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CENTRE STAGE

Driving Better Policies from the Centre of Government

**33rd meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government
8-10 October 2014
Vienna, Austria**

This document presents the results of the 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government. Delegates are invited to provide comments or corrections by 31 October 2014.

This document is available in PDF format only.

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English - Or. English



CENTRE STAGE

Driving Better Policies from the
Centre of Government





The 'Centre of Government'(CoG) is the body that provides direct support and advice to the Head of Government and the Council of Ministers. The CoG meetings began in the 1980s, and were consolidated into an annual event in the 1990s. CoG constitutes a forum for informal discussion and remain one of the OECD's highest-level policy networks.

The meetings serve three main purposes:

- To review issues of how to make the centre of national government work more effectively;
- To achieve a more in-depth understanding of decision and policymaking systems in the host country.
- To work on broad governance issues fundamental to achieving economic and social public policy objectives.

The meetings are hosted each year by one of the members of the network.

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OECD work on Centres of Government

The Centre of Government is the body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to Heads of Government and the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet. From their traditional role of serving the executive from an administrative perspective, Centres of Government are now playing a more active role in policy development. The Centre in many countries now provides services that range from strategic planning to real-time policy advice and intelligence, and from leading major cross departmental policy initiatives to monitoring progress and outcomes. OECD work on Centres of Government explores how governments can adapt the institutions at the Centre in order to play this expanded and more outward-looking role.

This report is based on survey responses provided by delegates to the OECD Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government from 35 countries. It represents one of the first cross-national empirical assessments of Centres of Government today, summarising the data and providing some preliminary observations. The final report will integrate additional comments and updated information from countries.

The results of the OECD survey provide a unique knowledge base that countries can draw on to benchmark the performance and evolution of their own Centres of Government. The data will also be used to support OECD's research agenda on good governance as well as country-specific policy reviews.

OECD work on Centres of Government is undertaken by the OECD's Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, under the supervision of Mr. Rolf Alter (rolf.alter@oecd.org). The report was written by Mr. Andrew Davies (andrew.davies@oecd.org) with statistical support from Mr. Zoltan Mikolas. The OECD survey was managed by Ms. Andrea Uhrhammer (andrea.uhrhammer@oecd.org), who also provided editorial support along with Mr. Justin Kavanagh.



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Overview

This report focuses on the Centre of Government -- the support structure for the highest level of the executive branch of government. While it occupies centre stage in many respects, this institution has rarely been the subject of empirical examination. In spite of its prominent role in diverse parts of the policy process, the precise nature of the work of the Centre of Government is not well understood, though it invariably generates curiosity and a certain fascination. The Chancellery, Cabinet Office, Office of the President, *Presidencia*, White House Executive Office, Privy Council, *Casa Civil*, and so on are all prestigious entities in their respective administrations; yet, Centres of Government have often had the reputation of being, perhaps deliberately, impenetrable and detached.

The fact that international comparisons of Centres of Government are so rare is somewhat surprising, particularly in light of the potential “governance premium” that effective management of policy from the Centre can generate. The crisis has, however, helped to turn the spotlight onto the crucial role that the Centre plays in effective, decisive government. This report is the first comprehensive effort to reflect on this central element of the public governance system and to better understand the role and potential of the Centre of Government in supporting better policies. It responds to a growing demand visible in OECD countries but also visible in non-member countries, notably in Latin America and South East Asia. The report draws on information from a survey of 35 countries that explored, on the one hand, the structure, personnel and budget of Centres of Government, and, on the other, their functions, priorities and ways of working.

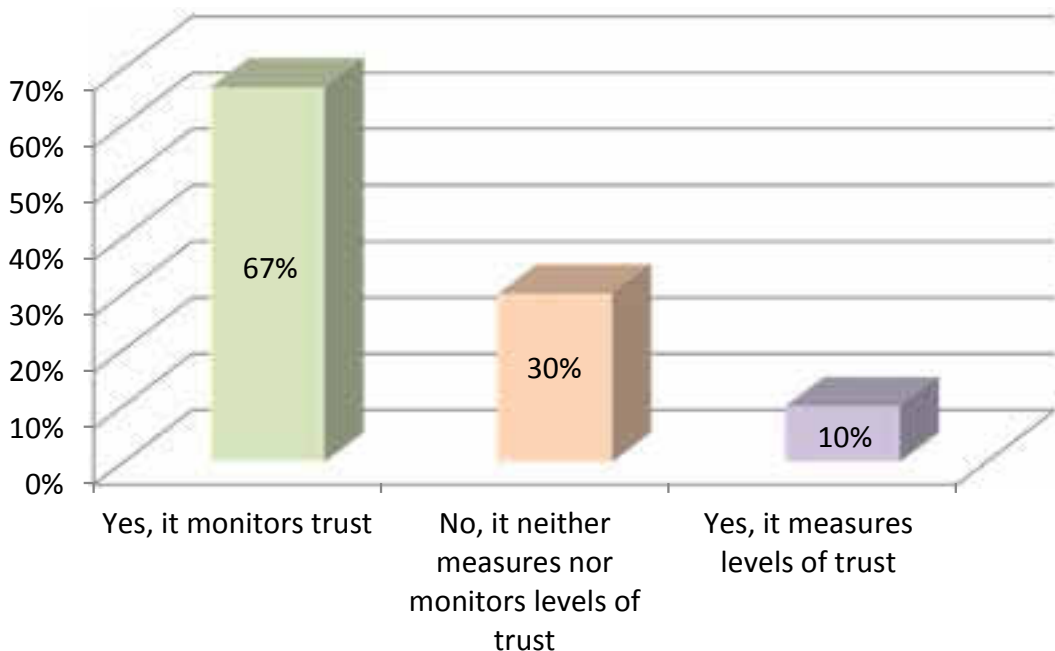
The role of the Centre of Government is closely linked to the role of the executive branch itself, i.e., to direct the resources of the State (financial, legal, regulatory, even military) to achieve a mission that reflects a political vision and responds to a mandate from citizens. But to meet these expectations, the executive – led by 20 or so politicians, of whom perhaps only half a dozen individuals are responsible for the major decisions -- needs a highly effective support structure in order to cope with the range of issues and complexity of modern government. This support structure is there to ensure that government decisions – made by politicians, often non-specialists, often working in conditions of extreme pressure – are not ad hoc, imprudent or inconsistent. Its objective is to promote evidence-based, strategic and consistent policies. The success of any government and the implementation of its key strategies and reforms depend on the Centre achieving this objective.

Despite differences among countries with regard to constitutional forms and administrative tradition, strong similarities emerge with respect to the functions that the Centre performs. These functions combine facilitating the decision-making process by government, and in particular by the Head of Government, with overseeing the quality of the policy cycle, from policy development to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

The overarching objective of the Centre is thus to ensure high-quality decision making by government and to align government actions. It does this in different formal and informal ways, ranging from structuring and informing the process by which the Head of Government takes decisions and issues instructions to maximising the effectiveness of the civil service machinery in implementing those instructions. The role of the Centre today is close to “full service”, extending well beyond the Cabinet meeting room or presidential office to the nitty gritty of policy delivery. It includes both formal functions, such as preparing the agenda and reviewing submissions to meetings of the government according to clearly defined procedures, as well as very informal activities that depend on an intimate understanding of and sensitivity to unwritten political cultures.

The context in which the Centre of Government plays this role is a challenging one. Currently, governments in OECD countries are trusted by less than half of their citizens. The figure fell dramatically during the crisis, from an already fairly low starting point. And trends in trust in government are closely monitored (including by the Centre of Government itself, see figure 1), not only an essential indicator of citizen satisfaction with the performance of the government but also as a guide to how easy or difficult it will be for the government to implement its programme. Governments have to deal with a problem of legitimacy, which can act as a brake on their ability to govern effectively. Rebuilding public trust in the capacity of government and in the political process is a major challenge for governments. The environment in which reforms are rolled out is thus often one of scepticism, resistance and opposition. The task of persuading and winning support is far more complicated than simply explaining the merits of a particular policy. The ability of a Head of Government to mobilise support and win over opponents depends not only on his or her personal qualities but also on the ability of the Centre of Government support structure to generate persuasive evidence and present persuasive arguments for diverse audiences.

Figure 1. Does the Centre monitor trust in Government?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The advice offered by the Centre of Government needs to be both analytically sound but also politically aware. Officials at the Centre are expected to master the ‘political economy of reform’ – how to expedite laws and other decisions through the legislative process as effectively as possible. Problems of poor co-ordination and slowness, present in most large organisations, can mean that the translation of a good decision into a positive outcome on the ground can take too long for citizens and business. In other cases, reforms that make up a central part of government strategy are implemented quickly in order to respect electoral promises, but involve such cultural shifts or fundamental changes that they provoke negative reactions and resistance. In both cases, the Centre of Government is involved in devising a strategy of persuasion, negotiation and compromise to shepherd key reforms through. And, as in all other aspects of its work, the Centre must do this in a way that balances effective governance with sensitivity to optimal degrees of centralisation.

Tests of this capacity to lead cross-government reform agendas have come thick and fast since the crisis. The dramatic restructuring of public services in many OECD countries has often been possible only because of strong leadership from the Centre. But other emerging issues such as ageing, competitiveness and climate change will also require similar coordination of agendas and mobilisation of commitment towards a shared goal. The climate change debate is rapidly moving to a point at which countries will need to make choices that go far beyond the remit of ministries of environment. Once this message gets through, a more whole-of-government approach to climate change mitigation will be necessary, and the convening and coordinating power of the Centre of Government is likely to prove a valuable asset.

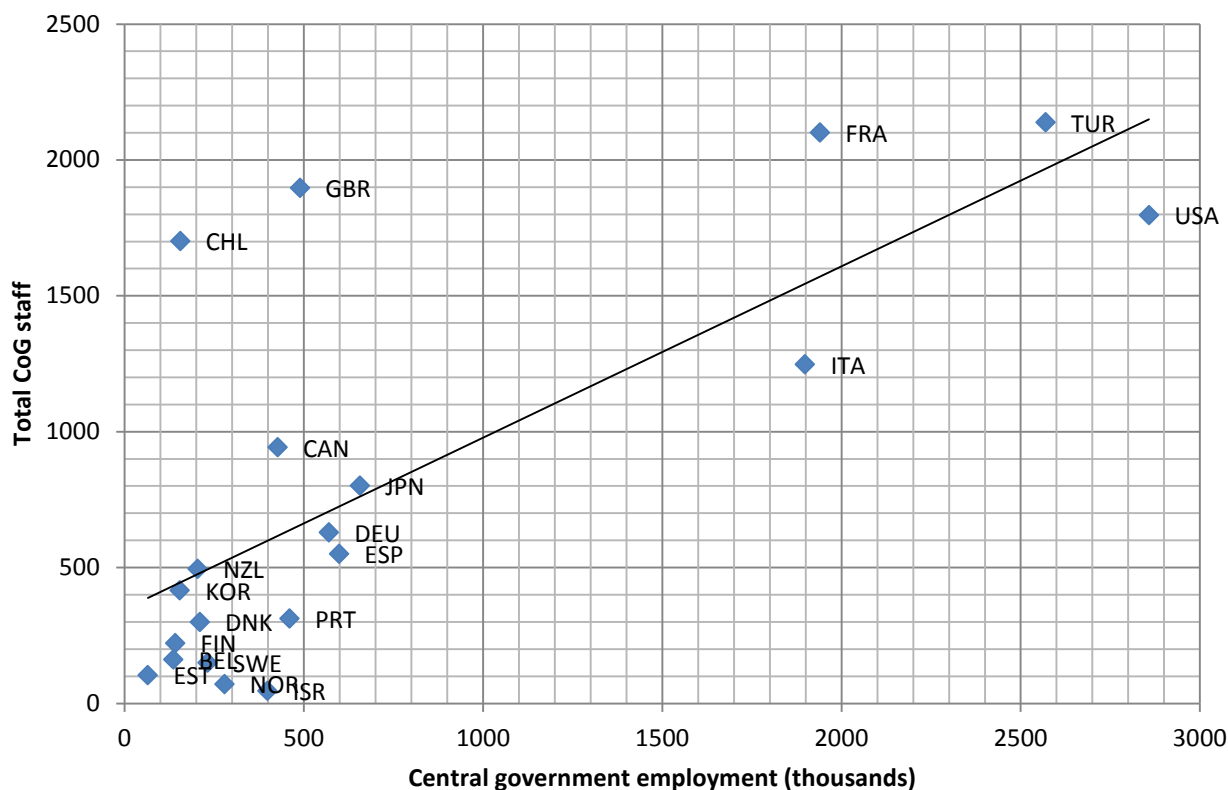
Government seems to be often characterised by crisis and emergency. Whether it is really the case or merely a perception that today’s societies are more exposed to shocks, the daily agendas of the Head of Government and senior ministers are frequently dominated by fire-fighting on both domestic and international fronts. If the Centre is to ensure that government decisions are not ad hoc or imprudent, it has to be a kind of intellectual “rapid reaction force”, able to respond and provide advice on any topic at short notice - knowing that the government will then take a decision that could have significant consequences. The President or Prime Minister is on the front line in these emergency situations, but the staff of the Centre of Government is not far behind the lines. The Centre needs to be able to bring together political facts, strategic interpretation, scenarios and policy options as well as a viable communications spin on any topic, and all as quickly as possible. This underlines the difference, or even the tension, between objectives and function or organisation. The structure of the Centre needs to be such that it can generate the service that the Head of Government needs to get the policy right, but that service is unlikely to come from one single “unit” (crisis management, strategy, and so on): it has to be distilled from all the resources at hand.

While the Head of Government’s time is dominated by current events, the Centre has a duty to try to maintain some coherence in the action of government. The initial shape of government policy is set out in its election manifesto, then this is adapted to political realities and changing economic and social circumstances once in office. Heads of Government are regularly asked about their vision for the country and need to demonstrate that they can look beyond a particular crisis, even if this and other short-term events monopolise his or her time in practice.

No Head of Government wants to hear that the country is like “a ship without a rudder,” Keeping a hold on the strategic direction of the government is a key task of the Centre. This direction needs to inform and “flavour” the actions of all line ministries. It also needs to be consistently communicated via the Head of Government to the public and to business. If this vision vacillates, then opposition leaders will quickly point out inconsistencies. Policy advisors at the Centre have to help shape the evolution of this vision in a way that demonstrates how today’s actions are consistent with it and contribute to it.

Given the broad scope of its activities, one of the first misconceptions about the Centre of Government probably concerns its size. Most people would probably tend to assume that it is both bigger and better resourced than it usually is. Despite playing a decisive role in key areas of public policy, Centres of Government in most countries are surprisingly small. They represent a tiny fraction of total government expenditure – an average of 0.045% across OECD countries – and typically employ less than 0.1% of central government employment or fewer than 40 staff per million inhabitants (see figure 2) . Total staff at the Centre of Government rarely exceed 1000, including both professional and support staff, except in the United States and larger unitary states (France Italy, Turkey, UK). In ten countries, there are fewer than 200 people working for the Centre of Government. It is essentially a small to medium-sized government agency. For example, the Cabinet Office in the UK has a similar number of staff to the International Development department and to the Meteorological Office. The size of the United States Executive Office of the President is comparable to that of the National Labour Relations Board.

Figure 2. Punching above its weight: the Centre of Government represents around 0.1% of central government employment



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris



The apparent disconnect between the Centre's broad responsibilities and its limited budget is at least partly explained by the fact that almost all resources and most formal powers lie elsewhere in the public administration, outside the Centre of Government. In most of its activities, the Centre is working with partner organisations that are much larger and that are responsible and accountable for most if not all spending on those activities. Nonetheless, even if it does not have direct control of expenditure or human resources, the Centre of Government is still expected to guide the direction of an organisation that manages up to 45% of national GDP and employs 20% of the labour force. From a narrow perspective, the Centre of Government has a staff of one thousand or so; from the broadest perspective (and assuming coherent government), it is managing a staff of tens or even hundreds of thousands.

This raises the important issue of leadership of the Centre itself. As mentioned above, the Centre now acts along a continuum from visionary thinking to rolling out strategies, using both formal and informal channels, while also engaging in short-term responses to day-to-day emergencies. Managing the very limited resources at the Centre and leveraging resources from elsewhere to fulfil these diverse responsibilities is a challenge that involves analytical, political and administrative skills. These skills are required at the apex of the support structure in the person who heads the Centre of government, but also need to be present throughout the system. The Centre of Government's success in mobilising and influencing larger, budget-holding departments across government depends to a large extent not on formal powers or structures – in these terms the Centre tends to be relatively weak – but on its capacity to lead and motivate.

Small though they are, Centres of Government are a cornerstone of governance systems in both developed and developing countries. They struggle to play this role in the face of numerous obstacles – institutional legacies, political discontinuity, bureaucratic inertias – but this report emphasises the trend towards experimentation and adaptation at the Centre. Given the anchoring role that the Centre plays within public administration, there is also an expectation that the Centre should be exemplary in the way it works – flexible, horizontal, cooperative and innovative. Further work can help identify international good practices to help government refine the operation of the Centre so that it become the source.

Key findings and Data

Centres of Government are surprisingly small given their prominent role...

- On average, the Centre of Government represents around 0.1% of central government employment.
- The Centre of Government's budget represents less than 0.05% of general government expenditure.

They include permanent components that ensure continuity and procedure, but their structures are characterised by adaptability to new priorities...

- Over the period from 2008-2012, the size and structure of the Centre of Government changed in over three-quarters of countries.
- While most countries reinforced the Centre and increased its budget, a significant minority opted to streamline the Centre by relocating non-core functions to other ministries.
- Secondments and temporary placements are increasingly used to bring in expertise and build in-house analytical capacity in line with political priorities.

Despite different organisational structures, the survey shows that most countries have common expectations and needs with respect to the role of the Centre...

- The top four priority tasks of the Centre of Government are:
 1. supporting decision-making by the Head of Government/Cabinet, which in almost all countries involves blending dual streams of political and non-partisan advice;
 2. policy coordination across government, which increasingly includes leading cross-departmental priority strategies;
 3. monitoring progress with policy reform, which means developing new mechanisms that emphasises outcomes rather than just tracking expenditures; and
 4. strategic planning, which is being redefined post-crisis to be more closely aligned with policy development and resource allocation.
- Other highly valued functions of the Centre include handling government communications and its media strategy, managing relations with the legislature and preparing and operationalising the Government Programme.
- While the Centre works closely with all line ministries, its most frequent partner is the Ministry of Finance.

The Centre is the architect of effective decision-making

- Around 15% of the Centre's resources are devoted to providing personalised policy advice and intelligence to the head of Government.
- In 27 out of 33 countries, the Cabinet is the principal channel for decision making by the Head of Government and in 90% of cases, the Centre of Government prepares and structures the material that forms the basis for government decisions.
- In 29 out of 33 countries, the Centre coordinates discussion and dispute resolution in advance of Cabinet meetings through pre-meeting briefing sessions with relevant senior ministry officials and uses these occasions to mediate differences of opinion.

The Centre is a key vehicle for driving priority policy initiatives

- Most countries (59%) reported that the number of cross-ministerial policy initiatives has grown since 2008, increasing the need for strong co-ordination.
- Many countries now use issue-specific teams and working groups to mobilise expertise and drive complex agendas in addition to their normal inter-ministerial committees.
- Recently this has included post-crisis public sector restructuring. In the future this could extend to other co-ordination-intensive themes such as climate change mitigation.
- The overwhelming majority of Centres of Government (27 out of 30) monitor the implementation of government policies by line ministries. A number now use delivery or implementation units to strengthen this function and provide support and advice to departments.

A more dynamic, outward-looking role poses challenges to the Centre's ability to lead and influence

- Nearly two thirds (62%) of the 29 respondents considered their influence over line ministries no more than moderate regarding co-ordination. Less than one-third (31%) felt that their influence was high.
- In half of OECD countries, the Centre is led by a minister-level political appointee and in the other by a senior civil servant. In countries where the head of the Centre of Government is a political appointee, he or she is normally replaced after an election, along with up to 50% of senior staff.

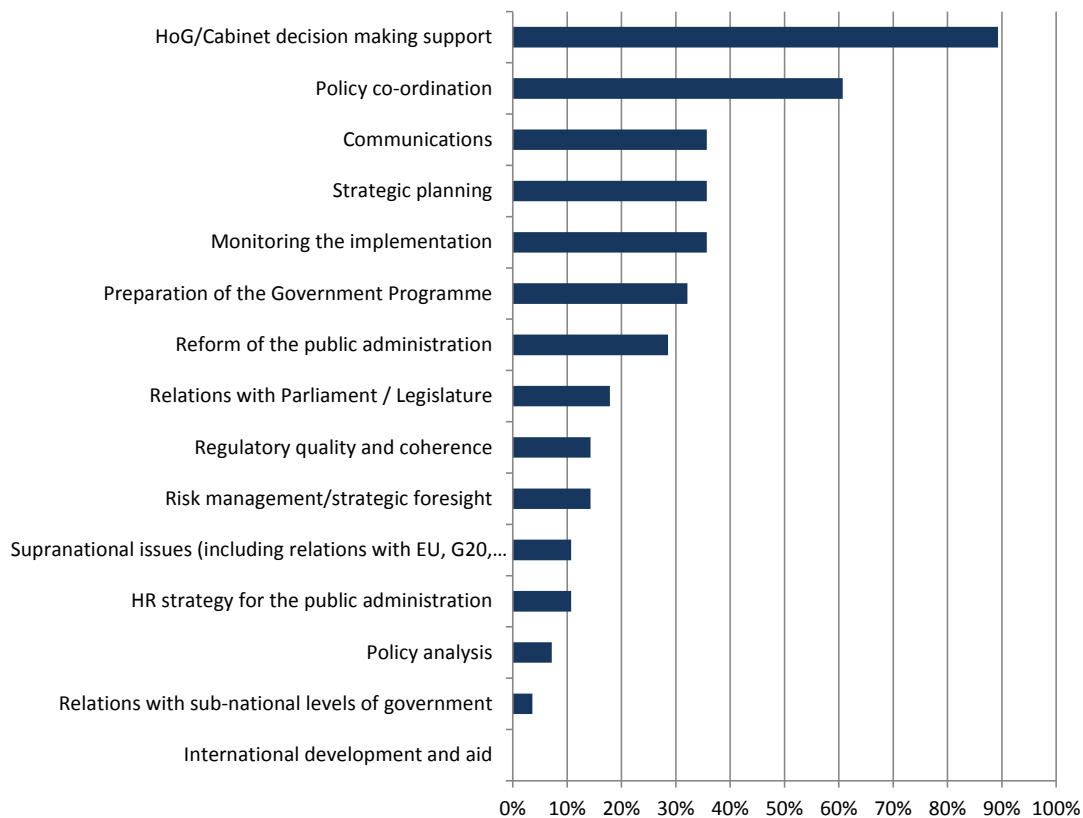
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Shared challenges, similar responses

What the Centre does, and what it doesn't do

Each country's Centre of Government is a product of diverse historical, cultural and political forces and has developed incrementally over time. Despite this heterogeneity, and notwithstanding a confusing array of institutional titles, the 2013 OECD Survey found that the vast majority of countries have a recognisable Centre of Government corresponding to "the administrative structure that serves the Executive (President or Prime Minister, and the Cabinet collectively)". Common needs and similar responses are visible across very diverse constitutional situations. In sum, Centres of Government are increasingly expected to combine their traditional role of serving the Head of Government and Cabinet from an administrative perspective with a more active role in policy development and implementation. The survey results (see figures 3 and 4 for an overview) confirm that the Centre in many countries now provides a full range of services from strategic planning and impartial policy advice to leading cross-departmental initiatives and monitoring progress and outcomes. A key conclusion of the survey is that Centre's functions are expanding, and that governments are therefore tending to look for organizational models that are adapted to these new expectations and demands.

Figure 3. Most important responsibilities of the Centre of Government
(percentage of countries identifying function as one of the top four tasks of the Centre)



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The survey asked countries to identify the top four functions of the Centre of Government (see figure 3). Two interlinked functions stand out as priorities for most Centres: (1) facilitating evidence-based decision-making for the Head of Government and/or Cabinet and (2) cross-government policy coordination. Other common high priority functions include monitoring implementation of government policy and strategic planning (all top-four priorities in around one-third of surveyed countries). These four priority functions will be discussed in more detail below.

As well as giving a clear signal about the priorities of the Centre of Government in OECD countries, the survey also highlights the remarkable breadth of the Centre's responsibilities. The Centre has a role to play as either the lead organisation or a partner in 12 of the 15 functions that were proposed (figure 4). Only international aid, public sector human resources and relations with supranational bodies are largely the remit of another organisation. In all of the functions in which it is active, the Centre can bring significant assets -- convening power, access to the chief executive level, political intelligence and analytical expertise, and many other things -- that can have a positive impact on outcomes.

Figure 4. What Centres of Government do and what they don't do

(Number of countries, 4-grade scale, sorted by values of "Among the top 4 responsibilities of CoG")

	Amongst the top 4 tasks	Primary task of the CoG	Shared with other bodies	Another body leads	
Preparation of Cabinet meetings	25	6	0	2	33
Policy coordination	17	9	7	0	33
Monitoring implementation	10	8	12	3	33
Communications	10	6	16	1	33
Strategic planning	9	11	11	2	33
Reform of the public administration	9	1	12	11	33
Preparation of the Government program	8	14	8	3	33
Relations with Parliament/legislature	6	11	15	0	32
Regulatory quality and coherence	4	6	16	6	32
Risk management/strategic foresight	4	6	17	6	33
Supranational issues	3	1	16	13	33
HR strategy for the public administration	3	4	8	18	33
Policy analysis	2	5	22	4	33
Relations with sub-national levels of government	1	5	13	13	32
International development and aid	0	0	7	25	32

Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The function "preparation of the Government Programme" is a good example of the scope of the Centre's involvement and the influence it has on supporting successful government action. A Government Programme is typically the product of direct negotiation among political parties or political leaders and is sketched out by political staff rather than civil servants. Once prepared at the political level, however, the Government Programme then becomes the roadmap for much of the downstream work of the Centre of Government with line ministries.

In essence, Centres of Government operationalise the Government Programme via policy development, coordination and monitoring mechanisms. Successful implementation depends to a large extent on their ability to translate political objectives into instructions for departments that are realistic and clear. This includes some tasks that can make or break policy commitments, such as:

- ensuring that the budget preparation process reflects priorities in the Government Programme;
- ensuring that departmental work plans reflect strategic priorities and include feasible, concrete actions to achieve them.

Maintaining a smooth relationship between the executive and legislature is another activity that, according to the survey, is the remit of the Centre more than of any other entity. While each department has sector-specific links with the Parliament (which largely explains why 15 countries put the function as being “shared with another body”), overall responsibility for management of relations with the legislature lies with the Centre of Government. Indeed, five countries (Austria, Norway, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and the USA) identified relations with the legislature as one of the top four priority tasks of the Centre of Government.

From one perspective, managing relations with the legislature is an administrative task -- to schedule government legislation. However, it is often a more significant role than it seems in terms of ensuring that government policy is translated in to timely legislation. The Centre’s role is to resolve disputes and provide clarifications to facilitate the smooth passage of laws through the legislature, minimise amendments and avoid delays that could reduce their impact. In addition, parliament is often an initiator of laws, and these laws may or may not fit well with the government’s own priorities and policies. Complex and unstable coalitions can make it difficult for governments to harmonise its own legislative programme with that originating with the legislature. However, if well managed by the Centre of Government, this task can have a major impact on the success of a government and on the coherence of the ensemble of legislation that is delivered during its mandate.

Another crucial function for successful modern government is effective communication. Given the development of 24-hour, global media, the pressure on governments to give instant responses to unfolding events has increased dramatically. Governments have realized that they have to adapt their media strategy to react to these changes. While all ministers and ministries have their own communications capability, most OECD governments place responsibility for communications at the Centre of Government. For 10 countries, communicating government messages is one of the top four priorities of the Centre of Government, and it is a primary responsibility for the Centre in another five countries.

The communications role of the Centre has three main dimensions. First, the Government usually has a spokesperson located at the Centre of Government to make statements on behalf of the government as a whole. Second, the Head of Government needs communications staff support in order to prepare his/her own statements. Third, there is a need to ensure that the information provided by one Ministry is consistent with information issued by others, that initiatives are synchronised and that announcements are timed to maximise their impact.

The Centre of Government usually organises strategic communications planning and liaises with communications officers from departments to make sure that media actions are well orchestrated. Given the intense scrutiny of the consistency of government messaging, this effort is crucial for the ability of a government to present a common and united image of itself to the public.

These results of the survey show a strong commonality of core objectives across Centres of Government. There is a strong consensus around the top four functions and several other functions are common to a large number of countries.

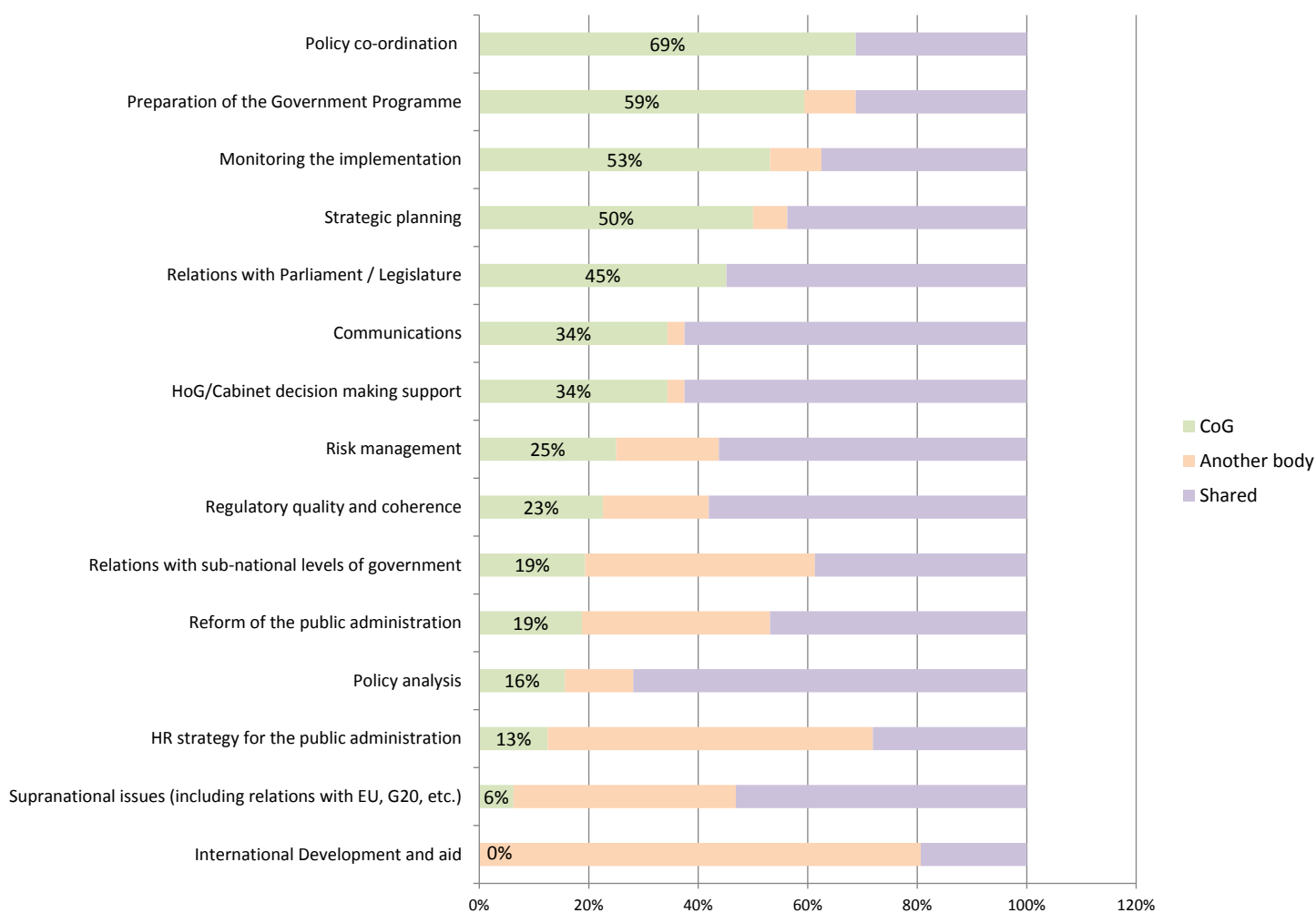
At the same time, there are functions that are particularly important for certain countries or country groupings. In federal states such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, and Austria, the management and coordination of relations with the constituent governments is often a priority for the Centre. Indeed, Australia identified “relations with sub-national levels of government” as one of the top four functions of the Centre of Government. In European Union member states, the coordination of EU business is often a major responsibility of the Centre of Government. As will be discussed in a later section, this is an area in which cross-departmental coordination by the Centre is particularly visible and often highly effective (partly, of course, because EU funding streams present clear incentives for ministries to participate and EU mechanisms, such as the Europe 2020, tend to be built around cross-sectoral strategies). Estonia’s Government Office, for example, coordinates the preparation of EU policy, monitors its implementation and monitors transposition of EU legislation into domestic legislation: this function takes up nearly 15% of the Centre’s annual budget.

Another important point is that functions can also be temporary. The essence of the Centre of Government is its ability to respond to changing demands. As such, issues that are not normally its remit can become a priority if required. For example, according to the survey, the Centre of Government plays a limited role in designing and leading public sector reform and human resources strategy for the public administration, (despite being viewed as an institution at the apex of the public service pyramid). In both cases, responsibility lies mainly with other ministries – usually Finance, Interior or Public Administration – or with dedicated agencies. However, in periods of major structural reform of the public administration, especially when decisions on cutting expenditures have been primarily directed towards staff levels and compensation as has been the case in several OECD countries since 2008-9, the Centre plays a more prominent role in driving the politically sensitive reform agenda.

This temporary assignment can send a strong signal both internally within the civil service and to the public that a particular issue is a priority for the Head of Government. Functions that might logically be located in particular ministries are sometimes launched by the Centre of Government because the government wants to give extra prominence to its efforts in these areas or because the Head of Government wants to take more personal control of the policy. This has been the case recently, for example, with e-government strategies and with red tape/administrative burden reduction initiatives in a number of countries. Once the initiatives have been launched and a cross-departmental architecture is in place to implement the strategy, the initiative and its budgetary allocation can be moved out of the Centre into the most appropriate sectoral ministry.

An important finding from the survey is the level of integration of the Centre of Government with other government departments and agencies (figure 5). While most countries identified a number of functions that are the primary responsibility of the Centre of Government, a larger number are in practice shared between the Centre and one or more ministries. In some cases, respondents to the survey indicated that responsibility is shared among all ministries (for example, for policy analysis and communicating government messages), but the Ministry of Finance (e.g., monitoring policy implementation), and Ministry of Interior (e.g., public sector reform, relations with sub-national levels) tend to be the main partners for domestic policy issues and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for international and security questions. Indeed, in some cases, specific units of those departments are considered as functionally part of the Centre of Government (see Box 1).

Figure 5. Centre of Government's share of responsibility



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Box 1. Ireland's reform process: a joint Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Public Expenditure effort

Ireland's banking and construction collapse in 2007-08 led to a loss of one-third of its state revenues while significantly increasing demand for social services. An unprecedented Public Service Reform Plan was introduced in 2011, led by the newly established Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which works in cooperation with the Department of the Taoiseach to lead and monitor reform efforts and control expenditures. The department established a Reform and Delivery Office (RDO) to drive implementation of a cluster of reforms aimed inter alia at reducing public sector payroll levels, consolidating service delivery and rationalising government agencies, consolidating state-owned property and enhancing leadership and performance management to link more clearly the performance of senior officials to the achievement of reform results. The RDO's tasks include communicating reform implementation effectively across government and to the public, and sharing across government best practices in resource management plans and successful reform implementation methodologies.

Ensuring high-quality, evidence-based and inclusive decision making

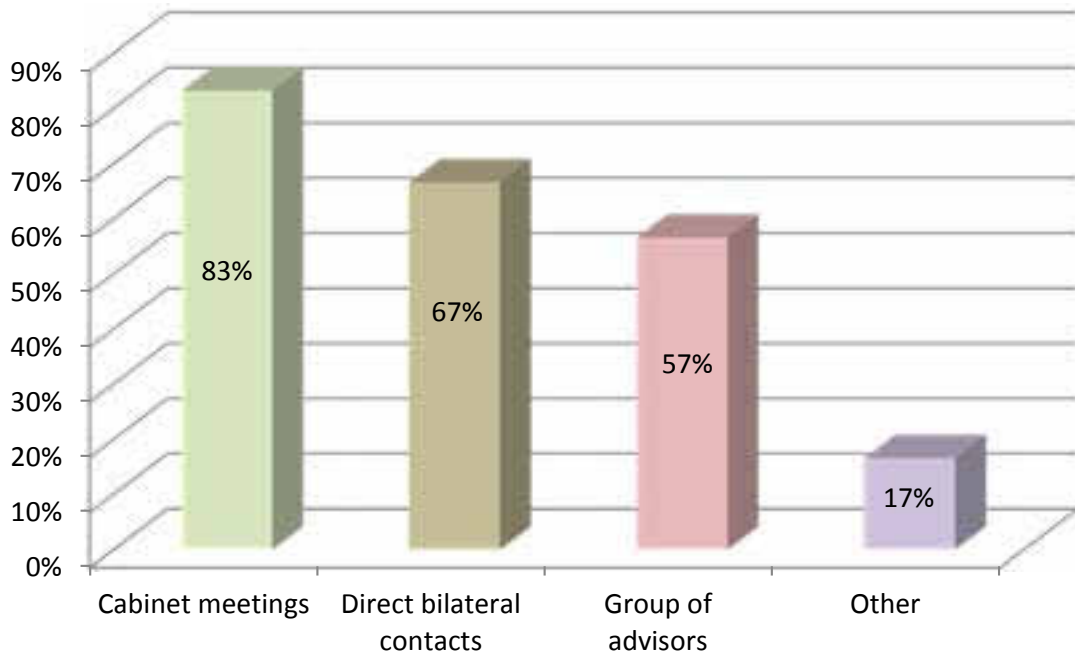
A defining function at the Centre of Government is its role as a direct and personal support structure for the Head of Government him/herself. This appears as an overarching or meta-role that influences all of the other activities of the Centre listed above. In most countries, the chief executive is supported by a private office (PMO) that structures daily business and provides political intelligence and advisory support on an ad hoc basis according to the needs of the Head of Government and keeping a close eye on the day's meetings and upcoming appointments that need briefings or other preparatory material. At the same time, this office is relatively small (around 10 percent of Centre of Government resources, see later section) and in practice its advice is usually complemented by advice and analysis that is either generated by the Centre of Government's own policy units (briefings, position papers, etc.) or that is processed by the Centre from other sources (in most cases from departments in the form of policy proposals or background memos). In theory, the blending of these streams of (partisan and impartial) policy advice help the head of government and senior ministers understand key issues from both a political and substantive angle and facilitate effective decision-making.

The survey underlines the role of the Centre in driving evidence-based, inclusive and timely decision-making process. The financial and fiscal crises have put the spotlight on the ability of governments to take decisive action and mobilise key partners in support of those actions. During the crisis, governments were sometimes portrayed in the media as hesitant or reactive, hindered by political inertia, and led by market shifts rather than driving their own policy agenda. The various constitutional forms around which decision-making is built in OECD countries continue to be tested by the economic legacy of crisis and by today's international flashpoints.

During the most high-pressure periods of the crisis, governments introduced abbreviated processes to speed up decision making (so-called “economic war councils” involving the head of government, minister of finance and one or two other senior members of the government). While normal procedures have now been restored, the episode nonetheless highlighted the importance of rapid reaction analytical and political intelligence systems to facilitate effective decision making by the Head of Government.

Across the OECD, a variety of constitutional models structure how decisions are taken, from highly collegial Cabinet systems such as those of the Netherlands and Sweden, to Presidential systems such as those of Chile and the US, with a multitude of hybrids in between. What they all share is the need for a Centre of Government that can organise the decision-making process on the basis of high-quality, impartial, balanced, reviewed and verified information, presented in a format that helps (non-specialist) policy makers understand the different options and their implications. The key issue for the Centre of Government is the extent to which it takes an active, as opposed to reactive, role in planning the agenda of senior government meetings. In some countries, the Cabinet agenda is a compilation of proposals that arrive from relatively autonomous ministries by a certain date. In other countries, the Centre of Government takes a more active role in planning, scheduling and stage-managing the flow of business.

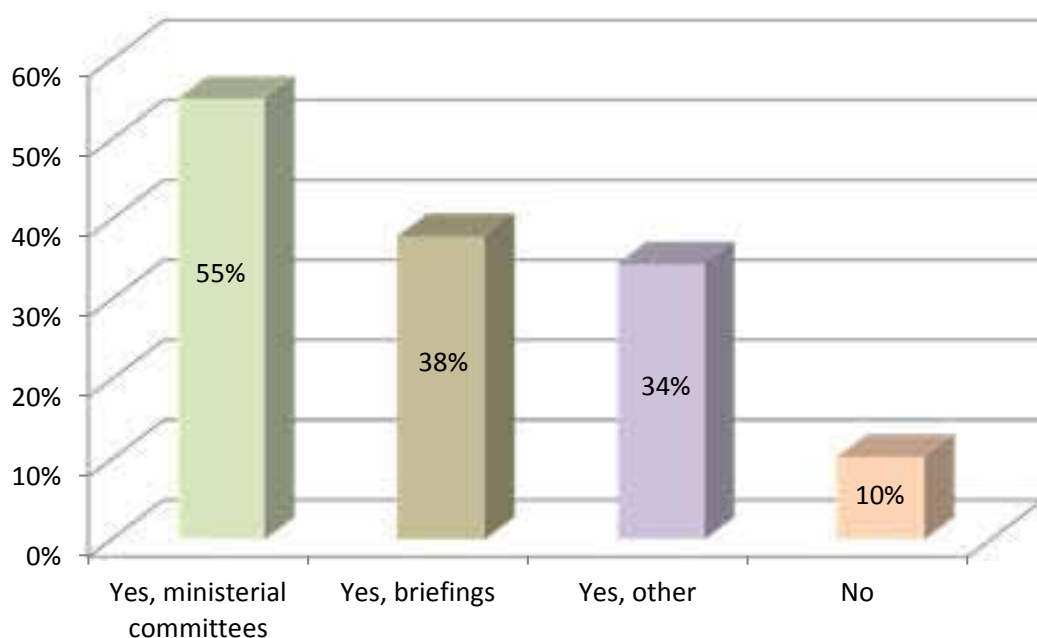
Figure 6. What are the principal channels through which the Head of Government discusses policy issues?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

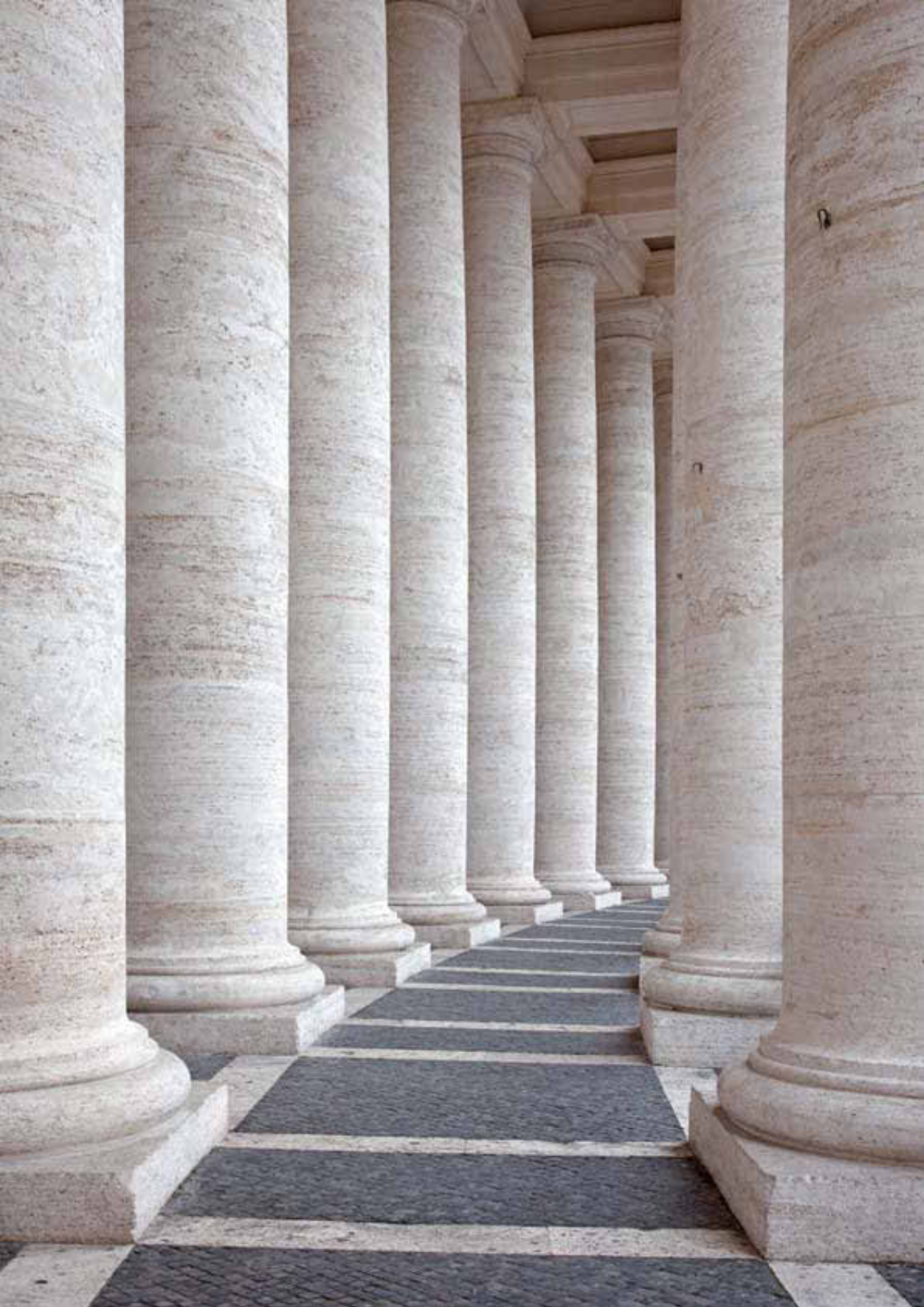
Each Head of Government organises policy discussions differently. In presidential systems, a combination of bilateral meetings with key ministers or with groups of advisors tends to be more common, with full meetings of Cabinet occurring less frequently. For the majority of OECD countries, regular Cabinet meetings remain the principal channel for policy discussion. In addition, most, if not all, systems use committees composed of Ministers, their state secretaries, or senior advisors to prepare policy advice for subsequent transmission to Cabinet or to the Head of Government (see figure 6). All of these meetings are usually prepared by the Centre of Government and, in the case of committees and commissions, are often chaired by the head of the Centre of Government. The role of the Centre is to control the quality of evidence, verify the objectivity and inclusiveness of options presented, and ensure that procedures are respected. Effective preparation of these policy meetings includes a range of tasks such as careful review of supporting materials and pre-meeting dispute resolution (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Does the Centre take responsibility for co-ordinating discussion of agenda items prior to Cabinet meetings?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The predominant role of the Centre in coordinating discussion of agenda items (a sole Centre of Government responsibility in 90% of countries) is important for ensuring that government meetings result in clear actionable outcomes. The first and most basic task of the Centre is to ensure that items have been prepared and presented in accordance with normal procedures (often written in “rules of government procedure“ or a similar, more or less formal rulebook). Timeliness is usually mentioned as one of the more important elements to be verified. Both line ministries and the Head of Government can be tempted to rush through proposals for diverse reasons, and the Centre of Government has the right to return proposals to the originating ministry if there has not been sufficient time for other members of the government to assess the proposal or in deed for the Centre to assess the analytical and political content of the proposals.



Two important technical functions also co-ordinated by the Centre of Government – legal conformity and regulatory quality – support the decision-making function (though in around half the countries surveyed legal or regulatory expertise is located in another agency). Recently, and partly as a result of the crisis, political attention on reducing growth-obstructing regulations and administrative burdens as well as interest in concepts such as smart regulation have elevated the regulatory governance issue on the political agenda, with countries looking for more consistent and whole of government responses. With respect to the presentation of legislative proposals, the main concern is that a consistent method for assessing regulatory impact has been applied and that other departments accept the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) conclusions. This suggests that the Centre of Government is seen as a strong guardian of consistent regulatory practice. Assessing the cost of proposals tends to be the remit of the Ministry of Finance.

Table 1. How are the items submitted to Cabinet reviewed by the Centre?

Mentioned by % of respondents	CoG reviews	CoG has authority to return items to Ministry for additional work if criterion is not satisfied	This is reviewed by another body
That procedures for preparation and presentation are respected	65%	74%	10%
That the item is in line with the Government Programme	59%	59%	21%
That relevant ministries and other stakeholders have been consulted as required	53%	63%	20%
Quality of legal drafting and legal conformity	45%	55%	59%
That a regulation meets regulatory quality standards (public/economic benefits, that benefits outweigh costs, that an impact analysis has been carried out, etc.)	43%	64%	43%
That adequate costing has been carried out	41%	48%	62%

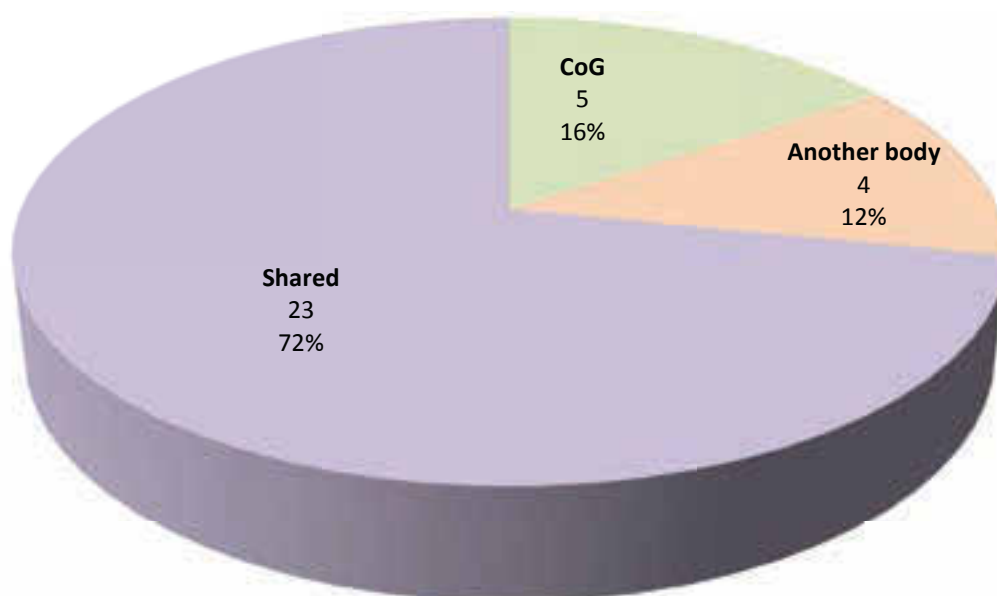
Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

One key management role of the Centre of Government with respect to high-level government meetings is to ensure that harmonised consultation processes have been followed and that appropriate analytical tools have been used. The overall objective is to ensure that the usefulness and cost-benefit of a particular action can be judged easily by the Head of Government and senior members of the government, whether they are knowledgeable in the field or not. Information should be presented in a way that allows political leaders to understand the need for - and consequences of - proposed policy interventions, to evaluate costs and benefits, to weigh evidence on their likely impact, and to anticipate risks and resistance to the policy.

This analysis and consultation process usually goes well beyond the sectoral perspective of the sponsoring agency or department and, as such, the tools and processes must also be broader. While individual departments might focus on their own evidence gathering, including through large internal research units, the Centre is obliged to canvass opinion and analysis more widely. This process must be formalised to some extent so that the Centre is able to justify how it has selected the evidence that is presented.

In sum, the Centre needs a system that makes best and transparent use of available evidence. This process is important from the perspective of evidence-based policymaking but also with respect to transparency and inclusiveness.

Figure 8. Policy analysis



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Box 2. The role of Supreme Audit institutions in supporting decision making

Given the need for objective government-wide information and a well-functioning Centre, three opportunities for SAI engagement with the Centre of Government emerge:

- SAIs could provide valuable information at a whole-of-government level for the Centre’s oversight and co-ordination functions, to enable quality policy formulation, policy co ordination, monitoring and evaluation.
- With respect to budgeting issues, SAIs could provide the Centre with useful information about risks, implementation challenges and performance, which can feed into the budgeting process, thereby allowing the Centre to guide budgeting decisions with helpful, objective information.
- The Centre could itself become the subject of assessment by SAIs to ensure that it is well-positioned to guide governments in achieving strategic objectives and responding effectively to government-wide challenges. To this end, SAIs can examine the institution(s) at the Centre to determine whether they are well structured, have effective processes and are contributing to overall good governance across the whole-of-government.

While SAIs are well positioned to provide these assessments, in theory, many do not currently have a systematic approach to supporting or assessing the Centre, as it may fall outside of their traditional remit. To the extent that SAIs have been engaged with the Centre, it has been on an ad hoc basis.

Note: For more information on the role of SAIs, see OECD 2014, “Partners for Good Governance: Mapping the Role of Supreme Audit Institutions” (Analytical Framework).

Closely related to the preparation of evidence for senior government meetings is the question of the Centre's own ability to generate analysis. The crisis seemed to suggest that this capacity needed to be strengthened, and organisational charts confirm that few countries have clearly defined analysis units at the Centre. The survey found that the policy analysis function is, in most cases, shared between the Centre of Government and other bodies, particularly with the Ministry of Finance for budgetary impact analysis (see Figure 8). Given the volume of material that needs to be passed to Cabinet, the ability of most Centres to undertake this rigorous analysis is limited. Exceptions to this include Lithuania and Austria, which both have strong capacity within the Centre to undertake policy analysis, and Japan whose Cabinet Office intelligence and research department accounts for three-quarters of the budget. But most Centres are obliged to draw on information from a variety of sources. The principal source will be the supporting material gathered by the sponsoring line ministry. This can be combined with research from independent sources, such as supreme audit institutions (see Box 2) or think tanks, to give a balanced presentation of the arguments. Pre-meeting briefings are then used to work through any aspects that are unclear or to identify contentious issues or potential areas of dispute.

As they are usually not in a position to master the analysis directly, Centres of Government need to have consistent principles in place to guide the preparation of submissions. For example, formal frameworks could be developed to establish the type of analytical processes and the requirements and standards that are expected of line ministries. Clear and transparent methodologies and criteria can be imposed to analyse the potential impacts (benefits, costs and anticipated effects) of new policies and the review of existing policies. Policy options should be costed and the outputs of the analysis should clearly indicate the source(s) of funding for the proposed policy, with the base criteria being that proposals should be affordable within current budgetary agreements; if additional funding is necessary, a reason for this deviation should be provided.

Beyond these technical and administrative checks, perhaps the most important role of the Centre is to ensure that proposals are in line with the Government Programme and aligned with current priorities. The Centre also reviews the proposals with respect to how well they are aligned with strategic priorities, the overall Government Programme, and other strategic documents and plans (e.g. "Growth Strategies", fiscal sustainability plans, public sector reform programmes, etc.). Having this overview of how policy proposals fit into the broader policy context can be seen as one of the unique features of the Centre's role in the policy development process: the strategic "fit" rather than the merits of the individual policies.

In operational terms, Centres of Government usually prepare a briefing note for the Head of Government before each Council of Ministers. These notes inform the Chair of outstanding issues or unresolved conflicts between departments that might need special attention at the session and can also advise on the handling of the item at the meeting. The fact that the Centre of Government is briefing the Chair before the session gives it some informal authority to push for better information and to resolve conflicts. If Ministries know that the Chair might be briefed that the item is not ready or too controversial, they might make an extra effort to fix the problems and avoid a "negative" brief.

On this basis, the Centre ensures an inclusive and objective process of policy analysis that is essential for evidence-based policymaking at the highest level. Its ability to effectively structure and present the information can have a major influence on achieving a decisive outcome rather than an academic debate in Cabinet.

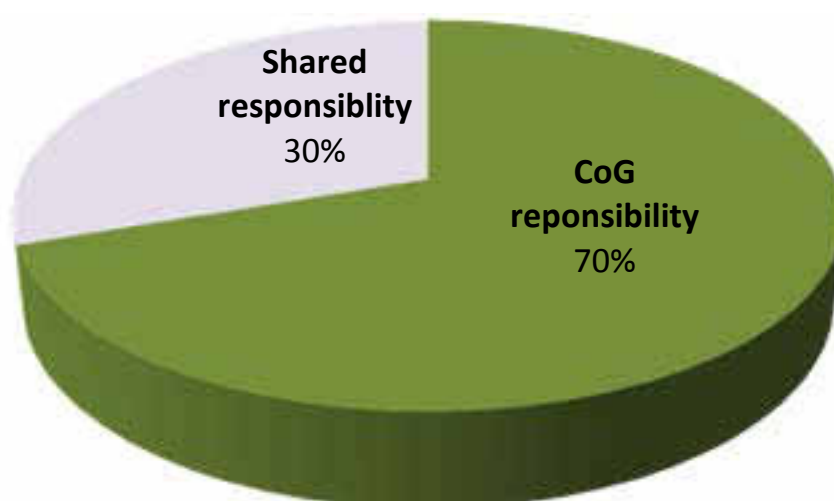
Leading co-ordination, driving priority strategies

A second key mission of the Centre of Government, highlighted by almost all countries in the survey, is to promote coherence in the way the government works across its departments and agencies (see figure 9). Poor co-ordination can increase the risk of duplication, inefficient spending, a lower quality of service, and contradictory objectives and targets. In a context of budgetary pressure, improved co-ordination has become a key objective, and for around two-thirds of countries this objective is assured principally by the Centre of Government.

The fundamental task of the Centre of Government is to balance an ideal of perfect coordination against the political and practical limits on coherence in real public administrations. Governments are subject to many policy tensions that often stem from the normal divergence in perspective between sectors. Ministers are the principal initiators and implementers of government policy, and are formally accountable for it. Each department can have its own culture and enormous financial and bureaucratic resources. Compromises and trade offs between these diverging interests usually have to be made at the highest level, with the Centre of Government helping to facilitate this arbitrage and promote collaboration.

Figure 9: Policy co-ordination: a priority for most Centres of Government

Policy co-ordination across government is:

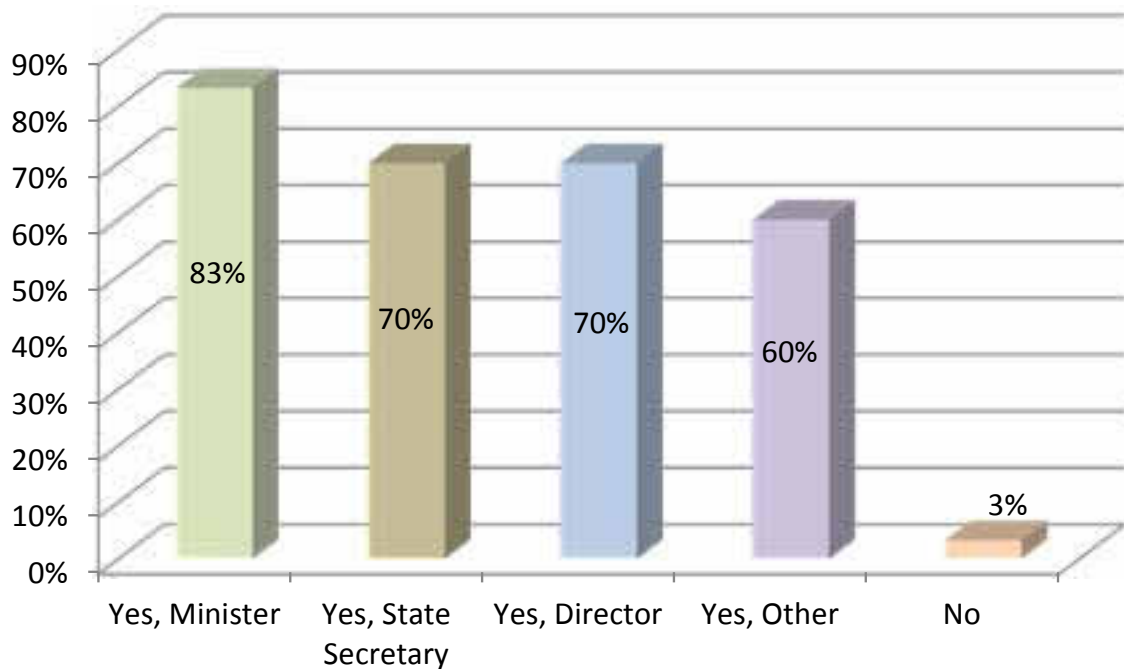


Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The issue of coordination has traditionally been addressed by means of inter-ministerial bodies, usually chaired by a senior official from the Centre of Government. More than three-quarters of countries have co-ordination groups at the state secretary level. Two-thirds of countries also have co-ordination groups at the Director level and at head of unit or expert level (see figure 10). In typical cases, ‘standing’ committees organized on a sectoral basis are used as filters, handling quality control and dispute resolution before dossiers are passed up to ministerial-level committees. In this way, the Centre of Government plays a crucial role in smoothing out the decision-making process via its overview of agendas, scheduling and procedure. In a large number of countries, including France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, the expectation is that all disagreements should be resolved at the level of ministerial committees, and that differences of opinion should come to the Council of Ministers to be reported and noted rather than being arbitrated in that forum by the Head of Government. One test of the effectiveness of the Centre of Government is its ability to play this mediator role diplomatically.

Figure 10: Cross-government policy co-ordination groups

Is the Centre responsible for organising cross-governmental policy co-ordination groups or committees? If yes, at what level do these groups exist?

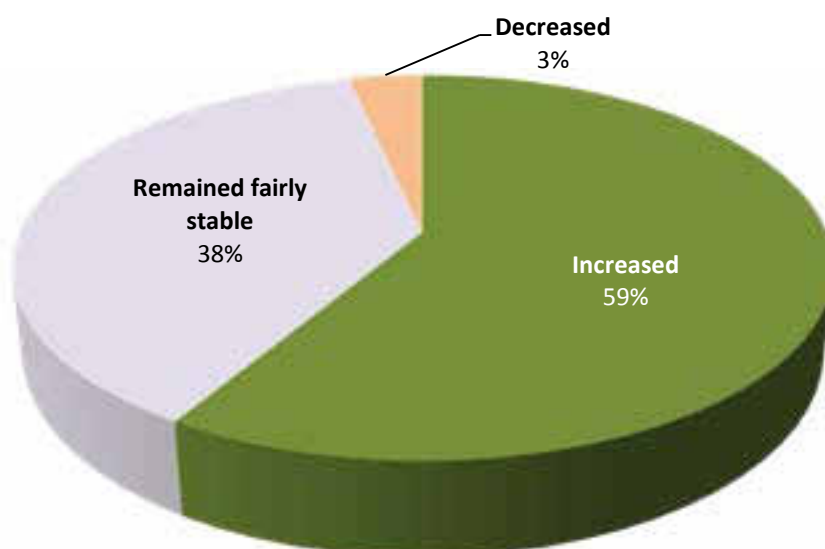


Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

At the same time, as the number of cross-departmental projects has grown, so the way in which coordination is managed must also evolve. Even though the right to initiate legislation rests mainly with line ministries, initiatives often, and increasingly, originate in direct instructions or mandates from the Head of Government that do not always fit with ministerial portfolios. Consequently, the Centre's co-ordination function can be both reactive in responding to initiatives coming from departments and proactive in leading initiatives that emanate directly from the Head of Government. While the former tend to be more sectoral in nature, the latter are more and more likely to be cross-departmental and thus require more active co-ordination. Survey results confirm the increasing number of cross-ministerial policy initiatives (see Figure 11), suggesting the increasing importance of cross-departmental policy co-ordination.

Figure 11. Cross-ministerial policy initiatives

From 2008-2012, the number of cross-ministerial policy initiatives...



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The new emphasis on cross-sectoral policy initiatives is testing traditional methods of co-ordination, such as standing committees and inter-ministerial committees, which were designed to manage more “routine” coordination issues. The Centre is now playing more of a leadership role with respect to specific strategic priorities, designing action plans in cooperation with relevant departments and leading on project management.

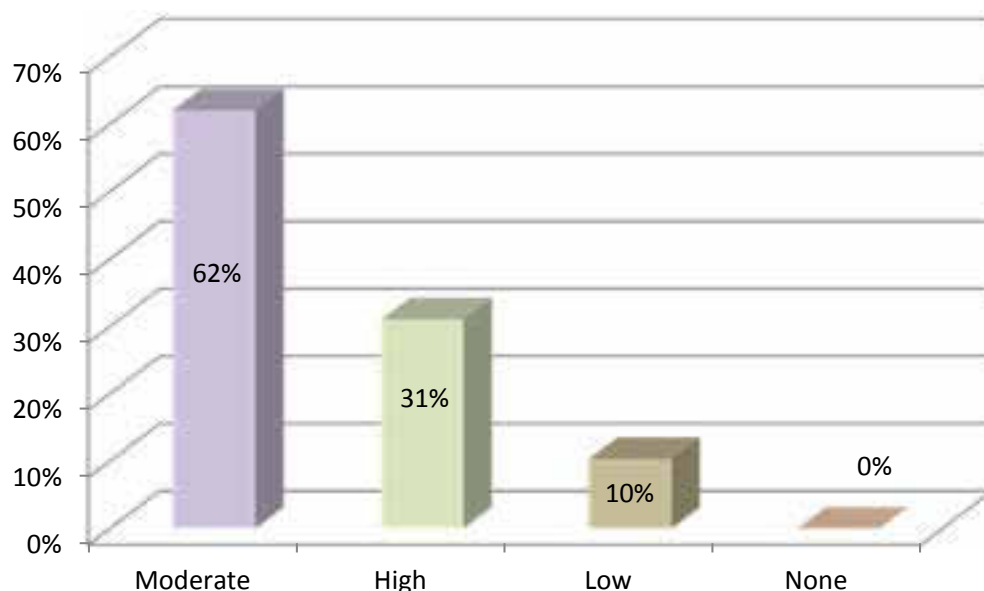
In some cases, these are issue specific or one-off reform initiatives, though often wide-ranging and controversial. A prominent and very topical example is that of austerity-era public sector reform. The survey noted, somewhat surprisingly, that public sector reform is often not a formal Centre of Government responsibility and tends to be either the remit of a specialised agency or linked to Ministry of Finance budgeting exercises. However, in cases where major, politically sensitive reforms are required, as was the case in several OECD countries after the crisis, then these agencies are less likely to have the influence necessary to push the reform agenda through, and hence the Centre is a better option. In Portugal, for example, a broad modernisation strategy is led from the Centre under the authority of the Head of Government, and the bodies that implement actions within the strategy report to the Centre of Government. In France territorial reform and reform of the public sector are both led from the Centre. Over the past decade, a number of countries have located e-government and digitisation at the Centre in order to generate momentum for innovation and harmonise approaches to technology adoption.

Looking to develop more of a culture shift in terms of the way departments work horizontally, there are also examples that imply more fundamental changes in working arrangements. For example, in Finland, the Government Programme is now structured around a small number of horizontal policy objectives. These assume significant levels of cross-departmental co-ordination, from agenda setting to designing timelines and joint targets, with the Centre of Government playing a key role in facilitating integrated multi-department workplans. The Centre of Government brings ministries together at the senior level (minister, state secretary, director) and works with senior departmental officials to identify follow-up actions and clarify the respective roles of participating departments. This is an example of a more broadly based and structural approach to horizontality – with the Centre helping to promote a culture change across the public service.

This new, more active role suggests the need for new tools. Rather than simply bringing people to together as a chair or mediator, the Centre has to be able to set agendas and work with other government institutions, including with respect to human and financial resources. This often involves applying rules in the name of the Head of Government. The survey indicates that most Centre of Government officials consider that they exert a moderate degree of influence over ministries to promote co-ordination (13 countries, moderate influence; 9, high influence; 2, low influence) (see figure 12). This is partly a result of the general institutional problem of co-ordination in any large organisation, and in cases where influence is low, such as in Austria and Portugal, it is clearly linked to political traditions that bestow significant autonomy to ministers and their departments. The question is not constitutional form but rather whether the level of influence is sufficient to achieve the objectives set for a given horizontal initiative, or whether more effort is needed to find mechanisms by which the necessary influence can be generated, even where this means potentially disrupting standard operating procedures.

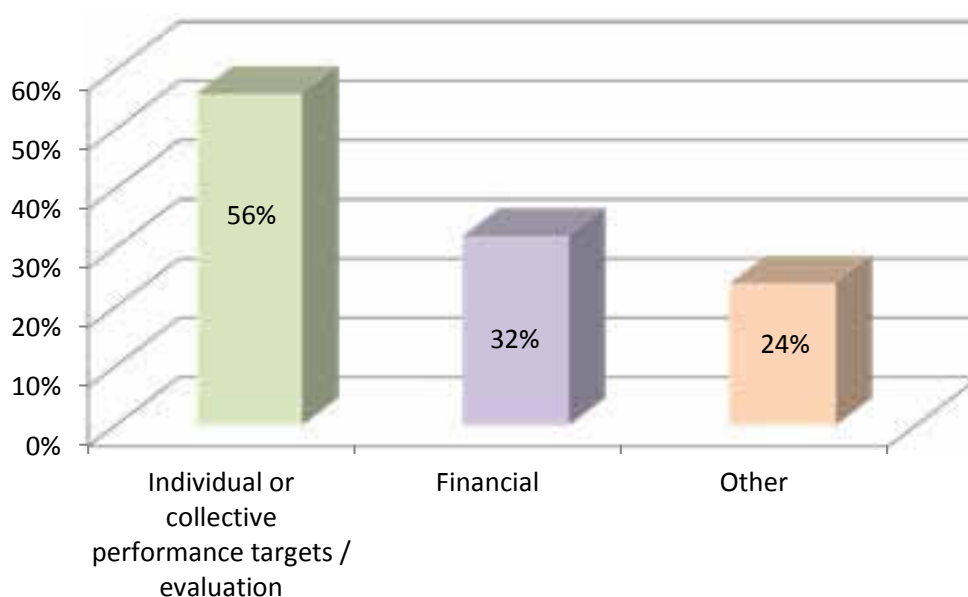
Figure 12. The Centres influence over line ministry co-ordination

How much influence can the Centre exert over line ministries to encourage them to co-ordinate with each other?



While exercising influence is important to the success of broad reform or policy initiatives, this has to be done in a way that does not create resistance or suggest over-centralisation. Several countries' Centres now provide technical and advisory support to line ministries to help them adjust and meet the extra demands of horizontal projects. This makes it easier to integrate horizontal working or participation in horizontal projects into performance management systems at either the organisational or individual level (which represent the main incentive to participate in cross-departmental initiatives (see figure 13), with financial incentives less common).

Figure 13. Incentives used by the Centre to promote horizontal working



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

In promoting coordination, Centre of Government officials come up against the issue of how to combine institutional structures, which might exist or may need to be created, with informal channels that often dominate the working relationships among government agencies. One way to minimise the risks associated with heavy reliance on informal networks and to enhance collaboration and co-operation is to complement the use of informal personal networks with institutional networks. This entails embedding networks more formally in the administrative culture. The OECD Public Governance Review of Estonia (OECD, 2011) identified the Estonian EU Secretariat of the Government Office as an example of how formal arrangements were integrated with informal cross-departmental ways of working in order to respond effectively to the demands and procedures of working on EU policy in a flexible way.

Box 3. Centres of Government: an emerging issue in Latin America

A recent report by the IADB explored the situation of Centres of Government in Latin America and the Caribbean using a similar survey to that of OECD. They found that the majority of countries have bodies with a Centre of Government style mission, but that in many cases the roles were more formal than effective in practice, with many systems working along informal lines. For example, with respect to coordination, formal responsibility does not imply an actual or effective performance of this task. In fact, the report found that in a large group of countries, the decision-making channels are almost exclusively informal, ad hoc for each issue, and without the necessary inclusion of all government agencies with jurisdiction over the matter. In response to the increasing demands on policymakers, the report notes a general increase in interest in strengthening the Centre's capacity to coordinate and monitor.

See: IADB (2013), Strengthening the Centre of Government in Latin America and the Caribbean, IADB Technical Note IDB-TN-591

The horizontal co-ordination processes managed by the Centre of Government are increasingly broad in scope and participation. While policy co-ordination within the administration is a key focus for the Centre of Government, the evolution of modern government means that the Centre is becoming more involved with actors outside the executive branch. For example, multilateral action on economic, social and environmental issues now touches the core of domestic public policy in individual countries. Effective working at international level is an increasingly important aspect of good governance at the domestic level and comes increasingly into the sphere of the Centre of Government (even though, as the survey indicates, formal responsibilities for international aid and foreign policy usually lie outside the Centre itself). International regulatory cooperation as a way to unblock trade negotiations and coordination of complex climate change responses are two example of global debates that are influencing domestic policymaking.

Promoting a progressive regulatory agenda

One of the most important aspects of policy co-ordination concerns regulatory coherence. The Centre of Government plays a vital role in both directly and indirectly ensuring that policy proposals are consistent in the way they verify regulatory coherence and evaluate regulatory impact. This is achieved primarily via the Cabinet meeting preparation system, one of the responsibilities of the Centre of Government. The Centre acts as a gatekeeper in many countries by verifying that policy proposals conform to some basic criteria. For example, Canada's Privy Council Office (PCO) assesses Memoranda to Cabinet and legislative proposals with regard to instrument selection, regulatory implications, and consistency with both the Cabinet Directive on Regulatory Management and the Cabinet Directive on Law-making. Any proposals with significant regulatory implications are then referred to a unit outside PCO for more detailed assessment.

Table 2: The role of the Centre in regulatory policy

Mentioned by % of respondents	CoG reviews	CoG has authority to return items to Ministry for additional work if criterion is not satisfied	This is reviewed by another body
Quality of legal drafting and legal conformity	45%	55%	59%
That a regulation meets regulatory quality standards (public/economic benefits, that benefits outweigh costs, that an impact analysis has been carried out, etc.)	43%	64%	43%

Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

In addition to this procedural function, a number of countries also have internal units charged with improving general regulatory standards. Brazil, Japan, Chile, Iceland, the European Commission, Korea and Sweden are among the countries that locate primary responsibility for regulatory quality within the Centre of Government. The reasons for doing this vary, but tend to include either a strategic decision by the Head of Government to reduce regulatory burdens (for example, as part of a broader growth strategy) or a desire to harmonise approaches to regulatory impact assessment and promote a general upgrade in the quality and consistency of regulations across departments. In both cases, the Centre plays a role in developing and applying common frameworks and procedures that are then rolled out across the public administration.

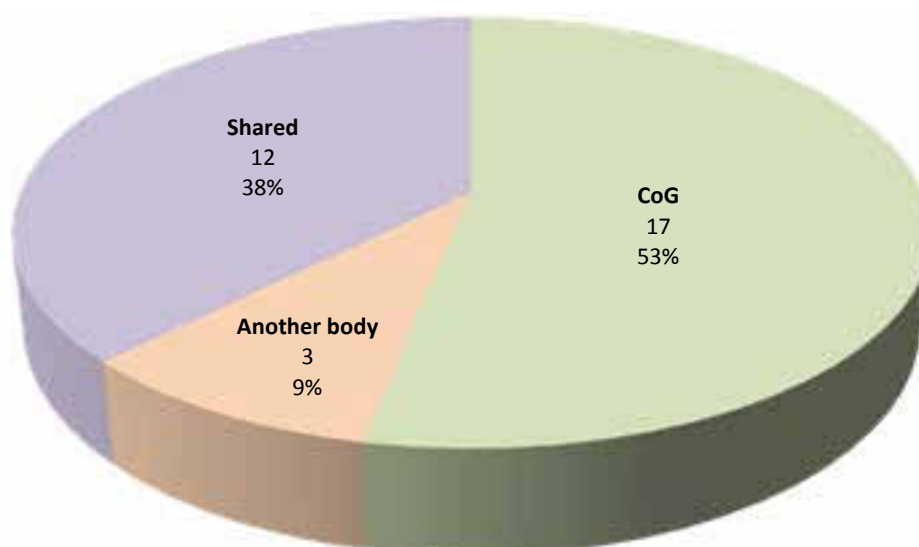
The role of the Centre of Government in promoting better regulation can, as with policy co-ordination more generally, remain fairly administrative (setting standards and encouraging line ministries to adopt them) or reactive (reviewing legislative proposals through a better regulation lens). But the role can also be much more proactive and involve more mandatory guidelines for regulatory quality combined with interactive support to departments to help them achieve these new standards. In Australia, the Office of Best Practice Regulation was transferred from the Department of Finance to the office of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 2013 to assist government departments and agencies in meeting the Government's requirements for best practice. Germany has also moved primary responsibility for regulatory policy into the Chancellery (though the function is still a shared one) in order to boost the coherence of regulatory governance.

Monitoring implementation and correcting mistakes

The need to do more with less has led to a new emphasis on monitoring policy outcomes and ensuring that government programmes are being implemented effectively and in a co-ordinated manner. This continues a New Public Management trend towards better benchmarking of policy and programme performance. What is new is that the effort is driven from the Centre of Government and puts more emphasis on policy alignment and impact than on tracking expenditures. In the past, monitoring of spending by departments was usually the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, with the departments themselves tracking their own spending for accountancy and reporting purposes. Today, the Centre of Government seems to play a more direct role in following the implementation of the policies themselves, ensuring good co-ordination, particularly in the increasing number of cross-disciplinary policy initiatives, and communicating progress and achievements. Over half of countries assign prime responsibility for monitoring implementation to the Centre of Government, and for nearly one-third of countries (e.g. Belgium, Chile, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Morocco, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and South Africa), this monitoring role represents one of the four priority tasks of the Centre (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Responsibility for monitoring the implementation of government policy

Monitoring the implementation of government policy is...



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The implementation of government decisions and the monitoring of results from specific actions are the formal responsibility of individual ministers and their departments. However, the government collectively, and especially the Head of Government personally, have a responsibility (constitutional, legal, or by convention) for both individual and collective performance. Moreover, the Head of Government is increasingly put on the spot by the media and civil society to account for progress and achievements across the full range of the government's activities and, on some occasions, delegating the response to a minister can send the wrong signal. The need for the Centre to provide accurate information to the political level on progress with implementation – successes and failures -- assumes some mastery of the detail of spending and results across a large range of policy areas.

While most departments have units to track spending, this is a relatively new task for the Centre of Government and the resources available are limited. This could lead to challenges such as:

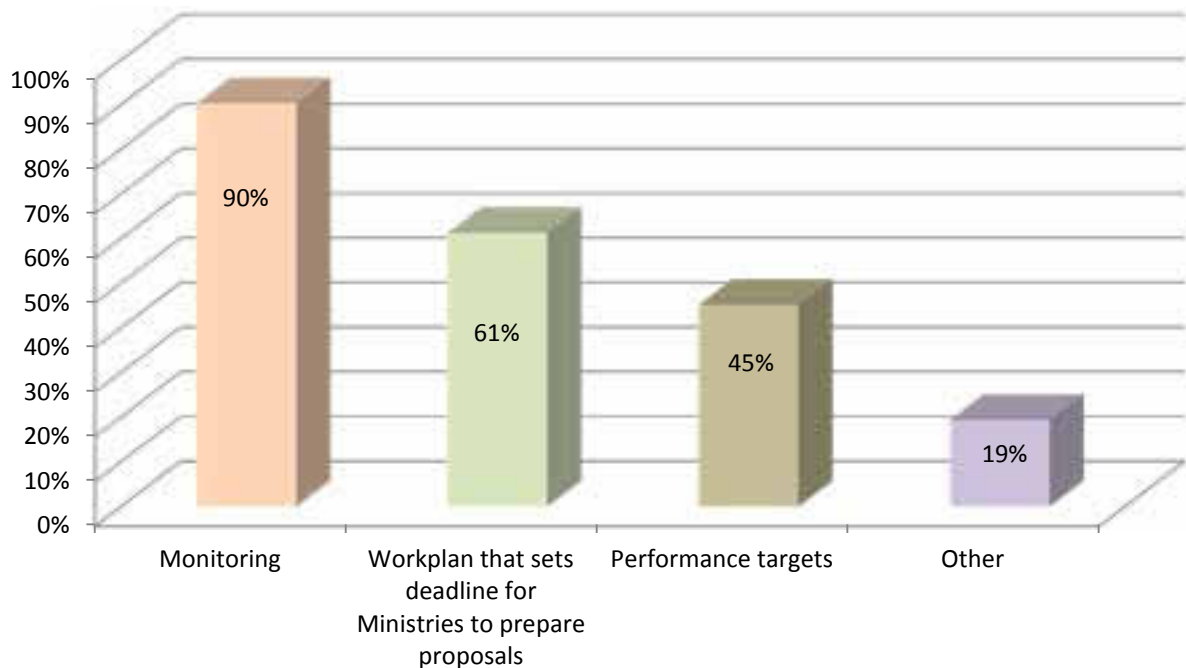
- the flow of information becomes too great and transaction costs are larger than the benefit to policymakers;
- there is a knowledge asymmetry between large teams in departments that provide the data and the non-specialist teams in the Centre that try to process it;
- the information delivered might not be entirely objective given that departments know that their performance – and possibly resources – will be judged on the basis of it.

These challenges need to be addressed to ensure a healthy and productive relationship between the Centre and line ministries. It is easier to get departments to reorient activities to support priority initiatives and work towards targets agreed with the Centre if there is good working-level cooperation between the two entities. If monitoring functions are not clearly defined, a number of problems could emerge, for example:

- inconsistent interaction between the Centre and departments, because of lack of resources;
- lack of clarity in the respective roles;
- overlap between the Centre and the Ministry of Finance with respect to tracking.

Monitoring can take different forms. The more formal procedure is via regular reports delivered to the Head of Government or Cabinet. These reports assess progress against agreed workplans that correspond to the Government Programme and that set deadlines and targets. This is the system in many countries (including Brazil, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, the European Commission, Finland, France, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States). Cabinet meetings are also often organised according to a forward schedule that specifies the deadlines for ministries to bring proposals to Cabinet or to report on the achievement of particular targets.

Figure 15: Mechanisms to ensure that government policies are implemented



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Within this common mechanism, however, there are likely to be variations in the degree of detail, the use of indicators, recourse to penalties or sanctions, and the extent to which targets are linked to individuals or collectively to organisations. The UK tends to use relatively detailed departmental business plans to track performance. These plans include information on departmental responsibilities, planned expenditure, and input and impact indicators. In Canada, the promotion of cross-departmental working through the Cabinet is complemented by performance management mechanisms within the Privy Council Office that include the achievement of horizontal collaboration as a key management competency for individual managers.

At the same time, demands from the Centre for regular progress reporting need to be sensitive to the capacity issues that exist in budget-constrained departments. Australia provides a good example of how the link between the Centre and departments in the realm of policy monitoring can be supported in practice. While implementation of government policy is conducted by the relevant department or agency, the Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU) within the Centre draws on members' experience to share ideas on implementation and delivery issues. This group support approach aims to develop a culture of collaboration in which the Centre not only acts as a watchdog but also provides advice and guidance.

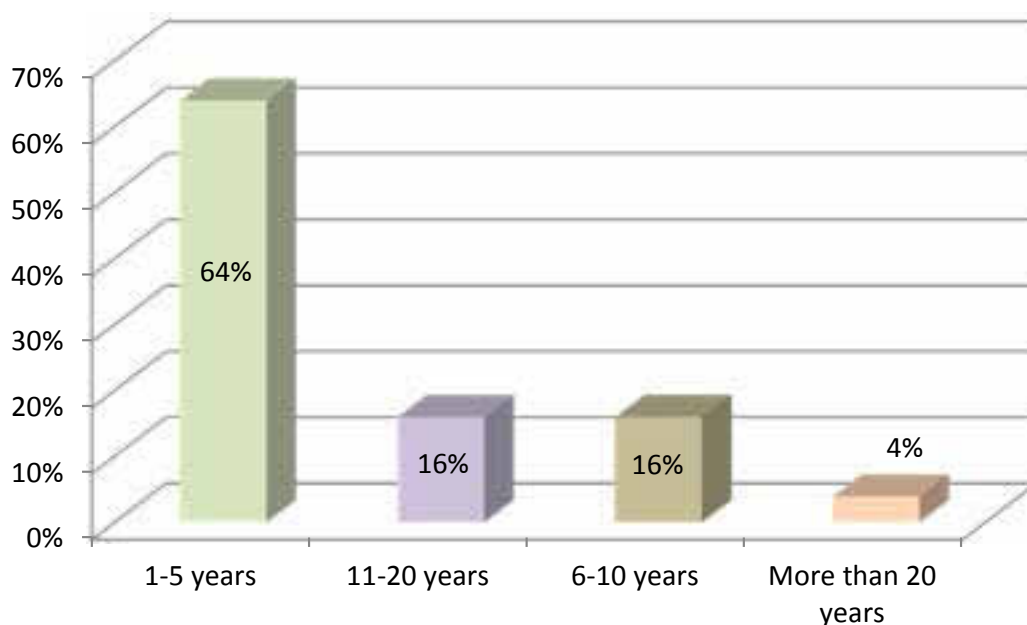
Strategic planning for the whole of government

Governments are elected on the basis of promises that usually reflect a strategic vision of where the new government wants to take the country. In practice, once in office, the Head of Government and senior ministers tend to be preoccupied by urgent matters, which leaves little time to devote to this strategic vision. The pressures of managing domestic and international policy crowd out longer-term thinking. Because this is a perennial concern, it has long been recognised that the Centre of Government has a duty to act as the steward of the government's longer-term strategy and try to maintain coherence in the diverse actions of government.

The initial vision and direction of government policy is set out in its election manifesto, then this is adapted to political realities and changing economic and social circumstances once in office. The vision needs to be seen to inform the actions of all line ministries. It also needs to be consistently communicated to the public and to business. Policy advisors at the Centre play a decisive role in making sure that all government action includes a recognisable flavour of this overarching vision. The Centre transmits strategic guidelines to departments that identify key elements of the government's strategic vision, verify that departmental work plans are aligned with government priorities and ensure that these priorities are taken into account in other key policy documents (fiscal plans, growth strategies, etc.).

Although the OECD survey of Centres of Government confirms that this strategic role is seen as an important task (a top four task of the Centre in around one-third of countries surveyed), a majority of countries prefer strategic documents with a relatively short time horizon, similar to a single electoral term. Only around one-third use documents that clearly span electoral cycles. Thus, the concept of "vision" is generally translated as a political strategy, rather than something that looks more long term (see figure 16). At the same time, even a relatively short-term vision needs to be informed by longer-term evolutions and needs to understand the likely impact of these trends on policy choices. The crisis has helped to focus attention on the need for strategic capacity at the Centre; yet, paradoxically, the pressures that economic and social turmoil have brought mean that there is probably even less time available for politicians to focus on longer-term issues.

Figure 16: Time period covered by long-term strategic vision documents



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The long-term strategic vision document covers			
1-5 years in	6-10 years in	11-20 years in	more than 20 years in
Austria	Denmark	Finland	Japan
Canada	France	Lithuania	
Chile	Iceland	Slovak Republic	
EU	Israel	South Africa	
Hungary	Latvia		
Italy			
Korea			
Norway			
Portugal			
Slovenia			
Spain			
Sweden			
Switzerland			
Turkey			
United Kingdom			
United States			

Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Governments have, nonetheless, an obligation to minimise uncertainty in the economic, social and political environment of their citizens. This is particularly true with respect to external events over which citizens have limited or no control, such as natural disasters or economic crises. The crisis and other recent disasters were a severe test of the ability of governments to play this important stewardship role, raising a number of important questions about the way that government identify challenges and assess risks for society as well as their ability to take action to mitigate such risks.

Yet, the history of strategic planning at the Centre suggests a function that is still not well anchored in institutional terms and one that still struggles to influence the direction of policy in practice. The situation is similar to that of medium-term fiscal planning, which is a concept that has been around for many years but which has also only a moderate influence on policy. Long-term strategic perspectives such as these translate into clear policy instruments in only a small number of countries. For example, few countries seem to have a specific strategic planning unit, even though such units were relatively common in the past.

Currently, the three models that the survey highlights are (i) an intimate, high-level cluster located close to and reporting directly to the Head of Government; (ii) a system of strategy meetings involving multiple departments, often integrating ideas developed at department level via retreats, intra-departmental brainstorming, etc., and co-ordinated by the centre of Government; and (iii) a specific unit dedicated to horizon-scanning, of which the UK model of the 1990s is perhaps the most well-known. Strategy units are generally quite small, ranging from over 40 staff in the Australia to under 10 professional staff in most others, including Sweden, UK and Canada. In some cases, strategic thinking is located very close to the Head of Government and led by one or two high-profile personalities rather than by a civil service team. In the majority of cases, where strategic planning is not a clearly separate activity within the Centre, there is a clear danger that long-term thinking is crowded out by day-to-day policy matters.

The focus of foresight and strategic thinking is also changing. From its origins in Cold War-era, RAND-style political scenarios, foresight has evolved to cover a number of quite different areas, such as international economic competition (the rise of the BRICS, etc.), the future of technology and its implications, the sustainability of the welfare state, demography, migration and natural resource depletion, and climate change. The way that vision is developed is also changing. In the past, and also today, the different models used by governments – small clusters of blue sky thinkers, formal strategy units, department-level sectoral strategies integrated by the Centre, parliamentary committees – tend to be civil service driven. But with government becoming more citizen focused, strategic planning needs to be more sensitive to the desires and expectations of citizens themselves, i.e., “What future do we want?” rather than “What future are we going to get?” The German Chancellery’s ‘Dialogue on the Future of Germany’ initiative is a good example of this approach.

Whatever the model used to develop new thinking on longer-term issues, this thinking needs to find its way into policy development. Finland is perhaps the best example of a country that has integrated a long-term vision into its policy cycle. Almost 30% of the Centre of Government budget is allocated to forward planning. Once in each government’s term in office a long-term Futures Report is prepared with a 20-year perspective, drawing on input from a broad stakeholder base. Each Government Programme has to be clearly aligned with the findings of the Futures Report.

A prominent example of a strategic plan linked closely to implementation and monitoring systems is provided by the EU’s Europe 2020 – Strategy for Growth. This is a comprehensive cross-national effort to use strategic planning to orient and reorient public policies and to monitor implementation towards targets that are national in scale but that contribute to EU-level objectives as well. This is currently one of the key drivers leading member countries to strengthen the role of the Central agencies in EU policy matters. The Europe 2020 framework is so broad and structured that effective management of the system requires an exceptionally good overview of actions and outcomes by line ministries, a vision that is likely to be best located within the Centre of Government.

In the aftermath of the crisis, strengthening capacity to anticipate and manage risks is an area that preoccupies many governments. This is linked to the issue of strategic planning and vision, but involves a far more practical organisation of resources in order to identify threats and understand the steps that need to be taken should an event occur. Decision-making processes must be capable of reacting to the unexpected in a timely and effective manner. In the aftermath of disasters, governments generally face considerable pressure to intervene: to reduce or contain persisting dangers, compensate victims, clean up and reconstruct damaged areas, provide liquidity to affected industries and local governments, prevent credit bottlenecks, and restore market confidence.

Box 4. The EU's Europe 2020 Growth Strategy: A cross-national strategic planning and monitoring system

Europe 2020 is the European Union's growth strategy for the period up to 2020. It is based on five objectives, each with concrete targets for the EU as a whole. These five objectives focus on:

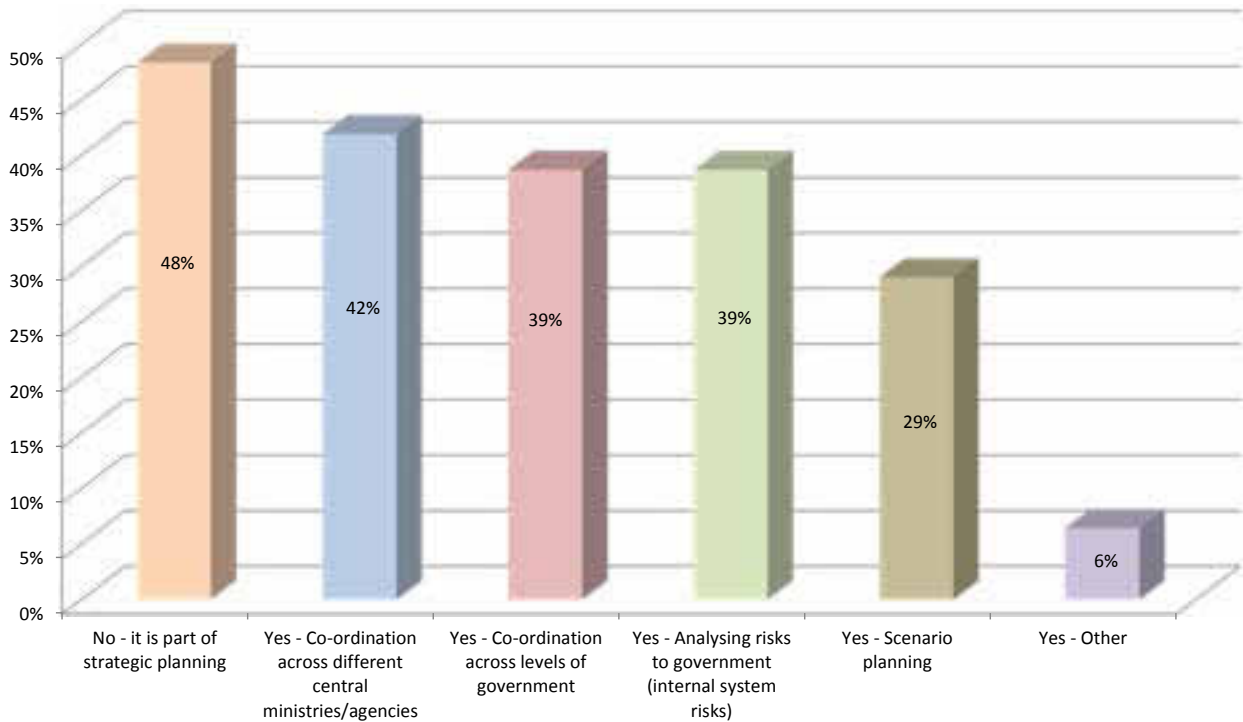
- Employment: 70% of 20-64 year olds to be employed.
- Innovation: 3% of EU GDP (public and private combined) to be invested in R&D/innovation.
- Education: reducing school drop-out rates to below 10%; at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary education.
- Poverty/social exclusion: at least 20 million less people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- Climate/energy: greenhouse gas emissions 20% (or even 30% if the conditions are right) lower than in 1990. Twenty percent of energy from renewables; 20% increase in energy efficiency.

The EU-level targets are translated into national targets for each member country. Each member country has adopted its own national targets in each of these areas. Achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy requires reinforced surveillance to address key macroeconomic challenges and a thematic approach to speed up growth-enhancing structural reforms. Member countries set out actions to be undertaken (e.g. in employment, research, innovation, energy and social inclusion) in their national reform programmes to achieve key targets. The EU Council then issues country-specific guidance to member countries in June/July. This means that policy advice is given to member countries before they start to finalise their draft budgets for the following year.

Source: European Commission (n.d.), "Europe 2020", European Union, Brussels. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm.

These are very cross-disciplinary tasks and therefore the role of the Centre of Government can be crucial. Yet, Centres of Government appear to have a somewhat ad hoc and unclear attribution of risk management functions. To ensure good co-ordination among the main stakeholders, some countries have given explicit responsibility for risk management to the Centre of Government. For example, the UK Cabinet Office is responsible for scenario planning, crisis co-ordination, and identifying risks, yet the process of risk management is not considered 'distinct' from strategic planning (as defined in the OECD survey). The remit of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, a team that sits within the Cabinet Office, falls into four main areas: risk assessment, preparation and planning, response and recovery, and building a resilient society. In this respect, its work is normally very closely coordinated with strategic planning activities in the Cabinet Office.

Figure 17: Is risk management a separate activity or part of the broader strategic planning function?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Each of the main steps in the risk management cycle (which includes risk assessment, risk evaluation, decision-making, risk control, and ex-post evaluation) requires judgements based both on scientific analysis and political estimations of public values and perceptions. The Centre of Government usually works by transmitting evidence from departments and from scientific bodies up to meetings of senior government officials in the same way that it filters, reviews and reformats information on other policy issues. In today's situation of (perceived) heightened exposure to both natural and man-made disasters, the time is probably right for Centres of Government to reassess their risk management capacity. But, effective risk governance from the Centre presents specific challenges in terms of both the assessment of evidence and risk and the co-ordination of actors in the event of a crisis or disaster.

Many actions can be quickly adopted in the aftermath of a major event. The challenge is to move from such "reactive strategies" to "proactive strategies": that is, identifying the major gaps ex ante, and filling them. The main "risk" to guard against with respect to a Centre of Government-led review of crisis management is that the process does not become a purely bureaucratic process, lacking the imagination and creativity to prepare for the unexpected. However, if operating in crisis mode becomes the norm, and if crises are both multiple and diverse, then this role will become more important, and more capacity will be needed at the Centre.

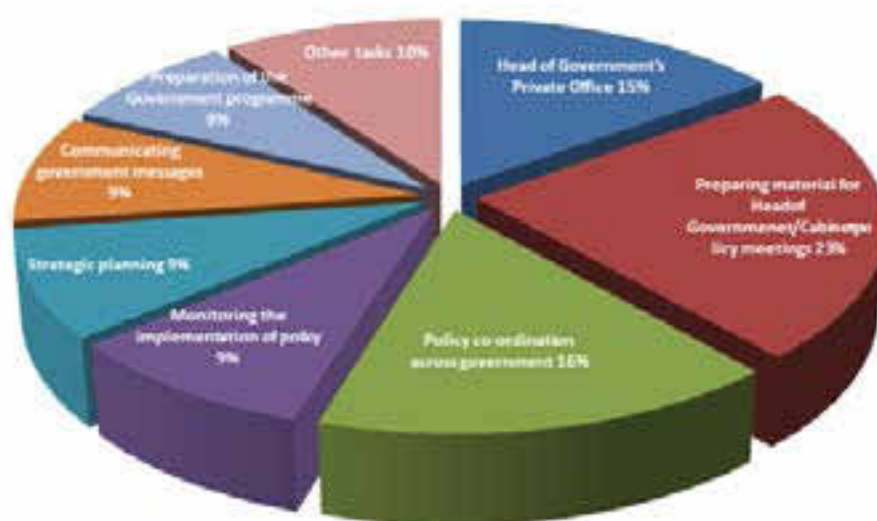
B Getting the job done: Structures and people

An organisational structure characterised by change and adaptation

Understanding how the Centre can best fulfil its key roles and identifying good practice is complicated. There is no single model of an effective Centre and the functions described in Part A do not fit neatly with the Centre's organogram in most countries.

According to the survey responses, the proportionate allocation of the resources of the Centre should look something like the pie chart in figure 18. This would assign around 15 percent of resources to the private office of the Head of Government, 25 percent to the decision-making support role linked to preparation of senior government meetings, 16 percent to policy coordination and so on among the other main functions identified in the survey. A final 10 percent goes to the miscellaneous activities that each country's Centre of Government seems to undertake.

Figure 18: A 'model' allocation of resources at the Centre

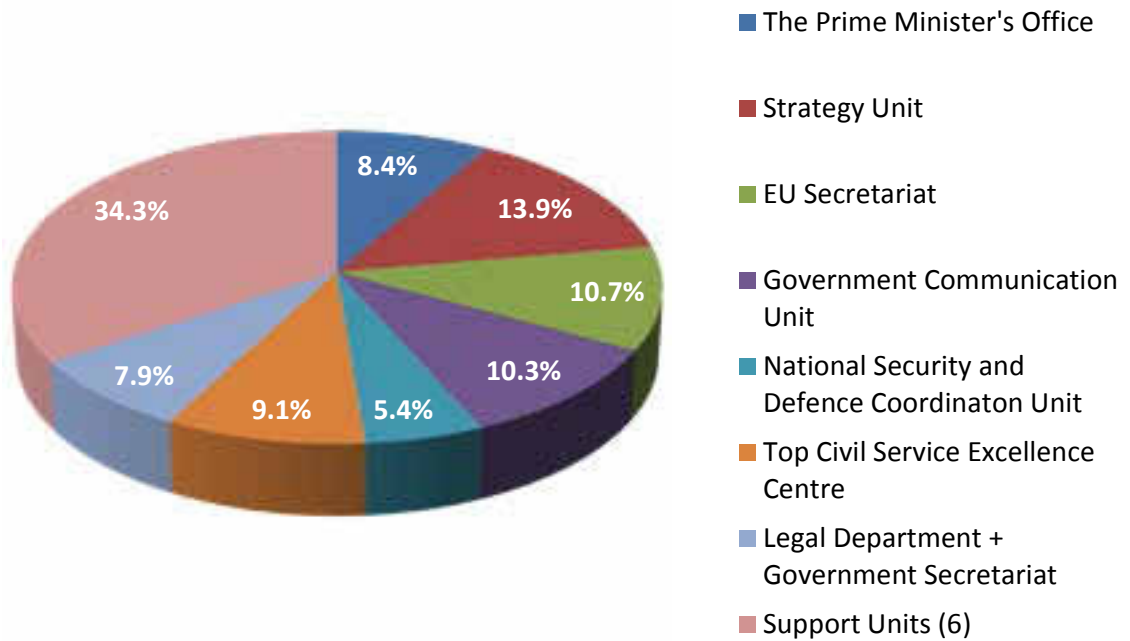


Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

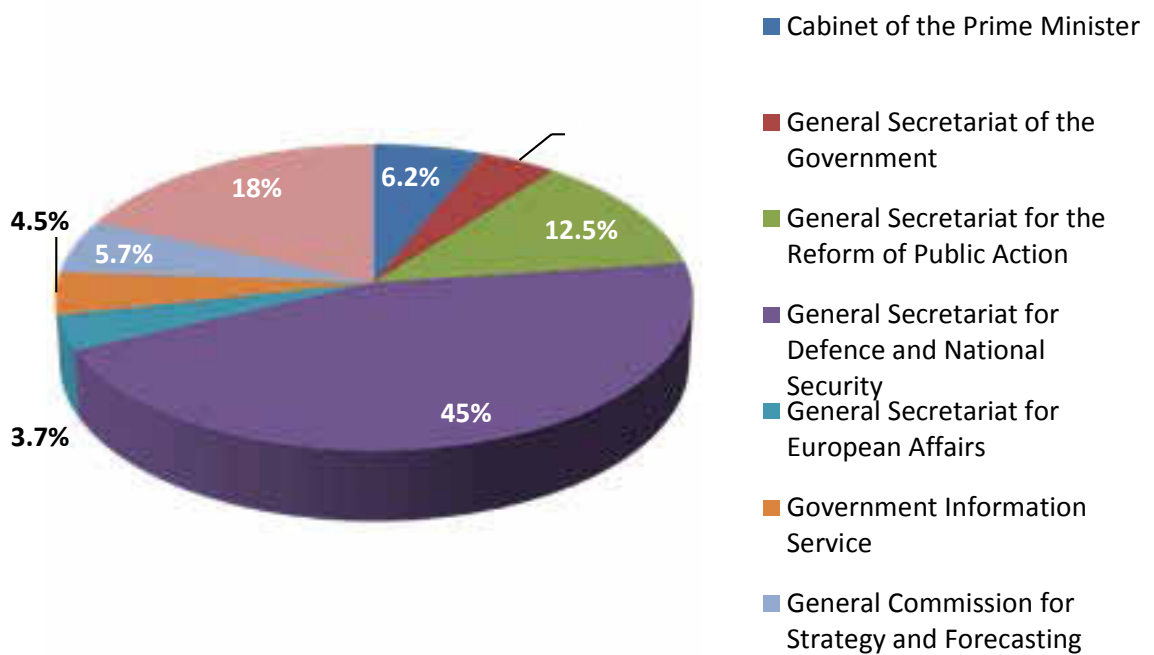
However, the geometry of the Centre of Government varies greatly. It certainly varies more across countries than is the case with most sectoral ministries which often look quite similar from one nation to another. Indeed, the need to focus on functions and objectives rather than on organisational form is underlined by a quick comparison of the structures of just four OECD Centres of Government -- Estonia, France, Japan and the United States. The latter three have similar staff levels in their Centres of Government, yet very different distributions of resources.

Figure 19: Centres in practice: examples of central structures and the distribution of resources

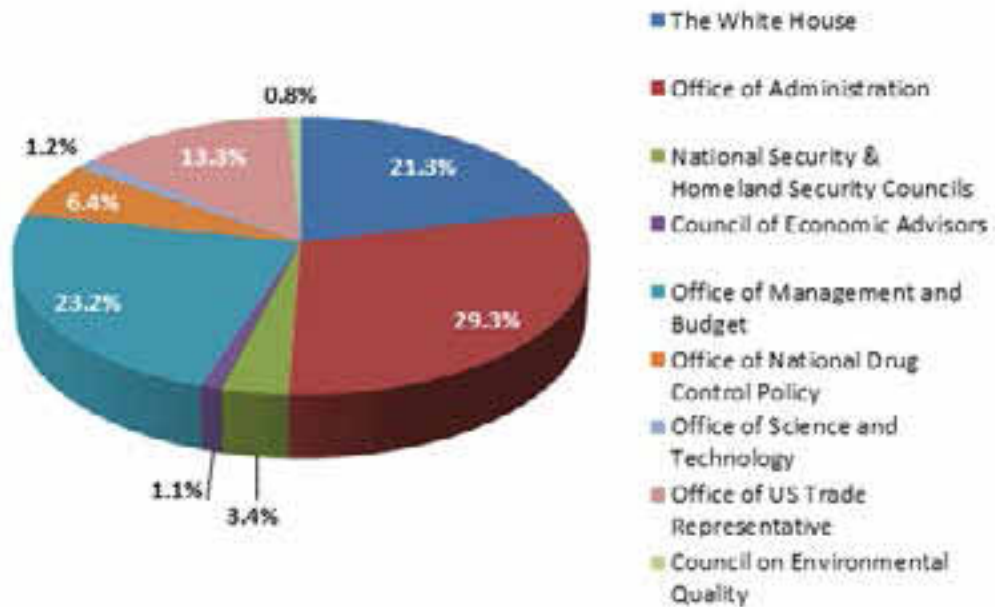
Estonia



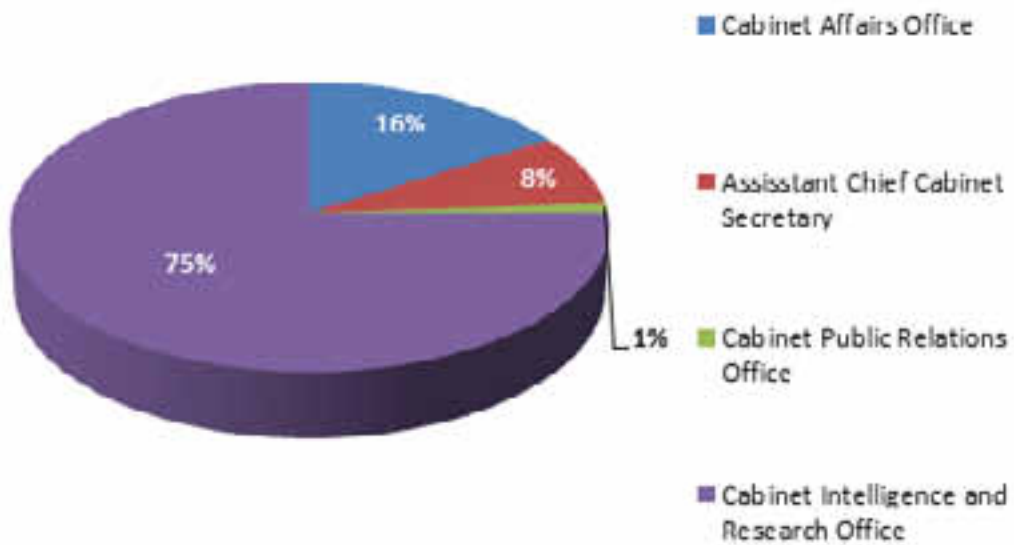
France



United States



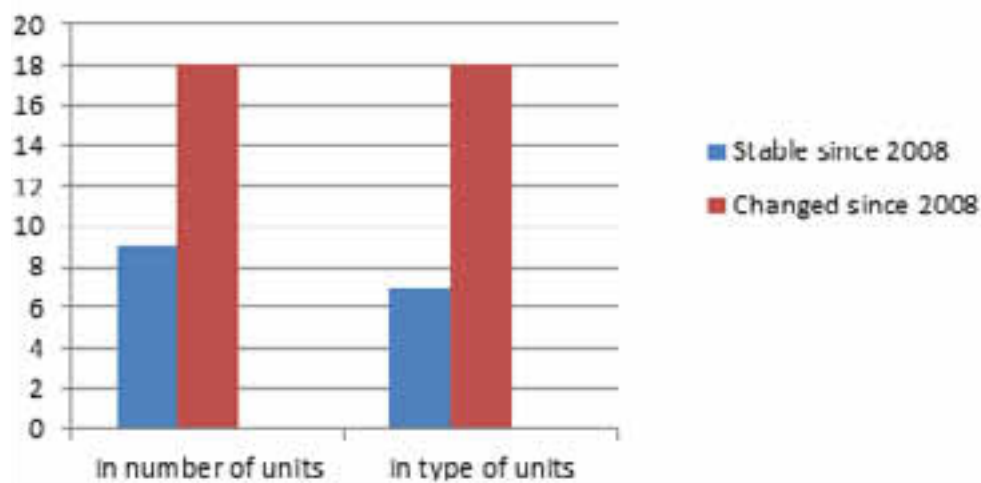
Japan



The structures of some Centres of Government are remarkably simple – domestic affairs/ international affairs or policy development/administrative affairs – while others such as Germany, France, Italy and the United States contain many separate units. In Spain, the same group of staff are responsible for policy analysis and coordination, strategic issues and work planning. In Hungary, the Referatura of the Prime Minister’s office combines responsibility for preparing items for the Council of Ministers, policy analysis, legal verification, work planning, monitoring implementation and relations with Parliament. In others, each task is assigned to a specific unit. On the one hand, integrated teams mean that policy development can be followed by the same group from design to implementation. On the other, the risk might be that some tasks – typically those linked to day-to-day business or short-term issues – crowd out other more strategic or less politically valuable tasks.

The other feature of Centres of Government in addition to their heterogeneity is their fluidity. The size and structure of the Centre appear to be in fairly permanent evolution.

Figure 20: Change in the number and type of units in the Centre of Government



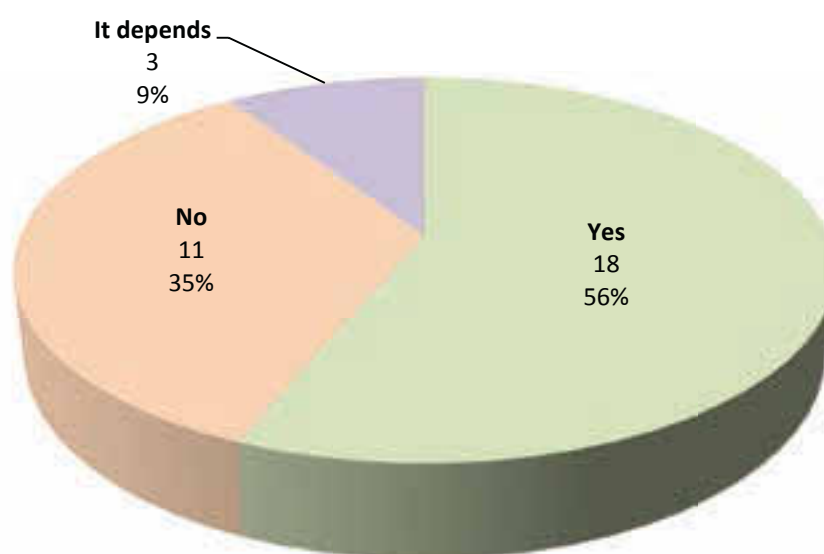
Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

While some core elements seem to remain constant, the OECD survey shows a large number of institutional reforms and adjustments even in the short space of time since the onset of the crisis. This is not entirely surprising because the structure of the Centre of Government reflects, on the one hand, constitutional and legal requirements, which provide some architectural anchoring, but, on the other, it must also be highly adaptable to the needs, preferences and personality of the Head of Government of the moment. As such, the Centre usually includes two complementary elements:

- A permanent element that ensures continuity and compliance with constitutional and procedural norms, and
- Temporary elements to allow for subject-driven advice and agenda setting in line with the preferences of the Head of Government and/or Cabinet.

The fact that many Centres of Government have such fluid organisational structures over time is a reflection of their importance as support mechanisms for the Head of Government him/herself. When a new incumbent arrives, advice and support from the Centre of Government is vital to the successful launching of a new government’s legislative programme because although the new administration has a high level of political power, it usually has less experience with policy development or the legislative process. Sometimes, the new government sets testing deadlines for the introduction of key reforms – e.g., “30 reforms in the first 30 days”, etc. – which then need to be moved rapidly through a myriad of legal and procedural steps.

Figure 21: Is the head of the CoG normally replaced after each election?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Countries with particularly high levels of turnover following elections

Belgium	26-50%
Chile	26-50%
Portugal	26-50%
United States	26-50%
Brazil	More than 50%
Slovak Republic	More than 50%
Turkey	More than 50%

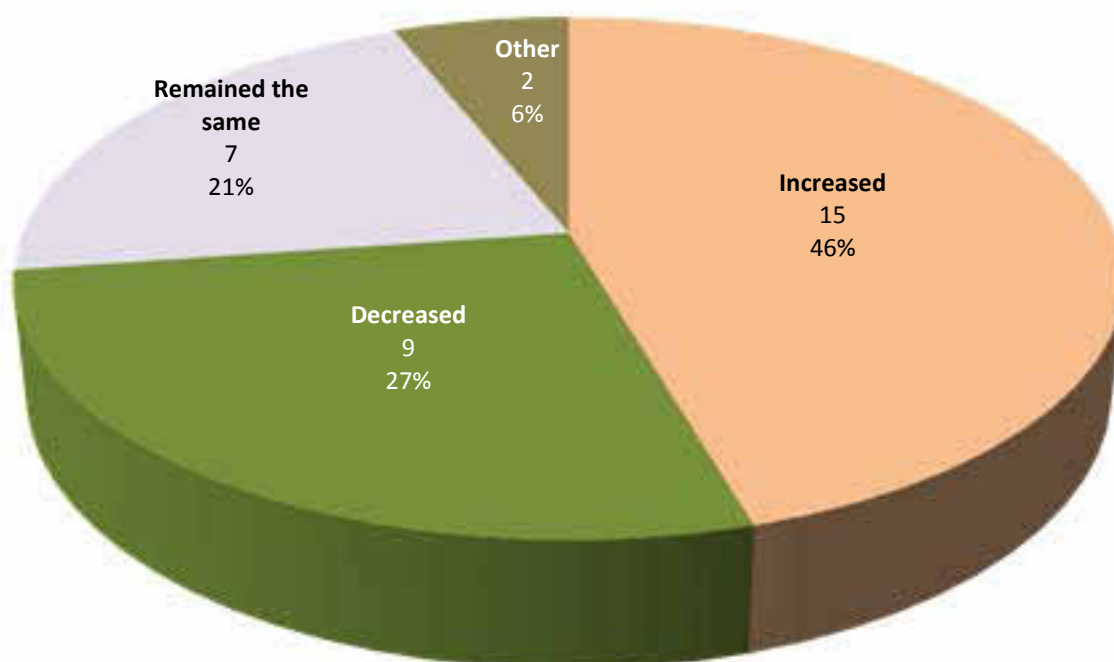
Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Electoral changes also bring new directions, priorities and perspectives that can require an organisational response at the Centre. Typically, a new Head of Government will review the resources at his or her disposal to implement those priority policies and then propose institutional changes at the Centre. This often takes place in a situation of significant upheaval within the Centre itself. In some countries, between one-quarter and one-half of senior Centre of Government staff change with the arrival of a new government. In around half of OECD countries, the Head of the Centre of Government and the top layer of staff are replaced (see figure 21). Change at the Centre of Government is thus often a question of balancing the desire to add new capacity or skills linked to new priorities with the need to maintain institutional memory and continuity, while allowing time for new senior management teams to settle in.

A new Head of Government will tend to expect Centre of Government institutions to adapt rapidly to align with new policy directions, and in many cases this means new units or new project teams. Institutional “stickiness” then plays a part: the specific structure of the Centre of Government tends to be an amalgam of recent adjustments made to suit the preferences of an incumbent, on top of other adjustments made by predecessors that were perhaps superseded but not entirely removed. This can explain sometimes confusing organisational structures and could also perhaps encourage new arrivals to think about wholesale restructuring. However, the challenges involved in developing effective working relationships between a new political team and the Centre of Government’s permanent civil service staff are such that reforms tend to focus on operationalising core priorities rather than on wholesale reorganisation.

In addition to this pattern of adaptation to different political regimes, new economic or social circumstances can also drive change at the Centre of Government. For instance, the economic crisis has had a profound impact on priorities and, in turn, on structures at the Centre of Government. The German Chancellery’s International Financial Market Policy Unit and the UK Cabinet Office’s Efficiency and Reform team are examples of important changes at the Centre driven by a changing economic context. In some cases, specific events – such as the terrorist attack in Norway and the earthquake in New Zealand – have led to substantial strengthening of capacity at the Centre (visible in increased budgets and staff numbers). In others, the general threat posed by international terrorism has resulted in additional resources being allocated to the Centre to coordinate cross-government security-related tasks and extra resources for crisis management.

Figure 22: Between 2008 and 2012, the CoG's budget...



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Between 2008 and 2012, the CoG's budget...			
...increased in	...decreased in	...remained the same in	...oscillated in
Australia	Austria	Belgium	Canada
EU	Brazil	Chile	Lithuania
France	Denmark	Finland	
Hungary	Estonia	Germany	
Israel	Italy	Iceland	
Korea	Latvia	Japan	
Morocco	Portugal	United States	
New Zealand	Slovenia		
Norway	Spain		
Slovak Republic			

While the OECD survey certainly suggests adaptability in terms of resources and structures, and even though most have grown in size over the past five years, there are examples in which strengthening the Centre has meant reducing its overall budget.

Achieving a more effective Centre of Government can involve decreasing resources in cases where “non-essential” functions are reallocated to give the Centre a sharper focus on serving the head of government. For example, for the last few years the Government Office of Estonia has been transferring functions not directly related to serving the Prime Minister and the Government to ministries, such as developing records management, management of civil service training and managing certain EU funds. On the basis of various spending reviews, Italy has introduced significant consolidation of the Centre, including elimination or transfer of non-core activities. Streamlining of the Centre of Government is often accompanied by enhanced secondment and reassignment mechanisms. The EU’s General Secretariat has reduced in size because of the transfer of some units to other directorates. At the same time, a large redeployment pool has been created that can be drawn on when required to augment analytical or administrative capacity at the centre temporarily.

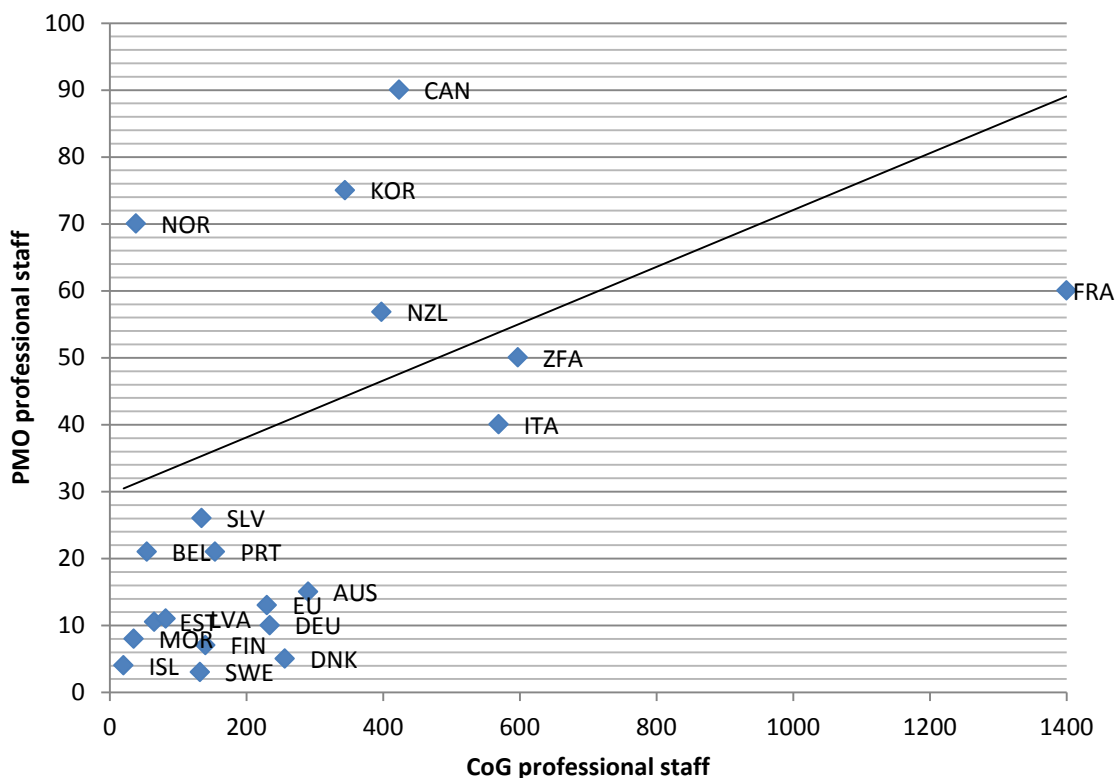
A key characteristic of the Centre of Government is its ability to adapt to new challenges and circumstances, whether these derive from domestic politics or from external events. It is probably unwise to allow too many ‘additional’ functions to accumulate at the Centre of Government. To be effective, the Centre of Government needs to be small enough to react rapidly to changing events; as it grows, it risks losing flexibility and becoming unwieldy. At the same time, recent experience suggests that too small could mean too little capacity, which, in turn, jeopardises the ability of the Centre to provide impartial, authoritative advice and support. Periodic ‘spring cleaning’ of the Centre of Government seems to be a valuable exercise that all countries could undertake on occasion without the “external shock” provided by a change in government.

Serving the Head of Government: integrating political and technical support

Support to the Head of Government is viewed as a broad Centre of Government task. Nonetheless, most systems include a specific Prime Minister’s Office, Private Office or similar body that serves the Head of Government personally. This PMO usually manages the Head of Government’s agenda and provides ad hoc policy advice and political intelligence gathering support. As most systems include a PMO as well as a larger Centre of Government structure, policy advice can come from both the PMO (staffed by political appointees in most cases, providing party political perspectives) and the wider Centre of Government (staffed largely by civil servants and providing more impartial advice). These PMO units are often administratively tied to the larger Centre of Government structure, but because of their highly political nature (and separate staffing procedures), they keep some degree of separation.

The range of support functions that can be assigned solely to the PMO is quite limited. Survey results suggest that the average PMO accounts for between 10% and 20% of the overall resources of the Centre of Government.

PMO professional staff vs. Centre professional staff



New Zealand is a fairly typical case: the PMO has around 30 staff, generally political appointees, while the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet employs around 120 civil servants of which 20 make up a “civil service” policy advice unit for the Prime Minister. In Germany, the Chancellor’s Office is small (+/- 10 senior advisors) but very influential, with the Chancellery’s 600-plus staff providing complementary policy advice as well as a range of other coordination and brokering services. The Austrian Federal Chancellery also has limited resources for supporting the Chancellor (15 out of a total of 400 Chancellery staff), largely because policy development rests with the political parties and competencies are distributed widely across strong line ministries. As such, the Chancellery focuses on cross-departmental issues (e-government, public service reform, policy coordination).

Some other countries, in contrast, place a more explicit emphasis on the role of supporting the Head of Government and/or Cabinet. In Australia, the most important area of responsibility for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is to provide advice to the Prime Minister (ahead of other functions such as policy coordination or strategic planning per se), and its approach is built around the idea of “focusing on the Prime Minister recognising what is important and anticipating what will become important” . On top of this, the Australian Prime Minister has a private office (PMO) which is not part of PM&C or the Australian Public Service. Similarly, in Canada, a large proportion of the Centre of Government’s resources are devoted to providing non-partisan advice to the Head of Government and portfolio Ministers (52% of total resources in 2012). This is in addition to around 90 political advisors in the Prime Minister’s Office, which is a separate body.

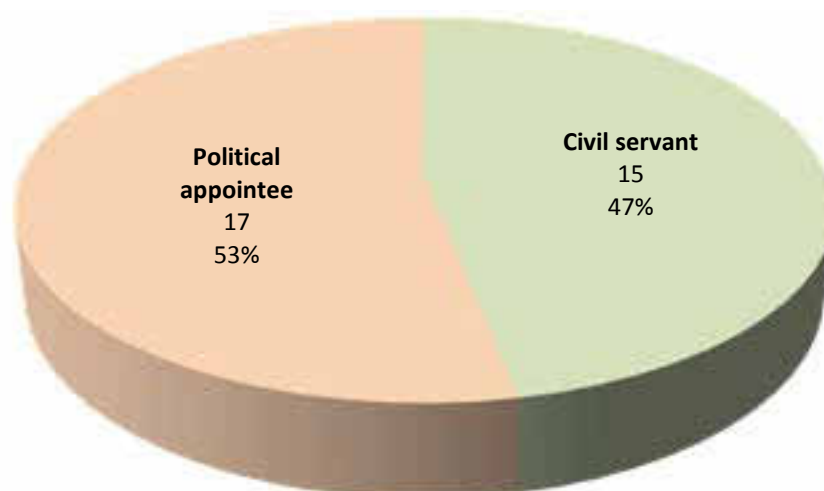
Leadership and human resources

As is apparent from the foregoing discussion of tasks, the role of the head of the Centre of Government is demanding and complex. The person must be close to and trusted by the Head of Government and his or her political staff, while also close to and trusted by senior civil servants and, more generally, respected by the civil service.

There is a clear split among OECD countries with respect to how that position is filled: in roughly half of the countries surveyed, the head of the Centre is a political appointee and is replaced when the government changes (except insofar as the post-holder is allowed to complete a fixed-term appointment before being replaced, as in Austria, for example). In the other countries, the head of the Centre of Government is a civil servant, normally holding the most senior civil servant rank (see figure 23).

There are advantages to both approaches: a political appointee provides a clear link between the administrative Centre and the specific political objectives of the party in power and the Head of Government. Ministerial status, which is the case in a large minority (13 countries out of 32, see figure 24), should also help to ensure that the perspective of the Centre is well represented in the deliberations of the Government. At the same time, understanding how the bureaucracy functions is likely to be more challenging, at least in the early days. A career civil servant heading the Centre of Government is likely to be better able to navigate the administration and provides administrative continuity, which is a valuable commodity in the fast-changing environment of the Centre of Government. The flipside, of course, is that he or she might have more difficulty influencing the political level. For example, while a political head would normally participate fully in Cabinet meetings, a civil servant would be there in an administrative capacity.

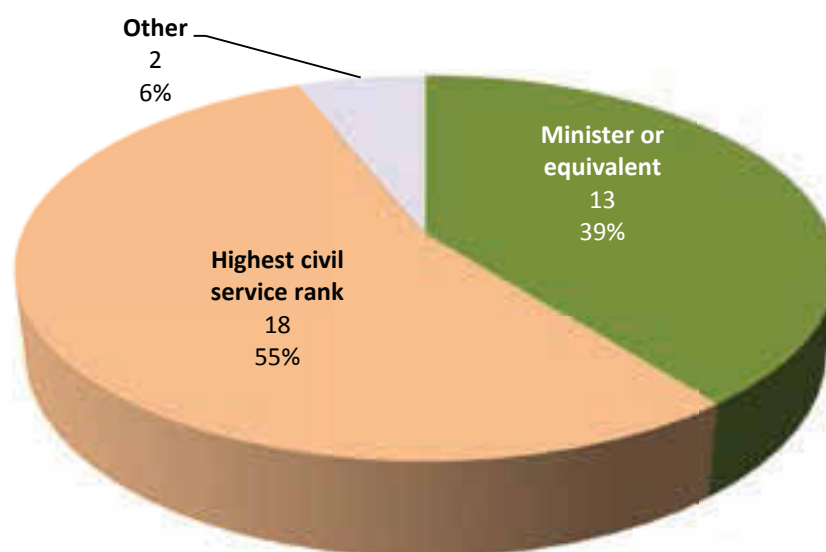
Figure 23: What is the status of the head of the Centre of Government?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

The head of CoG is a...	
...civil servant in	...political appointee in
Australia	Brazil
Austria	Chile
Belgium	Finland
Canada	Germany
Denmark	Hungary
Estonia	Israel
EU	Italy
France	Japan
Iceland	Korea
Latvia	Lithuania
Morocco	Portugal
New Zealand	Slovak Republic
Norway	Slovenia
South Africa	Spain
Turkey	Sweden
United Kingdom	Switzerland
	United States

Figure 24: What is the status of the head of the Centre of Government?

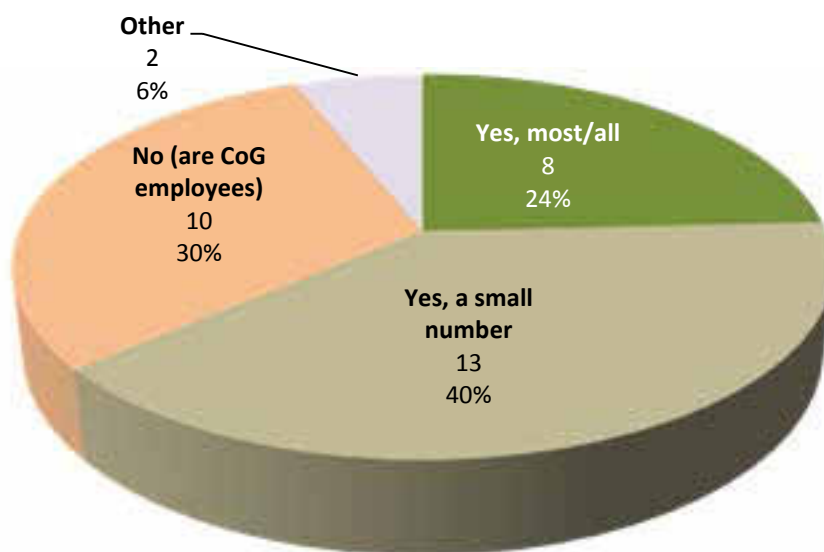


Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

As has been mentioned above, the human resources at the Centre of Government tend to be fairly limited in number. However, the nature of the work at the Centre of Government, not to mention the prestige of the institution, means that the Centre can usually attract top level staff. As shown in figure 25, most staff are civil servants and a large majority are permanently located in the Centre of Government. This reflects the organisational and managerial nature of a portion of the work and the importance of a strong understanding of procedural and organisational issues relating to the machinery of government and the legislative process. As was noted above, there is a distinction between the permanent element in the Centre that ensures continuity and compliance, and temporary elements to allow for subject-driven advice. In HR terms, the former is likely to require a number of permanent “generalists” while the latter needs rolling expertise.

The human resource context of parts of the Centre can be very different from other civil service entities. First, the work environment has at least the reputation of being extremely high pressure, with a level of media scrutiny and political attention not found elsewhere in the public administration. Second, the range of topics dealt with at the Centre is wider than in most other departments. The perceived risk of “burnout” combined with the need to bring in expertise to cover a wide spectrum of evolving priorities has led some countries to favour highly flexible staffing systems for the Centre of Government. In some countries (Brazil, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Spain Portugal and the UK) most or all Centre of Government employees are on secondment from other ministries. In most other countries (13 out of 32), seconded staff or external experts are concentrated in particular units, notably PMOs, policy development units, crisis management units or implementation teams for priority initiatives. For example, most staff in Australia’s Prime Minister’s Office are on temporary mobility contracts and return to their home ministry afterwards. This recruitment strategy was introduced in the 1990s to ensure a more dynamic team of staff with relevant expertise for the priorities of the specific Head of Government. As a by-product, the secondees’ continuing ties with their home ministries are seen as important for promoting coordination. Denmark’s human resources policy also emphasises the importance of rotating staff in and out of the Centre in order to keep the skills set fresh and dynamic.

Figure 25: Are Centre of Government employees normally secondees or permanent staff?



Source: 2013 Survey on the Organisation and Functions of the Centre of Government, OECD, Paris

Although some countries have a tradition of a small Centre of Government, a perceived increase in the pressure on the Head of Government seems to be prompting a review of staffing. The lack of a strong permanent secretariat in countries with decentralised administrative structures has been seen as a potential problem, particularly where the tasks of the prime minister or president seem to be expanding. In Switzerland, for example, a new office is being created to support the office of Federal President (which rotates annually and is therefore at risk of discontinuity), particularly in the areas of policy and communications.

Overall, the structure of Centres of Government incorporate a fair amount of flexibility in the way that they are organised to respond to changing priorities and short-term demands. At the same time, the human resources and budgets are small and this puts a premium on relationship building and the formal/informal mechanisms by which the Centre works with other departments. The survey suggests strongly that a functional perspective on the Centre's role is more useful than a strict organisational perspective. At the same time, it can only achieve its functions if the organisation leads to a highly-skilled, networked and influential Centre.

Glossary of terms used in the questionnaire

Agency: Semi-autonomous public organisation that operates at arm's length from the government, usually reporting to a ministry and mandated to carry out public tasks (e.g. regulation, service delivery, policy implementation) in a relatively autonomous manner (i.e. with less hierarchy and political influence in daily operations and with more managerial freedom).

Cabinet: This term is used to refer to the collective meeting of Ministers. In some countries it is called the Council of Ministers, in others Government, and there are a number of other less common names.

Centre of Government (CoG): For the purpose of this survey, the term Centre of Government (CoG) refers to the administrative structure that serves the Executive (President or Prime Minister, and the Cabinet collectively). Therefore the survey is not concerned with other units, offices, and commissions (e.g. offices for sport or culture) that may report directly to the President or Prime Minister but are, effectively, carrying out line functions that might equally well be carried out by line ministries. The Centre of Government has a great variety of names across countries, such as General Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Chancellery, Office/Ministry of the Presidency, Council of Ministers Office, etc. In many countries the CoG is made up of more than one unit, fulfilling different functions. A unit that is shared by virtually all Centres of Government is the unit that serves specifically the head of the government. This too has a variety of names, such as the Cabinet of the Prime Minister or the Private Office.

Civil servant: an employee of the state, either permanent or on a long-term contract, who would remain a state employee if the government changes.

Full-time equivalent (FTE): A full-time equivalent, or FTE, is defined as total hours worked divided by average hours worked in full-time jobs.

Government: Specific group of people who occupy the institutions of the state and create laws. "The government" is usually taken to define the individuals who exert political power over the state and its institutions at a given time (for example the prime minister, ministers and ministers without portfolio). The government is thus the particular group of people that controls the state apparatus at a given time, and is the means through which state power is employed (for example the adoption of laws). In a democracy, the state is served by a continuous succession of different governments. The number of governments is determined by the number of terms served by the head of the executive branch (where a term is defined by a change in the executive or an election that renewed support for the incumbent government. Government in this definition is not the same as the use of the term government in a statistical or expenditure context (as for example in "general government").

Government Programme: The government programme is typically developed on the basis of an incoming government's policy manifesto (or in the case of coalition governments, the coalition manifesto). The programme covers policies and legislation that the government intends to implement during its period in office. It may be updated and refined on annual basis.

Head of Government (HG) This term is used to refer to the Prime Minister or President – or both - depending on the political system of the country.

Implementation: The processes and actions that need to be taken, once a new policy and/or law has been adopted, in order to ensure that the policy or law is given concrete effect. Can also be called operationalisation, reflecting the fact that policies have no effect unless and until they are made operational.

Minister: Political head of a ministry (in certain countries, the head of a ministry may be called Secretary or Secretary of State, and minister may be more junior in rank). Ministers are generally in charge of one or more ministries, and have a portfolio of responsibilities derived from the areas of responsibility covered by the ministry or ministries. Some ministers do not head up a ministry, but are in charge of specific issues supported by an office (“minister without portfolio”). In most parliamentary systems, ministers are drawn from the legislature but keep their parliamentary seats. In most presidential systems, ministers are not elected officials and are appointed by the President.

Ministerial Committee: Committees of ministers, usually set up to deal with specific sectors of government activity and policy such as economic affairs, social affairs, EU issues, in order to confirm a course of action and to resolve disagreements. They are usually chaired by a relevant senior minister. A key objective is to minimise the number of issues that need to be put to the Cabinet, and to identify the priority issues that merit Cabinet attention. Ministerial committees are often “shadowed” by committees of officials, with the equivalent aim of preparing the ministerial committees, identifying priority issues for ministerial attention, and resolving disagreements.

Ministry: An organisation which forms part of the central core of the executive branch of government. A ministry is responsible for the design and implementation of an area or sector of public policy and administration (e.g. agriculture, education, economy, foreign affairs), in line with the government programme and strategy. A ministry is also responsible for the direction of agencies under its authority. In some countries, such as Australia, Norway, the United States and the United Kingdom, ministries are called “departments.” Sub-national governments may also be organised into ministries. A ministry has a delegated budget to exercise its responsibilities, under the authority and direction of the finance ministry or equivalent organisation responsible for the budget in central government. The term line ministry designates the majority of ministries, which exercise delegated, sectoral powers. The finance ministry is not a line ministry.

Policy: A term which does not exist in all languages and which in some languages may be synonymous with politics. A public policy defines a consistent course of action designed to meet a goal or objective, respond to an issue or problem identified by the government as requiring action or reform. It is implemented by a public body (ministry, agency, etc.), although elements may be delegated to other bodies. Examples include a public policy to tackle climate change, educational reform, support for entrepreneurship. A public policy is, or should be, linked to the government programme and its strategic planning. It is often given a formal framework through legislation and/or secondary regulations, especially in countries with a system of civil law. It is given practical effect through a defined course of action, programmes and activities. It is, as necessary, funded from the state budget. A priority policy is a policy which matters more than others for the achievement of the government’s strategic objectives. The responsibility for taking forward a public policy may rest with the relevant line ministry, or, in the case of policies that cut across ministerial boundaries, may be shared by relevant ministries.

Political adviser: A member of staff who is not a civil servant, appointed by the President, Prime Minister or a Minister to assist them, and who would leave state employment if the government changes.

Private Office of the Prime Minister or President (PO): Many countries have a unit which is part of the CoG (at least for administrative purposes) that serves specifically the head of the government. This, too, has a variety of names, such as the Prime Minister's Office or Office of the President.

Professional staff: This category of staff is to be distinguished from clerical/secretarial staff and managers. They are usually required to have a university degree, and may have leadership responsibilities over a field of work or various projects. They develop and analyse policies guiding the design, implementation and modification of government operations and programmes; review existing policies and legislation in order to identify anomalies and put-of-day provisions; analyse and formulate policy options, prepare briefing papers and recommendations for policy changes. Moreover, they assess the impact, financial implications and political and administrative feasibility of public policies. Their areas of expertise may include law, economics, politics, public administration, international relations, engineering, environment, pedagogy, health economics, etc.

Risk anticipation and management: In this context, refers to focused efforts at anticipating and identifying emerging risks (may also be referred to as horizon scanning, or strategic foresight) and taking actions to manage the identified risks. A more technical definition focuses on risk assessment, risk management and risk communication as part of a cycle. Risk assessment is about identifying and assessing the extent of a potential hazard and to estimate the probability and consequences of negative outcomes for humans, property or the environment. Risk management refers to the design and implementation of actions and remedies to address risks. Risk communication refers to the methods and practices for educating and informing the public about risks when making risk trade-offs.

State: Set of enduring institutions, usually given legitimacy in a constitution and related legal forms, through which public power is distributed. In the social sciences, a sovereign state is a compulsory political organisation with a centralised government that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a defined territory (Weber), and is internationally recognised as such (through for example membership of the United Nations).

State Secretary: Administrative head of a ministry, i.e. a civil servant; may also be known as Permanent Secretary, Chief Executive or (non-political) Deputy Minister. There is great variability in the roles, responsibilities, place in the hierarchy and mode of appointment of state secretaries. Note that in some countries the same term may be used for (political) junior ministers, and a variant (Secretary of State) may be used to designate the senior minister in political charge of a ministry.

Strategic planning: A tool for identifying short-, medium-, and long-term priorities and goals (e.g. "improve education" or "achieve energy security") and laying out a set of present and future (collective) actions for achieving them.

Support and clerical staff: These staff are generally not required to have a university degree although many do. They perform a wide range of clerical and administrative tasks in connection with money-handling operations, travel arrangements, requests for information, appointments and communications, including recording, preparing, sorting, classifying and filling in information; preparing reports and correspondence; recording issue of equipment to staff; responding to telephone or electronic enquiries or forwarding to appropriate person; checking figures, preparing invoices and recording details of financial transactions made; transcribing information onto computers; updating Internet pages; and proofreading, correcting and laying out copy. Some assist in the preparation of budgets, monitoring of expenditures, drafting of contracts and purchasing or acquisition orders. Senior staff who supervise the work of clerical support workers are excluded from this category.

Unit: We use this generic term to refer to Departments, Directorates, Sections, or any other organizational segment that can be identified within the CoG.

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