministry needs attention of the minister, it’s often through the ministerial assistant in terms of what the issue is, what the priority is, and it’s often the ministerial assistant who in turn will do some of that outreach to other stakeholder groups to bounce ideas off, or to try and gauge what reaction there might be to various government policy initiatives. (Minister)

Deputies also confirmed that partisan advisors were heavily engaged in discussions and consultations with departmental stakeholders. Partisan advisors were in frequent contact with stakeholders and they served as an additional channel for the communication of potentially salient information that, it was explained, at times the stakeholders preferred to provide to the minister’s office. Partisan advisors may have more informal relationships with stakeholders or receive information about stakeholders’ attempts to deal with public service officials that could be of benefit. Partisan advisors could scrutinize suggestions or red flags brought to their attention and integrate suggested policy advice into the political or administrative spheres. Moreover, stakeholders could provide political context to ministerial partisan advisors in a more open fashion than they could with senior public servants. One deputy minister lauded the role partisan advisors had played in championing suggested legislative reform on a particular issue, explaining:

You know again when it came to some of the [policy area] laws that were recently adopted I think it was, it was the political staff that were really reaching out to some of the constituents and stakeholders. Who were really I think trying to influence you know if we do this particular course of action this is the result that will happen. Here’s how the stakeholder group will respond and what they will say. And ultimately what ability will we have in terms to get this program funded or people supporting it, whether it’s in the house if there’s legislative change required, or the approval of treasury board to fund something. Again, I think they provide a strong role in providing ongoing advice to the minister. (Deputy Minister)

Bridging in the B.C. case was also commonly reported to involve gatekeeping. Gatekeeping activity was not simply an exercise in limiting access which though that formed part of the activities reported. More often it was described as pre-sorting policy
advice for the minister to ensure that key policy items were prioritized. It should be emphasized that some variance was observed on this front. Some ministers reported that they appreciated such gatekeeping and expected their staff to engage in that type of activity. Others reported that they ensured such forms of negative bridging were kept to a minimum. How frequently partisan advisors played a gatekeeping role and to what degree related to policy was contingent upon the minister’s preference. When asked to describe their policy advisory activity one B.C. partisan advisor put it succinctly:

I would say the best Coles Notes version of the way I see myself is letting the minister know what he needs to know when he needs to know it. So it’s a very much well one part, one aspect of it, is a sort of a gatekeeper role. It’s keeping him aware of the things he needs to know and not bothering him with things he doesn’t need to know things that I can make decisions on. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Ministers reported that providing and limiting access was a key means by which partisan advisors could wield influence in advisory systems. One minister detailed how partisan advisors could exert influence through control of access, prioritization, and control over the sequencing of policy advisory inputs. The minister explained:

So as they take on direct responsibility for the establishment of priorities. In terms of so they know that you know your schedule is relatively limited, your availability is relatively limited, and the desire for people to meet with you probably exceeds the hours and days that are available for you to connect with people. So a lot of times they are able to shape your views and opinions by who it is that they deem to be most important for you to connect with and talk to. (Minister)

In this sense, the gatekeeping role and activities of partisan advisors in the B.C. case was much more explicitly tied to patterns of interaction between departmental officials, the minister, and stakeholders. Partisan advisors were thus able to facilitate or impede the integration of various sources of policy advice within the advisory system.

**Ministers’ Office Bridging in New Brunswick**

Partisan advisors in N.B. were more active in bridging than buffering. They themselves reported engaging in bridging to increase the exchange of policy advice between departmental officials and their ministers. Interviews with ministers confirmed
that they frequently relied on their partisan staff to do just that. When asked about if their political staff had a policy function one minister explained, “You know [partisan advisor’s] daily function is to meet the needs of me as a minister. To get me the information, so I don’t have to go around and ask individual staff all the time” further explaining, “Their job is to navigate through the department to find the answers that are needed”. Another senior minister referred to his staff as his ‘eyes and ears’ and made clear they engaged in bridging. Explaining:

So we will have discussions on that and its puts me in a much better position to be better informed and whether we are looking at a change of policy or not on [policy area] for example. [Partisan advisor] will do some of the ground work with departmental staff here and will have a series of questions and we’ll have a meeting and see what we can find out from [deputy minister] or one of the other ADMs, you know here’s a series of questions and let’s see if we can get answers to those questions. You know a lot of the information gathering is done through liaison work.

(Minister)

Interviews with officials also confirmed that ministerial level partisan advisors served as bridges, transmitting policy related information bilaterally across political and administrative spheres. One DM reported that partisan advisors could be useful to reinforce the ‘policy message’. Explaining, “I may use the EA [minister’s Executive Assistant] to just know that the EA is going to be in more frequent contact with the minister than I because they will be traveling with them and whatever. So just to make sure they know the messages so that they can just repeat and reiterate and are strong on the messaging”. With a particular policy example the DM explained:

So we are working on some [policy area] and it’s a thing that the minister really wants and we have been trying to get going in the department. He’s interested, the department is, you know it’s a good match right now. So we are trying to move something forward. So all of our milestones along the way, where this is where we are, this is how much we got done are we on the track for what he can support – the EA [partisan advisor] is in on those. So we say this is how we are looking at addressing this issue in the bigger issue of [policy area]. You know are you comfortable with where we are going? Because we don’t want to be at the final end and find out we have taken a left turn and [minister] wanted us to take a right turn. (Deputy Minister)
Partisan advisors reported almost constant interactions with their ministerial counterparts or through the executive assistant to the premier’s office. However, these interactions were again cited in the context of case based problem solving versus departmental of government policy specific activities. Similarly, when asked about their potential policy interactions with first minister’s office, partisan advisors almost universally characterized them in terms of logistical or constituency casework. Partisan advisors themselves reported more uneven patterns of bridging with exogenous sources of policy advice. Most reported no real activity on that front but some described maintaining close working relationships with their various stakeholder groups. Overall ministers and their partisan advisors made clear that they relied heavy on departmental officials for such activity. Almost all ministers and deputies described explicit preferences for having departmental officials present to ensure that subject matter expertise was on hand if required. A representative answer provided by a minister is as follows:

Anytime I meet with stakeholders I make sure [departmental] staff are there. They take down the information, some of the questions I might have they might not and vice versa. I mean because they have been in the department for so long they probably met the stakeholders beforehand through a previous administration or they know how to ask the question in a relative way. You know you always want to have your [departmental] staff there. (Minister, emphasis added)

A partisan advisor to a senior minister explained that exogenous oriented bridging was contingent upon ministerial preference, and any given partisan advisor’s level of experience and or comfort in such matters. As the partisan advisor put it, “So for me, I met with the majority of stakeholders overall and dealt with a number of them quite a bit. Once again there are other [partisan advisors] that never met with stakeholders”. The advisor further explained that a significant portion of his time was spent relaying information to both the department and the minister from stakeholders. Those who reported any bridging with stakeholders noted it was primarily informational or involved follow ups to seek out reactions ensuring political stakeholder management was on track. Two advisors explain:

A good EA [ministerial executive assistant] could really make a difference. But you need to have an EA that the minister obviously trusts in that sort
of situation. And I don’t, by any means, mean the EA is out there making decisions on behalf of government, but is the perfect conduit for information transfer. One thing I’ve seen about people or organizations they believe that when they are talking to the EA that they will be transferring that information to the minister. They have the ear of the minister. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

I did a lot of follow up with them after the fact. I would know what the position was from being in the meetings and the briefings that we had afterwards and what those decisions were going to be so I could say look this probably isn’t going to happen but this is how we’re going to approach it and gauge their reaction from there. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

The New Brunswick case stood out for the degree to which ministerial level political actors (both ministers and their staff) deferred to officials in dealing with departmental stakeholders. As was seen above, the federal and B.C. cases saw partisan advisors much more assertively engaging with stakeholder on a policy-specific basis apart from officials. N.B. officials described much more control over stakeholder interaction related to departmental policy issues. One official explained, “We’ve been very careful and the EA and the minister’s executive secretary to make sure that any department business that the deputy or myself be aware and that we, or our designated officials be present”. The official went on to describe that “Almost anytime the minister meets with a stakeholder group, an industry or organization, or whatever, either the deputy or myself or at least director level official would be present with the minister”. The New Brunswick case saw departmental officials present at nearly all stakeholder meetings. In the other two cases it was more commonly reported by both political and administrative actors that ministerial partisan advisors engaged with stakeholder groups without officials present in addition to joint consultations undertaken with officials.

Conclusions: Ministerial Partisan Advisors, Advisory System Operation, Complementarity, and Policy ‘Success’

This chapter has provided evidence that ministerial office level partisan advisors, as buffers and bridges, can also be consequential actors within advisory systems. ‘Political aides’ have been long acknowledged as components of such systems (Halligan, 1995; Prince, 2007). However, this study has argued traditional location-
based advisory system approaches obscure content and processes dimensions of advisory activities therein. The policy advisory model developed in chapter 2 (restated below) was elaborated precisely to provide greater specificity for the examination of such aspects of partisan advisors policy activity. This chapter’s findings of buffering in two of three cases (federal, B.C.), and bridging activity in all three cases, points to potential variance in how partisan advisors engage in advisory activity, raising implications for how they may impact the operation of advisory systems, complementarity, and policy ‘success’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Advisory Activity (one of many sources of policy advice)</th>
<th>Nature of Policy Advisory Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Buffering</strong> (Contestation of ‘content’ of policy advice)</td>
<td>Partisan-Political Policy Advice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contestation of policy advice by partisan advisors based on partisan criteria</td>
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<td>(e.g. advocating for policy option ‘a’ over ‘b’ for partisan-political advantage)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging</strong> (Process-based integration of advisory activity)</td>
<td>Partisan Policy Advice Integration</td>
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<td>Integration or ‘gatekeeping’ of policy advice among partisan sources of policy advice</td>
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<td>(e.g. integrating policy advice from the first minister’s office or external partisan-political stakeholders)</td>
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Buffering, when reported, was described as involving the provision of direct content-based policy advice. At times it involved partisan-political policy advice designed to contest other sources of policy advice from decidedly more partisan-political perspectives. At other times, it was described in administrative-technical terms - involving the provision of policy advice to ministers, or engaging in advisory activity with officials or stakeholders based on substantive or experiential expertise, or the technical
merits, basic logic, or perceived deficiencies of policy advice. Buffering was therefore found to diversify not only the available quantity of policy advice to decision makers, but also the qualitative content of that policy advice as well. However, each of the cases included candid acknowledgment by partisan advisors that they were one of many sources of policy advice – an additional source to that provided by officials, cabinet, caucus, the first ministers’ office, and non-governmental sources. Comparatively, the federal case demonstrated a greater intensiveness, frequency, and sophistication of buffering than either sub-national case. This was principally due to the unique mix of written and oral advisory practices described above, as well as ministerial expectation that their partisan advisors be active advisory systems participants. B.C. ministerial partisan advisors also reported partisan-political and administrative-technical forms of buffering, but their policy advisory activity was limited to informal oral advisory practices only. In N.B. no buffering of any kind was reported at the ministerial office level. These are important differences that reinforce the need to pay due attention to the actual policy tasks undertaken by policy workers rather than attributions of influence predicated solely on location.

Partisan advisors were active as bridges in all three cases serving important function with respect to the integration of variously located sources of policy advice. The B.C. and federal cases again demonstrated more sophisticated and frequent bridging along partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. In these cases bridging involved the integration of policy advice to and from officials, ministers, other partisan advisors, and exogenous actors. The N.B. case saw partisan advisors’ bridging confined to vertical administrative-technical bridging with departmental officials and their minister. In fact, in all three cases ministers’ office partisan advisors administrative-technical bridging was confined to their ‘home’ departments. Respondents across the cases revealed that any partisan advisors interactions with officials outside of their ‘home’ department were facilitated (and mediated) by that department’s ministerial partisan advisor(s). This confirms, as detailed in chapter 4, the pivotal function first ministers’ office partisan advisors undertake in relation to horizontal ‘administrative-technical’ bridging across government. The B.C. and federal cases included varying degrees of horizontal partisan-political bridging among ministerial and first ministers’ office partisan advisors. In both cases ad hoc issue and policy advisory integration
activity supplemented formal and routine ‘all staff meetings’. However, horizontal partisan-political bridging also differed in the federal case. It consisted of a blend of endogenous and exogenous bridging with other partisan advisors and stakeholders. The B.C. case was marked by a much greater tendency towards exogenous horizontality in partisan-political bridging. Strikingly, in the New Brunswick case the full spectrum of interviewees candidly detailed that departments took front and centre stage on bridging with stakeholders. Officials’ in that case explicitly referenced efforts to manage and control how ministers and partisan advisors engaged with exogenous advisory actors, if at all. Bridging was thus found to increase access for both officials and ministers to other actors and sources of policy advice within the political-administrative nexus. It was a clear means by which partisan advisors could lubricate the advisory systems and increase bilateral integration of policy advice between political and administrative spheres. Interviews with senior officials included direct references to the use of partisan advisors as ‘conduits’ to ministers. For their part, ministers reported using partisan advisors to relay policy preferences to officials and as vehicles to integrate stakeholder policy advice into advisory systems. Combined, these various forms of bridging provide convincing evidence that partisan advisors represent important potential mechanisms for the integration and distribution of policy advice within advisory systems.

Another key finding was the limited purchase configuration has in determining how and with whom partisan advisors engaged in policy advisory activity. Again, the federal case was unique in that it consisted of multiple partisan advisors at the ministerial office level. This layered configuration impacted how and when partisan advisors engaged in buffering. For example, senior partisan advisors buffering was largely supplemental to the preliminary partisan-policy or administrative technical policy advice of junior partisan advisors. Or as was noted above, multiple categories of ministerial partisan advisors in the federal case were actively buffering with other actors in the advisory system. Yet, similar configuration within the sub-national cases yielded vastly different frequencies and intensities of buffering and bridging. Partisan advisors in B.C. were quite active sources of content-based policy advice, while those in New Brunswick were clearly not. B.C. ministers’ office partisan advisors were active in exogenous bridging while those in New Brunswick were not. Such differences, despite similar locational configurations, buoys the argument made above advocating for a
combined approach focusing on behavioural (policy tasks) as well as structural factors (configuration, location) in determining partisan advisors policy work, influence, and impact.

As per Table 18 below, differences in buffering and bridging can be linked to different propensities for partisan advisors’ abilities to impact complementarity. Ministers’ office buffering in the federal and B.C. cases served to increase political control. It diversified the availability of policy advice for the ministers thus weakening the ability of the public service to control and monopolize advisory inputs. The federal case demonstrated a greater ability for partisan advisors to buffer with its combined layered configuration and blended written/oral policy advisory practices. This increased the number of actors buffering and ensured all policy advice flowing to the minister was subject to contestation, including partisan-political contestation, and ultimately a non-public service recommendation. Political control was also augmented through various forms of bridging. Across the cases ministerial partisan advisors administrative-technical bridging with officials served to increase control through, to varying degrees, increasing access to departmental sources of policy advice. Further, as this chapter has demonstrated, the partisan-political bridging described in the federal and B.C. cases also offered, again to varying degrees, greater access for ministers to variously located sources of partisan-political policy advice. Finally, this chapter also outlined negative interaction, or gatekeeping activities. These served in the federal and B.C. cases as a means by which political control could be exercised over access to the minister, or for stakeholders and prioritization of policy advisory sources based on their alignment with stated ministerial/government policy priorities.

In all three cases senior officials underscored that partisan advisors provision of partisan-political policy advice served to greatly reduce the potential politicization of the public service by confining partisan-political activity to ministerial offices. This was by far the most commonly reported benefit and mechanism by which professional independence or differentiation of the public service was augmented. It was however much stronger and more specifically related to traditional conceptions of ‘policy’ broadly cast in the B.C. and federal cases, while in New Brunswick it was clearly more ‘case specific’ or constituent focused.
In all three cases DMs normatively recognized partisan-political context and factors were part of a minister’s world, but that the provision of policy related advice taking those into consideration was best left to the ‘experts’ at such matters working in ministers’ offices. The federal case was however found to have a higher insulating effect due to the presence of a separate written partisan-political policy advice system. In this case ministers had a clear and separate channel for partisan-political policy advice. As noted in the first ministers’ office chapter on federal partisan advisors, this prevented public servants from having to identify, with careful language, potential political contexts or pitfalls for minister to be aware of as was previously the practice.

The evidence in this chapter also suggests ministerial office partisan advisors hold potential for unique opportunities to contribute to policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a, 2010b). As this chapter detailed, administrative-technical and partisan-political buffering and bridging served to diversify the quantity and qualitative content of advice.
available for ministers. This, as was originally intended via the institutionalization of political counterstaffs’, served to increase ministers’ capacities to avoid so-called ‘bureaucratic capture’. It provides ministers with additional direct sources of policy advice as well as capacity to go out and secure it from various sources within the advisory system. The findings from all three cases make clear that while partisan advisors were not, and did not see themselves, as the administrative-technical policy experts. They could nonetheless usefully provide additional scrutiny and checks and balances on the advice circulating within the advisory system.

As senior officials in all three cases reported administrative-technical bridging can be beneficial for increasing access to ministers (or their positions of various issues). Potentially serving as instruments by which public servants can reinforce or supplement administrative-technical advisory activity. The clearest ‘value added’, as partisan advisors themselves acknowledged, was in their unique ability to provide or integrate partisan-political policy advice. There was little disputing that officials typically bring to bear substantially greater expertise, technical ‘know-how’, institutional memory, and sector specific policy advice. Further, partisan-political bridging was a clear means by which partisan advisors could provide ministers with improved integration of exogenous political stakeholder policy inputs which facilitated and cultivated policy legitimacy (Wallner, 2008; McConnell, 2010a). While demonstrated to be potentially important actors within advisory systems, Chapter 7 now turns to ministers’ office partisan advisors formulation activity. Does their privileged position in policy subsystems translate into substantive or procedural formulation activity? What comparative lessons can be drawn regarding their formulation activity and governance arrangements, or policy ‘success’?
Chapter 7.

Ministers’ Office Movers and Shapers

Introduction

Extant Westminster studies have provided evidence that ministerial partisan advisors are also active participants in policy formulation (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a; OECD, 2011; Gains & Stoker, 2011). Comparable examination of similar Canadian actors is however thin at best (Benoit, 2006; Aucoin, 2010; Bourgault & Dunn, 2012). This chapter aims squarely at addressing this gap. Following the policy formulation model set out in Chapter 2 (Table 7 above), the chapter examines ministerial office level partisan advisors moving and shaping in relation to formulation and its sub-stages: appraisal, dialogue, formulation, and consolidation (Howlett et al., 2009, p.111; Thomas, 2001). Additionally, it examines the vertical *intra*-ministerial and horizontal *inter*-ministerial and partisan-political and administrative-technical orientation of such activity. As a privileged set of actors in policy development partisan advisors have a ‘seat at the table’ in policy formulation given their special access to policy resources, proximity to decision makers and senior public servants, appointed political status, and implicit trust of their ministers (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a; Aucoin, 2010; Benoit, 2006; White, 2005). This chapter focuses on if and how ministers’ office partisan advisors participated in formulation activities. That is, pertaining to policy work *formally in development* as opposed to the broader policy advisory activity undertaken related to any number of policy issues.

Ministerial office level partisan advisors were found to engage in moving across all three cases and shaping in two of three cases (federal and B.C.). The findings presented herein shed new light on how, when, and with what consequence partisan advisors engaged in formulation. Their moving and shaping was differentiated across
the cases, both among ministerial office partisan advisors themselves and in relation to their first ministers’ office counterparts. The findings highlight that ministerial office level partisan advisors moving and shaping primarily involved the refinement and calibration of policies from pre-existing or established policy direction. That is, ministerial partisan advisors were instrumental to the translation of partisan-political policy direction into concrete programs and policies by departments and ministers, or the refinement and calibration of administrative-technical policy formulation underway in their respective departments. In the B.C. and federal cases this involved ongoing and iterative formulation work with officials and exogenous actors, not simply ex-post political analysis of policy.

Of the three cases examined federal ministers’ office partisan advisors were by far the most active in formulation. They demonstrated the most frequent, sophisticated, and multi-staged moving and shaping. Again, it spanned the partisan-political and administrative dimensions. Moreover, it was also reported to involve much more consistent horizontal partisan-political moving and shaping than either of sub-national cases. The federal case was also unique in that all categories of respondents acknowledged partisan advisors were active participants in formal policy formulation mechanisms. For example, departmental memoranda to cabinet development and cabinet/cabinet committee work. Ministerial partisan advisors in B.C. were also found to engage in moving and shaping that spanned all four dimensions used in this study to plot such activity (partisan and administrative, horizontal and vertical). However it was not tied to formal policy mechanisms and was reported at fewer formulation sub-stages. N.B. ministerial partisan advisors again demonstrated the weakest level of activity. No shaping at the minister’s office level was reported. Partisan advisors were confined to constituency and case specific files with little to no involvement in substantive policy formulation. N.B. partisan advisors were however active in moving, particularly vertical administrative-technical moving involving formulation activities with deputies and other officials. Their formulation activity was the least horizontal and reported at the fewest sub-stages of formulation.

The evidence presented in this chapter supports ministerial partisan advisors as consequential to formulation. The findings detailed below reveal heretofore unacknowledged policy functions undertaken by such actors in relation to both the
substantive and procedural aspects of formulation. Not only were ministerial partisan advisors instrumental for ministerial determinations of political feasibility (Bakvis, 1997; Aucoin, 2010; Axworthy, 1988), they were also found in the majority of cases to be active participants in the elaboration and refinement of policy options, dialogic sub-stage consultation activity, and important participants in policy process management and coordination. These various formulation activities are directly relevant for formulation, but also complementarity and policy ‘success’ as well.

**Ministers’ Office Procedural Formulation Activity**

*Federal Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors’ Moving*

Federal partisan advisors in ministers’ offices reported a variety of vertical and horizontal procedural policy formulation activity, along partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. The greater overall number and specialization of partisan advisors as detailed in previous chapters produced more intensive and frequent participation in procedural formulation activity at a greater number of sub-stages. In interviews, various categories of respondents clearly articulated partisan advisors were active in moving. Overall most political respondents (both ministers and their partisan advisors), emphasized they took their marching orders from the mandate letters provided by PMO/PCO. Policy work that they undertook was described as largely flowing from the priorities delineated within these documents. That is, partisan advisors frequently described their policy formulation functions in relation to matching partisan-political policy priorities to available policy options generated in large measure by departmental officials. When asked to explain his policy role one chief explained:

> We were expected to make policy changes within the government and within our department that reflected our policy platform as a party and what we had campaigned on. To be able then to turn around and say this is what we promised on the campaign trail and therefore this is what we did when we were in office. So the mandate letters that I tried to implement on behalf of [minister] had very short time frames. (Chief of Staff)

Ministers interviewed generally echoed this sentiment. Mandate letters were taken seriously and partisan advisors were vigilant in ensuring that ministerial policy
work matched the policy objective set out in the mandate letters. Most ministers, like partisan advisors, emphasized the function of the ‘center’ in creating these documents. Partisan advisors were to a large degree monitoring the policy development process to ensure compliance with centrally set objectives. As one minister explained:

Well again the big priorities really come out of the prime minister’s office and you get what’s called a mandate letter when you become minister. The mandate letter is packed with deliverables that you are expected to deliver on over your annual mandate. That letter is a concoction, typically, of the Privy Council office and the prime minister’s senior staff. So you’ll get the mandate letter and your political staff and public service staff will all see that letter. The political staff will be particularly focused on making sure that the, in setting your policy program and the work that you do and the time that you spend, they will be particularly sensitive to the mandate letter and how you deliver is going to be particularly important to your stature in cabinet on a go forward basis. (Hon. David Emerson)

Partisan advisors detailed considerable moving in their descriptions of the types of policy work they engaged in. One chief of staff in explaining the general policy function of a chief makes clear the procedural formulation activity is a core function, stating, “They [chiefs] work directly with the deputy minister to make sure that, you know, important policy files that need to get to the minister get to the minister and ensure their completion”. When asked to elaborate on how they engaged in policy formulation work the same chief reported a focus on the procedural coordination of policy work, at various formulation sub-stages, occurring along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. Their response points clearly to activity at appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. The chief explained:

Well there are really 3 stages I think that the come to mind right away. The first one is when you do the conceptual work. You sit down and say ok we’ve been tasked by the prime minister’s office and by cabinet to do this. What’s that project going to look like, what are the parameters, how do we do that? You deal you know primarily with your senior [partisan] staff, with your [partisan] policy staff and with senior departmental staff. That takes a lot of work because you know with the example in [minister’s] office there might be 15 different areas that are going at the same time and so you tend to run around quite a bit and you have to keep on top of your staff to know what they’re doing. The second area would be consultation. The minister’s office staff would be meeting, as well as the department, would be meeting with stakeholders right across the
country. You know right from the [stakeholder] to [stakeholder] to whatever and everybody in between. So you know the chief of staff would be responsible for taking the most important of those meetings. The third one of course is the writing, the drafting, and I would say of the … and basically you know basically making sure that the minister’s colleagues on cabinet are comfortable with the direction are informed on the direction and therefore will support her in cabinet. So I spent, I would say I spent most of my time on the design phase and at the end on the networking and liaising with other cabinet ministers and making sure that the drafts of the materials would be approved and accepted by the Prime Minister and by the ministers cabinet colleagues. A lot of human stuff a lot of talking a lot of interaction with people and trying to keep them on side or get them on side. (Chief of Staff)

Sequentially, most partisan advisors described some limited involvement in initial vertical ‘front-end’ appraisal sub-stage formulation activity. It was most often described as occurring simultaneously on both partisan-political and administrative-technical levels. In terms of the former, moving at the initial appraisal sub-phase generally consisted of coordination and management of initial assessments by the minister’s partisan advisors to determine ‘fit’ with stated political objectives and policy priorities (e.g. platform, throne speech, mandate letter). In terms of vertical administrative-technical moving, partisan advisors emphasized it entailed numerous meetings with department officials to plan and coordinate various policy work flowing up from the department, or to deal with pressing ‘firefighting’ types of issues that may have unexpectedly emerged. Partisan advisors also noted engaging in consultations with senior officials (DM/ADM level) regarding ‘housekeeping’ policy items on the medium and long-term policy horizon.

Vertical moving activities were reported as subsequently followed by partisan-political horizontal moving. For example, signal checking with PMO as items were developed, or related to the political management of their movement through formal cabinet processes as required. The above response from one chief makes clear this involved significant brokerage and coordination with other chiefs (and less frequently ministers) to ensure proposals had the requisite support for cabinet/committee ratification. Additionally, horizontal partisan-political moving was often characterized as involving the leveraging of others to move policy items forward or for dispute resolution. Another chief, when asked to explain who and why they interacted with other ministers’ offices chiefs on policy matters echoed this in responding:
I would relate to other chiefs of staff when perhaps we were having difficulty moving a policy imitative forward. You know sometimes it was our officials slowing things down sometimes it was another minister’s officials who were slowing things down. And so I would interact with my chief of staff counterpart. But usually yeah it was chief to chief. (Chief of Staff)

Most chiefs described being heavily involved in the coordination of dialogue sub-phase activities involving discussions about feasibility with department officials and consultations with a range of pertinent external stakeholders or experts (both formal and informal). As the previous chapter on bridging made clear, federal partisan advisors reported frequent policy advisory interactions with exogenous actors on policy matters both with and apart from officials. This was also true for their policy formulation activity. However, horizontal administrative-technical moving in the dialogue sub-phase was not reported as involving moving activities with public service actors outside their ‘home’ departments. Instead, most chiefs characterized such horizontal administrative-technical moving as externally oriented towards stakeholders or partisan-political in nature. One minister when asked if and how his partisan advisors played a role in policy gets to the heart of partisan advisors horizontal moving, as the minister puts it:

Well yeah, for sure. There would be let’s say you get in your mandate letter from the prime minister to address, oh I don’t know, housing. So immediately the bureaucracy goes to work and starts to come up with housing ideas. Meanwhile you have all these housing stakeholders coming to you, they don’t know that you have housing is in your mandate letter but they’re always knocking at the door asking for things. And the political staff starts to engage them knowing in the back of their mind that this is an issue. Then, but the political staff is also conscious that we’ve said things in our platform maybe the prime minister has said something in a speech. So we have some very broad direction on how we want to move forward with these issues. And then based on those interactions with stakeholders, that knowledge of what we’ve said in the past in political platforms and this kind of thing that will inform our discussions with the bureaucracy about what this should look like, this new policy on housing should look like. And then if political staff are wise they will also loop in other ministers and PMO about sort of the general direction of where this is going because the last thing you want to do is surprise people at the end with something that’s just not aligned. (Minister)

The chiefs of staff interviewed tended to focus on the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. They described considerable coordination, management, monitoring and
oversight, as well as ‘steering’ activity related to the formulation activities of public servants as well as stakeholders. Simultaneously they noted there were continuously engaged in ongoing signal checking and coordination with counterparts both vertically and horizontally. That is, close working relationship involving high levels of moving including process management, sequencing, and coordination with first minister’s office partisan advisors were repeatedly described in interviews. How did this policy match established priorities? How did this fit with other initiatives? How would the timing of the policy development fit within larger cabinet or cabinet committee processes? Who was affected? Who do we need to consult with?

Horizontally chiefs reported moving through coordination of policy items in relation to their minister’s cabinet business. When asked to describe if and how they involved themselves in policy formulation for cabinet and cabinet committee work a chief responded:

Typically you would do two things. You would hold a whole series of meetings with cabinet colleagues ones that are affected by this. Briefing them on the initiative, you know ascertaining if there are any concerns, understanding who your allies are, which particular points are of the most interest to cabinet colleagues and then going back and working with the, with the departmental staff to make sure that presentation that ministers makes builds on the strengths of those things, minimizes the weaknesses of those, and attracts the people that it needs to actually get. You know to get support in the cabinet. The other thing is that there are regular meetings in the prime minister’s office on important bills. So prime minister’s policy person would call a meeting of all the five or six implicated people, departments, ministers’ offices and the thing. Go through them, go through the cabinet agenda. What’s your perspective on this, what’s your perspective on that, what’s your perspective on this and try and sort out any difficulties and let them know where the prime minister is coming from on these things as well. (Chief of Staff)

This horizontal partisan-political moving highlights considerable opportunity for partisan advisors to facilitate policy and political policy success through improved processes management and partisan-political formulation coordination. As the above quotation underscores, moving can: facilitate the identification of potential process related pitfalls, consolidate support at the cabinet/political level, and/or overcome or avoid information asymmetries through improved policy processes management amongst ministers and their offices. The limited horizontal administrative-technical
moving reported was described as part of inter-ministerial meetings or so-called ‘four corner meetings’.

Ministers’ office directors of policy described much more involvement in the early stages of the policy formulation process. They were less burdened by the various other ministerial office responsibilities and oversight duties that fall upon chiefs of staff. The principal duty of directors of policy was policy work. Procedurally, many reported significant early involvement, particularly as it pertained to the priority files of their minister or of the government agenda more broadly cast. Again, the ministers’ office policy directors frequently reported a distinction between ‘housekeeping’ and ‘priority’ policy work. As one director of policy put it:

On major projects, projects driven by the ministers’ personal interest, legacy projects, high profile projects, then I will generally keep abreast of it from front, from front to end is maybe a good way to say it. So I will get, I will invest time in becoming smart on the issue or the lead [partisan] advisor will in terms of policy background, alongside the department and be in a position to review advice from both a political perspectives and from objective policy perspectives. On more day to day issues or issues that don’t have a clear political bent then the team and I will defer to the department and avoid taking a more intimate … unless the minister or the minister on our advice feels as though there’s a problem with what’s being done and then we may take personal responsibility for it. (Minister’s Office Director of Policy)

Most directors of policy described their vertical moving activities in comparable terms as those used by chiefs of staff. They saw it involving simultaneous partisan-political and administrative-technical formulation activity. It was described as involving sequencing and coordination of partisan-political and departmental policy work. Another director of policy who had also served in the PMO policy shop pointed to marked

63 These include ministers and their staff, deputies, as well as PMO and PCO staff. These meetings were however reported to be rare. More typically, like in all the other cases in this study, horizontal administrative-technical moving would be coordinated through bridging to their counterparts in the respective ministerial office.
differences in their vertically interactions with public servants, and their policy formulation activity at the minister’s office level. The policy director explained:

[at] the minister’s office I was exposed a lot more to, not just to the government’s priorities, but the priorities and the wish list of the bureaucracy. So there I saw that from a PMO perspective one could be forgiven for thinking that you know the political side completely drives the agenda of government. When you go into a minister’s office you realize that there’s a lot going on in departments that may not be the government’s you know top five or top 10 priorities but there is stuff none the less that has to be done. So the officials themselves I found that once I moved into a minister’s office the officials in the bureaucracy themselves had a lot more, there was upward pressure as well as downward pressure on a policy level. (Minister’s Office Director of Policy)

The same partisan advisor was asked to reflect on how the two locations, PMO and a minister’s office director of policy, influenced their policy activity along substantive or procedural lines. The policy director specified:

I think there [minister’s office level] was a lot more, there had to be a lot more … sort of dialogue and engagement with officials. A lot more to and fro. So you know I said that within the prime minister’s office developing policy was an iterative process. It was much much more so in a minister’s office again because we were getting into the details. So you know we got briefed a lot more often. We would get briefed by more junior officials and by officials who maybe only saw their piece of the overall puzzle. We got briefed by the deputy’s office as well. But the more junior officials you know all they did all day long was consumer product safety they didn’t do the bigger, they didn’t see the bigger picture of [department], for example. So again we really got into the weeds there. (Minister’s Office Director of Policy)

This type of vertical administrative-technical dialogue sub-phase activity was quite commonly reported at by all categories of partisan advisors at the federal level. Ministers and their advisors made clear that, as a general rule, partisan advisors were not there to provide in-depth technical or subject matter expertise. That was the purview of their department. Rather, partisan advisors reported their core duties consisted of challenging the veracity of departmental policy work that at times involved their engaging with officials to ensure that the formulation process included the appropriate degree of consultation and context. Partisan advisors often reported moving activities that involved coordination and management of policy formulation. That is, ensuring policy
development was unfolding at an acceptable pace, had included appropriate consultation with various actors as required, and was aligned with the originally agreed upon policy goal. These process-based interactions were almost always framed as occurring with senior public servants. Partisan advisors described often, but not exclusively, inserting themselves into the formulation stage when policy development became problematic. As such, they would typically consult with senior management to coordinate responses or discuss options for resolutions. This type of vertical intra-ministerial process based policy work was described often and represented a core aspect of dialogue or formulation sub-phase activity. While one policy director was asked about his typical policy interactions with officials the partisan advisor explained:

Back to your question about who we interacted with in the public service my interaction would be with ADMs and directors. Certainly when it came to files that were more technical in nature, I can’t become an expert on that, so I talk to the guy in the lab. Literally the guy in the lab who did the test. So that’s an example of going into the department saying, tell me what the problem is. (Minister’s Office Director of Policy)

This vertical procedural work extended to significant oversight and coordination roles in the partisan-political policy briefing system as well. Most noted that they might have responsibility for a few of the key ministerial policy priorities, but their policy shop staff carried most of the load for political policy analysis. Horizontally, directors of policy, similar to chiefs of staff, reported moving of a partisan-political rather than ‘administrative-technical’ nature. Policy directors differed from chiefs in that they almost always interacted with the junior PMO policy advisor who oversaw their policy sector, not the PMO policy director. One director of policy whose minister also had cabinet committee responsibilities was the exception to the rule. In that case, the director of policy had dealt with both the PMO policy director and PCO representatives directly. As that partisan advisor explained:

And then my interaction with the Prime Minister’s office would be actually with the director of policy and not policy advisors, and that was the interaction there. I also had interaction with PCO directly related to operations. There was secretary set up to support the chair and I would speak with the secretary and the key people there on the files. (Minister’s office Director of Policy)
Horizontal partisan-political procedural policy formulation activity in the federal case was described in similar terms to that reported in the British Columbia case. Ministerial partisan advisors took the lead with respect to policy interactions with the first minister’s office. As one minister explained:

You mean as a minister? Well most of the interaction is between staff. You know like staff members talking to staff members about the timing of announcements, the sequencing of events, making sure you don’t show up on another minister’s pet project, PMO is a clearing house for all of that, for all of those things and more. So typically the interactions are between staff who check those things out and then would just say here’s how this is likely to roll out or whatever. But sometimes I would meet with or talk to staff that I needed to. There was nothing to prohibit that but most of the time I would just leave it to my staff to check that part of it out. (Minister)

The most junior level partisan advisors in ministers’ offices reported primarily vertical moving. They reported significantly less horizontal activity on either partisan-political or administrative-technical dimensions. As can be gleaned from the responses of chiefs and directors of policy set out above, junior level partisan advisors did engage in significant partisan-political policy formulation. The more senior partisan advisors tended to engage in broader horizontal and ‘back-end’ policy formulation activities. Junior partisan advisors were described as the partisan-political subject matter experts. They managed whatever files they were assigned by the director of policy and kept close tabs on any policy related developments under their purview. Those interviewed reported more front-end activity in the appraisal and dialogue sub-stages. Junior partisan advisors also participated in a support capacity in the latter stages of policy formulation, particularly if the minister was presenting at cabinet committee. One director of policy explained how his policy staff would be involved in consolidation sub-phase activity around cabinet processes. As the policy director explained:

Then, it was the job of the policy advisor and my team to support the presentation of the minister. So they would attend the cabinet [committee] meeting for that presentation of the item. So let’s say it was, let’s go back to [policy area], then it would have been one of my team members that would go to the meeting and support the minister. He would have been the one who would sort of brief the minister on what the lay of the land was. If he had any intelligence on whether minister x or minister y was in support or non-support of the direction we were taking.
To try and remove any surprises, ministers don’t like surprises. They
don’t mind oppositions to their ideas but they don’t like to be surprised by
that. (Minister’s office Director of Policy)

Deputy ministers interviewed described the policy development activity of
partisan advisors as partisan-political, strategic, and process related. They reported
such activity as most pronounced in the initial appraisal sub-phase activity or in the
formulation sub-phase as policy work was more formally fleshed out. Federal deputy
ministers, similarly to those in B.C., described partisan advisors’ formulation activity as
primarily occurring during dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Partisan advisors were
seen as actors who, in light of their regularized interactions with ministers, knew what
would be politically feasible and what the minister’s direction was. In short, they could
help steer policy development in that direction. Deputies at the federal level were very
clear that it was always the minister’s directives that were to be sought out as partisan
advisors had no authority to ‘provide direction’ to public servants. Two deputies’
responses are indicative of this emphasis, and a view that sees partisan advisors as
procedural transmitters of ministerial direction at appraisal and dialogue sub-stages:

They tend to be, I wouldn’t say never. They tend to be more people who
would communicate the views on something. So it would be more as
communicators as opposed to … So if someone on the minister’s staff
says well I think you should do it this way instead of this way. The first
question you say is, is this how the minister feels? And so sometimes
you assume that because they have that day-to-day connection with the
minister they’re just communicating it. But if it’s their own independent
view then they are kind of not seen as having that role. (Deputy Minister)

But some, sometimes a political staffer will say to a public servant do this.
You know I teach my staff to say is ‘that the minister’s direction that
you’re giving me right? Because if it’s not I can’t take your direction,
right’. That’s not the way it works. Usually that’s a sort of, you know, any
political staffer with integrity, and they almost all have integrity I think, that
kind of catches them short and they say really is that the minister’s wish
or just my sort of general impression of that. (Deputy Minister)

Overall, the federal case involved ministers’ office partisan advisors engaging in
procedural policy formulation activities at various formulation sub-stages. The case
stood out comparatively in that ministers’ office level partisan advisors reported
significantly greater formulation activity in conjunction with formal policy advice and
formulation processes. This involved vertical administrative procedural formulation activities with departmental mechanisms including in the development of ministerial briefing notes, decision notes, and information notes. Horizontally, moving related activity was heavily reported in conjunction with cabinet and cabinet committee activity. This included simple processing of various dockets and documents for ministerial signature. As well as ensuring that minister’s cabinet ‘decks’ and memoranda to cabinet had been properly developed by officials, and received the appropriate partisan-political analysis. A key difference that was observed in relation to moving was that partisan advisors, regardless of seniority, reported engaging in exclusively vertical administrative-technical moving. Formulation interactions with the public service, at the minister’s office level, were confined to intra-departmental activity. Their partisan-political moving however spanned both horizontal and vertical dimensions. These included pronounced inter and intra-ministerial coordination on policy items, gauging and promoting support for cabinet items, and ongoing signal checking with pertinent ministerial offices and the PMO.

**Ministers’ Office Procedural Formulation Activity in British Columbia**

B.C. partisan advisors also reported procedural moving activity at various sub-stages of policy formulation. Such activities were most commonly reported at the ‘front-end’ including activity at the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. Policy formulation activity was generally described along partisan-political dimensions as opposed to administrative-technical ones. Specifically, as opposed to their federal counterparts, B.C. partisan advisors reported no vertical involvement in the processing of departmental policy documents such as decision notes or briefing notes intended for the minister. While they certainly were exposed to, and would familiarize themselves with such documents, they had no formal involvement in their development. Similarly, partisan advisors also reported much less administrative-technical moving related to cabinet or cabinet committee activity. Horizontal administrative-technical moving was, as reported in the federal case, described as centering on dealings with various external stakeholders in their policy sector rather than public servants outside of their ‘home’ department.
Vertical partisan-political and administrative-technical moving was most prominently reported at the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. The smaller contingent of partisan advisors in ministerial offices in B.C. also resulted in a reduced amount of moving within and between ministers’ offices. The two sub-national cases shared this characteristic. When asked to describe if and how they might be involved in the development of policy one long-time partisan advisor explained:

So I wouldn’t say we’d be completely uninvolved at that point. But in terms of who’s doing the evaluation and you know gathering information and coming up with options that’s the department that’s doing that. But then it comes back with options and that’s when the minister’s office gets more involved. You know are these options sufficient or do you know do they need to look at more options. But whether or not the MA [Ministerial Assistant] is asked if they’re sufficient you know they’re not always asked. They’re just, it maybe that a briefing is scheduled with the minister and they are presented. And then at that meeting it is decided that we want to see more options or we want more information on this options or what have you. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Overall many partisan advisors shared this view and reported that they would engage in policy development at the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Deputies and partisan advisors largely agreed that on such matters partisan advisors were less consequential at the ‘front-end’, again largely deferring to officials. All categories of respondents emphasized that partisan advisors were not there to replace or duplicate public service policy work. In-depth and detailed formal and technical policy analysis was seen as the appropriate function of the public service. For those priority ministerial or governmental policy initiatives partisan advisors were again reported to undertake moving tasks. For example, at the appraisal sub-stage, relaying the minister’s strategic direction, or steering the department away from identified ‘non-starters’ or towards potential red flags at the outset of policy development. As one long time partisan advisor put it:

And the ministry stuff, they’re the experts on that kind of stuff. You know, by no stretch of the imagination am I an expert on legislation. Those people who write legislation are a strange and wonderful breed of people. I would go nuts I think trying to do that. I’m maybe a little different than some of the staffers here but I tend to be more high level. I tend not maybe to as much detail but I you know, and we develop a rapport with the people that we’re working with. And like I said, part of our role
especially is to liaise between the deputy minister and the ministry staff and the minister. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Partisan advisors described a significant amount of vertical administrative-technical moving at the dialogue sub-phase. When asked to describe their policy work, one partisan advisor made clear their functions in process aspects of formulation, as the advisor put it:

And a lot of the time we’re dealing with not so much policy in a pure sense where you are saying what should our policy be on this, but collecting the data, working with the ministry, and then meeting with the minister and disseminating the information and coming up with a strategy or a policy on how we are going to deal with things. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

In the B.C. case partisan advisors described themselves as heavily involved in ensuring the policy development process unfolded without delay. Many referenced a role in keeping the minister apprised of the various policies that were ‘in play’ at any given stage of development with the department. Furthermore, horizontal moving tasks were primarily described in relation to dialogue sub-stage activity. This type of moving was however focused on particular aspects of specific policies during formulation as opposed to general discussions about any given policy issue, departmental business, or the policy landscape. Partisan advisors explained that they worked in parallel with officials. Officials would ensure the department was reaching out to the appropriate stakeholders through formal consultations that partisan advisors would monitor. Additionally, partisan advisors themselves would reach out, often informally, to consult with stakeholders regarding partisan-political impacts of policy work. One long-time partisan advisor explained their function in the process of policy making as follows:

I found myself at all levels of the development of policy. From the very germination of ideas. I was lucky enough to see a couple of ideas through from you know a sparkle, a twinkle in someone’s eyes to a full act passed in the legislation. If you look at [lists various specific policy initiatives]. You know I got to be there at the very start when it was just an idea and help implement it all the way through. Helping follow up with the bureaucrats making sure there were no issues related to that, no roadblocks, helping clear the way for talking to stakeholders and other ministries to make sure, even other levels of government to make sure there were no issues blocking the way. I got to be … On the political side
you do get to help develop policy if you want to. If you as an individual and the minister has the will and vests the authority into you, you can develop policy and see all the way along. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

Significant vertical and horizontal moving for B.C. partisan advisors was expressed in relation to partisan advisors ability to coordinate and manage disparate policy inputs during formulation. B.C. partisan advisors often described their policy work as involving the synthesis of the various policy inputs in relation to specific policies in development. Moreover, while not tied to formal cabinet activity as seen in the federal case, many reported involvement in managing the processes around policy formulation. This was particularly the case for key political priorities as established by their ministers or the government. Ministers and partisan advisors interviewed were quick to point out that government involves both clear politically set priorities, but also a host of ongoing policy and operational concerns or ‘housekeeping’ policy activities. Their involvement in the former was as drivers of the policy development process but one that was primarily undertaken by officials. With the latter, most explained it was generally limited to formulation sub-phase activity when policy options percolated up that were inconsistent with the political agenda of the minister or the government more broadly. As one advisor put it:

A lot of the day-to-day work of government you know is … you know it pretty much runs itself and you know you’ll get the decision note. That the, that you never heard anything about this issue because government is a big operation so you’ve never heard of this issue and you get the decision note and the minister reads it. You have a briefing about it, all the work has already gone into it and you just have to trust it’s accurate and correct. And that the decision is the right decision that the bureaucrats’ advice, and you go with it and that’s the day-to-day of government. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

Deputies often categorized the policy formulation work of partisan advisors as primarily occurring at a strategic level. While some noted their minister’s partisan advisors had substantive expertise in particular files, most deputies described partisan advisors’ moving as strategic. That is, it was tied to coordination of political policy priorities and departmental work, ensuring departmental work dovetailed with political priorities both in content and sequence. With many years of service at the deputy level,
one DM explained that based on experience, partisan advisors were important actors able to reconcile the policy work occurring in both political and administrative spheres:

In some cases you will get ministerial staff who are phenomenal at this [reconciling political and administrative policy priorities]. They not only become very knowledgeable about the ministry business but they become very knowledgeable about getting that back into the political sphere. The only danger in that is that they [partisan advisors] start doing the strategic thinking, which is probably a good thing in terms of providing advice to the minister in terms on how to handle something politically. But the ministry gets lazy and isn’t doing that kind of thinking itself. So there is, it is dependent on who the political staff are, and how mature they are, and what thought process they’ve been through. To the extent that they look at them ministry and try and manage that I don’t have a sense. I just don’t have a good sense of that. But I have seen quite a difference depending on the political staff as to what the ministry have to adapt to. Because in some cases we have become lazy, because the minister’s office is doing some of that strategic thinking for us. (Deputy Minister)

Ministers and deputys frequently cited this type of coordination and management activity at the formulation sub-phase. It was fundamentally described as ensuring the political feasibility of formal policy options as officials developed them, and ensuring that politically established policy direction was followed. This involved steering, coordination, and monitoring types of moving activities. Ministers reported their partisan advisors’ moving as pronounced at the appraisal, dialogue and formulation sub-stages. One Minister described his partisan advisor as a proactive contributor to policy development. Again, an emphasis was placed on the twin dimensions of administrative and partisan-political policy related work. The minister elaborated, “He had a proactive role in policy development not only in terms of having the right questions to ask but also often assisting me in getting to both the politically acceptable answer and the practical answer as well”. This response was representative of ministers overall descriptions of their partisan advisors as having dual partisan-political and administrative-technical duties. On the one hand they were part of the departmental policy making apparatus but served simultaneously as a vehicle for partisan-political oversight for the ministers.

Additionally, ministers also described their partisan advisors’ influence through process management. In a similar way as described at the federal level, minister’s office level partisan advisors were seen as able to manage and coordinate policy development
processes through control over their schedules and appointments. This type of process management, such as the sequencing of consultation activity was reported at the dialogue sub-phase policy formulation. Partisan advisors could, to a limited extent, affect the temporal nature of when consultations occurred during formulation or procedurally increase the amount of exogenous dialogue sub-phase activity undertaken during formulation through their own consultations. Ministers made clear they expected their partisan advisors to be in constant contact with external stakeholders and other ministerial offices and be able to alert the minister to red flags or opportunities related to departmental policy priorities. This type of active coordination with exogenous actors was the primary mechanism by which partisan advisors engaged in horizontal moving in B.C. This type of process-based moving was predominant in the dialogue sub-phase, but also was a key means by which formulation sub-phase activities were informed.

Horizontal moving was restricted to interactions with their ministerial counterparts or stakeholders. Interviews confirmed that, as in the other cases, partisan advisors interactions with other ministries were always mediated through their colleagues in other ministers’ offices. As with the two other cases, the patterns of interactions between partisan advisors at the ministers’ office level were directly at level. When asked what typical policy related interactions were like with their counterparts one advisor explained:

My interactions with them [other partisan advisors] are typically, and their interactions with me, if they need something for their minister or they have a question or that sort of thing. It’s very collegial like I’ve never had any problems working with them. Working with the premier’s office usually it’s almost entirely information requests that they are needing. And vice versa, I’ll go to them sometimes if I need advice. If I have a problem that I can’t figure out what the best response would be or if it’s going to be an issue that the premier is going to have to speak to publicly then I would call them. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

Horizontal moving from ministerial offices to the first minister’s office shared greater similarities to those at the federal case than those reported in New Brunswick. At a basic level, B.C. partisan advisors like their federal counterparts, tended to interact with more senior level first minister’s office staff. Partisan advisors, in a similar sense to their N.B. counterparts, also dealt with the premier’s EA on logistics or communications issues. However, they also engaged in interactions on policy matters with the Premier’s
Deputy Chief of Staff. These activities were usually reported as transactional exchanges of information from a policy coordination or issues management perspective. Such as raising potentially contentious policy activity or flagging items to the premier’s office. Most however indicated that they would also field requests related to where certain policy work was at, or for intelligence on stakeholders. As one partisan advisor summarized:

We do have a good interaction with the premier’s office obviously. We do have to keep them up to speed on any emerging issues that you may have to deal with. But we probably don’t deal with them in the same way we deal with other MAs [ministerial assistants]. Because usually you’ll say I need this information on this can you help me get it? Whereas when you’re dealing with premier’s office you’re either giving them information or they’re asking for it. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

Deputies were also asked if they or their minister’s partisan advisors interacted with the first minister’s office and what effects this may have on policy formulation. Almost without exception DMs indicated they only dealt with the deputy minister to the premier, leaving partisan advisors to tend to the more partisan aspects of policy formulation. As one DM put it:

So [partisan advisor’s] job is to consistently sit there and look at everything that’s coming into his office, and listen to the, look at the mail, look at the correspondence, set-up the kinds of meetings he’s going to attend, look at briefing notes and information coming to the minister, make sure he sees all of that in a timely way. But also make sure that a political lens is put on it, and also report back to the [premier’s] chief of staff. So you know were putting forward a difficult decision and really there is three other ministries involved, and they need to know, and our minister needs to make sure three other ministries know, well it would be the [partisan advisors] who would work with the other MAs to make sure everybody’s on the same page. (Deputy Minister)

While significantly less institutionalized and formal then their federal counterparts, B.C. partisan advisors did engage in moving activity, particularly at the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. On a vertical partisan-political level such activity was more direct with ministers as a consequence of the smaller complements of ministerial staffs. In the B.C. case there were no policy teams or formal political policy briefing systems in place. Moving thus consisted of significant transmission of
ministerial direction to officials and ongoing monitoring of development to ensure consistency with such direction. The horizontal moving activities, both partisan-political and administrative-technical, were less routinized than those reported in the federal case. While partisan advisors did describe coordination between their office and the first minister’s office, it was less frequent or institutionalized as a practice. As with the federal case there was little horizontal administrative-technical moving activity with officials. Horizontal moving was described in partisan-political terms and with other ministers’ offices with limited moving relating to premier’s office. Again, the lack of involvement with cabinet/committee work and formal cabinet policy making tools like MCs reduced their participation this dimension. The instances involving horizontal administrative-technical moving were reported to consist of formulation activity involving exogenous policy stakeholders. For example, consultations with stakeholders in appraisal and dialogue sub-stages for the legitimation of departmental policy work. Further, clear instances of horizontal partisan-political policy advisory activity with stakeholders were also reported. These involved dialogue and formulation sub-stage activity to gauge stakeholders related to their support or the impacts related to particular policy decisions.

**N.B. Ministers’ Office Procedural Formulation Activity**

Partisan advisors at the minister’s office level in New Brunswick reported the lowest levels of overall policy related activity of all three cases. Multiple interviewees suggested this was the product of a less mediated political-administrative interface. That is, ministers worked directly with their DMs on all matters of policy and relied almost exclusively on officials as their primary sources of policy advice. Ministers noted they would not hesitate to interact directly or seek out from departmental officials in any policy branch (at mid to senior levels) on an as-needed basis. Deputies reported that, in general, partisan advisors were so preoccupied with requests from various ministers’ constituents that it left little to no time for departmental policy related work. Most DMs hinting that was probably for the best.

The limited policy related activity that they did engage in was at the formulation stage, and it tended to be highly transactional. Again, ministers and their partisan advisors frequently referenced the electoral platform as having set out what policy would
broadly look like and once they were elected it was a matter of figuring out the details in conjunction with departmental officials. Partisan advisors described formulation activity that was most aptly categorized as occurring within the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Across the board, minister’s office partisan advisors in this case described policy making as an activity that was a departmental function. One partisan advisor explained the importance of the party platform and how they saw their own policy function. Much like in the federal case it was articulated to consist of ensuring ministers undertook what had already been set out. As the advisor put it:

A lot of the policy is pre-prepared by the party itself and I think [minister] readily admitted especially after the fact that they hadn’t read that when [minister] was running going door to door. They didn’t know what was in that, they hadn’t even seen it, it was delayed it only came on her door like with probably only a week left on the election campaign. So a lot people who ended up being ministers were kind of reading that for the first time when they became ministers. Oh yeah exactly what does this say. I always had it on my desk, I was always quite, I guess that was part of my job as a political assistant was to know what was in there you know you’re going to do this well it says you can’t do that. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

The limited moving activity reported by New Brunswick partisan advisors extended to them coordinating updates between minister’s and deputies related to formal policy development. This would for example, involve confirming political direction from the minister to the deputy or managing the follow-up of queries to the department. Again, ministers and their staff reported that this was less about partisan advisors being readily involved in policy development and more often the product of busy ministerial schedules. One partisan advisor explained having had regular meetings with the deputy about ‘briefings’. When asked to expand on what those briefings involved another advisor explained:

Usually particular files. When we’re talking about a policy change, a regulation change, legislation change … any of those sort of high level shifts in the way the department operates the deputy takes care of that, that’s sort of how that has happened. Takes care of giving the information on that. I mean I’m not a staff person in the department per se, implementing the acts and regulations that are set out. If there are any changes on the staff level the deputy takes care of keeping both of us informed about that (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)
Interview respondents were unanimous across categories that partisan advisors’ general activities were case and issue specific. Ministers often explained that their staff was overwhelmed with responding to such case specific matters. Even if they wanted to they simply would not have the time to become more engaged in policy formulation. The responses from two ministers are indicative of the how ministers perceived their partisan advisors:

Well my [partisan advisor’s] duties are to…well if there’s an email or a letter that comes in and somebody wants answers to questions you know, I can forward that off to them. [Partisan advisor] goes and contacts the appropriate person in the department and has that information delivered to that person who asked it. (Minister)

The political staff were not, with me, involved in any policy initiatives or changes. They were to put out fires. So all of the things that I did in policy came as I say from the base of the pyramid where I would then direct the civil service to come up with a way to do it. Political staff weren’t really involved in the policy changes. (Minister)

Vertical administrative procedural policy formulation activity was limited, but generally again was reported during the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. Deputies however explained that from their perspective, partisan advisors did have a role in policy formulation activities, along vertical procedural administrative dimensions. Several deputies, again citing the importance of access to ministers, commented on the value of partisan advisors’ knowledge of what might be problematic politically on both internal and external dimensions. One deputy put it succinctly:

Where it’s helpful, you get a minister and an EA that are really interested in a subject and they will start to say I know who will have trouble with this and I’ll meet with them, and I’ll do this, and I’ll do that and then they support and pave the way for you and that’s very helpful. (Deputy Minister)

Horizontal moving on either partisan-political or administrative-technical dimensions was rarely reported. Most of the partisan advisors interviewed described significant administrative case based policy work. Ministers confirmed that when it came to policy related work they would generally deal with their ministerial counterparts and then partisan advisors would be used to ensure whatever action or follow up work required was then completed. One minister’s response when asked if and why he might
deal with other partisan advisors is representative of all of the ministers interviewed. He noted:

Good question. I don't usually deal with the [other] EAs, I let my EA do that. But I'll certainly will [get] him to work with them. Usually I will work with the minister, I'll tell him look this is the problem I have I need your help in this. You know I'm going to talk to my EA he's going to talk to your EA and their going to work this out. But I would like your support on that. This is how I usually deal with that. Make them aware at least that I have a problem here and that I'd appreciate their help. I just had one lately with [ministry] and that's just what I did. And it worked out well. Worked out well you know. But it was with the deputy minister, I'll go to the deputy minister some times. You know, nobody knows the department better than the DM. But usually that's what I'll do. (Minister's Office Partisan Advisor)

This response is indicative of the general responses of ministers regarding their interactions and perceptions of partisan advisors formulation activity. Partisan advisors were involved, albeit in a more limited fashion, in the dialogue sub-phase along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. They engaged in limited administrative-technical moving vertically, including the transmission and process management of policy information between political and administrative spheres. In very few instances partisan advisors reported horizontal administrative-technical moving involving stakeholder-based policy interactions. Partisan advisors did not report active roles at the front-end of policy formulation as were cited in the federal and B.C. cases. Their moving activity was much more narrowly cast to iterative dialogue sub-stage activity along the vertical dimension.

**Ministerial Office Partisan Advisors’ ‘Shaping’**

**Federal Ministers’ Office Substantive ‘Shaping’**

Tremendous amounts of partisan-political shaping were reported in interviews with the federal ministerial partisan advisors interviewed. This was consistently articulated as applying a political lens to existing policy as well as iterative and ongoing participation in policy development. Their administrative-technical shaping activity was described along vertical dimensions, involving iterative and ongoing formulation work
with their departments and other actors during the development of specific policy measures.

At the senior level, ministers’ chiefs of staff reported the most activity along all four dimensions at various sub-stages of policy formulation. Their vertical shaping activity was often described as involving considerable activity during appraisal and dialogue sub-stages, involving departmental officials and fellow partisan advisors within their own ministerial policy shop. When asked if and how they might be involved in policy formulation one chief described their engagement in the substance of policy formulation as, “Sitting in committee meetings with senior public servants and senior political staff writing, redacting, editing, briefing the minister, finding out what the minister’s perspective is on this”. Another chief explained at length their involvement in substantive content based shaping in relation to specific policies:

The writing [for a policy document] had to be done a certain way and so we brought it into our office. The department had drafts but you know frankly they weren’t good. And the title of it. But we would then go back and forth with the stuff right. So it all you know even at the end of the day regardless of who’s initiating in the case of [department] it doesn’t work if the two don’t come back together in some way. But the [policy] was initiated mostly, well looking back the department thought it was a good thing to do, the minister thought it was a good thing to do, and then there’s a cabinet process, PCO and other things. And then our office with me in particular took a strong lead in actually developing it, writing it, you know shaping it, you know sometimes directly with the department and sometimes on our own. Because we thought it was better that way. We’d give them stuff and go back and forth. It’s never an exact chart, an exact navigation course. (Chief of Staff, emphasis added)

Chiefs shaping activities were often referenced explicitly in the initial appraisal sub-phase, as well occurring throughout the dialogue and formulation sub-phase, with consolidation activity occurring politically at the cabinet level. With very few exceptions, partisan advisors did not characterize their shaping activities as *ab initio*. Rather, most explained they were applying a political lens to formal policy formulation work (i.e. draft policy work including memoranda to cabinet, budget, or briefing materials) carried out by their departments. As one chief explained, “It’s not so much developing core public policy, you know on a blank sheet of paper. You’re responding to what the department is bringing up but the department is also responding to what you’re sending down”. The
same chief further explained, “I was more heavily involved the [policy] was in the first instance very strongly reflective of the party’s platform, the incoming government’s platform. So those issues were being translated, you know sent down, they were looking at them”.

Horizontally, ministerial level shaping was reported as primarily partisan-political in nature. Respondents explained that they did not engage in administrative-technical shaping with public service officials outside of their ‘home’ department. That type of horizontal administrative-technical shaping was reserved primarily for the PMO-PCO interface around cabinet committees and memoranda to cabinet (as detailed in chapter 5). Federal partisan advisors at the ministerial level described their horizontal partisan-political shaping as occurring in concert with their partisan counterparts (typically at their same level) in other ministerial offices. Junior ministerial partisan advisors reported that they engaged with junior PMO partisan advisors who kept a watching brief on their files, but tended to interact more regularly with their counterparts in other ministerial offices substantively. Directors of policy, as with their chief of staff counterparts, shared a focus on both horizontal and vertical shaping activity along both partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. The directors of policy interviewed frequently described holding key policy files themselves and delegating others to their policy teams. They would thus have direct and ongoing shaping interactions with departmental officials specifically related to particular policy initiatives or sectors. This was explained to result in significant vertical administrative-technical shaping in the appraisal, dialogue, and formulation sub-stages. Directors of policy would, at the ‘front-end’, set out the broad parameters of what the minister was looking for. Subsequently they would be involved in ongoing interactions with departmental officials at the dialogue and formulation sub-stages as they prepared drafts of formal policy materials. One director of policy explained when asked about their participation in formal policy making:

Certainly with an MC [memorandum to cabinet]. You know, minister, the department has drafted the following as per your instructions in the meeting last week. You know I’ve looked it over and you know I believe it does accord with what you had told them to do so you can go ahead and sign it. You know you should read it and be familiar with it and I’m prepared to brief you in detail on it but its ok, you can sign it so it can get processed by the cabinet papers unit and get on next weeks’ (cabinet) agenda. Or similarly if it was a problem then, I would point that out. You
know they got most of it right but you asked for such and such and I noticed that’s not what they did they did something else. Maybe that’s ok and I can advise you know on balance I think they have wrestled with it and you know they didn’t do what you asked but I think the way they way they’re doing it gets us where we want to be so that’s ok but I’m drawing it to your attention anyway. Or you know say no they’re trying to get away with something they don’t like what you told them to do and you have to tell them to do it again. You know that sort of thing. (Minister’s Office Director of Policy)

Vertical administrative-technical shaping was generally an iterative exchange between minister’s office partisan advisors and senior officials during the development of MCs or briefing materials. Vertical partisan-political shaping on the other hand was first and foremost explained in the context of the partisan-political briefing note system as previously set out. Chiefs of staff and directors of policy referenced an oversight function over this system whereby they would review the partisan-political policy analysis of their subordinates and if they were in agreement, would include it in the minister’s binder for review. Most chiefs and policy directors reported very little modification to their junior staff’s notes. In general, it was a quick review to ensure they understood the partisan-political policy analysis and could discuss it, if required, with the minister. They reported infrequently requesting rewrites or revisions to their policy staff’s work. Rather, the picture that emerged from interviews was that if warranted they would insert themselves in the policy teams review as it was developed thus ensuring senior shaping was brought to bear on more junior staffs partisan-political policy analysis. This was described as typical and occurred primarily at the dialogue and formulation sub-stages and on rare occasion at consolidation sub-stages to resolve disagreements. Additional partisan-political shaping was described as providing departmental officials with the political context, or thinking that underlay the ministers/governments position and was reported as primarily occurring within the dialogue and formulation sub-stages. When asked to describe how they integrated partisan-political policy advice into the formulation processes, a policy director made their shaping activities clear. The advisor explained it involved scrutinizing formal policy proposals with a political lens as the department was developing it:

Well it’s based on having those discussions with the bureaucracy. I don’t think I’ll be teaching you anything you didn’t already observe. If it looked like, smelled like, or sounded like a [policy option] it wouldn’t of flown. Even if it was the best idea or not, the department might of packaged it in
such a way that it now made sense. Guess what if it sounds like and
walks like a duck then I don’t care. If this thing has the feel of a [policy
option] it’s not going to get out of the cabinet alive because of the position
the government has taken during a previous election. That would be an
example of looking at it from a political lens. Does this smell like a [policy
option], yes? Then you’re wasting my time and your time, and the
minister’s time. You’re putting the minister at risk from political bullets.
(Minster’s office Director of Policy)

Vertical partisan-political shaping was described by most respondents as
ensuring consistency or ‘fit’ of proposed policy options or fully developed policies with
the governments stated positions (in existing documents such as platforms, throne
speeches, or mandate letters). This type of shaping differed from buffering in that it was
not simply a matter of providing partisan-political policy advice about any given potential
issues, actors, or processes. It involved direct content-based input into specific policy
items that were being developed in their respective departments or the public service.
As one director of policy put it, “So as policy director you know I could sort of look at, is
this policy consistent or not consistent with the direction that the government wants to go
in”. Ensuring consistency with previously articulated ministerial direction was a recurring
theme in interviews and a core activity of partisan advisors in this case at the formulation
sub-phase. Ministerial partisan advisors were politically adjudicating departmental policy
work for its feasibility and alignment. Policy directors like chiefs, also described
considerable partisan-political shaping at the appraisal and dialogue sub-stages.
Multiple respondents described shaping as involving frank discussions with staff about
policy options that were considered to be ‘non-starters’. When asked directly about the
distinctions between their functions in procedural versus substantive aspects of policy
making one director put it succinctly:

In an ideal world the department would get the process right and we
would get the substance right. We obviously advise on substance all the
time it’s what we do. But in terms of us getting involved in process I
guess the way I would say it is we do. Tying back to the fact we’re loyal
to the minister we’re the ones who know how the minister operates, know
his personal wishes, know the wishes of the prime minister in the case of
the cabinet process, know what the prime minister’s expectations are.
We get involved when there is a, this one I’ll put bluntly, if the department
has, in the minister’s opinion, failed, he will go to us to do better.
(Minister’s Office Director of Policy)
Such blunt assessments were not uncommon and point to the direct content-based formulation activity partisan advisors undertake. Another junior advisor noted happily that in their most recent position they could focus much more on substantive policy matters. They explained that in a previous ministry their policy role had been more procedural, often in relation to cabinet submissions. Their current position was about the substantive policy the ministers had been tasked with giving life to. As the advisor explained:

Yeah for [policy sector] it was more substance it was actually really liberating. Before I was at [department] and you’d have to try to get things through cabinet committee but they weren’t things that you felt particularly strong about. They were things you really couldn’t care less about like tech projects and things that cost hundreds of millions of dollars that you didn’t understand and you’d have to call around and try and get support for it. And you’re like I don’t know I don’t really like it either but its government you’ve got to have these things it was a relief to get away from it. I didn’t have to do that at [ministry]. (Minister’s Office Partisan Advisor)

Ministers concurred that they relied on their staff for the provision of politically attuned policy formulation rather than subject matter expertise. However, most advised that it was always preferable, if possible, to have someone on staff knowledgeable in the substantive policy field. When asked if their political staff played a role in policy development a minister’s response points to the specialization that now characterizes federal partisan advisors as a subset of political staff. The minister explained:

Well not all of them of course my communications people didn’t. They had nothing to say about it. But when you hire people specifically for policy analysis and so those people, and depending on the department and so on but you’d hire someone with that had expertise or that had develop expertise in [policy sector] and someone else in [policy sector] and a third one in [policy sector] and so they … not everyone weighed in on everything. But you tried to make sure you had somebody who could cover off the different parts of it, of the portfolio. (Minister)

Harper ministers described their partisan advisors policy work as consisting of them working hand in glove with officials. This was described as ongoing to ensure that any given policy would be technically sound as well as politically feasible. When asked
how the partisan politics of being a minister was reconciled with the public service policy advice in policy development, Hon. David Emerson explained:

So the process of reconciliation would vary somewhat by minister. In my case, the reconciliation at the departmental level would really come in terms of joint meetings that I would have that would include senior public servants and senior political people. And, frankly, I and my deputy and my chief of staff would sort through any conflicting advice that I was getting and land on a particular place. (Hon. David Emerson)

This underscores how partisan advisors in some jurisdiction have become an institutionalized feature, a third party to the traditionally bilateral political-administrative nexus. Ministers were largely in agreement that for policy development to be sound it had to include a mix of evidence informed analysis as well as partisan-political policy advice. Ministers explained that they used their partisan advisors to at times provide a countermeasure to departmental policy advice. To further challenge the public service during policy development. Moreover, ministers broadly reported using their partisan advisors to ensure the political context and considerations of any given policy had been thought through. Shaping for them was generally about their partisan advisors combining expert policy advice (from whatever source) with an eye to the current partisan-political landscape of government. A minister described partisan-political policy advice and the role of their partisan advisors with respect to policy work as follows:

But you know then it would be, you would have to address it [policy generally] from a Conservative point of view. You would have to figure out what we had said about this you know use your political judgement to know what’s acceptable to the caucus, the cabinet, and the base of the party in terms of addressing those issues and take all that into account as you move forward. And really set yourself apart, to some degree, from what the previous government had done. Maybe it’s in emphasis or whatever but you would try and do that. But you would try and do that. I would say proactive, but you know … you also to be you know to be as frank and honest as I can be, you also knew enough, or hopefully you did, to know you can’t die on every hill. Not every issue would be a red meat issue for the base some issues were more of a shield than a sword. Those ones would be issues where you would take some steps in some ways to make sure there was a conservative imprint on it. But you knew better than to advocate that this was going to be some kind of hill that our party was going to die on (Minister)
Deputies were unanimous in agreeing that partisan advisors were actively involved in policy formulation. Deputies cast the overall formulation contributions of partisan advisors as predominantly partisan-political, but acknowledged that partisan advisors’ formulation interaction with senior officials, and others in the department, also involved administrative-technical shaping. DMs interviewed reported interactions primarily with chiefs of staff and occasionally with directors of policy. These partisan advisors were described as engaging in vertical administrative-technical shaping activity, typically through iterative meetings at the outset of policy development, in the appraisal and dialogue, and formulation sub-phases. While deputies themselves limited their interactions to senior partisan advisors they readily acknowledged that other senior departmental staff was in regular contact with partisan advisors and generally briefed them prior to briefing the minister. As one deputy minister described: “So my staff would interact with the minister’s office staff all the time on issues. You know we try to you know brief them up before we brief up the minister. So they can make an informed contribution to this [policy area]”. This sequencing of interaction with partisan advisors prior to ministerial engagement was explained to ensure that partisan advisors could then complete their political analysis, brief the minister, along with or subsequent to the minister receiving the departmental briefing. This facilitated vertical partisan-political shaping between ministers and their partisan advisors at the formulation sub-phase. Several deputies noted the importance of interactions with the minister’s partisan advisors as a means of ensuring that they did not become ‘cross threaded’ on substantive aspects of policy formulation. This is well stated by one deputy who explained:

But I trust [chief of staff]. If it’s an issue that it’s appropriate for the department to get involved with we’ll be there. Otherwise we might get cross threaded. It’s ok if we disagree in our advice to the minister but we have to do it in a way, and I mean it’s very rare, but we have to do it in a way where we explain to him exactly why we disagree. (Deputy Minister)

**British Columbia Ministers’ Offices Shaping**

The British Columbia case saw moderate levels of shaping but primarily along the vertical partisan-political dimension. Less frequent horizontal partisan-political shaping can be in part explained by the considerably smaller size of ministerial offices in
general. This reduced the opportunity for senior-junior partisan advisor interactions and produced more ‘direct’ vertical shaping in conjunction with ministers and senior departmental officials. Shaping activities were most commonly reported at the formulation sub-phase, but also cited in the context of appraisal and dialogue sub-stages. Like their federal counterparts, the provision of partisan-political policy advice and the iterative participation through dialogue sub-phase activity with officials and external stakeholders were the most routinely cited examples of shaping in the B.C. case. Both political and administrative elites interviewed in this case acknowledge that partisan advisors engaged in partisan-political shaping and described such activity as a core component of their policy work.

When asked about substance versus process dimensions of their policy advisory and formulation activity, a partisan advisor noted that while he certainly applied a political lens to policy development most also brought substantive ‘technical’ subject matter expertise to bear. The advisor explained:

We also try to, I can tell you personally here that most people here have some degree of expertise in their areas and they can offer some advice as to how they, how they think someone should react and work with the minister. The minister is obviously is the decision maker and the policy maker not the staff. But we try to work with them and if they need information we help try and get that information. We also talk quite extensively with the stakeholders within the ministry to try to read where they’re coming from and try to pass that advice along as well. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Several B.C. partisan advisors noted a degree of expertise in their portfolio either as a product of experience gained in the same ministry over time, or from pre-existing work experience related to the policy sector. Ministers interviewed in the B.C. case detailed that their partisan advisors could marshal a degree of knowledge or substantive expertise applicable to their portfolio. For some, it was described as in-depth policy or sector-specific knowledge. Others noted that their partisan advisor had in fact been in their ministry for longer than they had as a minister and thus could offer significant policy advice as to the departmental policy work, key stakeholders, and the policy landscape more broadly. More than one minister commented on the utility of their advisor’s substantive administrative-technical shaping activity. One minister responding to a
question about whether they turned to their partisan advisor for policy related advice made clear they had significant expertise that complemented their own, as they put it:

I tend to particularly with my senior MA who has been in the portfolio longer than I have I tend to rely on him for advice in a number of the areas of the business. So I think he plays a fairly significant role. He has expertise in one side of [policy sector] that I don’t have and I have expertise in another side that he doesn’t have so we work very well together as a team. (Minister)

When asked to elaborate on what that expertise was and how it figured into the policy formulation process the minister went on to explain:

Sure, I’ve been over to [country] quite a bit four times in the last 24 months or so. And he [partisan advisor] has become as knowledgeable about [country] as I am and in some ways more so in certain areas. And so on the manufacturing side he has helped steer our policy around working with different companies [in policy area]. He has a significant expertise in that area. So his advice on where we need to go really helps to shape any policy we take forward in that area. (Minister, emphasis added)

Several partisan advisors interviewed framed their shaping activities as occurring at the appraisal sub-phase. As with their federal counterparts, this was most often expressed as providing the minister’s direction at the ‘front-end’ of policy making to ensure that politically suitable options would be generated for considerations. The overarching point was again to avoid any ‘non-starters’. When queried about how they participated in policy development a partisan advisor explained that policy development consisted of a significant amount of formulation occurring in the political sphere and then being raised with officials in the dialogue sub-phase activity. The advisor explained:

I would say half of that [policy development] comes from the political side. Meaning that it either originates from the minister or myself, or it comes from talking with stakeholders and we develop it here before going to the bureaucrats asking for more detailed analysis of what we want to do. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Partisan advisors would use bridging activity to also facilitate shaping activity that could be administrative-technical, or partisan-political depending on the nature of their exogenous interactions with policy actors. Another partisan advisor also framed their
policy formulation activity as occurring primarily at the front-end. They described significant activity at the appraisal and formulation sub-stages as a regular part of their policy work. When asked at what ‘stage’ of the policy cycle they were most active the advisor made it clear:

I would say it’s more in the beginning. So what is it we’re trying to achieve? What is it that we want to do basically? Why is it important enough to be a priority to government? So then for example you decide well [existing policy] isn’t really working for everyone we have these budget constraints what can we do? A decision is made that we want to try and restructure it somehow to make it more fair. So then that’s the overall direction that’s given to the ministry and they go away and work on it. And in some cases, depending on the relationship that an MA would have with senior bureaucrats there could be interactions there during that processes of developing options to kind of bounce ideas off or just to get a little bit of guidance. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

Respondents frequently explained that their policy formulation activity hinged on the type of policy work in question. Again, a distinction was made, as in the federal case, between ongoing policy work that was percolating up through the department and those priority policy items of the ministers and/or the government. Partisan advisors in B.C. shared the view that involvement in the former was during the front-end phases, while considerably more emphasis would be placed at the formulation sub-phase in the latter. As one partisan advisor explained:

Again it is so variable, if you look at an issue I mentioned [policy issue] so that’s a real life example. As a result of that you know we had emerging issues and it needed policy and legislative answers and I was involved in that from start, middle, to end. In other things, more long-term things you often find that that the ministry comes forward and says oh yeah we’ve been working on this for two years and now we are looking for your input. So it’s difficult to be involved at the start when nobody told you what was being done. Certainly that happens within ministries. Every ministry I’ve been in that if you come to work one day and see a note come forward from the ministry saying we just need your input on this. And you say where did that come from? Why are we doing that? Who’s idea was it? There are certain times that things are generated in the ministry from whatever level and then you get involved later in the process. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)

This type of responses was common. Partisan advisors were involved in the various sub-stages of formulation but when pressed noted that ministers were the
decision makers and the public service took care of the implementation. Partisan advisors’ shaping activities tended to be most pronounced for those ‘priority’ items at the appraisal and dialogue sub-stages in exchanges with officials. These were also informed by ongoing signal checking with external stakeholders or the first minister’s office as needed. When presented with policy work that was department-driven their shaping activity was described as partisan-political and pronounced in the formulation sub-phase. That is, ensuring that the policy work did not present any political issues that required attention from partisan advisors.

Discussions with various DMs painted a picture of partisan advisors as active shapers, particularly through the provision of partisan-political policy advice, at various stages of policy development (again in the context of the priority versus ongoing dynamic described above). As such, deputies tended to characterize the substantive shaping activity of partisan advisors as explicit in the latter parts of the formulation stages particularly around partisan-political aspects germane to formulation sub-stage activity. When asked if they perceived partisan advisors as playing a substantive role two deputies suggested they are consequential albeit in different ways. They explained:

Definitely, they provide the political lens to the minister. In terms of if there are policy recommendations that we are bringing forward to them ultimately for their decision, political staff, in my experience have played a strong role in influencing the thinking of the minister. (Deputy Minister)

I think it’s an indirect role. I think they provide advice to the minister from a political perspective. I might query them in terms of their thinking, but in terms of doing the analysis and the development of the policy issue. In terms of their role of providing a political perspective to the minister on decision making around policy I think they do have a role. So in terms of development side I can’t think of them having any, but in terms of decision making clearly they have a role because the minister needs to think about things both in terms of what we are telling them is the right thing from a policy perspective and the political consequences of that. We can try to outline some of that but we can’t make those political calls obviously. (Deputy Minister)

Deputies often mentioned, as the quotations above illustrate, engaging with partisan advisors to get a sense of where the minister may stand on policy option ‘x’ or ‘y’. Again, from deputies perspectives partisan advisors engaged in shaping primarily, but not exclusively, on partisan-political policy dimensions.
New Brunswick Ministers’ Office Shapers

The interviews with elite political and public service actors confirmed that New Brunswick partisan advisors undertook virtually no substantive shaping activity. The shaping activities in this case extended only to partisan advisors involvement in individual case-by-case basis interventions for their minister’s constituents or for other member’s constituents. Universally, partisan advisors themselves described this as their predominant form of interaction with the department. Furthermore, when asked about their involvement in policy at a general level, the first inclinations of New Brunswick partisan advisors were almost always to discuss their constituency related cases. As outlined in previous chapters N.B. advisors played a more passive role in providing policy advice to their ministers. Most typically it consisted of transmission and integration functions between the deputy and minister. All three categories of respondents underscored partisan advisors were hardworking individuals who made a minister’s job possible. They dealt with correspondence, dealt with constituent cases, and organized logistics around announcements and legislative activities. They were not described as having currency in the policy process. All respondents indicated that partisan advisors would generally be present during briefings with senior officials and interact with departmental officials regularly. One advisor explained they had frequent interactions with their deputy minister for briefings, when asked if these briefings were related to particular files or departmental policy work more generally the advisor responded:

Usually particular files. When we’re talking about a policy change, a regulation change, legislation change, any of those sort of high level shifts in the way the department operates the deputy takes care of that. That’s sort of how that has happened. Takes care of giving the information on that. I mean I’m not a staff person in the department per say, implementing the acts and regulations that are set out. If there are any changes on the staff level the deputy takes care of keeping both of us informed about that. For example, when we came on, the department was going through a restructuring. We weren't involved in that. I suppose that if there was a major problem and [the minister] didn’t like the direction it was going I’m sure there would be a discussion. But basically the deputy was in charge of that operation. So when I brief him on stuff its on particular files. (Minister’s office partisan advisor)
This was the typical response from partisan advisors. They may informally discuss policy with their ministers but, more typically, their policy formulation activities were procedural, involving moving activities across the political-administrative spheres. This type of limited activity on the substantive aspects of policy development was confirmed in interviews with both ministers and deputies. When asked if his partisan advisors contributed to policy formulation one minister responded no and then elaborated:

There was really, the only thing that political staff would take to the deputy minister or assistant deputy ministers was what we considered to be a solution to a problem and say [Minister] says that the regulations say this and this is what he wants to do now you tell us how are we going to accomplish that. They would not go to the deputy minister or assistant deputy minister and say this is the problem what is the solution? We would come up with the solution and say how do we mould the civil service, or the regulation, or the law around the solution that we found. (Minister)

Deputies were unanimous in stating that ministerial level partisan advisors did not engage, formally, in policy development activities. Most acknowledged that they thought some advice giving might be occurring between ministers and their advisors but that it was primarily partisan-political in nature. Deputies described partisan advisors as having negligible input with them in terms of shaping the substance of policy. Again, deputies concurred with partisan advisors that their interactions predominantly involved case specific constituency work. Even on those matters, it was the departmental officials who would be the ones undertaking the inquiry into the constituent case and what options existed to address the issue. A senior deputy emphasized that partisan advisors did not shape policy and that this had long been the case in New Brunswick explaining with reference to specific policies the DM explained, “You know in my situation the two executive assistants have zero role in terms of giving [policy sector] policy advice, [policy sector] policy advice, [departmental] advice. That’s just the way it’s structured. It’s never been any different”.

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Conclusion: Ministers’ Office Policy Formulation Activity, Complementarity, and Policy ‘Success’

This chapter has presented compelling evidence that ministerial office partisan advisors were, but not universally, active participants in policy formulation. This finding supports other contemporary Canadian studies suggesting such actors likely have differentiated patterns of involvement and influence in policy work (Bourgault & Dunn, 2012a; forthcoming; Benoit, 2006; White, 2001; 2005). The findings detailed herein allow this claim to be further specified through attention to the substantive and procedural nature of their formulation activities, sub-stage(s) of formulation at which they occur, as well as their vertical, horizontal, and partisan-political and/or administrative-technical orientations. When plotted along these various dimensions the findings are revealing. Ministerial level partisan advisors were in all cases found to be active in vertical administrative-technical moving at the dialogue sub-phase. For example undertaking monitoring, signal checking, coordination, or process management as various policy actors deliberated, consulted, and developed policy. In the federal and B.C. cases such moving extended to several other formulation sub-phases. However, as detailed above, only in the federal case were ministerial partisan advisors involved in formal public service policy making instruments (e.g. MC development, departmental policy documents, cabinet processes). This provided additional opportunities for these actors to engage in various types of moving. Strikingly however, ministerial partisan advisors across all cases described only engaging in vertical intra-ministerial administrative-technical moving.

Ministerial partisan advisors in the B.C and federal cases also described engaging in vertical and horizontal partisan-political moving. Other than its more informal nature in the B.C. case, vertical partisan-political formulation was described in essentially similar terms (e.g. adjudication of consistency, alignment, and identification of risk). The marked difference observed in these two cases related to how such actors engaged in horizontal partisan-political moving. This, as seen above, was stakeholder centric in the B.C. case. In the federal case the layered configuration of partisan advisors produced more frequent and intensive endogenous partisan-political moving among variously located partisan advisors in addition to considerable exogenous stakeholder driven moving.
Table 19. Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisors Procedural Formulation ‘Moving’ Activity by Case and Formulation Sub-stages

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PROCEDURAL (Nature of Process-Based Formulation Activity)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Type A - Horizontal Partisan-Political Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal Ministers’ offices: All sub-stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. Ministers’ offices: Appraisal, Dialogue, formulation*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Type C - Vertical Partisan-Political Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fed, B.C. Ministers’ offices: All sub-stages</td>
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Source: Author.

As summarized in Table 20 below, federal partisan advisors were found to engage in the most frequent and wide ranging shaping activities. They consistently described partisan-political and administrative-technical types of shaping activity at multiple formulation stub-stages. For instance, many reported participating in content-based administrative-technical shaping via input into the elaboration and refinement of departmental policy development. This was typically described to involve early appraisal sub-stage scrutiny of the direction, dialogic activity around the logic underpinning suggested policy options, contributions based on personal knowledge or experience, or transmitting inputs received from other actors in government or the stakeholder

* This horizontal procedural formulation activity involved exogenous stakeholders or other partisan advisors rather than public service actors outside of their ‘home’ departments.
community. This was the only case where formal written comments were provided by partisan advisors to the minister in relation to formal policy in development.

**Table 20. Ministers’ Office Partisan Advisor Substantive ‘Shaping’ Policy Formulation Activity By Case and Formulation Sub-stages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>SUBSTANTIVE (Nature of Content-Based Formulation Activity)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Types I - Partisan-Political Horizontal Shaping</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal Ministers’ Office: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. Ministers’ offices: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Types III - Partisan-Political Vertical Shaping</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fed Ministers’ Offices: All sub-stages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. Ministers’ Offices: All sub-stages</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

Further, as was detailed above various respondents described partisan advisors as active participants, engaging in ongoing shaping functions as policy was developed. This included departmental policy work (issue notes, decision notes) as well as participation in the shaping of cabinet submissions and committee work. Federal ministerial partisan advisors were clearly engaging in ample partisan-political shaping as well. They detailed regularly engaging in formulation sub-stage activity designed to

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1. Similar to their moving activity, Ministerial partisan advisors in B.C. describe their horizontal partisan formulation activity in the context of stakeholder interactions rather than in terms of interactions with other partisan advisors.
increase alignment with policy direction, to improve consistency with previously articulated ministerial/government campaign commitments or policy positions, or to identify potential partisan-political risks for the minister. Their shaping on both dimensions also spanned across the greatest number of formulation sub-stages.

British Columbia’s partisan advisors’ were reported by ministers and deputies as being able to marshal ‘expert’ or substantive policy knowledge to shape policy based on particularly skills sets, or experiential expertise developed in particular policy sectors. Their shaping was however decidedly more informal. In no instance did partisan advisors or any other actors report it as including formal written commentary on policy either in development or ex-post. Partisan-political shaping was also reported but was predominantly vertical with horizontal shaping, similar to moving, being stakeholder centric but spanning all formulation sub-phases. New Brunswick partisan advisors were not active in any shaping whatsoever. Respondents reported no activity along any of the dimensions used to plot and analyze that formulation activity. In that case, shaping was confined to formulation activity undertaken by partisan advisors at the centre.

The differentiated patterns of formulation participation are however only partially explained by differences in configuration. Spatial factors such as the layered configuration in the federal case produced variance in how ministers’ offices engaged in formulation. Yet, similar configuration in the two sub-national cases did not yield similar propensities for moving and shaping. This supports the importance of situating partisan advisors within the broader political-administrative arrangements that characterize the environment in which they engage in policy work. As has been noted throughout this study respondent’s in New Brunswick repeatedly characterized political-administrative arrangements between ministers and deputies as direct. The two other cases included a more pronounced function for partisan advisors within the political-administrative nexus. Finally, the federal and B.C. cases demonstrated that moving and shaping might vary with respect to the instrumentality of how partisan advisors engage in formulation. The lack of participation in formal policy making mechanisms in the B.C. case (e.g. cabinet activity and formal departmental policy mechanisms) reduced the ability of ministerial partisan advisors’ to insert themselves into formal policy development.
These findings also point to differences in how partisan advisors can influence complementarity. Clear evidence was found that ministerial partisan advisors serve to increase political control for elected officials in policy making. However, this chapter points to a greater variance in the likelihood of such activity at the ministerial office level as compared to the more consistent findings presented in chapter 5 pertaining to first ministers’ offices. The N.B. case quite clearly demonstrates that simply having partisan advisors is no guarantee that such actors will increase political control for ministers. Partisan advisors in that case demonstrated minimal formulation activity with only vertical administrative-technical moving activity reported. In contrast, the federal case involved ministerial office partisan advisors actively moving and shaping along almost all dimensions and multiple formulation sub-phases. In that case, partisan advisors were able to increase political control to a greater degree through combined vertical moving and shaping, along administrative-technical and partisan political formulation dimensions. Confirming a variety of techniques and activities by which partisan advisors can increase political control through process management and/or content-based formulation activity. However, their limited horizontal administrative-technical moving and shaping indicates a limited ability to do so in relation to administrative-technical formulation activity outside of their own departments.

The evidence on the impact of partisan advisors on the differentiation or distancing of spheres is, as it was at the first ministers’ office level, more ambiguous and paradoxical. That is, ministerial partisan advisors narrowed or reduced the distance between spheres related to administrative-technical formulation activity, but also expanded or increased differentiation related to partisan-political formulation activity. In all three cases the same insulating and distancing was reported with respect to any perceived partisan-political moving and shaping in formulation. Officials across the board were quick to note that ministers and their staff dealt with anything remotely partisan-political. Further, all three cases included partisan advisors’ explicitly describing efforts to undertake such activities apart from the public service given their non-partisan status. However the dividing line between attempts to improve public service responsiveness through moving and shaping and the erosion of the public service ‘neutrality’ is difficult to determine and seemingly not mutually exclusive.
Table 21. **Ministers’ Office Formulation Activity and Complementarity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementarity Dimension</th>
<th>Policy Formulation Activity and Impact on Complementarity</th>
<th>Fed.</th>
<th>B.C.</th>
<th>N.B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Control</td>
<td>Moving Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political policy process management /coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial administrative-technical policy process management and coordination</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaping Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political policy process management and coordination</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial administrative-technical policy process management and coordination</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaping Vertical intra-ministerial alignment of ministerial/government policy direction with departmental policy development</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal inter-ministerial alignment of substantive content-based ministerial/government policy direction with departmental policy development</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing and Differentiation</td>
<td>Moving Distancing of officials from partisan procedural aspects of policy formulation</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaping Distancing officials from partisan-political considerations in substantive policy making</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

The finding of uneven formulation activity set out in this chapter also suggest different propensities for process and political facilitation of policy ‘success’. The B.C. and federal cases offered considerably more opportunities for partisan advisors to contribute to political policy ‘success’. In both cases partisan advisors reported ample policy activity aimed at improving political success through moving and shaping. In both cases partisan advisors were in ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, and contributed to improved determinations of partisan-political risk and feasibility. Their substantive shaping activities were clearly intended to improve consistency and alignment of departmental policy with stated partisan-political commitments and policy preferences. Federal partisan advisors demonstrated the greatest ability to strengthen policy.
‘success’ on political levels via their involvement in formal policy making and through a more muscular system of partisan-political checks and balances than either sub-national cases.

Signal checking, monitoring, and process coordination were frequently reported and point to ministers’ office partisan advisors as viable tools for the identification of potential process related challenges or risks. The prevalence of vertical administrative-technical moving across the cases, particularly in relation to dialogic sub-stage activity with endogenous and exogenous actors, suggests partisan advisors are important for the exchange of policy inputs within policy subsystems. The findings also underscore a potential tension between political and process imperatives in policy formulation. For example, in the federal case if departmental policy documents were not provided to ministers’ offices early enough to allow partisan-political analysis and recommendations - they were not included in the ministers reading binder. This clearly serves to increase political control and facilitates political policy ‘success’. It may however also result in procedural delay and potentially process related policy ‘failures’. This type of tension is also evident in relation to the layered federal configuration. While it offers opportunities for additional partisan-political procedural and content based safeguards, it may also lead to potential procedural blockages or delays due to partisan-political ‘bureaucracy’ at any or all formulation sub-stages.

Having examined both ministers’ and first ministers’ office partisan advisors formulation and advisory activity, the concluding chapter of this dissertation now takes a step back to assess the implications. The comparative research design utilized in this study has yielded some important insights into the various potential configurations, uses, and impacts partisan advisors raise for policy work and governance arrangements.
Chapter 8.

Conclusion:
Institutionalized Partisan Advisors in Canada

Introduction

The chapters in this dissertation have highlighted the many significant ways partisan advisors can be active policy workers. Together, the historical and contemporary findings presented in the preceding chapters demonstrate that partisan advisors, as a subset of appointed political staffs, have emerged through a three-stage process of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization. This study has suggested that one possibility is that this process may in fact be part of an overarching professionalization and bureaucratisation of the political arm of government (Evetts, 2003a; Evetts, 2003b; Fawcett and Gay, 2010; Webb & Kolodny, 2006). The evidence presented in this dissertation suggests that partisan advisors should no longer be assumed to be mere 'political operatives'. Rather, in many instances in the three cases examined their policy work suggests they have emerged as policy professionals with partisan links. Or, as Campbell styles them, ‘amphibians’ who “exhibit the operational traits of policy professionals - expertise and knowledge of how to negotiate through the bureaucratic maze” but maintain explicit partisan ties (Campbell & Peters 1988, p.93; Campbell, 1988b, p.267).

A principle argument advanced herein has been that greater care is needed in attributing policy influence to such actors based solely on locational considerations or ideal type ‘roles’. Instead, it has been argued that improved modeling and analysis of partisan advisors can be secured through additional focus on the policy activities they undertake. To this end, buffering, bridging, moving, and shaping were advanced in a framework with two models to array and examine the substantive and procedural nature
of their formulation and advisory activity. This concluding chapter distils the findings
detailed in this dissertation with a focus on the implications they raise for the
configuration and operation of advisory systems, policy formulation, complementarity,
and notion of policy ‘success’ (McConnell, 2010a, 2010b).

Chapters 4 and 5 documented how, across cases, first ministers’ offices were
found to be consequential to advisory system operation and policy formulation. Chapter
4 revealed that, as buffers and bridges, partisan advisors at the centre were important
direct sources of content-based policy advice, and key mechanisms for the integration of
policy advice in their respective advisory systems. Their buffering and bridging
strengthened political control through quantitative diversification of available policy
advice. It was also a key means by which the qualitative content of available policy
advice was diversified through their unique ability to proffer administrative-technical
and/or partisan-political policy advice. The latter form of which also served, in all cases,
to increase the differentiation or distance between political and administrative spheres.
This is consistent with findings from other contemporary Westminster studies noting
similar insulating effects for public servants from the partisan-political aspects of political
appointees’ advisory activity (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007b, 2008).

Chapter 5 documented how first ministers’ office partisan advisors were also
active formulation participants in all three cases. As privileged actors in their respective
policy subsystems they were engaged in moving and shaping throughout formulation,
across almost all of the various dimensions used to plot formulation activity. As this
study has emphasized, they were unique in their prominent participation in horizontal
formulation activity, ‘front-end’ formulation activity, and were universally found to engage
in formal public service policy making instruments. Their horizontal moving and shaping
was a key vehicle by which first ministers’ offices could seek to increase political control
through procedural and substantive activity including steering, coordination, process
management, and alignment and content calibration (Dahlström et al., 2011b; Savoie,
1999).

Chapters 6 and 7 documented that ministerial partisan advisors, in two of three
cases (federal and B.C.), were also consequential to the operation of advisory systems
and policy formulation. In these two cases ministerial partisan advisors were clear
sources of policy advice for ministers. In all three cases ministerial partisan advisors were found to engage in some degree of bridging activity. These findings suggest that Canadian partisan advisors are, like their international counterparts, important actors who provide contestability to various sources of policy advice flowing to decision makers and are particularly active in the integration of policy advice in advisory systems (OECD, 2011; Zussman, 2009b; Eichbaum and Shaw, 2011). As movers and shapers ministerial partisan advisors were also found in two cases (federal and B.C.) to be active participants in policy formulation. In these two cases their formulation activity, to varying degrees, spanned the process and substance dimensions, formulation sub-stages, and partisan-political and administrative-technical orientations.

This concluding chapter takes stock of the key findings generated by this study, which are in summary:

a. From a historical perspective partisan advisors in all three cases, to varying degrees, demonstrate a pattern of institutionalization, expansion, and specialization.

b. Current models of policy advice fail to capture the partisan-political dimensions of policy advice, notably the policy advisory activities of institutionalized partisan advisors termed here as ‘partisan-political policy advice’.

c. Partisan advisors’ policy advice is frequently applied as an overlay to existing advice from the public service or other sources and plays a significant and under-examined role in ‘advisory systems’.

d. Partisan advisors can be important contributors or impediments to complementarity between political and administrative elites and can be effective linkages and resources for both components of modern democratic polities.

e. Institutional location is a key determinant of how partisan advisors engage in policy formulation, but must be coupled with considerations of the content and processes by which such formulation activity is undertaken.

f. With respect to (e), Partisan advisors’ often serve as key interfaces for the integration of exogenous policy inputs into government but such activity is subject to variation by institutional location.

g. Partisan advisors are important contributors to formulation activity that extends beyond determinations of political feasibility to include a broad spectrum of substantive and procedural formulation activity.
h. Partisan advisors policy advisory and formulation activity is a means by which ‘process’ and ‘political’ types of policy ‘success’ can be facilitated (McConnell, 2010a).

Policy Advisory Systems and Partisan Advisors: Impacts and Configurations

A principal goal of this study was to understand if, how, and with what implications partisan advisors were active within policy advisory systems. Chapter 2 developed a framework, building on existing studies that recognize (1) a growing plurality of advisory sources engage in the provision of policy advice increasing the contestability of traditional public service advisory sources; and, (2) greater integration (within both political and administrative spheres) of policy advice is required to sift and sort the disparate sources of policy advice therein. The evidence collected in this study confirms that partisan advisors are one of many sources of policy advice. The three cases examined also point to various potential configurations of partisan advisors within policy advisory systems. Zussman’s (2009b) collaborative, gatekeeper, and triangulated ideal-type models of ‘political advisors’ detailed in the introduction to this study (restated in Figure 4 below) were a clear advance in modeling their advisory activity within the political administrative nexus. The evidence generated in this dissertation does not however support the claim that Canada operates under the ‘triangulated model’.

A greater interaction and overlap between partisan advisors and public service sources of policy advice was reported in all three cases. This finding runs counter to the discreet compartmentalization set forth by the triangulated model. Most respondents included in this study reported significant independent and overlapping policy advisory activities. This suggests a mix of the collaborative and triangulation models best characterizes the advisory systems in these cases. Partisan advisors were found to engage in iterative and dialectical policy advisory activity with ministers, deputies, and fellow partisan advisors. Moreover, the directionality presented in the triangulated model masks the important bi-directional flow of policy advice reported to be occurring between ministers, their partisan advisors, and public service officials. Political and administrative respondents in all three cases did acknowledge the existence of firm boundaries, particularly related to partisan-political activity. However, they also described areas of
overlap with officials in relation to administrative-technical policy work. This refutes the unidirectionality suggested by the triangulated model.

**Figure 4. Three Models of Political Advisors and the Machinery of Government**

Source: Reproduced from Zussman (2009b)

Based on the evidence collected in this study, and using the principles of complementarity (distinct and overlapping governance activities and values), Figure 5 below illustrates an alternative locational approach – the complementary policy advisory model. This alternative ideal-type model is argued to more aptly characterize the nature of partisan advisors policy advisory activities in the three cases examined. It recognizes that partisan advisors and public servants work in independent and separate spheres, but also engage in overlapping policy advisory activities. The model recognizes that while ministers remain the focal point of advisory activity as the authoritative decision makers, they are not simply passive recipients of policy advice. The findings from this study and other existing studies have underscored that ministers are, to varying degrees, active participants in policy formulation (Savoie, 1999, 2003a, Bakvis, 1991; 1997; Campbell & Szabrowski, 1979, White 2005). Ministers interviewed in this study reported actively seeking out policy advice from various sources not passively waiting for it to be tendered. Moreover, ministers noted they were not shy about providing input and direction to officials and reported using their partisan advisors to transmit ministerial direction, feedback, or policy advice of their own regarding preferred directions in which to take policy development. Such practices were confirmed by partisan advisors in all three cases who noted transmission and integration of minister's feedback and policy
direction to officials. The complementarity of policy advice model recognizes this active participation by retaining the minister as the nodal actor, yet reflects the multilateral nature of exchanges reported between actors within the advisory systems examined.

Thirdly, as set out in Chapters 4 and 6, policy advisory activities were not confined solely to political and administrative elite ‘insiders’ within government. All three cases were replete with references to exogenous sources of policy advice. Ministers, senior public servants, and partisan advisors all confirmed that policy stakeholders are a reality in government. As this study documented, particularly in Chapter 6, partisan advisors often engaged in the integration of external advisory policy feedback and input by means of formal and informal consultations and interactions. In all three cases a broad spectrum of respondents made clear that departments have, and continue to engage in such activities as well. The complementarity model of policy advice explicitly recognizes external sources of policy advice as a component of advisory systems and partisan advisors as one mechanism by which their input can be integrated.

**Figure 5. Complementarity Model of Policy Advice**

![Figure 5. Complementarity Model of Policy Advice](image)

Source: Author.

However, a key finding from this study is that spatial considerations upon which policy advisory systems are based can be improved by coupling them with content considerations. That is, while locational approaches can tell us the ‘where’ of advisory
sources; greater specificity can be achieved by integrating locational dimensions with the ‘what’, or content dimensions of policy advice. As such, the complementarity model of policy advice is provided as a useful heuristic. In a similar fashion to the various existing locational models (Lindquist, 1998; Zussman, 2009; Halligan 1995) it provides the general contours and parameters leaving the particular operationalization of the model as an empirical question to be addressed by detailed study of locational and content variables. The buffering and bridging propositions used in this study were advanced as a means to do just that. When combined with the locational aspects particular to each case, varying configurations of policy advisory systems and partisan advisors activities therein can be elaborated.

Three Configurations of Partisan Advisors within Advisory Systems

The Federal Case: Comprehensive-Differentiated and Layered-Dispersed Configuration

The evidence collected in the federal case points to a comprehensive, differentiated, dispersed, and layered configuration within the policy advisory system. From a locational standpoint, partisan advisors were dispersed in that they were deployed at the ministerial and first minister’s office levels. They were also ‘layered’ in that they operated at multiple levels within the two institutional locations (e.g. junior/senior partisan advisors). This locational arrangement produced ample policy advisory activity within and among ministers’ offices, the first minister’s office, as well as between various partisan advisors and a range of public service officials and external actors. As Chapter 4 documented, at the first ministers’ office level junior and senior partisan advisors noted considerable interactions with senior PCO officials.

Ministers’ offices were organized in very much the same hierarchical structure, itself resulting in multi-level interactions between partisan advisors and departmental officials. Routine policy advisory interactions were also reported between junior level partisan advisors and senior partisan advisors, at both the ministerial and first ministerial office levels. At the ministerial office level, all partisan advisors reported engaging in policy advisory activity directly with the minister. However, at the PMO level only senior partisan advisors reported regular advisory interactions with the Prime Minister. For their part, junior partisan advisors reported their advisory activities were mediated or
delivered by more senior PMO partisan advisors. Moreover, at both institutional locations junior partisan advisors, in concert with their respective directors’ of policy, undertook the detailed partisan-political advisory activity with chiefs of staff reporting more coordination and strategic buffering and bridging.

With respect to the content basis of their advisory activity, partisan advisors in the federal case were found to be comprehensive and differentiated. Comprehensive in that partisan advisors at all levels (first minister’s and minister’s office) were found to engage in both buffering and bridging along the partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. Though they differed in how, and with whom bridging was focused (e.g. exogenous integration principally at the ministerial office level), partisan advisors were involved in both the direct provision and integration of policy advice. This case was unique in that partisan-political policy advice was provided discreetly through a separate or differentiated partisan-political written and oral briefing system. This was supplemental to partisan advisors participation, in concert with officials, in the development of departmental ‘administrative-technical’ policy advice. As per Figure 6 below, this can be further added to an attempt to map-out the advisory system. For example, junior partisan advisors in ministers’ offices described engaging in partisan-political policy advisory activity with fellow partisan advisors in their own offices, or at times with the more junior partisan advisors in the PMO policy shop. Interactions with the PMO chief of staff were described as restricted to the ministerial chief of staff level and/or directly occurring with ministers. As Figure 6 charts, partisan advisors universally reported only engaging in partisan-political policy advisory activities with other partisan advisors or their ministers. Their administrative-technical policy advisory activities were undertaken with their minister’s, colleagues, and often with departmental officials, in an iterative fashion as departmental policy advice was developed.

At the minister’s office level, both junior and senior partisan advisors reported ongoing exchanges with departmental officials related to administrative-technical policy advice. This was most commonly described as involving discussions about the proposed policy options being considered. Conversely, deputies and senior PCO officials interviewed all emphasized that they and departmental officials only provided non-partisan ‘administrative-technical’ forms of policy advice. As per Figure 6 this is modeled through the use of solid line linkages between actors. Minister’s office partisan
advisors policy advisory interactions were limited to their senior departmental level officials.

**Figure 6. Federal Partisan Advisors and Complementarity Model of Policy Advice**

In contrast, first minister’s office partisan advisors described almost exclusive policy advisory interactions as occurring with senior PCO and central agency officials. Little interaction was reported between PMO partisan advisors and departmental deputy ministers. More often, partisan advisors at the centre would use their ministerial counterparts or PCO officials to secure departmental policy advice or materials. Secondly, federal first minister’s office partisan advisors, as noted in chapter 4, reported that they explicitly ‘pushed out’ policy specific stakeholder engagements to ministers’ office partisan advisors. While they indicated meeting with groups or policy sector based stakeholders they would always ensure that ministers’ offices were understood to be the lead actors. This was to avoid ‘end runs’ around ministers or complications due to ‘cross threading’ between offices. This is an important insight regarding how exogenous policy inputs are integrated.
The British Columbia Case:  
Limited-Dispersed and Integrated Configuration

The B.C. case was found to demonstrate a limited-dispersed and integrated configuration of partisan advisor activity within the advisory system. From a locational perspective, partisan advisors were also dispersed at the ministerial and first minister’s office levels. They were however limited, in that they were confined to a single tier at the ministerial office level and two partisan advisors within the first minister’s office. This limited-dispersed locational configuration greatly reduced the number of reported intra-ministerial partisan advisory interactions compared to those described in the federal case.

In relation to the content-basis of their advisory activity, ministerial office level partisan advisors did report both administrative-technical and partisan-political activity but informally and iteratively with officials. They were explicit about their application of a political lens to departmental policy work, and again emphasized ensuring consistency with the policy direction of their minister and government. Ministerial level partisan advisors also reported policy-based interactions with the first minister’s office on both partisan-political and administrative-technical fronts. However, the single tiered configuration at the ministerial office level and smaller first minister’s office reduced the frequency and intensity of such activity.

B.C. first minister’s office partisan advisors rejected the term partisan-political as a legitimate label to describe their policy advisory activity. Preferring instead to describe their advisory activities as ‘public interest’ focused. Their description of their policy work, as reported in this study however, was in keeping with the definition advanced herein of partisan-political policy advice. That is, it was largely described as focused on ensuring consistency of policy work with politically articulated and electoral mandated policy positions.

64 The one exception was the Minister of Health’s office which employed two ministerial assistants.
Partisan advisors at the center reported a mix of both departmental deputy level and central agency (primarily the deputy minister to the premier) interactions. This was described as involving the synthesis of considerable sources of policy advice, and the content-based integration of policy advice in a ‘knitting together’ of both partisan-political and public service policy advice. At the minister’s office level, partisan advisors described policy advisory interactions that were predominantly with departmental officials. These involved providing administrative-technical policy advice often in relation to clarifying their minister’s direction, or integrating policy advice flowing from external stakeholders.

Compared to the federal case, the ministerial office level partisan advisors partisan-political bridging was far more often reported to consist of the integration of exogenous sources of policy advice or input. This was most often described as integrating key stakeholders’ policy preferences into the policy advisory system and consulting (formally or informally) with stakeholders related to what reception formal policy options might solicit. Ministerial partisan advisors reported ongoing consultations
with stakeholders that were explicitly partisan-political in nature. Moreover, ministers and deputies in this case widely acknowledged such activities. There was consensus that partisan advisors frequently engaged in such interaction with stakeholders without the minister or departmental representatives present. B.C. first minister’s office partisan advisors reported a limited amount of exogenous policy advisory integration. However, they shared the practice as reported in the other cases of ‘pushing out’ the vast majority of stakeholder advisory integration activities to ministers, their offices, and departmental officials.

The New Brunswick Case: Limited-Dispersed and Centralized-Integrated Configuration

As this study documented, partisan advisors at the ministerial level in the N.B. were found to be far less active than their counterparts in relation to both policy advisory and formulation activity. Locationally, the configuration was limited-dispersed. Partisan advisors were present at the ministers’ and first minister’s office but shared the B.C. format. That is, they were configured in a single tier at the ministerial office level and a limited two-tiered first minister’s office. However, when coupled with the content of their policy advisory activity, ministerial office level partisan advisors were found to only engage in limited vertical administrative-technical bridging. All categories of respondents interviewed painted ministerial partisan advisors as marginal sources of direct policy advice. In contrast, all respondents underscored that the first minister’s office partisan advisors engaged in policy advisory and formulation activity. In relation to content-based policy work N.B. partisan advisors at the center readily acknowledged that at times they engaged in policy advisory activity that was partisan-political. This was, as in the federal case, explicitly described as an application of a political lens to ensure consistency with their platform - a compass by which they oriented their policy advice. This configuration can be graphed as per Figure 8 below.

No formal partisan-political policy advisory briefing system was in place in the N.B. case. Interviews with first minister’s office partisan advisors made clear that contestation and scrutiny of documents going through cabinet was common, and they were active participation in cabinet and cabinet committee advisory activity. That is, first minister’s office partisan advisors described engaging in oral partisan-political advisory activity with the first minister and cabinet through strategy meetings and the like.
However, in relation to formal policy development contributions they were always integrated by the public service. The public service would provide its own free and frank advice, but would contextualize that by informal discussions and consultations with senior premier’s office partisan advisors. This content integration mirrored the process that was described in the B.C. case. Again, first minister’s office partisan advisors reported a limited amount of exogenous policy advisory integration. However, as detailed above the bulk of stakeholder integration was in this case undertaken directly by ministers, and particularly departments.

**Figure 8. New Brunswick Partisan Advisors and the Complementarity of Policy Advice Model**

The variance documented in this study related to partisan advisors advisory system activity supports the claims that components of policy advice supply systems are often combined in different ratios (Prince 1983; Howlett, 2011). It also provides new insights that go beyond locational and control-autonomy considerations in confirming that the content of policy advice generated and integrated within advisory systems is also subject to variance (Craft and Howlett, 2012). Lastly, the findings highlight that
partisan advisors can be variously configured with respect to both process and content-based activity with dramatic implications for the operation of advisory systems.

**Partisan Advisors as Formulation Participants**

The second principal aim of this study was to explore if, how, and with what consequence partisan advisors were meaningful participants in policy formulation. Based on extant studies of political appointees and policy theory this dissertation elaborated a new schema to model and analyze partisan advisors formulation along multiple categories. The evidence from the cases examined provides new insights about formulation participation and its impact. Principally, that (a) the policy literature elides important procedural aspects of partisan advisors formulation activity; (b) partisan advisors substantive and procedural formulation activity extends beyond activities tied to determinations of political feasibility; and, (c) the instrumentation and actors with which partisan advisors undertook moving and shaping were case specific.

**Process Dimensions of Partisan Advisors Formulation Activity**

As we have seen, procedural formulation activity was a key means by which partisan advisors participated in formulation. When plotted together the moving activities from the cases spans multiple formulation sub-stages and across partisan-political and administrative-technical dimensions. Given their 'whole of government' responsibility, the finding that horizontal administrative-technical moving was restricted to first ministers’ office partisan advisors is unsurprising. Such actors have long been (implicitly) suggested to have such procedural types of responsibilities (Savoie, 1999; White, 2005; White, 2001). However, beyond such an obvious general observation the findings herein that such activity was found to span all formulation sub-stages is important. As emphasized in chapter 5 partisan advisors at the centre were key participants, in concert with senior officials, in appraisal sub-stage activity involving the determination of the initial policy parameters during formulation, as well as active process managers as policy was formalized through formal public service channel (e.g. cabinet). First ministers’ office partisan advisors were also key actors in relation to ‘back-end’ horizontal administrative-technical formulation activity, notably in
consolidation sub-phase activity. First ministers’ office partisan advisors almost exclusively arbitrated contentious policy issues, conflicts between competing policy priorities, and sequencing decisions. This was a key means by which they wielded additional influence in relation to policy formulation. Additionally, the moving activities of these actors in all cases, and categories used to plot them, were heavily associated with formal public service policy making instruments. In all three cases these actors are thus pivotal to formal government wide process management and coordination, which is particularly germane to contemporary governance practices given the emphasis accorded to collaboration and horizontality in policy making (Bakvis & Julliet, 2004; Dahlström, Peters, & Pierre, 2011; Peach, 2004).

A subsidiary finding was that this horizontal moving was a product of partisan advisors leveraging other policy subsystem actors’ resources and capabilities. However differences were documented in how this was undertaken. The federal case was marked by a clear preference for almost exclusive central agency interactions, whereas the two sub-national cases included greater mixes of central agencies and DM based interactions. Regardless of their approach this finding weakens the argument that partisan advisors are usurping or overtaking public service actors as the dominant force in formulation. Their participation in horizontal process dimensions of formulation was found to be in all cases highly dependent on public servants. Similar leveraging was reported in relation to horizontal partisan-political moving with the ‘layered’ configuration at both PMO and ministerial offices. In that case this facilitated a greater intensity and frequency of horizontal partisan-political moving. While such findings support that in short, configuration matters, as detailed in chapter 7 it had limited explanatory purchase. Similar ministerial office configurations in the sub-national yielded dramatically uneven patterns of formulation activity. Moreover, the B.C. and federal cases demonstrate that horizontal partisan-political moving can also vary in orientation towards endogenous or exogenous sources. While both included a stakeholder component the federal case was characterized by a much stronger and institutionalized pattern of horizontality between ministers’ offices and the PMO. Such differences may lead to variation in dialogic activities as well as the ‘open’ or ‘closed’ nature of policy subsystems (Howlett et al., 2009; Howlett & Ramesh 1998). These differences also suggest different propensities or needs for coordination amongst partisan advisors themselves. Finally, as per Table
22 below, the federal and B.C. cases involved ministerial partisan advisors horizontal partisan-political activities extending beyond the formulation sub-phase. This suggests that partisan-political moving is not confined to this sub-stage, but rather can be pivotal to any one or combination of formulation sub-stages.

**Table 22. Partisan Advisors Procedural Formulation Activity by Case, Formulation Sub-stages, and Institutional Location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Procedural (Nature of Activity)</th>
<th>Federal, B.C., and N.B. Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
<td>(FMO = First Ministers' Office Partisan Advisors; MO= Ministers Office Partisan Advisors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative-Technical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Type A - Horizontal Partisan-Political Moving</td>
<td>Type B - Horizontal Administrative-Technical Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal, B.C., N.B. FMOs: All sub phases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal MO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type B - Horizontal Administrative-Technical Moving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal, B.C., N.B. FMOs: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Type C - Vertical Partisan-Political Moving</td>
<td>Type D - Vertical Administrative-Technical Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. FMO: Appraisal, dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• N.B. FMO: Appraisal, dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fed, B.C. MOs: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• N.B. FMO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• N.B. MO: Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

* This horizontal procedural formulation activity was reported as oriented primarily to exogenous stakeholders and to a much lesser degree other ministerial or first minister’s office partisan advisors.
The combination of a layered configuration and a policy specific ‘policy shop’ within the PMO fuelled a broader array of verticality along all fronts and formulation sub-stages. As detailed in chapter 5 it resulted in considerable vertical partisan-political moving amongst PMO staff. It also served to increase vertical administrative-technical moving as junior and senior PMO staff coordinated and managed the formulation activity they engaged in with PCO counterparts. The best example of this was the repeated references to vertical intra-PMO administrative-technical policy work in relation to cabinet committee work and MCs as they worked their way through the PMO-PCO nexus. This type of moving was much less commonly reported in the two sub-national cases that had no such policy shops and operated with only two partisan advisors. Respondents did point to some limited vertical moving at the appraisal and dialogue sub-stages in both cases, with additional vertical partisan-political moving produced by the sharper distinction between ‘policy’ and ‘politics’ in operation in the New Brunswick case.

Across all three cases at the ministers’ office level vertical moving was reported along multiple formulation sub-stages. A wide spectrum of political and administrative respondents described signal checking with officials during formulation, monitoring departmental policy formulation activity, or processes management and sequencing. Vertical moving at the dialogue sub-stage, along both administrative-technical and partisan-political categories, was the only formulation activity consistently reported in all three cases. It was not only described by partisan advisors but also explicitly described by deputies and ministers who noted it as a key aspect of partisan advisors formulation contribution. As detailed in chapter 7 the B.C. and federal cases included a broader range of moving along a greater number of sub-stages. The layered configuration in the federal case again produced greater opportunity for partisan-political and administrative-technical moving at various sub-stages. This was in part due to a greater specialisation in policy functions among partisan advisors given the more specific division of labour in that case. Finally, moving was more pronounced in the federal case given the unique opportunity for ministerial partisan advisors to actively participate through formal public service policy making instruments. In the B.C. case, moving was a much more informal and dialectical process. The procedural moving documented at various sub-stages and dimensions in these cases is argued to be evidence of the increased specialization that sets apart partisan advisors from broader ‘political staffs’. That is, increased vertical and
horizontal specialization among partisan advisors themselves, as well as with other subsystem actors, supports the notion that partisan advisors are increasingly engaged in specialized and sophisticated policy work (Laegried & Verhoest, 2010; Bouckaert et al., 2010).

‘Shaping’: Beyond Determinations of Political Feasibility

Partisan advisors shaping certainly demonstrated close attention to partisan-political factors and considerations. It was however described in many instances as extending beyond determinations of political feasibility. That is, shaping activity in the all cases was described at multiple sub-stages and along partisan-political and administrative-technical categories. First ministers’ dominance on the horizontal dimension also included such actors being the only partisan advisors to report horizontal administrative-technical shaping. This was reported as spanning the formulation sub-stages with ‘front-end’ instruments such as mandate letters and budgets being key shaping instruments. Across the cases respondents noted that first ministers' offices were essential to appraisal sub-stage formulation activity, including providing initial policy direction and setting parameters in concert with officials. As explored in chapter 5 shaping was an ongoing activity throughout formulation particularly in relation to cabinet and treasury/management board submissions and other policy items requiring attention. First ministers’ office partisan advisors reported decidedly different preferences in relation to the instruments by which they sought to shape policy. Notably the greater emphasis on the development and use of mandate letters in the federal case compared to limited involvement in ‘service plans’ in the B.C. case. Additionally, as we have seen, there were decidedly different orientations to their shaping activity as either central agency focused (federal case) or more deputy minister focused (N.B.).

Vertical specialisation is meant to denote “differentiation of responsibility on hierarchical levels describing how political and administrative tasks and authority are allocated between forms and affiliations” (Bezes et al., 2013:4). Horizontal specialization implies “how tasks and authorities are allocated between organizations at the same hierarchical level, for example between ministerial areas” (Bezes et al., 2013:4).
Horizontal administrative-technical shaping was also described as ongoing and undertaken at all of the sub-stages involving for example: (in)formal consultations with officials consisting of advancing recommendations, refinement of policy options being considered, contestation or challenge functions based on knowledge of related or pending policy initiatives, scrutinizing the internal logic, consistency, or less frequently technical merits of any given policy being developed. The federal case included additional horizontal administrative-technical formulation flowing from bi-directional shaping activities between first minister and ministers’ office partisan advisors throughout formulation. This was largely described as involving similar activities as delineated above. For example: both sets of actors jointly discussing cabinet submissions being drafted, departmental policy recommendations, potential policy initiatives, or using their counterparts to provide second opinions for proposed policy in various stages of development.

Divisions of labour within first ministers’ offices were again partially responsible for variance in degree, intensity, and type of vertical shaping in the three cases. The hierarchical structure of the PMO policy shop for example necessitated greater intra-PMO administrative-technical policy shaping. Junior and senior levels of partisan advisors reported engaging (at level) with PCO officials, working with PMO policy shop colleagues on content aspects and ‘nuts and bolts’ of MCs, and various cabinet and cabinet committee items and policy documents. Both sub-national cases were found to have much less intensive overall verticality in their shaping in part explained by their respective divisions of labour. In New Brunswick’s case the agreed upon political/policy division of labour between Chief and Principal Secretary resulted in some verticality in shaping. This stemmed from determination of who tackled what items and engaging in collaborative work in the 20% of policy situations where their purviews overlapped. The B.C. case had no principal secretary only a deputy chief of staff (policy coordination and issues management) but interviews widely support the suggestion of a near monopoly of policy formulation activity at the first minister’s office by then chief of staff Martyn Brown.

Federally, the more muscular partisan political machinery in place at the ministerial office level fostered greater vertical partisan-political shaping within ministers’ offices. Chapter 7 detailed at length how the specialization within the ministerial policy
shops resulted in variance in how, with whom, and when various partisan advisors engaged in shaping.

**Table 23. Partisan Advisors Substantive ‘Shaping’ Formulation Activity by Case, Institutional Location, and Formulation Sub-stages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Substantive (Nature of Activity)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partisan-Political</td>
<td>Administrative-Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal</strong></td>
<td>Type I - Partisan-Political Horizontal Shaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal, B.C., and N.B. FMOs: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal MO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation²⁶⁶</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type II - Administrative-Technical Horizontal Shaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal, B.C., and N.B. FMOs: At all sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vertical</strong></td>
<td>Type III - Partisan-Political Vertical Shaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: At all sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. FMO: Appraisal, dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• N.B. FMO: Appraisal, dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fed MO: All sub-stages:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type IV - Administrative-Technical Vertical Shaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal FMO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Federal MO: All sub-stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B.C. MO: Appraisal, dialogue, formulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

The B.C. case also included some vertical partisan-political shaping which was most commonly reported at the formulation sub-stage, but also cited in the context of appraisal and dialogue sub-stage activity. As with their federal counterparts, this

²⁶⁶ Ministerial office level partisan advisors in B.C. describe their horizontal partisan-political formulation activity in the context of stakeholder interactions and less as interactions with other partisan advisors.
involved providing the minister’s direction at the ‘front-end’ appraisal sub-phase of policy making to ensure that politically suitable options were generated for considerations. It was also reported to involve external stakeholders at the appraisal and dialogue sub-phases.

A key finding emanating from interviews was that irrespective of location or case, partisan advisors characterized partisan-political shaping in essentially similar terms. It was described as: a) involving the translation of partisan-political policy positions into concrete policies and programs; b) the adjudication of policy recommendations from the public service to ensure consistency with previously articulated policy positions and commitments; and c) the identification of partisan-political risks/benefits for elected officials. The cases all abounded with references to ‘translation’, ‘alignment’, and ‘consistency’. This activity was also not confined to the formulation sub-stage, but was also found to span various other sub-phases. This is an important finding for two related reasons. First, it suggests that partisan advisors in these cases approached partisan-political formulation tasks in similar ways. Secondly, it underscores that partisan political shaping can occur beyond the formulation sub-stage at all formulation sub-stages. How policy is initially framed, how and from whom data collected, who is involved in dialogue sub-stage activity and the nature of the input they provide, what options are excluded, all have partisan-political considerations. As one N.B. first minister’s office respondent put it, constant vigilance throughout formulation is required to ensure that any given policy is not ‘lost in translation’. The various shaping activities documented in this study provide evidence of a unique form of ‘expertise’ provided by partisan advisors which supplements and complements other forms of ‘expertise’ (Page, 2010; Head, 2008). This further supports the argument of an evolution towards greater specialization in partisan advisors formulation activities.
Partisan Advisors Policy Activity: Implications for Complementarity, Policy Success, and New Political Governance

Complementarity: Towards a ‘Stylistic’ Approach?

Svara’s (2006) complementarity model was used to anchor this study’s examination of partisan advisors. The approach understands political-administrative relations as involving distinct and overlapping activities undertaken by both sets of actors arrayed by (1) the level of control of administrators by elected officials; and, (2) the degree of distance and differentiation between elected officials and administrators. The model is useful in that it offers a framework by which to reconcile the ongoing tension in governance between political control and bureaucratic independence. This study has argued that the institutionalization of partisan advisors compels a review of the model. Not only in relation to assessments of if partisan advisors foster or impede complementarity on one or both of its dimensions - but for the greater specificity it can provide in understanding how they may do so. Table 24 below summarizes the policy activities detailed in the previous chapters and their corresponding implications for complementarity.

It underscores how the differentiated patterns of moving, shaping, buffering, and bridging documented in the three cases impacted complementarity. The chapters in this study have examined the particular findings in greater detail. Taken together however, the findings are revealing in that they point to various potential combinations of partisan advisors policy work, and corresponding impacts on complementarity. These can usefully be thought of as mixes or ‘bundles’ of partisan advisory and formulation activity. These mixes could be deployed based on particular needs, governance contexts, or available resources in any given jurisdiction or policy sector. For example, partisan advisors could be utilized strictly for advisory or formulation capacities or combinations thereof along any number of the dimensions outlined in this study. As we have seen, and Table 24 summarizes, the three cases demonstrated significant differences in the formulation and advisory activities partisan advisors undertook.
Table 24. **Partisan Advisors Policy Activity and Complementarity by Case, Institutional Location, and Frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementarity Dimension</th>
<th>Partisan Advisor Policy Activity And Impact on Complementarity (FMO = First Ministers' Office, MO = Ministerial Office; frequency H= High, M= Moderate, L= Low)</th>
<th>Fed. B.C. N.B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source: Author.</td>
<td>Fed. FMO/ MO</td>
<td>B.C. FMO/ MO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buffering</strong></td>
<td>Provision of alternative policy advice H/H</td>
<td>H/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging</strong></td>
<td>Access to/ integration of public service policy advice for minister H/H</td>
<td>H/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to/ integration of variously located partisan-political policy advice M/ H</td>
<td>M/ M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to/ integration of exogenous sources of policy advice M/H</td>
<td>M/ H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Control</strong></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political policy process management H/H</td>
<td>L/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal intra-ministerial partisan-political policy process management H/H</td>
<td>L/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moving</strong></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial administrative-technical policy process management H/H</td>
<td>M/ M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal intra-ministerial administrative-technical policy process management H/L</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shaping</strong></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial administrative-technical content based alignment activity H/H</td>
<td>L/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal intra-ministerial administrative-technical content based alignment activity H/L</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vertical intra-ministerial partisan-political content based alignment activity H/H</td>
<td>H/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal intra-ministerial partisan-political policy content based alignment activity H/H</td>
<td>H/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation/ Distancing of political and administrative actors</strong></td>
<td>Insulating non-partisan public servants from partisan-political policy advice H/H</td>
<td>M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buffering</strong></td>
<td>Provide access (for officials) to ministerial preferences related to policy advice H/H</td>
<td>H/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging</strong></td>
<td>Gatekeeping related policy advice M/H</td>
<td>M/H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moving</strong></td>
<td>Distancing of officials from partisan-political process based policy activity H/H</td>
<td>H/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shaping</strong></td>
<td>Distancing officials from content based partisan-political policy activity H/H</td>
<td>H/H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.
Conceiving the policy activities of partisan advisors’ as ‘mixes’ is a useful analytical tool to facilitate comparative examinations of their participation in core executives, and the implications they raise for governance arrangements among elites. However, this study identified structural and behavioural variables beyond the policy activities of partisan advisors that impacted the type and method by which they engaged in policy work, and by extension, complementarity. These were: the configuration of partisan advisors, their institutional location, the availability and use of policy instruments, and ministerial preferences related to partisan advisory use.

Institutional location has long been a variable of keen interest to those studying policy advisory systems and the activity of political appointees (Halligan, 1995; Savoie, 1999; Aucoin, 2010; Dahlström et al., 2011b). This study confirmed institutional location was also salient to how partisan advisors were able to impact complementarity. The clearest example was in the greater ability of first ministers’ office partisan advisors to leverage their ‘central’ location for increased political control. In all three cases their location at the centre facilitated additional access to central agencies and DMs, strategic policy resources (e.g. mandate letters and cabinet planning processes) and cabinet machinery. All of which provided first ministers’ office partisan advisors with unique additional channels by which to seek increased political control. Another factor was how partisan advisors were configured. This study has repeatedly noted how the ‘layered’ federal configuration produced discernable differences from the single-tier configuration in place at the two sub-national cases examined. The specialized policy shops at the PMO and ministerial levels provided dedicated resources and much greater capacity for federal partisan advisors to engage in policy work and impact complementarity.

Behavioural factors such as preferences in instrument use were also found to be important determinants in relation to how partisan advisors were or were not able to impact complementarity. Some notable examples were the federal written partisan-political advisory system, differences in participation in formal public service policy making mechanisms (e.g. MC development), and varied use of mandate letters by partisan advisors at the centre. Finally, this study confirmed the longstanding assumption that partisan advisors’ policy activity is in part contingent on ministerial/first ministers’ office preferences (Aucoin, 2010; Doern, 1971; Halligan, 1995, p.162). The cases in this study demonstrated clear differences in ministerial expectations and use of
their partisan advisors as policy workers. The clearest contrast emerging in the much greater policy functions expected of ministerial partisan advisors in the federal case compared to those in New Brunswick.

The contention here is that these behavioural (activity mixes, instrument preferences, ministerial expectations) and structural factors (configuration and institutional location) combine to produce distinct ‘complementarity styles’. The concept of ‘styles’ has been applied to a host of comparative public administration studies examining policy and governance (Howlett and Lindquist, 2004; Richardson, Gustafsson and Grant, 1982), public sector reform (Howlett, 2003; Peled, 2002; Richardson, Gordon, & Kimber, 1978) and Canadian ‘executive styles’ (Bernier et al., 2005). In the latter case the notion of styles was further specified through examination of changes in so-called ‘political-administrative styles’. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation these are “a more or less consistent and long-term set of institutionalized patterns of relationships, norms, and procedures existing between the different arms or branches of government” (Howlett, 2003; Howlett et al., 2005). While appointed political staff have been implicitly recognized in the executive styles literature they have not been explicitly or systematically assessed (White, 2005, p.157). Cooper & Marier (2012) have attempted to theoretically address this lacuna. They argue that executive styles can be thought of as a continuum spanning from a ‘collaborative style’ to a ‘politicized style’ (See Table 25 below). Positing that an increased use of ‘political appointees’ in policy making results in a shift from collaborative to a ‘politicized executive style’.

**Table 25. Collaborative and Politicized Executive Style Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Input of career civil servants</th>
<th>Input of Political appointees</th>
<th>Input of external actors</th>
<th>Relationship between politicians and career civil servants</th>
<th>Membership of centralized bodies</th>
<th>Turnover of Civil Service after elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Executive</strong></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Politicians and career civil servants</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politicized Executive</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Confliction or minimal</td>
<td>Politicians and political appointees</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reproduced from Cooper and Marier, 2012.
Their main argument is that political appointees reduce or eliminate the public service’s input into policy making. The approach is useful in that it links the use of ‘political appointees’ to policy outcomes and includes them as a stylistic variable for the organization and operation of executives. However, the authors do not specify how or what kinds of policy activities political appointees engage in. Instead, the authors deploy the proactive/reactive differentiation developed in the policy styles literature\textsuperscript{67}. They suggest that political appointees’ are generally short-term and reactive in policy orientation resulting in politicized (and less favourable) policy outcomes. Further, while rejecting a dichotomistic political-administrative approach, the authors implicitly create one by positioning political appointees and senior civil servant policy making ‘inputs’ as mutually exclusive. In their model participation by political appointees automatically results in politicization thus providing a binary scenario of extremes. As such, they do not recognize or allow for situation in which political appointees and public servants can be understood as simultaneously engaging in ‘high’ degrees of policy input.

Combining complementarity’s focus on the existence of overlapping and discreet activities with the policy styles literature facilitates the elaboration of an alternative approach. A first step towards its development can be achieved by grouping the aforementioned institutional and behavioural components along with their potential permutations (see Table 26 below). This provides a general taxonomy of potential configurations from which particular cases may be evaluated against. While these five variables and their multiple permutations present a large number of potential combinations, applying the second initial spectrum developed in the policy styles literature - consensus versus imposition - helps provide added conceptual clarity. As set out by Richardson, Gustophson, and Grant (1982), and later used by others (Boven’s et al., 2001), policy styles were also designed to examined the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis other social actors on a spectrum of imposition to consensus. That is, in relation to any given state’s ability to impose its policies on social actors. This spectrum

\textsuperscript{67} See Richardson, Gustophson, and Grant (1982), Boven’s et al., (2001) the spectrum is used to characterize a governments approach to problem solving.
can, with slight modification, provide a more theoretically and empirically useful lens by which to understand the use of partisan advisors. Not only as a stylistic component of the executive, but also with respect to their potential impact on complementarity among political and administrative elites. On a fundamental level it more closely aligns with the theoretical scholarship, including complementarity, emphasizing the importance of the control-autonomy dimension in elite governance arrangements (Savoie, 2004; Aucoin, 2010; Halligan, 1995; Svara, 2006a).

**Table 26. Partisan Advisors and ‘Complementarity ‘Styles’: Components, Factors, and Options**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Potential options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Configuration Single or Layered at first ministers’ and/or ministers’ offices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional location of partisan advisors’ policy activity</td>
<td>First minister’s office centric, ministers’ offices, mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Policy activity undertaken Advisory, formulation, or mix</td>
<td>Process, substance, or mix Partisan-political, administrative-technical, or mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ministerial preferences Direct, mediated, or mixed ministerial relations with public service For partisan advisory activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrument availability/ preference Formal, informal, or mix</td>
<td>Front-end, ongoing, or mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

The contention here is that as governments move along the spectrum from consensus to imposition modes of policy making, on an aggregate or policy specific level, they will require greater political control and thus deploy partisan advisors in more complex structural and/or behavioural configurations. Their ability to do so will, as it did in the cases examined herein, likely depend on several factors including: the availability of resources, overarching institutional and normative arrangements that have traditionally characterized the operation of the political arm of government, political-administrative arrangements, and the acceptable degree of public service autonomy for
both sets of elites. The question mark at the end of this section’s heading was intentional. The paucity of empirical research using the complementarity approach in general, and particularly vis-à-vis core executive actors and political appointees specifically, limit the ability to generate a basic set of complementarity styles from empirical findings. The cases examined in this study point to clear differences along the five structural and behavioural dimensions outlined above. This suggests differences in basic ‘imposition’ or ‘consensus’ based complementarity styles. How partisan advisors are configured within these or other styles is left as an empirical question to be addressed through rigorous and detailed casestudies.

**Partisan Advisors and Policy ‘Success’?**

Implicit in the rationale of the institutionalization of partisan advisors was the logic that they may serve as a means to improve governance. That is, if deployed properly such actors could increase ministerial involvement in policy making, increase advisory capacity for ministers, ensure closer alignment of policy outcomes with democratic mandates, and prevent ministerial ‘overload’ (Savoie, 1983; White, 2005; Prasser, 2006b; Tellier, 1968). Political appointees as a broader category of policy actors have been examined as potential mechanisms to drive improvements in executive management performance and management competence (Gilmour and Lewis, 2006; Lewis, 2007; Kim, 2009). However, comparable study of appointed partisan advisors as *policy workers* in Westminster systems is lacking (see Eichbaum & Shaw 2007; Gruhn & Slate, 2012). This study used a simplified version of McConnell’s policy ‘success’ framework (2010a, 2010b) to consider how partisan advisors may contribute to ‘successful’ policy on political, programmatic, and process levels. Table 27 below summarizes the findings detailed in this study. It suggests that while no panacea, partisan advisors can be effective resources for political and administrative actors in facilitating policy ‘success’ on two of three levels.

The moving and bridging documented in this study point to potential for partisan advisors to strengthen process based ‘success’. For example, by broadening available sources of policy advice for ministers, increasing access to advisory input from stakeholders, facilitating increased access or information exchange within the political-administrative nexus, and strengthening coordination and process management.
Additional process based activity such as ‘signal-checking’ may yield earlier identification of potential conflicts, challenges, or omissions in formulation. This may serve to foster a ‘no surprises environment’ and avoidance of so-called process based ‘cross threading’ between political or administrative actors. Further, partisan advisors can be instruments to reduce so-called ‘ministerial overload’ (Savoie, 1999; Peters, 2001; Foster, 1999; Tiernan, 2006) by tending to delegated functions in policy development or through gatekeeping of stakeholders and prioritization of policy imperatives. Additional horizontal administrative-technical moving undertaken by first ministers’ offices as reported in chapter 5 offer clear benefits related to securing the requisite coordination and ‘coherence’ for successful governance (Dahlström et al., 2011a; May et al., 2006; Parsons, 2004; Peters, 2004; Pierre, 2000; Weller & Bakvis, 1997).

The elaboration of the term partisan-political policy advice in this dissertation was not intended as an exercise in esoteric academic nomenclature development. Rather, it was advanced to capture and analytical explore partisan advisors contributions to the ‘political’ aspects of formulation and advisory activity (Majone, 1975; Meltzer, 1972; May, 1981; Webber, 1986; Head, 2008). A central argument of this study is that as appointed political actors, partisan advisors are privileged because of their institutional location in proximity to ministers, but also due to their ability to engage in explicitly political activities to support their ministers as elected officials. Such activity has a direct bearing on political dimensions of policy ‘success’ through avoidance of bureaucratic capture, improved credit claiming, and blame avoidance and legitimation with citizens and stakeholders (Hood, 2002b; Hood & Lodge, 2006; Wallner, 2008; Peters, 2001). It may also facilitate securing electoral/reputational benefit for political actors through advancing stated political direction, objectives, or commitments; or increased avoidance of political traps or negative political consequences (Hood, 2002b; Weaver, 1986). The evidence presented in this study certainly documents partisan advisors actively ensuring effective ‘translation’ of stated policy objectives and commitments into concrete policy outcome.

Moreover, as was noted in the federal case explicit partisan-political policy advice was provided formally through a written briefing system. Further, the bridging documented in the federal and B.C. cases underscores the function partisan advisors can play related to the integration of variously located sources of partisan-political policy advice. Partisan-political bridging among partisan advisors themselves or with
stakeholders can be an important means to secure political policy ‘success’. It offers a venue for the consolidation of policy option selection, and opportunities to identify support or opposition on a partisan-political level in relation to variously sourced policy advice.

Table 27. Partisan Advisors Policy Activity and Policy ‘Success’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Policy ‘Success’</th>
<th>Partisan Advisory Activity and Potential for Policy ‘Success’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Increasing the ‘non-partisan’ status of public service policy advisory activity through ‘insulation’ of public servants from partisan process based activity (e.g. Partisan-political policy advisory system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Improved determination of political feasibility/analysis of potential partisan-political consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance of attempts to solve ‘wicked’ problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

Moving and shaping also lend themselves to fostering policy ‘success’ on a political level through fostering greater alignment of government policy with stated political intentions (May et al., 2006; Parsons, 2004; Weller & Bakvis, 1997). Substantively, partisan advisors provide added partisan-political capacity for ministers in relation to content-based determinations of political feasibility. As noted throughout this study the principle function of partisan-political moving and shaping from the perspective
of ministers and partisan advisors was to ensure consistency with stated partisan-political objectives. Partisan advisors were also reported by ministers as often serving as an additional source by which potential substantive deficiencies could be identified, such as insufficient attention to partisan-political context. The three cases also point to the importance of partisan-political moving for coordination among political actors. It was particularly striking in the federal case where ministerial and first ministers’ offices worked collaboratively to ensure process and substance based partisan-political formulation were leveraged to their fullest. At a basic level, partisan advisors were also reported as a means by which additional ‘checks and balances’ could be implemented. As such, they represent actors who may supplement systemic capacity at the executive level to detect substantive or procedural deficiencies during policy development.

The evidence collected in this study reveals that while partisan advisors were active in the substantive (as buffers/shapers) and process (as brides/movers) aspects of policy they had little to no involvement in the programmatic or operational dimensions of policy. As such, Table 27 above does report any contributions such actors reported in relation to fostering policy ‘success’ on the ‘programmatic’ level. Universally, partisan advisors referenced, as Weber (1978) long ago noted, their respective public services as having far more expertise in translating policy into programs and services. This captures well the overlapping yet distinct nature of complementarity and partisan advisors roles therein. While their activities may be contribute to procedural or political success, programmatic success was found to largely remain the ambit of the public service.

**Partisan Advisors and the New Political Governance**

In itself, this study cannot claim to provide the required evidence to confirm or refute the validity of a shift towards the extremes theorized by the New Political Governance. The multiple hypotheses it represents extend far beyond the scope of this dissertation. The findings generated by this study do offer new evidence related to one facet of the NPG thesis, political staff. Albeit, only a defined subset of those actors partisan advisors. NPG argues appointed political staffs have become highly influential; so much so that they are argued to be displacing or dangerously politicizing core public service values and behaviour. Are partisan advisors influential? The findings of this study suggest they certainly are. However, that influence was found to rests purely in
their access to decision makers as a source of advice giving, not as decision makers themselves. Several partisan advisors went to great lengths to make clear their function was advisory and decision making was a ministerial prerogative.

Across the cases, ministers and their partisan advisors lauded public servants for their professionalism, expertise, and their non-partisan policy work. Partisan advisors in the vast majority of cases even explicitly acknowledged the public services non-partisan status, and how they and their offices consciously comported themselves in ways that avoided jeopardizing it. As referenced in the buffering and bridging chapters this typically involved restricting interactions with public servants to the senior ranks of the public service. Moreover, deputy ministers interviewed recognized and accepted that ministers need more explicit forms of partisan-political policy advice. Universally deputy ministers reported they were happy that ministers’ staff would perform such functions. The senior public service officials interviewed provided no indication that they were subject to partisan pressure that jeopardized their non-partisan professional public service values. More than one deputy noted that if they had a problem with a partisan advisor they had several venues by which to ensure functions were clarified and the proper comportment of ministers’ offices were well understood. For example, they could address it with their minister, central administrative agencies, or ask the first ministers’ offices to ensure proper guidelines were followed.

Throughout interviews with all categories of respondents it was clear that partisan advisors are not dominant sources of advice. Rather, they were confirmed as one of several within the larger advisory system. Partisan advisors in all three cases recognized they were not there to ‘out expert the experts’ as one advisor put it. They knew full well that their respective public services had the substantive and procedural technical expertise that was essential to sound policy development. Again, this is akin to complementarity. Both sets of political and administrative actors acknowledged and described instances of separate activity and values, but recognized that governance compels them to interact and overlap in some instances. Namely, the provision of advice to elected decision makers and policy development. While the public service may no longer have a monopoly in policy advice or formulation, it remains well placed and well resourced to offer essential policy advice to decision makers. Partisan advisors often referenced the fact that public servants expertise, resources, and mastery of
bureaucratic processes made them essential contributors to policy. That being said, the focus of this study on partisan advisors leaves much room for the analysis of the other categories of political staff that fell outside of the scope of this study. For example, those working in the communications, stakeholder relations, and issues management worlds of government may or may not provide evidence supporting the claims embodied by NPG (Giorno, 2009; Thomas, 2010).

Finally, scholars have already begun to critically examine and explore the NPG thesis (see Boston & Nethercote, 2012; Bakvis & Jarvis, 2012). These assessments have pointed to the lack of empirical evidence supporting some of its subsidiary claims, including the influence of political staffs. The evidence presented in this study supports recent assessments that influential partisan advisors have not fully displaced public servants or politicized them as set out in NPG. This study’s finding can be added to those such as king (2003) who finds “In Canada, Ireland and New Zealand there is no hard evidence of special advisers [partisan advisors] frustrating the work of permanent civil servants or compromising their authority” (King, 2003, p.15); and Boston (Boston & Nethercote, 2012, p.202) who argue:

To be sure, policy advice is more contestable than previously, but there is little evidence that political advisers have supplanted the core advisor role of the public service, systematically thwarted the access of departmental officials to ministers, or undermined important civil service norms.

Another point of contention that has heretofore escaped scrutiny in the NPG thesis is that, like the triangulated model described by Zussman, it pays insufficient attention to the function and potential influence of exogenous sources of policy advice. Neither adequately deals with (from locational, content-based, or activity-based perspectives) how advisory sources outside of government proper affect the operation of advisory systems or policy making. As this study has detailed, partisan advisors represent important linkages to exogenous sources of policy advice and use them to buffer and bridge within advisory systems. Whether modes of ‘governance’ are supplanting traditional public administration and management or not, understanding non-governmental actors’ contributions and influence in advisory systems and policy making is essential.
Study Limitations

This study has elaborated a conceptual framework, new theoretical propositions and empirical evidence. Its research design, methodology, and findings have limitations that require candid acknowledgement. First and foremost the adoption of a qualitative approach was an explicit choice to facilitate a detailed and in-depth understanding of the research subjects and cases being examined. This choice has the effect of limiting the generalizability of the study's findings. That is, the embedded qualitative case study approach of this dissertation limits the external validity of this study's findings. The various buffering, bridging, moving, and shaping activity of partisan advisors cannot be generalized to all partisan advisors in all cases. Rather, they can only be considered valid for the particular actors studied in these three cases. However, the conceptual and empirical findings offered by this study represent advances on existing theory, and provide new data, preliminary benchmarks, and metrics that can inform further theoretical and empirical work. The validity of the findings and the model developed in this dissertation are subject to improvement and refinement from additional study.

Secondly, this study did not interview every possible partisan advisor, minister, stakeholder, or public servant in each case. Following the established research designs of leading studies of partisan advisors and political elites (Maley, 2000; Savoie, 1999; Savoie, 2003a), this study drew a non-representative sample. The perceptions and descriptive accounts of respondents with respect to other actors not included in the field research are stated without judgement, and conveyed as they were provided, supported by direct quotations as much as possible. A final validity issue relates to the inherent conceptual validity of this study. The data collected was the product of interviews with human respondents. All efforts were made to strengthen the objective credibility of the study's data. The research design included triangulation involving the participation of ministers, deputies, and partisan advisors. Furthermore, the non/attributional nature of interviews as requested by interview subjects all serve to strengthen the study's validity.
Future Research

This study was principally exploratory and descriptive. It has by no means exhausted the research agenda that motivated it. Political dimensions of policy work, sources and configurations of policy advice, policy formulation and design, and political-administrative relations and governance arrangements are all ripe for further detailed analysis. Nor is this study the definitive statement on Canadian ‘political staff’. The modest aim of this dissertation was to offer an improved theoretical and empirical foundation upon which greater study of the formulation and advisory activity of partisan advisors could be undertaken. Additional Canadian and comparative study (Westminster and other) is needed to add to the generalizability of the preliminary findings herein, refine the theoretical propositions, and provide additional fine-grained analysis. A large research agenda remains including:

- Studies including a broader category of political staffs and/or examining other stages of policy-making. For example, the activity of political staffs charged with ‘issues’ or ‘stakeholder’ management, communications, and studies that examine other policy making stages such agenda setting and implementation are needed (Maley, 2000, 2011; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010a).
- Studies able to examine partisan advisors policy work by policy sector(s).
- Comparative quantitative survey based research similar to that undertaken by Eichbaum and Shaw (2007; 2008; 2011) as well as Howlett and Wellstead (2011) examining the daily policy work of political staff.
- Studies that apply network participatory approaches and explore and assess partisan advisors as subsystem actors within policy networks (Maley, 2011; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2011).
- Studies of partisan advisors that vary along the size of government to examine causal relationships between cabinet and/or public service size and political staffs policy work.
- Examinations of exogenous non-government actors experiences in dealing with political staffs in relation to policy making.
- Greater study of political staffs relationship to policy dynamics such as policy learning and change; and,
- Temporal studies that focus on the policy function of partisan advisors in relation to the electoral cycle or based on the length administrations have been in office.
Final Thoughts

It has been over forty years since Mallory (1967) and Tellier (1968) launched the normative debate on the purpose and utility of Canadian federal ministerial ‘exempt’ staff. The findings from this study document that, in most instances, partisan advisors are now active sources of policy advice and formulation participants. Suggesting a return to Mallory’s preferred state of affairs is unlikely. Unsurprisingly, as political appointees, partisan advisors were found to engage in policy activity through a demonstrably greater application of a ‘political lens’. This study has argued that greater attention needs to be placed on how such partisan-political contributions are understood as part of policy advice and formulation. ‘Partisan-political policy advice’ was advanced as an apt term to capture such policy advisory activity. However, to see partisan advisors simply as crass partisan-political agents is not supported by this study’s empirical findings. Such a position discounts the significance of partisan-political aspects of policy advisory and formulation activity, and omits such actors ‘administrative-technical’ policy activity. Most often, this later form of policy work was a result of partisan advisors interactions with non-partisan public servants and exogenous ‘stakeholders’. Partisan advisors policy activity was found to entail discreet partisan-political activity as well as overlapping administrative-technical forms of policy work. As such, it suggests that complementarity is indeed an effective prism through which to understand political-administrative relations. By almost all accounts, partisan advisors were characterized as a supplementary and complementary addition to the public service. To suggest partisan advisors have supplanted or usurped the public service’s policy advisory function or importance in formulation seems an exaggeration. However, this dissertation has clearly demonstrated that as buffers and bridges, and movers and shapers, Canadian partisan advisors are now one of many policy actors with currency in the policy process.
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Appendices
## Federal Exempt Staff by Department
(March 31, 2001 - March 31, 2011)

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Source: Adapted from a table provided to the author in correspondence with the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, October 24th, 2011 in response to request No. 31029. Figures include employees on leave without pay.
Appendix B.

Organization of B.C. Premier’s Office (2001)

Appendix C.

Organization of B.C. Premier’s Office (2011)

Appendix D.

B.C. Ministerial Staff by Department and Classification (1996-2011)

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Source: Provided to author November 8, 2011 by the B.C. Public Service Commission.