

Looking back and thinking ahead: 30 years of policy advisory system scholarship

Jonathan Craft
John Halligan

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Introduction

Decision makers have always had access to various forms of advice (Goldhammer, 1978; Bakvis, 1997). Considerable progress has been made through comparative examinations of policy advisory practices improving our understanding of the role of policy advice within the policy process (Boston, 1994; Weible, 2008). Several typologies and models have been advanced for understanding the function of individual public service policy advisers (Dluhy, 1981; Jenkins-Smith, 1982; Meltzner, 1976), and major contributions have ‘mapped’ the types and supplies of policy advice in various jurisdictions and policy domains, including but extending beyond those of their respective public services (Page & Jenkins, 2005; Hoppe & Jeliaskova, 2006; Howlett et al., 2014; Saint-Martin, 2005; Boston, 1994). Concurrently, analysis has also addressed the changing contexts within which advisory work is undertaken, its associated practices, and the role of policy advice in various administrative traditions (Rhodes et al, 2010; Painter & Peters, 2010; Peters & Barker, 1993). The concept of policy advisory system – or the interlocking set of actors and organizations with unique configurations in each sector and jurisdiction that provides recommendations for action to policy-makers (Seymour-Ure, 1987; Halligan, 1995) – has been important to advancing this research agenda. It has broadened the focus of analysis from individual policy advisors to a synergistic and dynamic analysis of how the various advisory components interact with one another, exert influence within the policy process, and evolve over time (Scott & Baehler, 2010; Craft & Howlett, 2013). As the concept approaches its 30th anniversary it is an appropriate time to reflect on how the advisory system concept has been applied, refined, and the directions ripe for future study.

This article begins with a synthesis of the dominant themes and approaches in the literature. This includes attention to leading approaches including the locational, control-autonomy, content-based, and dynamic approaches. In many ways advisory system scholarship has always sought to depict and analyze the dynamic of such systems. However as surveyed below, treatments have been animated by different research aims, including assessments of the type, number, and influence of advisory inputs, and the effects of successive public sector reforms on the public service’s function in the Anglo-American systems (Boston, 1994; Prince, 1983; Halligan, 1995). Others have emphasized the emergence and expanded use of alternative or non-public service advisory institutions and organizations (Weaver & Stares, 2002; St-Martin, 2005), or the changing processes

surrounding types of policy advice, and their generation, brokerage, and place within the policy process itself (Pierre, 1998; Boston, 1994; Prasser, 2006; Fisher, 2003; Majone, 1989). Despite these different orientations, the fundamental unit of analysis has typically been the public service, the intent being to analyze effects of such dynamics for the longstanding advisory orthodoxy, often framed as bilateral public service-elected official ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979; Parsons, 2004; Prince, 2007).

Contemporary analysis has continued in this vein, but has sought to examine potential linkages between advisory systems and their operational context. This has in large measure been spurred by claims of shifts from government to governance (Rhodes, 1997), and rapidly evolving institutional and international contexts (Hajaer, 2003; Craft & Howlett, 2012). Two dynamics have featured prominently – externalization, or the diversification of supply from the traditionally dominant public service to a plurality of suppliers; and politicization, or attempts by elected political actors to reassert the primacy of politics in the policy process (Halligan & Power 1992; Di Francesco & Eppel, 2011; Dahlström, et al, 2011; Savoie, 2015). Yet, even these more recent patterns retain the public service as the primary subject of interest. They usefully offer a rich examination of the implications on the constitution and function of public services within advisory system, but again offer much less analysis as to the implications for the systems themselves, or their function within the policy process. In response, emerging lines of inquiry have sought to address this lacuna by grappling with questions of scale, seeking, for example, to tease out the dynamics of advisory systems at the policy domain or sectoral level (Craft & Wilder, 2014; Husted, 2013; Fleischer, 2009; Inwood et al., 2011), or in international or trans-subsystemic contexts where polycentrism rather than single ‘authoritative’ actor(s) prevail (Wilder & Craft, 2015; Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009).

Sympathetic to such efforts, and using diachronic analysis of the Anglo-Saxon or ‘Westminster’ family of systems (Canada, U.K., Australia, New Zealand), we argue that each of the above approaches must be applied in concert for a full account of advisory system dynamics. Anchored by two questions, our analysis asks: what is the current state of the advisory system in each case and how have they evolved? Secondly, what do spatial, content-based, and dynamic approaches tell us about these advisory systems? We contend that the cases’ similarities are in large part a product of shared Anglo-Saxon administrative traditions (Halligan, 2010, 2015b; Painter & Peters, 2010), and their differences are a product of the varied impact of particular domestic contexts and international forces. The penultimate

section distills conclusions from the cases, and recent theoretical advances, to provide directions for future research. The continued purchase of advisory systems for comparative public policy can and should be extended through further study that seeks to integrate extant theoretical approaches, and which extends analysis to additional policy activities, and operating scales.

Conceptual Touchstones: Location, Control-Autonomy, Content-based, and Dynamic Approaches

Advice is a broad rubric but in policy terms it is typically broadly operationalized in terms of government knowledge utilization (Dunn, 2004; Peters & Barker, 1993; MacRae and Whittington, 1997; Webber, 1991) or more narrowly as part of the policy making processes (Scott & Baehler, 2010; James & Jorgensen, 2009)¹. For the insider, policy advice may simply be an ‘output’ (DPMC, 2014), which at its core can be seen as “covering analysis of problems and the proposing of solutions” (Halligan, 1995: 139), but the function encompasses a range of activities that includes “research, data analysis, proposal development, consultation with stakeholders, formulation of advice for decision makers, guiding policy through governmental and parliamentary processes, and the subsequent evaluation of the outcomes of the policy” (Gregory & Lonti, 2008, p.838). It therefore consists of more than the provision of information in including analysis and recommendations of some kind.²

Early conceptual models of policy advice relied heavily on spatial logic to depict and evaluate advice giving as a kind of tripartite marketplace for policy ideas. Typically, this involved the supply of policy advice, its demand on the part of decision-makers, and various potential intermediary brokers who match supply and demand (Craft, 2013; Lindvall, 2009; Verschuere, 2009; Lee, 2013). By this logic, influence was understood in relation to the proximity of policy advice to government decision makers (see Wilson, 2006; Prasser 2006).

Attempts to systematize policy advice, to link the various advisory components at work in any given jurisdiction in synergistic terms, was facilitated by Halligan (1995), who combined longstanding spatial considerations with ‘government control’ as a key variable affecting advisory system operation and influence. As per Table 1, a variety of advisory supplies, more and less proximate to decision makers can be set out to more accurately capture the constellation of potential advisory supplies. This approach also takes into account the observation that only some actors, be they internal or external, are able to influence government but not others.

Table 1 - Location of advice and degree of government influence

Location	Government control	
	High	Low
Public Service	Senior departmental policy advisers Central agency advisers/strategic policy unit	Statutory appointments in public service
Internal to government	Political advisory systems Temporary advisory policy units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministers offices • First ministers offices Parliaments (e.g. a House of Commons)	Permanent advisory policy units Statutory authorities Legislatures (e.g. U.S. Congress)
External	Private sector/NGOS on contract Community organizations subject to government Federal international organizations	Trade unions, interest groups Community groups Confederal international communities/organizations

Source: Halligan, 1995

In his analysis of the Anglo-American cases (Westminster plus the United States) Halligan (1995) detailed the significant shifts in advisory system configuration, and component interaction in these cases, with major trends reconstituting particularly the public services function within the broader and respective advice systems. There was a general shift away from the public service to other sources of advice, and a professionalizing of policy competence outside the public service: this extended to a diverse range of actors from established nongovernment, organizations – advocacy groups, consultants, trade unions to branches of government such as parliaments. Second, there is the pluralizing of the process – internally and externally – as more, and more diverse, sources are replacing what was once a monolith that pulled the strings (or strands) of policy.

Third, the general process of "push and pull" is externalizing and moving responsibilities outside both the public service and government and, therefore, beyond its capacity to exercise direct and close control. His analysis, prescient of subsequent analysis in the individual cases (see Rhodes et al, 2010; Savoie, 2004; Head, 2008) noted that the public service was increasingly compelled to play a political role or as he put it, was forced to "engage more in the politics of policy advice" (Halligan, 1995: 160; cf Gregory & Lonti, 2008; Savoie, 2003). The conclusion was that the internal government category had "expanded at the expense of the internal public service. But, in turn, the rise of external forms has been at the expense of internal mechanisms" (Halligan, 1995: 158).

While this control-autonomy approach is useful for understanding dynamics in relation to the configuration of components, it remains too based on inside-outside or spatial thinking, as governments, generally, were thought to be able to exercise more control over internal actors than external ones. Halligan, however, noted that in all categories, some actors were more susceptible to government control than others and hence more likely to articulate advice that decision-makers would find acceptable. That is, it involved matching their perceptions of best practices, feasibility, and the appropriate goals and means for achieving them (May, 1986, 1991; Weaver & Stares, 2001). However, each of these control categories remains ‘nested’ within a locational one. The extent of independence and autonomy possessed by those ‘inside’ government advisory components, is considerably less than that enjoyed by an ‘outside’ actor, whether or not that external actor, or policy advice, is amenable to government direction. Several studies have since documented the range of domestic and international policy-making pressures that have had significant effects on advisory systems. For instance, reduced domestic fiscal capacity, greater calls for transparent and participatory forms of policy-making, and increasingly internationalized and globalized policy issues. All of which have been noted forces that have transformed the policy advisory landscape, along with the types of policy advice required to govern in contemporary contexts (Tiernan, 2011; Craft & Howlett, 2013, Parsons, 2004). Systematic conceptions of policy advice helpfully draw attention to conceptual and empirical questions about how such system components interact, and change over time. However, to date only a limited set of dynamics have received attention.

Reappraisals: Content, Process, and Temporal Approaches

Moving beyond descriptive mapping of the location of advisory inputs scholars have turned to consideration of content, or the substantive and procedural dimensions of policy advisory activity. Early attempts to think through types of policy advice have long noted basic distinctions such as ‘political’ versus ‘public service’ or ‘technical’ or expert forms of policy advice (Weller, 1987; Head, 2008; Meltzner, 1976), and others have distinguished between strategic versus operational variants (c.f. Boston, 1994). Prasser, in his studies of Royal Commissions in Australia (2006a), and more generally concerning the nature of policy advice (2006b), suggested that distinguishing between ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ content of policy advice is less insightful than distinguishing between the content of the advice provided. Here he distinguished between what he termed ‘cold’ – typically long-term and proactive –

versus ‘hot’ – short-term and crisis driven – types of advice. Although he noted some overlaps between these categories and the old ‘politics’ vs. ‘administration’ divide, the general situation he describes is one in which neither partisan nor civil service actors have an exclusive monopoly of one type of advice over the other.

Prasser’s distinction between short-term ‘hot’ and longer-term ‘cold’ advice have been combined with others who have emphasized the process by which advice is provided to generate a more comprehensive account (see also Connaughton, 2010; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2008). Example include attending to whether advice is provided through closed or open processes (St-Martin, 2005), through lengthy or short public consultations, or royal commissions, or via traditional public service white paper or green paper processes, through reports of management consultants or blue ribbon panels, or by way of consultations with partisan advisers, technical experts, or stakeholders (Pierre, 1998; Weaver & Stares, 2001; Connaughton, 2010; Verschuere, 2009).

Table 2 - Policy advisory system members organised by policy content

	Short-term/reactive	Long-term/anticipatory
Procedural	<p><i>“Pure” Political and Policy Process Advice</i></p> <p>Traditional Political parties, parliaments and legislative committees (House of Commons, Congress); regulatory agencies</p> <p>As well as Internal as well as external political advisers, interest groups; lobbyists; mid-level public service policy analysts and policy managers; pollsters</p>	<p><i>Medium to Long-term Policy Steering Advice</i></p> <p>Traditional Deputy ministers, central agencies/executives; royal commissions; judicial bodies</p> <p>As well as Agencies, boards and commissions; crown corporations; international organizations (e.g. OECD; ILO, UN)</p>
Substantive	<p><i>Short-term Crisis & Fire-Fighting Advice</i></p> <p>Traditional Political peers (e.g. cabinet); executive office political staffs</p> <p>As well as Expanded ministerial/congressional political staffs; cabinet/cabinet committees; external crisis managers/consultants; political strategists; pollsters; community organizations/NGOs; lobbyists, media</p>	<p><i>Evidence-Based Policy-Making</i></p> <p>Traditional Statistical agencies/department; senior departmental policy advisers; strategic policy unit; royal commissions</p> <p>As well as Think tanks; scientific & academic advisers; open data citizen engagement driven policy initiatives/web 2.0; blue ribbon panels</p>

Source: Craft & Howlett 2012

As per Table 2, specifying that there is such content and process dimensions to advisory work provides a more complete understanding of differences in the creation and use of advice, as well as the influence within such systems. That policy advice can be oriented around processes or substantive issues, or be long or short-term in nature suggests that influence may be a product of the alignment of these conditions rather than simply where inputs comes from or government's 'control' over them. While location may be closely aligned with content – as was historically thought to be the case in Westminster-style systems based on sharp political-administrative distinctions – this is not always the case and while purely locational models may help capture growth in the exogenous sources of advice to government proper in contemporary governance situations they do not help to capture the idea that the *kinds* of advice provided by the growing constellation of advisory supplies has also changed and may represent changes in influence. Moreover, new and expanded advisory actors and advisory processes have compounded the need to reflect more carefully on the what or substance of advice provided along with the processes or how it is tendered.

A third approach, implicit in content based and spatial/control-autonomy precursors focuses on broader questions of advisory system dynamics. That is, not only is it important to understand how advisory systems operate in specific sectors and jurisdictions, and who exercises influence within them, but also to understand how actors and their relationships, and the environment within which they operate change over time (Aberbach & Rockman 1989). This allows for discerning whether any pattern of changes is common or idiosyncratic to specific kinds of advisory systems. Often, such assessments are tied to broader questions of shifts in modes of governance (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Bingham et al., 2005; Page & Wright, 2007). This is natural given the preoccupation with the policy and public administration literature of late which has widely analyzed potential departures from traditional public administration modes of governing, based on command and control have, to those characterized as distributed and polycentric 'governance' (Peters, 2014; Rhodes, 2007; Peters & Pierre, 2000). This is in part captured in Table 2 above, with the inclusion of 'new' or alternative advisory organizations and institutions and rapidly evolving policy processes (Weaver & Stares, 2002; Tiernan, 2011).

Two dynamics have figured most prominently in analysis to date, firstly externalization or shifts from a public service heavy to more diffuse and diversified advisory systems (Verseley, 2013); and secondly, politicization or attempts by elected officials to

reassert the primacy of politics. The latter is associated with attempts to increase political control of policy agenda and implementation through the use of political appointees, involvement in senior public service staffing, performance management, and procedural ‘steering’ (Dahlström et al, 2011). Additionally, some have noted that politicization has been a product of greater requirements for ‘open’ policy-making processes involving public consultation and stakeholder interventions (Pierre, 1998; Edelenbos & Klijn 2005; Bingham et al., 2005). Here too however the central concern has been the impact on the public service and less has been said of the dynamics of advice systems *themselves*. Below, we use these leading approaches to trace how the advisory system, not simply the public service, has evolved in each case and seek to illuminate the key dynamics.

Continuity and Change in Anglo-Saxon Advisory Systems:

The Anglophone group can be regarded as reasonably homogeneous for analytical and comparative purposes even though the countries are in some respects heterogeneous, including the relative sizes of their public sectors (as a proportion of GDP). The four countries – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – share an administrative tradition (Halligan 2010). Administrative traditions reflect values and principles that are influential in shaping structures, behaviours, and cultures (see Painter & Peters 2010). Indeed, the Anglophone tradition’s distinctiveness was reaffirmed during the reform era from the 1980s to 2000s. Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom were grouped because they adhered more to precepts of ‘new public management’ (NPM) than other OECD countries. At the peak of the OECD’s fixation on NPM, the Anglophone experiments were upheld as the ideal (OECD 1995; Pal 2012). The reform movement served to reinforce the notion of the Anglophone group’s identity as distinctive from and contrasting with that of other traditions. Significant institutional and cultural features such as unitary (U.K., NZ) or federal systems (Canada, Australia) are however important distinctions among the cases. For these reasons they have been subject to systematic comparison in the political science, public administration, and policy-making literatures (Aucoin, 1995; Rhodes et al, 2010; Hood, 1990; Savoie, 2008; Halligan, 2015a, 2015b). Recognizing that the cases share administrative traditions, but seeking to reorient advisory system analysis to the systems themselves, the analysis below applies spatial, control-autonomy, content-based, and dynamic concepts to offer a more comprehensive retrospective and prospective account of these cases. With entire volumes devoted to comparative assessments we limit our analysis to

broader shared trends and distinct developments in these four cases.

From a locational perspective, the Anglo-American cases feature strikingly similar accounts of declining public service policy capacity³ and expanding external supplies of policy advice. The narrative is especially similar in pointing to an erosion of public service policy capacity (Edwards, 2009) and a general trend of declining substantive experience in favor of generalist and process heavy forms of policy work (Howlett et al, 2014; Tiernan, 2011; Page & Jenkins, 2005). The findings are clearest in the Canadian case, where repeated studies have found the federal public service's policy capacity in decline with widespread shortages in particular of policy analytical capacity⁴ (Peters, 1996; Howlett & Wellstead, 2011; Dobuzinskis et al, 2007). Previously, the policy advisory group within the federal bureaucracy flourished in the 1970s, but its fortunes have nose-dived since the 1980s with successive purposeful expenditure reduction and public management reforms (Aucoin, 1995; Prince 1979; Savoie, 2014). However these studies, along with others noting a decline in intergovernmental policy capacity within Canada, reveal a more complex picture (Inwood, Johns & O'Reilly, 2011; Howlett, Wellstead & Craft, forthcoming) in which policy analytical capacity is 'lumpy' or unevenly distributed across policy domains and public service units (Voyer, 2007; Craft & Howlett, 2013). This domain specific or sectoral approach points to dynamics that have escaped previous assessments, a point we shall return to in the penultimate section below.

Australian studies have also noted declines and concern regarding the public services ability to provide policy advice (Halligan and Power 1992; Halligan, 2015b; Edwards, 2009; Tiernan, 2011), which reflect in part the ambiguous status of the policy role (which was only revived as a formal and statutory responsibility of departmental secretaries in 2013 (Halligan, 2013). The Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration (2009) found that the 'policy capacity of the APS requires strengthening, especially in terms of its ability to provide innovative and creative advice at the strategic level' (2009: 21). This not only points to the linkages between attempts to rectify perceived public sector shortages and deficiencies, but also in response to international pressures and policy complexity.

An internal review by the New Zealand Treasury (2010) found that considerable resources were being put to advisory work and capacity within the public service departments, but capacity was often unavailable in key areas or was unaligned with government priorities. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's recent 'policy

project' has diagnosed a long-standing policy problem with multiple dimensions. These include variations in quality, skill shortages, evidential shortfalls, cross agency weaknesses, and a series of contradictions and divergent goals resulting from the changing environment (DPMC, 2014: 1-2).

In the United Kingdom scholarly accounts have detailed a trend line of increasing policy process generalists below senior levels (Page & Jenkins, 2005), and a number of independent studies from government observers have detailed weaknesses in policy-making tied to deficiencies in advisory practices (Institute for Government, 2011: 7). The government has been pushing for outsourcing of delivery to encompass policy analysis (Diamond, 2014: 141), and arguing for "open policy making by default" (Rutter, 2013: 43).

Across these countries, the erosions in policy capacity have common bases in managerialism (or the refocusing on management from the 1980s), reformulation of roles in the executive branch with the political executive's expanding and the public service's contracting, and the extension of management consultants' role to policy advice. Governments seeking to cut staff would rather cop the costs of consultants, which can be disguised.

Internal Differences

However, when it comes to what Halligan terms the broader 'internal' category (1995), important differences emerge in dynamics related to Anglo advisory system reconfigurations, degrees of politicization, centralization of power, and the use of partisan advisers. Each of these suggests implications for the policy-making process that require careful consideration underscore why accurate depiction and analysis of these systems is important. For instance, clear differences have been documented regarding trends towards the centralization of power around first ministers, and the centralization of specialized policy advisory units in some cases, with concomitant differences in the distribution of advisory capacity, and advisory supply amongst central agencies (Dalstrom et al., 2011; Rhodes et al, 2010).

Canadian observers have also noted an ongoing trend of strong centralization of power to the center. The consequence is that the PMO and central agencies have been displacing departmental supplies of policy advice and influence (Savoie, 1999; 2003). Some contend that this has been an Anglo-wide trend, including other important advisory system modifications, such as the increased use of partisan advisers – particularly at the center of

government – and greater political involvement in the appointment of senior officials (Aucoin, 2012). The impacts not only speak to locational and control-autonomy approaches to advisory systems, but suggest politicization and content-based shifts in the types of policy advice sought and used by governments (Craft, 2014; Parsons, 2004; Howlett, 2009). Comparative examinations of the centralization tendency, and use of political staffs detailed further below, indicate that these trends apply to varying degrees in the Anglo cases. The concentration of power in the prime minister’s office, appointment of senior officials, and use of partisan advisers are most apparent in Australia and Canada, but less so in the other cases (Boston & Halligan, 2012; Boston, 2012).

The Canadian and UK cases demonstrate differences in how central agencies have been configured, with the Canadian Privy Council Office (and the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) remaining larger than Anglophone counterparts but its organization remaining static. In contrast, the UK has experimented with cabinet office and the prime minister’s office (ie No 10) specialized advisory complements. This has been detailed elsewhere (cf Fleisher, 2009) but includes the establishment of Central Policy Review Staff in the 1970s, and other variants including a PMO ‘policy unit’ and ‘performance and innovation’/strategy unit in the 1990s, and most recently “implementation taskforces” chaired by ministers, and supported by the Cabinet Office, to provide oversight to service delivery (Rutter, 2015). Whereas the Canadian model has seen internal supply retain a fairly stable model, the UK has experimented in providing centralized advisory capacity with varying degrees of success. The UK civil service has experienced volatility in its relationships with the political executive and has been subject to intense pressures to outsource policy and challenges to the appointment and performance review processes of permanent secretaries (HM Government, 2012).

With regards to appointments to the senior public service, the New Zealand State Services Commissioner has had responsibility for recommending appointments of departmental chief executives. Ministers can participate in the appointment process, but no government has made its own appointment, one argument being that it is unnecessary to make partisan appointments because of the responsive public service (Boston & Halligan, 2012). There has been little evidence to support marginalisation of the public service, or that ministerial advisers had been a significant source for concern (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010; Boston & Halligan, 2012). New Zealand’s institutional arrangements have made politicization

of senior appointments difficult, in contrast to other Anglophone countries where the responsibility for appointing (and dismissing) departmental heads lies with the prime minister. The openness of the New Zealand system has provided some protection for the public service (Gregory & Lonti, 2008).

Another form of appointments, that of partisan advisers to the personal offices of ministers offers further insights into advisory systems. These advisers have always been recognized as legitimate components in conventional Anglophone country advisory systems (Halligan, 1995). However, their evolving role within advisory systems offers considerably analytical and empirical leverage to revisit configuration, content, and dynamic developments in the Anglophone countries. Described as ‘[o]ne of the most significant examples of institutional innovation within Westminster political systems’ (Maley, 2011: 1469), recent assessments from the Anglophone cases indicate that partisan advisers have not only grown in number, but are more active in providing policy advice, and have become more influential through sophisticated policy advisory work involving a range of public service and non-governmental policy actors (OECD, 2007, 2011; Maley, 2011; Craft, 2015; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2007). As per Table 3 below, there are however differences in the numbers and institutional location of such staffs with implications for their advisory system activity.

Table 3 Advisors in Anglophone Systems

	Minister’s Offices	Prime Minister’s Office	Total
Australia	420	50	470 (2007)
Canada	470	96	566 (2014)
United Kingdom	88	26	114 (2013)
New Zealand			58 (2007)

Source: Canadian figures from Craft (forthcoming), U.K. Figures from Young and Hazel, 2014), Australia and New Zealand figures from Eichbaum and Shaw (2010).

New empirical studies detail, for example, that the Canadian and Australian advisory systems include a much more pronounced and accepted role for such actors compared to the United Kingdom (Halligan, 2014), the later featuring a dramatically lower complement of such staff both in ministerial and first minister’s offices. Fawcett & Gay (2010: 25) captured the British experience: ‘Special advisers have acted as the lightning-rod for debate in the UK for debate about the politicization of the public service’. The roles of individual advisers attracted more attention than elsewhere, such as the two senior advisers under Prime Minister

Blair, who were given authority to issue instructions to civil servants (most notably Alistair Campbell, an authority that was subsequently rescinded by Prime Minister Brown). Advisers were the subjects of several investigations over the years, and again by parliamentary committee inquiries (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee 2012).

However the tendency towards a centralization of power in prime ministerial offices has not been born out in New Zealand, and neither has politicization of the appointments to the senior public service. In the latter, the state services commissioner has had responsibility for recommending appointments of departmental chief executives. Ministers can participate in the appointment process, but no government has made its own appointment, one argument being that it is unnecessary to make partisan appointments because of the responsive public service (Boston & Halligan 2012). There has been little evidence to support marginalization of the public service, or that ministerial advisers had been a significant source for concern (Eichbaum & Shaw 2010; Boston & Halligan 2012; Yong & Hazell, 2014).

Scholars have long noted that the content or type of advice provided by these advisers differs from that of their public service counterparts (Weller, 1987). The trend is widely recognized to be that of politicization but some differences are worth noting. Further, recent scholarship has noted that the increase of ministerial staffs outside of first ministers' offices has important implications for the ability of the political executive to exert control, and marshal different types of policy advice, on a host of policy issues and tasks (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2015; Maley, 2011; Craft, 2015). In sum, even this one facet of the advisory system reveals that differences not only in institutionalization, but also in function, are part of the dynamic changes in the structure and operation of these systems.

Alternative Internal Advisory Systems

These systems are subjects to change, although the diversity of this group makes generalizations difficult, and much depends on regime preferences. There are both commonalities and differences among the four countries. Thus the role of independent reviews with authority, independence and permanence has tended to decline yet there are highly significant exceptions. The examples discussed below illustrate and point to the way new advisory components can come on-line within the internal sphere of advisory systems, and how longstanding suppliers can be jettisoned. As detailed below these dynamics characterize the Anglo advisory systems.

In the Canadian case, there is evidence of the creation and elimination of alternative advisory components, which have parallels in the other systems. Two illustrative examples of the diminution of capacity tease out component reconfiguration, and highlight their relationship to content and dynamic considerations set out above. First, there has been a marked decrease in the reliance on royal commissions as advisory inputs for government (Inwood & Johns, 2014). These traditionally important bodies were typically constituted to confront longer-term policy issues and offered focused attention to complex policy issues. This Canadian tradition had important implications for various policy areas including government operations, Indigenous peoples, official languages, and economic and financial policy (Inwood, 2005). The infrequent use of royal commissions suggests a reduced capacity and interest in using alternative advisory instruments of this kind. Similarly, after 25 years in existence the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy was shuttered in the 2012 budget. It had served as an independent policy advisory agent to the government of Canada and was an active advisory system participant mandated to raise awareness regarding the challenges of sustainable development. Notably, senior ministers were on record stating that its advice was simply unaligned with government's aversion to a carbon tax (Visser, 2012). The then Minister of the Environment explained its elimination by speaking to many of the above noted advisory system dynamics: "the round table was created ... before the Internet, when there were few such sources of domestic, independent research and analysis on sustainable development ... There are now any number of organizations and university based services that provide those services" (Visser, 2012).

Australia dispensed with relying on royal commissions and committees of inquiry in the 1980s, although they are still used occasionally. It has tended to favour working groups usually with close associations with a servicing department. White papers are now in favour, organised through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet or Treasury, two with political oversight because of intergovernmental dimensions (e.g. White Paper on the Reform of the Federation with advice from the Prime Minister's Business Advisory Council). A third involves a cross-agency task force of public servants. Two reviews are based on Treasury with external panels of experts or interests.

New Zealand has also been using "high profile" working groups of varying degrees of independence, which are sufficiently distant for governments to be able to respond selectively to recommendations (Shaw and Eichbaum 2010: 180-182). The variable pattern is

also apparent in the UK, with the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (which both scrutinizes spending and provides evidence-based advice for government decision making). At the same time other expert advisory bodies were abolished (Rutter, 2013: 41).

A common element has been the creation of independent fiscal oversight agencies, which have added capacity and improved accountability. Canada's first Parliamentary Budget Officer was appointed in 2008. Importantly, this addition to the advisory system was internal in that it was attached to the library of parliament, but was independent from the public service and the government. Mandated through legislation the general purpose of the PBO is to provide independent analysis to parliament about the financial position and economic trends (Lee and Cross, 2014). The broad mandate has allowed the PBO to engage in analyses that were often not welcome by government. Indeed, the PBO-government relationship has been characterized as confrontational: the PBO being accused of policy advocacy and even partisanship, while the government was accused of undermining its capability through withholding essential and basic information (Lee and Cross, 2014). The United Kingdom established an Office for Budget Responsibility in 2010, while Australia has had a parliamentary budget office since 2012.

Both Australia (from 1998) and New Zealand (from 2011) have a productivity commission that provides independent advice to government on microeconomic policy and regulation. The Australian commission can initiate inquiries, but like the New Zealand commission works generally on referrals from government. The purpose of the Australian Productivity Commission is to contribute to improving policy of long-term benefit. The Commission's significance derives from its role in advising the government and informing parliament and the community. The second important feature is independence as the Commission operates on an arms length basis, and through transparent processes (Banks 2011). The Productivity Commission conducts inquiries that "share the ad hoc and once-off character of royal commissions and other inquiries in relation to topics" (Banks 2013: 13).

Parliamentary contributions remain much as they were thirty years ago: that is, "substantially dependent on the influence exercised by the executive over the content of committee's references and other factors" (Halligan 1995: 151). Some chambers, and specific committees, can function as an alternative advisory system within government. Upper houses with more independence, particularly the Australian Senate, can influence policy debate

through committee reports (Halligan et al, 2007). Under the right conditions lower house may rise in significance, most spectacularly the select committees of the UK House of Commons 2010-2015 following changes to operational rules.

External Advisory Supplies/dynamics

Estimations of external advisory supply and influence has long been noted as difficult to study empirically with St. Martin (1998, p. 320) for instance noting that that ‘there is no direct and simple causal link between increased spending and increased influence’ of management consultants”. Canadian analysis has gone some ways in trying to detail what policy advice consultants provide and its influence within the advisory system. Studies have revealed that while data is often difficult to come by, policy and management consultants are clearly very active participants and influential members of the advisory system (Howlett & Migone, 2014; St-Martin, 2005). For instance, Perl and White (2002) in a study of policy and management consultants found the “evidence for a growing role played by policy consultants at the national government level is compelling in Canada” (2002: 52). Subsequent analysis investigating their policy analytical capacity has revealed that while these actors are more qualified than public servants in many respects, they are nonetheless primarily engaged in similar process-heavy forms of policy work as their public service counterparts (Howlett & Migone, 2013a). The conclusion of such studies being that policy and management consultants continue to have influence within the Canadian policy process, and remain attractive for public servants seeking specialized expertise and low cost replacements for public service capacity that has been lost (Howlett & Migone, 2013b, 2014).

The growth in the use of consultants in the Australian public service has been recorded as a concomitant of the development of managerialism (Howard, 1996), and the role of the para-public service has been entrenched since then. Their role in policy advice has become extensive, although it remains undocumented. Similarly, the policy capacity of departments is thought to have declined, but systematic evidence is lacking (Tiernan 2011; O’Flynn et al, 2011).

Taken together, the comparative analysis above suggests convergence and divergence in some respects, but what explains these advisory system dynamics?

Looking Ahead: Dynamics, Scales, and the Diversity of Policy Work

One potential explanation is the relative strength of the Anglophone administrative tradition (Halligan 2010). The Anglophone administrative tradition continues to provide an evolving and pluralist vehicle that can accommodate the complexities of country systems. It has been fairly resilient in general respects and adaptive in specifics. The administrative tradition is modified in content, but durable in terms of some essential elements, which is reflected in the debates about political incursions into the realm of the public service. The working through of the debates and tensions surrounding departures from convention has followed several processes. The first is the gradual evolution of principles and practice over time, normally punctuated by distinctive flourishes by one government and then by the government of an opposing party. The development of advisers takes this form leading to institutionalization. Secondly, the change process often takes something of a dialectical form: a radical departure is followed by public debate eventually producing modified principles and/or behavior. The appointment of externals and partisans to department head positions (Australia and Canada), and the peremptory dismissal of professional public servants (Australia), most clearly fit this category. This also applies to dramatic changes in the use of political advisers (e.g. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom or the institution of purchase advisers in New Zealand) (Boston & Halligan 2012, Boston, 2012).

The character of tradition (and the relative lack of obstacles to reform) also allowed early and full engagement with new public management (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). This has produced something of a reconceptualization of the public sector that has allowed externalization to flourish. Over time the external engagement has been extended increasingly to elements of policy advice. The transformation has been expressed through how the roles of heads of departments are expressed, e.g. CEOs in New Zealand (Boston and Halligan 2012), and corporate managers in the United Kingdom, who focus on corporate management at the top instead of policy: Rutter 2013: 41).

Administrative traditions are quite useful to appraise the public sector advisory dynamics such as deinstitutionalization of the public service supply, or its politicization. However as argued above, shifting the unit of analysis to the systems themselves reveals other dynamics. For instance, as detailed above, distinct dynamics for such systems related to restructuring, reorganizing, or the changing influence of individual components, or system-wide adjustment, and distinctions in the pace or sequence of changes in the cases. For

example, there was the increased use or influence of some advisers (e.g. partisan staffs, consultants, specialized central agency advisory units), or advisory processes (consultations, royal commissions).

Another dynamic is tied to the operating scale of these systems. Earlier work on advisory systems acknowledged that despite being macro-level heuristics advisory system operation and dynamics likely varied at sectoral level. As Halligan puts it, “the structure of advice systems also varies between policy domains, e.g. scientists compared to the mainstream policy specialists [...] Variations in organizations and interest among policy sectors have come to be identified as different types of policy networks” (1995: 142). As of yet, advisory system studies have not been used in an interactive fashion to test subsystem level effects⁵, that is, how the policy advisory system in specific jurisdictions is structured and operates in relation to policy making in particular subsystems (Craft & Wilder, 2014). Likewise, efforts to scale ‘up’ advisory system theory and empirical study are necessary given that systemic dynamics related to advisory systems and policy issues may span or cross multiple policy subsystems, or jurisdictions. For instance, climate change, terrorism, poverty, money laundering, and various other policy domains involve multiple subsystems that may overlap (Joachim and May, 2010; Jones & Jenkins-Smith, 2009; Wilder & Craft, 2015).

A third dynamic involves the structure and operation of advisory systems in relation to different types of policy work. While the formulation has long featured prominently in advisory system scholarship (Plowden, 1987; Halligan, 1995; Sidney, 2007) and has received renewed attention (Jordan & Turnpenny, 2015), policy advice is applicable to a broader and more diverse set of policy activities including: agenda setting, implementation, decision making, and evaluation, which may or may not be occurring within the confines of the public service (Gregory & Lonti, 2008; Tiernan, 2011). The growing emphasis on attention to the types of policy work and actors engaged in that work (Colebatch, 2006), suggest a new array of dynamics for advisory system scholars. Relatedly, as new approaches to the policy process and policy advice itself have challenged ‘authoritative instrumentalism’ accounts with socially constructed and interpreted accounts; how policy problems are defined and dealt with may raise new dynamics for advisory systems as well (Colebatch et al, 2010; Fisher, 2003).

Finally, optimality dynamics remain understudied. While concern about public service capacity erosion and politicization are imbued with concern over the state of advice giving, beyond examinations of the public service or public sector components, how well do these

systems function? Theorists and practitioners alike have recognized that these systems, in Anglo systems, are important to the governance and policy processes, but often are not always well organized or efficient (Scott & Bahler, 2010; Plowden, 1987). However, attempts to study the performance of these systems and improve them is fraught with challenge as measuring and quantifying policy advisory activity, and developing performance indicators, even within the public service, is a challenge (Gregory & Lonti, 2008; New Zealand, 2010). Should outcomes, process, or domain specific criteria prevail? Turning to the advisory system the picture becomes even more complex given that, as analysis above and in the extant literature suggest, the problem of disaggregation and causality can be difficult given the complex and interrelated nature of their various moving parts (Van Dooren et al., 2006).

Conclusion

Thirty years of theoretical development and empirical study has added precision to questions of configuration, operation, and dynamics of these systems. The continued purchase of advisory systems for comparative public policy can and should be extended through further study that seeks to integrate the above theoretical approaches, and tackle some of the remaining terrain we have identified. Our analysis of the Anglophone cases is helpful to ground theoretical developments and trace changes in advisory system configuration and operation.

The analysis reveals that elements of the traditional Anglophone policy advisory model can still be discerned. The common element is the retention of the impartial public service, although that continues to be under pressure, and new sources and types of advice have displaced the dominance of the public service across the Westminster family (Rhodes et al, 2010; Prince, 2007; Tiernan, 2011). This is reflected also in the appointment process and the institutionalized political advisory system. Having moved from the traditional model of an independent public service, the Anglophone systems now share more features with European countries (e.g. the cabinet).

Each of the theoretical approaches helps gain a clearer picture of the Anglophone cases. Careful analysis reveals distinct locational and control-autonomy dynamics tied to the uneven and distinct patterns of policy advisory diversification that have seen different advisory components come on-line including management consultants, and political advisers, while established components like royal commissions have waned in some cases more than others. Attempts to exert control over advisory systems have also varied with greater

movement towards the concentration of power in Canada, and the UK. Here too nuances in how public service central agencies and political advisers have been used add specificity to understanding distinct advisory system dynamics. Close attention to content-based approaches also reveal some shared properties in that there is widespread concern regarding politicization and externalization, though they have not played out equally across or within the cases. Likewise, concern over the alignment of policy advice with the needs of policy-makers has also been flagged (New Zealand, 2010; Institute for Government, 2011), drawing attention to the need to include focused analysis of the content of policy advice, and the relationships to context of its use and needs of policy makers. Together, the approaches paint a more fulsome picture of the interaction of policy advisory components in these systems, and their function within the policy process (Scott & Baehler, 2010).

The cases also reveal gaps and offer new venues through which advisory systems can provide fruitful lines of inquiry for assessing how advisory systems influence policy processes and outcomes, why they remain stable or decay, how they operate *in toto*, and why certain configurations of their components prevail in particular policy sectors, jurisdictions, or at particular conjunctures (Craft & Wilder, 2013; Scott & Baehler, 2010). Halligan's (1995) early work identified conventional properties and exigencies for operational success, such as the 'streams' of advice and their coordination, but additional questions remain as to whether particular best practices or configurations may lend themselves to more optimal advisory systems.

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¹ For a good discussion of definitional and theoretical matters on policy advice see Boston (1994).

² There is of course disagreement as to the objective analytical or value laden advocacy involved in advisory activities and a cornucopia of accounts delimiting *types* of advice such as strategic, technical, operational, instrumental (Plowden, 1998; Prasser, 2006; Boston, 1994).

³ The literature includes various definitions but *policy capacity* can be thought of as extending beyond analysis to include the actual administrative capacity of a government to undertake the day-to-day activities involved in policy implementation (Howlett, 2009; Painter & Pierre 2005; Peters 1996),

⁴ Policy analytical capacity is defined as “the amount of basic research a government can conduct or access, its ability to apply statistical methods, applied research methods, and advanced modelling techniques to this data and employ analytical techniques such as environmental scanning, trends analysis, and forecasting methods in order to gauge broad public opinion and attitudes, as well as those of interest groups and other major policy players, and to anticipate future policy impacts” ... “It also involves the ability to communicate policy-related messages to interested parties and stakeholders and includes “a department's capacity to articulate its medium- and long-term priorities” (Fellegi 1996, p. 19) and the integration of information into decision-making (Howlett, 2009).

⁵ See Weible (2008) for an excellent analysis of the use of expertise in different systems. His analysis is however focused on “expert knowledge” and not advisory systems or policy advice per se.