

## **INTRODUCTION THE PROCESS DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT POLICYMAKING**

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Public management policy is a novel classification in the academic study of public administration and management. Introduced in *The New Public Management: Improving Research and Policy Dialogue* (Barzelay 2001), the term refers to government-wide institutional rules and organizational routines related to expenditure planning and financial management, civil service and labor relations, procurement, organization and methods, and audit and evaluation. So defined, public management policy draws its meaning from a matrix of ideas, institutional relationships, and patterns of action that are highly familiar to public administration scholars and public officials alike. Seen from the center of government, public management policies are techniques for governing the organizations comprising the core public sector; equally, they are seen as tools for pursuing such policy aims as making governmental bureaucracies more efficient, transparent, smaller, responsive, or innovative. Seen from the perspective of program managers, public management policies are the rules of the game for acquiring and utilizing financial, human, material, and informational resources; often, public management policies are viewed by program managers as sources of perverse incentives or unnecessary constraints that diminish the efficiency and effectiveness of program operations (Chase and Reveal 1983; Wilson 1989; Barzelay 1992).

The motivation for introducing this new classification relates primarily to the study of New Public Management (NPM). The early study of NPM recognized that some governments—especially the UK, Australia, and New Zealand—were choosing to change the governance, management, and culture of organizations and programs in the core public sector. The implied category of interest was the organization design and culture of the entire core public sector. The concept of public management policies provides a narrower category of interest. Excluded from public management policy are policy tools, such as vouchers, which are

design features of substantive programs. Also excluded from the category are sector-specific organizational innovations, such as creating a novel set of institutions and funding arrangements for the public-financed provision of health care. The concept of public management policies also excludes cultural phenomena, such as norms of executive leadership or a service orientation. Public management policies are, rather, government-wide institutional rules and organizational routines in the five specific areas enumerated above—not program designs, sector-specific institutional strategies, or leadership styles.

As a concept, NPM was adequate for describing large-scale, geographically specific discontinuities and trends in the use of policy tools and public management practices. However, it was much less suited to understanding the subtle process dynamics of change in the core public sector or to learning about how to improve the performance of these institutions. A broad deficiency of the NPM literature was the relative absence of a policy approach (Barzelay 2001).

### THE INTELLECTUAL CORE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

This symposium issue of the *International Public Management Journal (IPMJ)* seeks to develop an aspect of a policy approach to public management policy. The focus is upon the policymaking process or, equivalently, the dynamics of change, rather than on how particular kinds of policies have operated in practice or might operate in different contexts of application. This focus for research recognizes that policy choices are collective decisions that result from the mutual adjustment of numerous actors playing differentiated roles, interacting in varied institutional venues, and responding to a flow of contemporaneous events. In this tradition, researchers seek to develop a process understanding of policymaking, which includes but is not limited to institutional analysis. The aim of this symposium is to deepen the field's process understanding of public management policymaking, specifically.

Such an understanding is given form by a tradition of theoretical and empirical inquiry about collective choice making in organizational and larger institutional settings. Those working within this tradition are acutely interested in what triggers changes in beliefs about collective problems and potential solutions, the mobilization of effort to accelerate the momentum of policy issues, the engagement of these issues by decision makers, and the resolution of conflict among decision makers regarding alternative policy measures. How opportunities for policy change emerge and are exploited are perhaps the central theoretical questions for researchers studying policy dynamics.

This research tradition runs strong within certain precincts of political science as it has developed in the U.S. Seeking a process understanding of some or all aspects of policy change has been a common aim of such seminal figures and prominent researchers as David Truman, Charles E. Lindblom, Albert O. Hirschman, James G. March, Richard E. Neustadt, Alexander L. George, Hugh Heclo, Martha Derthick, Theodore Marmor, John Kingdon, Charles Tilly, Martha Feldman, and Peter A. Hall.<sup>1</sup> This type of research tradition is much less practiced in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, even when the political science discipline has established a significant beachhead in universities. This geographical pattern is an obstacle to conducting systematic, comparative research on policy change.

## THE RESEARCH DESIGN: SUBSTANCE AND PROCESS

An initial step toward this volume was the research, writing, and publication of a study of public management policymaking in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s (Barzelay and Fuechtner 2003), which also compared these analyzed experiences with previously published analytical generalizations about public management policymaking in the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia. Using this study as a prototype, the contributors to the present volume have worked assiduously to provide comparable case studies of public management policymaking drawn from the recent history of Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Thailand, and the U.S., mainly during the 1990s. To this end, the contributors have examined similar research questions about similarly defined experiences. The articles focus on the emergence of public management policy issues, such as overbureaucratization, administrative modernization, and streamlining.

Across the cases presented in this volume, in addition to the Germany case, we see considerable variety.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the issue image in Thailand was downsizing and efficiency; in Spain, administrative modernization; in the U.S., creating a government that works better and costs less. In some cases, especially Brazil, the efforts of a high-profile policy entrepreneur are strongly in evidence, while in other cases, such as Germany, no clearly identifiable figure operated. Variety is apparent in stable context factors, as well. For instance, in three cases the form of government is presidential, in two it is parliamentary, and one is a constitutional monarchy in more than name. In some cases, the governmental system is that of a unitary state, while others are federal states. Context in motion was also varied. In Spain, the public sector was expanding, for instance, while in Mexico it was contracting. Germany was completing the political unification process, while Spain was deeply engaged in devolving political and administrative powers to its seventeen Autonomous Communities.

Utilizing a common theoretical framework, all the papers seek to explain the trajectories and outcomes of the selected episodes of public management policymaking. In doing so, they examine such causal sources of policy change as issue images, efforts of policy entrepreneurs, policy spillovers, and the jurisdictions of central coordinating agencies. The authors have sought to make connections between such context factors and the operation of the public management policymaking process in their cases.

These case studies provide the basis for the comparative analysis of public management policymaking, including the specific analysis presented later in this article. The aim of comparison is to provide a process understanding of public management policy change. The underlying premise is that a process understanding that fits a range of varied cases is almost certainly more robust than one that fits similar cases, like the benchmark cases of NPM (the concept of robustness is adapted from Hacking [1999, 70-78]).

## SURVEYING METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

The common research design of this volume's contributions is broadly patterned on Kingdon's *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (1995).<sup>3</sup> The reason for this pattern is that the Kingdon book exemplifies the quest for a process understanding of public policymaking (in addition to providing analytic

generalizations about statutory change in substantive policy domains within the institutional setup of the U.S. federal government). Kingdon's analytical approach examines the policymaking process systemically, while disaggregating the whole into component processes, drawing on the concept of a policy cycle. In the overall process, agenda-setting events influence alternative-specification events through two causal channels. First, problem definition trajectories influence the construction and winnowing of alternatives, through the influence of issue framing and the assignment of issues to distinct venues for alternative specification. Second, the prospect of policy change, inferred from an agenda-setting event's past and anticipated trajectory, spurs the efforts of participants in alternative-specification events, whether they are policy entrepreneurs, protectors of the status quo, or just doing their job. The trajectories of decision-making events are, in turn, influenced by agenda-setting and alternative-specification events. This aspect of the overall policymaking process arises because the rendering of alternatives, in combination with pressures responsible for an elevated issue status, may open the gates to decisional venues and their corresponding decisional agendas.

Translating Kingdon's book into a common research design requires considerable interpretation (see Barzelay, Gaetani, Cortázar Velarde, and Cejudo [2003]). For starters, one needs to distinguish the form of knowledge about the policymaking process from the content about statute making in the U.S. (the form v. content distinction is borrowed from Hacking [1999, 170-184]). The form of the knowledge includes questions about the role of social (mainly belief formation) mechanisms and interactive processes in agenda setting, for example, while statements about how policy entrepreneurs contribute decisively to joining the political, problem, and policy streams is considered content. The papers in this volume pursue roughly the same form of knowledge as does the Kingdon book; the resulting content is different, primarily because the specific topic is public management policymaking and the cases are primarily drawn from outside the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

In this volume's comparable case studies, the particular is an experience or slice of history (rather than a country or governmental system). The corresponding type is the process of public management policymaking. Following Kingdon, this type is divided into component processes, including agenda setting, alternative specification, and decision making. Each experience contains an episode, where one or more issues related to public management were on the governmental policy agenda. Each episode, in turn, contains the analytically defined events of agenda setting, alternative specification, and decision making. Observations about the event-comprised episode—which can be considered as trajectories and outcomes (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001)—are then explained by employing a common conception of the causal processes, mechanisms, and context factors at work in public policymaking processes.

This conception includes schema that are apparent in Kingdon's book. One schema includes stable context factors, such as the form of government and institutional relations within branches of government. A second schema includes context in motion, such as public mood, trends in various policy domains, and attention-grabbing incidents. A third schema includes types of mechanisms providing a dynamic linkage between context factors and the trajectory of the policymaking process. Such linkage mechanisms include focusing events and

policy spillovers. A fourth schema includes conceptual entities that belong to the interior of the policymaking process, such as efforts of policy entrepreneurs, committed interpretations of problems and solutions, the agendas of decision-making bodies and individuals, and statute makers' perceptions of their stakes in taking a position on matters reaching the decisional agenda. A fifth schema includes the sources of policy entrepreneurs' efforts. The primary schema of this type appears to be March's (1994) logic of appropriateness, where action springs from the relation between identity and situation (for an analysis of policy entrepreneurship structured in these terms, see Corbett [2002]). A sixth schema points to dynamic (or looped) relations among the components of the policymaking process—for instance, the upward movement of an issue on the governmental policy agenda can induce faster-paced efforts within the alternative-specification process, while the availability of elaborated alternatives can motivate lawmakers to act on a policy issue. These schema provide common conceptual resources for developing narrative explanations of the trajectory and outcomes of episodes where public management policymaking has occurred.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, they provide tools for comparing cases in order to develop a robust process understanding of the public management policymaking process.

The selection of cases is due to theoretical and opportunistic considerations. As for the former, the criterion was to find variation (Tilly 1984, cited in Ragin 1987). Good candidates are cases differing from the NPM benchmark cases in any of several ways: first, they could involve much less than comprehensive change in public management policies during the 1980s and 1990s; second, they could involve issues other than systemic organizational efficiency; third, they could involve contexts in motion where public spending was not contracting; fourth, they could involve stable contexts where public management policies were substantially inscribed in statutory or constitutional law and where the executive does not control the legislature. None of the selected cases matches all these criteria, but each matches at least one. As for opportunistic considerations, the main one was readily available human resources. Two of the cases—Brazil and Thailand—are drawn from doctoral dissertations in preparation at the LSE, while the Mexico case originated in an LSE MSc thesis. The other papers were commissioned for this volume from impressive younger scholars whom I had come to know during their time as doctoral students.

### **THE EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK, SCHEMATICALLY CONSIDERED**

The aspiration of this volume is to demonstrate the worth and feasibility of a robust process understanding of public management policymaking. The aim is not to provide a final, definitive study on this subject, but to move this research program forward (intellectually and in terms of scholarly network building). For this purpose, agreeing to employ a modified version of the Kingdon framework, together with identifying episodes in a broadly similar fashion, has been helpful. In conducting the comparative analysis presented below, however, it proved advantageous to place the Kingdon approach in a wider methodological context and to incorporate specific concepts from other studies about policy and organizational change (especially McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly [2001]). The wider framework is schematically depicted in table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Episodes of Public Management Policymaking

<i>Components of policymaking process</i>	<i>(1) Types of routine policymaking activities</i>	<i>(2) Types of generic political processes</i>	<i>(3) Types of social mechanisms</i>	<i>(4) Types of process context factors</i>
<i>Agenda setting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and analysis in professional and epistemic communities (including central agencies)</li> <li>• Media reporting</li> <li>• Campaigning, transition management</li> <li>• Advising top central authorities</li> <li>• Political strategizing at the top of government and political parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social problems construction (K)</li> <li>• Issue momentum building and constituency mobilization (and its opposite) (K)</li> <li>• Reconstruction of identities around innovative agendas (MT&amp;T)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief formation (H&amp;S, K)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attribution of opportunities and threats, goods and bads (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>- Focusing events (K)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Policy entrepreneurship (K)</li> <li>• Bandwagoning, self-fulfilling prophecies (S)</li> <li>• Diffusion (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Organizational appropriation (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Actor certification (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Political competition (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Agenda congestion (K, B&amp;J)</li> <li>• Exercise of formal authority, compliance (L)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form of government and state (HI)</li> <li>• Electoral cycle/governmental turnover (K)</li> <li>• Lines of partisan competition (K)</li> <li>• Public mood (K)</li> <li>• Background of central authorities (e.g., career) (N&amp;M)</li> <li>• Chosen direction of economic policy (PR)</li> <li>• Policy subsystem (B&amp;J)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central agencies (PR)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Domain structure (B&amp;J)</li> <li>• Previous reform episodes (HI)</li> <li>• Indicators and measures (K)</li> <li>• Authoritative interpretations of international public management trends and discontinuities (SI)</li> </ul>
<i>Alternative specification</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion and analysis in professional and epistemic communities</li> <li>▪ Operating special purpose advisory, coordinating, or change-instigating bodies</li> <li>▪ Interministerial policy coordination or development efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practical reasoning about public management informed by theory and experience (M)</li> <li>▪ Making sense of choices among instruments and designs of initiatives (W)</li> <li>▪ Building consensus and commitment to lines of action and specific proposals (W, N&amp;M)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief formation (H&amp;S, K)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct and vicarious learning (L&amp;M)</li> <li>- Attribution of past success and failure (L&amp;M)</li> <li>- Policy spillovers (K)</li> <li>- Commitment-performance spirals (MT&amp;T)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Policy entrepreneurship (K)</li> <li>• Actor certification (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Organizational appropriation (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Diffusion (MT&amp;T)</li> <li>• Deference to exercise of authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form of government and state (HI)</li> <li>• Policy subsystem (B&amp;J)</li> <li>• Issue image (B&amp;J)</li> <li>• Domain structure (B&amp;J)</li> <li>• Background of participants (N&amp;M)</li> <li>• Chosen direction of economic policy (PR)</li> <li>• Legal form of incumbent public management policies (CB)</li> <li>• Authoritative interpretations of international public management trends and discontinuities (SI)</li> </ul>

<i>Decision making</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legislating</li> <li>▪ Advising top central authorities</li> <li>▪ Political strategizing at the top of government and political parties</li> <li>▪ Operating special purpose advisory, coordinating, or change-instigating bodies</li> <li>▪ Interministerial policy coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Making sense of/comparing policy alternatives under conditions of ambiguity and risk in an institutional and political setting (W, M)</li> <li>▪ Conciliating conflicting parties (quasi resolution of conflict) (C&amp;M)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Belief formation (K) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attribution of past success and failure (L&amp;M)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Policy entrepreneurship (K)</li> <li>▪ Satisficing, sequential attention to goals, etc. (C&amp;M)</li> <li>▪ Agenda congestion (K, B&amp;J)</li> <li>▪ Policy interference effects</li> <li>▪ Exercise of formal authority (L)</li> <li>▪ Bandwagoning (S)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Form of government (K)</li> <li>▪ Policy subsystem (B&amp;J)</li> <li>▪ Legal form of incumbent public management policies (CB)</li> <li>▪ Lines of partisan competition (K)</li> <li>▪ Background of central authorities (N&amp;M)</li> <li>▪ Chosen direction of economic policy (PR)</li> <li>▪ Domain structure (B&amp;J)</li> <li>▪ Issue image (B&amp;J)</li> </ul>
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## Key:

B&J Baumgartner and Jones (1993)  
CB Comparative bureaucracy research  
C&M Cyert and March (1963)  
HI Historical institutionalism  
H&S Hedström and Swedberg (1998)  
K Kingdon (1995)  
L Lindblom (1977)  
L&M Levitt and March (1988)

M March (2000)  
MT&T McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001)  
N&M Neustadt and May (1986)  
PR Previous NPM research  
S Schelling (1978)  
SI Sociological institutionalism  
W Weick (2001)

The rows in this matrix are component processes of the policymaking process in the predecisional and decisional stages of a policy cycle. The columns provide a way to describe and analyze these component processes. Column (1) lists common-sense, descriptive categories of the activities that influence or produce decisions within government. Column (2) identifies generic social processes that typically operate in the policymaking process and in other nominally different domains. The specific terms—such as social problems construction—refer to social scientific constructs that are common property of political science, sociology, and social psychology. Column (3) identifies social mechanisms that are typically activated in the policymaking process, as these have been catalogued in the same social scientific literatures. Column (4) identifies process context factors, a slightly novel classification whose elements are well known in the policymaking literature.

This scheme can assist in a scientific community's search for a process understanding of public management policymaking in a few specific ways. First, it pursues the strategy of disaggregating policymaking into component processes, while preparing the ground for insights into how agenda setting, alternative specification, and decision making are dynamically linked. Second, the scheme sorts the vast number of oft-mentioned influences on policymaking into two large categories: generic social processes and mechanisms, on one hand, and process context factors, on the other. Third, the scheme incorporates the fine-grained conceptual distinction between social processes and mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The relationship is mainly a part-whole, configurational one, where social processes are considered concatenations of mechanisms (Gambetta 1998). Differences in the operation of the particular social processes can be attributed to differences at the indenture (or level) of mechanisms.

Table 1 indicates sources of the concepts classified under social processes, social mechanisms, and process context factors. This portrayal indicates that Kingdon's framework becomes more manageable when his rich set of concepts are classified under the column headers. At the same time, table 1 borrows liberally from sources other than Kingdon. For instance, formal authority, elegantly conceptualized by Lindblom (1977), is included as a reminder that many public management policy decisions are made by individuals in peak-level positions. A second example is the mechanism of organizational learning—characterized by its key components, attribution of success and failure and drawing inferences from direct and vicarious experiences (Levitt and March 1988). Finally, the scheme catalogues process context factors that researchers have called attention to in previous studies of NPM and public management policy change, specifically.

A primary advantage of this framework is to facilitate causal interpretation of episodes of public management policy change. The general form of a battery of major research questions is then:

1. How did public management policy change happen?
2. How can change be explained by the operation of social processes and mechanisms? and,
3. How can the operation of processes and mechanisms be explained by (contingent) process context factors?

By utilizing the method of analysis sketched in this section, researchers can pursue satisfying explanations of analytically significant similarities and differences among cases, en route to attaining robust process understandings of public management policymaking.

The results of this volume's medium-scale effort to attain this sort of understanding through the comparative analysis of case studies is presented in this introductory article. For analytical purposes, each section focuses on a single component process of public management policymaking: the order of presentation is agenda setting, alternative specification, and decision making. By and large, the method used is to formulate empirically grounded, analytically significant differences between two or three groupings of the six cases examined here: Brazil, Germany, Mexico, Spain, Thailand, and the U.S. Explaining these differences becomes the focal research task. Table 1 comes into play in explaining these differences. However, within-case differences are sufficiently pronounced in the analysis of the decision-making phase that the closely related method of explaining differences among case pairs—i.e., the U.S. and Germany—is instead pursued. Before turning to the presentation of the comparative analysis, the limitations of our approach are briefly discussed.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN: CONDITIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS**

The most severe limitation of this volume's research design follows from the chosen focus on developing a process understanding of public management policymaking. The papers in this volume and the comparative analysis are not optimized to provide insight into the sources of stability in public management policy, even though some light is cast on this closely related research issue.<sup>6</sup> Nor are the papers optimized to help us understand the policy dynamics of any particular area of public management policy, such as civil service and labor relations (compare Hood [2000]). Finally, it is plain that the volume does not illuminate the process of management or institutional change other than public management policy change (broader studies include Pollitt and Bouckaert [2000] and Christensen and Lægveid [2002]).

Some limitations are due to the specific designs by which we have pursued our core topic. One limitation is inherent in focusing on recent episodes of public management policymaking. This design is not optimized to shed light on policy dynamics that might operate on a time scale of several decades or longer (compare Silberman [1993] and Light [1997]). Another limitation is inherent in providing narrative case studies within the space constraints of journal articles; the richness of the historical accounts is necessarily less than in book-length monographs (compare Skowronek [1982]). A third limitation arises from use of Kingdon's book as the principal theoretical reference.

Kingdon's case studies and generalizations concern statute making. The substantive interest in statute making presupposes that the policy cycle will continue into the implementation phase. However, in challenging our provisional reliance on the Kingdon book, one participant in the workshops leading to this symposium issue inveighed: "We pass lots of laws in my country, but their significance for policy change is usually nil."<sup>7</sup> Second, several of the cases do not involve statute making. Public management policy change in these instances

typically results from authoritative actions taken by officeholders situated within the executive.

The first of these concerns is more problematic than the second. It points to a potential pitfall in defining episodes to include the predecisional and decisional events, but not implementation events. Understood in this fashion, however, the concern is not so much about the Kingdon book as a theoretical approach, but rather about how we, like Kingdon, have bounded the episodes and, as a consequence, restricted the research questions. The only way to accommodate this objection is to expand each case study to include implementation events (if any). We have not done so for reasons of practicality, in terms of undertaking primary research effort, constructing comparable cases, and consuming journal space.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the rationale, the fact remains that the lack of detailed attention to implementation events is a limitation of the current research design (although it is not inherent in the theoretical approach).

By comparison, the second concern is easily accommodated. While it is true that the content of the knowledge presented in Kingdon's book is specifically related to statute making in the U.S., it does not follow that his theoretical framework—the form of the knowledge—is inadequate for investigating other kinds of policymaking in other countries. This concern can be accommodated by identifying episodes differently than Kingdon did. Most papers in the present volume do not model episodes as single policy cycles (excluding implementation), with the culminating event being an authoritative allocation by lawmaking power centers. Multiple alternative-specification and decision-making events occur in several of the episodes.

## **TOWARD A PROCESS UNDERSTANDING OF AGENDA SETTING**

In this section, the five cases included in this volume, plus the Germany case (Barzelay and Fuechtner 2003) are compared in terms of properties that are analytically relevant to agenda setting. Three analytically significant properties of agenda-setting events are identified here. The first is the presence or inclusion of public management policy—an observer category—as an item on the policy agenda. In all the cases examined here, an issue bearing on public management policy did in fact become a policy agenda item. The second is the formulation of the issue. The specific formation varied, from catch-all conceptions, as illustrated by the need for streamlining the state in Germany, to narrow-gauged formulations, such as the need for better administrative processes, as in Mexico. The third type of property is the issue's status. High status issues attract a substantial amount of attention of policymakers.

These three properties—issue inclusion, formulation, and status—evidently require analytic attention. A policy cycle, by definition, cannot occur unless an item related to public management policy is placed on the policy agenda. The issue's construction influences how alternatives are crafted and sorted out. The issue status influences efforts to specify alternatives as well as agenda access at the decisional stage of policymaking.

The following paragraphs use these terms to outline each case's agenda-setting event trajectory. The aim is to familiarize the reader with the case study observations as well as the classifications made in this synthesis article. Subsequently, the comparative analysis begins to unfold.

### **Agenda Setting: Case Overviews**

In the U.S. case, public management was included on the policy agenda from the outset of the Clinton administration in early 1993, and remained there for eight years. The issue came to be formulated in terms of making government work better and cost less. Beyond the slogan, the formulation was two-fold: first, in order for the government to work well, major changes were needed in the bureaucratic systems within which well-meaning governmental employees were trapped, and, second, in order to reduce the scale of federal bureaucracy, personnel numbers had to be significantly reduced. This formulation held fairly steady throughout the Clinton years, with emphasis upon one or the other of the two-part formulation varying along the way. As for issue status, the reinvention issue occupied a fairly high position on the executive branch's policy agenda for more than a single presidential term, though it was outranked at various points by such legislative issues as health care, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the shutting down of the federal government in 1995; it declined in importance during the latter half of Clinton's second term.

In Thailand, public management was included on the policy agenda from the outset of the period when Prime Minister Anand Punyarachun assumed office following the 1991 military coup. For a brief moment, the issue was formulated solely in terms of the need for a transparent civil service and, specifically, the urgency of deterring and punishing corruption. However, within three months a second public management issue came onto the policy agenda, namely, curtailing growth in public employment and introducing more sophisticated practices of civil service management. This second issue occupied a very high position on the government's agenda during an intense nine-month period of policy development.

In Brazil, public management was included on the policy agenda at the end of 1994, when President Fernando Henrique Cardoso accepted Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira's suggestion to establish the Ministry of Federal Administration and Reform of the State (MARE), with Bresser serving as minister. Under Bresser, the issue was formulated in terms of the need for managerial reform of the state apparatus. A central claim was that the state's organizational structures and employment regimes were far from optimal under current conditions. Bureaucratic forms of employment and organizational structure were said to have become unsuitable. The issue occupied a fairly high position on the government's agenda during Cardoso's first four-year term, although it was outranked by other reform issues, including those related to banking and pensions.

In Mexico, public management was included on the policy agenda in 1995 when President Zedillo tried to expand the mission of the Federal Ministry of Controllershship (SECOGEF) and rename it the Ministry of Controllershship and Administrative Development (SECODAM). Public management remained on the policy agenda for most of Zedillo's six-year presidency. For much of this period, the issue was defined diffusely in terms of a need for administrative modernization. However, for some months a career civil service system was on the agenda. Once this was ruled out, attention focused on making the federal government's budgetary and financial management practices more effective and transparent. In terms of issue status, administrative modernization never held

anything like a commanding position on the policy agenda, but was crowded out by matters related to economic stabilization.

In Spain, public management was included on the policy agenda from the time the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Prime Minister Felipe González came to power in 1982. During the first legislative period (1982-86), the issue was defined in terms of statutory civil service. The issue was reformulated during the government reshuffle following the 1986 general elections. This reshuffle included the establishment of the Ministry for Public Administrations (MAP), with responsibility for both relations with the recently created subnational governments, including the Basque Country and Catalonia, and civil service management. From 1986 to 1993, the public management issue defined in terms of administrative modernization focused mainly on the need to alter the culture and administrative systems of the central government bureaucracy. However, a number of scandals erupted in the mid-1990s, which involved the head of the Civil Guard, a major national law enforcement organization, among numerous other officials. By 1993, fighting corruption replaced administrative modernization. Prior to this last issue formulation, public management consistently ranked low on the policy agenda, save for a brief period in the early 1990s when it climbed into the second tier.

In Germany, public management was included on the policy agenda in 1994, when a coalition comprised by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) announced that the government's top priority for the new Parliament was the streamlining of the state. The issue's formulation was initially very broad, encompassing big questions about the state's role as well as narrower questions about cost and bureaucratization. Eventually, the issue was reformulated in terms of budget and civil service reform. These issues maintained an important position on the governmental policy agenda until reforms were enacted and senior officials turned their attention to moving the government's capital from Bonn to Berlin.

### **Agenda Setting: Comparative Analysis**

Comparing these six agenda-setting events, what are the major similarities and differences? First, public management was included as an item on the policy agenda in all cases. This similarity is an artifact of the study's case selection criteria. Second, issue formulation varied. In the U.S., Thailand, and Germany, diffuse concerns about organizational practices in government were combined with focused concerns about the scale of the national-level bureaucracy. In contrast, in Mexico, Spain, and Brazil, the formulation was simpler, with concerns focusing on organizational practices in government or what can be termed civil service management. Third, issue status varied. In the U.S., Thailand, Brazil, and Germany cases, the public management issue usually enjoyed a middling to high status, while the issue's status was middling to low in Mexico and Spain. Let's now try to explain these similarities and differences.

#### *Issue Inclusion*

The case evidence indicates that inclusion is a consequence of the process dynamics of organizing and launching governments or presidential

administrations. In the U.S., the reinventing government effort was an outgrowth of developing a presidential political strategy with two clear objectives: to win the Perot vote and to inoculate the administration against the charge of promoting big bureaucracy, especially when the health care reform was under consideration. In Brazil, the managerial reform of the state was an outgrowth of President Cardoso's need to satisfy the political pressures and personal loyalties that became salient in filling ministerial-level positions after his election as president. Cardoso's ties to Bresser Pereira were strong, as they had worked closely politically and intellectually since the days when they opposed the military regime. These ties persisted, as reflected in Bresser's senior role in the presidential campaign, with responsibilities for fund raising. In Thailand, interest in civil service management was a direct outgrowth of the military coup that brought the government to power. Dealing with corruption—the initial issue—was the coup's principal justification. This issue remained on the agenda even when other public management items—civil service management and curtailing manpower growth—were placed there, too. In Germany, the lean state issue emerged as a statement of unified direction for the winning electoral coalition. In Spain, the establishment of the Ministry for Public Administrations (MAP) and the selection of Joaquín Almunia as minister was partly a matter of balancing the factions within the PSOE.

The intimate relationship between agenda setting in public management and launching new governments or presidential administrations may seem unsurprising until one considers several of the conventional explanations for public management reform in the 1990s. One common explanation is that public management reform resulted from international movement of New Public Management ideas. This factor may have influenced the content of policy agendas, as well as the alternative-generation process. Nonetheless, the situational imperatives facing peak political executives at the outset of governmental periods offer a more convincing explanation of agenda inclusion, based on the case evidence. A second common explanation is that the posture and direction of economic policy was an important source of public management reform in the 1990s. The problem with this explanation is its weakness in accounting for agenda inclusion in the cases of Spain, Brazil, and Mexico, where the linkage to economic policy was highly tenuous, as underscored by the issue's assignment (at least for some time) to central coordinating agencies responsible for civil service management matters but not for budgeting or economic policy.

Granted that agenda setting is intertwined with the dynamics of forming governments and presidential administrations, how should this observation be incorporated into the explanatory scheme presented earlier in this article? What is being accounted for in each case is essentially a tiny number of decisions made by a few, powerful people—such as Bill Clinton, Anand Punyarachun, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso—within a short interval of time. To explain such decisions, we slot the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1989; March 1994) into the role of an explanatory, social mechanism. Under this theory, people engage in a particular mode of practical reasoning, where they consider what to do in the situation at hand from the standpoint of their identity. An appropriate action is one that fits the situation, given the agent's evoked identity. As a social mechanism, the logic of appropriateness works to link a configuration of context factors—the situation—to actions or efforts, through a motivated

reasoning and judgment process. The motivation stems from a desire to act in an appropriate way—and be seen as doing so. In seeking a partial explanation of agenda inclusion by analyzing the logic of appropriateness as a social mechanism, we therefore need to consider both actor identity and construed situation.

In brief, the evoked identities in these cases involve the roles inhabited by the main actors. These roles were mainly occupational and political. The roles of Bill Clinton, for instance, included being the chief executive of the system of organizations called the federal government and the victorious leader of a political party. Attached to these roles were some presumptions about how their role-occupants should act. For instance, the chief executive role in the U.S. carries the presumption that a president should not only take care that the laws be faithfully executed, but also that efforts be undertaken to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the executive branch as an organizational system (March and Olsen 1989). The role of victorious leader of a political party carries the presumption that the resources of the presidency will be used to enlarge the party's future electoral prospects. In the U.S. case, the situation did not lead Clinton to override the presumption that he should engage in efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the executive branch or seek to enlarge the party's electoral prospects. On the contrary, the situation—especially the systemic policy agenda and the political stream—tended to underwrite efforts in these same directions. As discussed by Donald Moynihan in the article on the U.S. case, the systemic agenda included making government work better, thanks to the publishing success of Osborne and Gaebler's best-selling book, *Reinventing Government* (1992). The political stream included the bases of partisan competition. Clinton and Gore won the presidency without a majority of the popular vote, and were keen to find ways to appeal to those who voted for Perot. The concept of reinvention and streamlining the federal bureaucracy could appeal to these voters. Given the systemic agenda and the political stream as well as their occupational and political identities, the logic of appropriateness explains why they decided to take actions that placed public management on the policy agenda.

The social mechanism of the logic of appropriateness can be viewed as concatenated with other social mechanisms (Gambetta 1998). Policy learning is one such mechanism. This mechanism involves forming beliefs about the practicality of certain kinds of interventions on the basis of direct or vicarious experience (Levitt and March 1988). Such beliefs can lead to the inference that a visualized intervention would be futile or would lead to perverse outcomes (Hirschman 1991). For instance, the Thai prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, eventually came to the view that fighting corruption through disciplinary procedures would be futile, for reasons detailed in Surapong Malee's article. The U.S. case is evidently one where the policy learning mechanism was at work. In Arkansas, Clinton gained direct experience with total quality management initiatives, which he considered positive both substantively and politically. Such policy learning appears to have added optimism and confidence to judgments favorable to including public management on the policy agenda. The analytical point, worth stressing here, is that the logic of appropriateness mechanism can be fruitfully combined with others in order to offer a more complete and, in that

sense, more satisfying explanation of agenda-setting event characteristics, such as agenda inclusion.

As a rule, detecting and explaining case differences enhances a process understanding of social phenomena, like the public management policymaking process. Across cases, we can detect some differences in the process dynamics of agenda inclusion. As discussed in the article on Brazil by Francisco Gaetani, public management issues were not on the systemic agenda before Cardoso began to organize his first presidential administration. Nor did Cardoso have any direct policy experience with public management. To understand the inclusion of public management as an item on the policy agenda in Brazil, we have to know why Cardoso wished to include Bresser in his administration, though in a less sensitive position than foreign affairs minister, for instance. From a logic of appropriateness standpoint, Cardoso's action is attributable, in some measure, to an evoked identity as a long-time political collaborator. As to why Bresser put forward the idea of a managerial reform, we need to consider his identity as a politician (albeit, without experience in elected political office), as a professor of economics based in a major business school in São Paulo, the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, as a scholarly expert on Brazil's political and institutional transformations, and as a nonexecutive director of a national supermarket chain. This background gave him some interest in both the federal government as an institution and management as a field of practice. In sum, the Brazil case indicates that when the systemic agenda and political stream do not intersect public management as a policy issue, the felt political obligations of presidents may exercise causal importance.

Since public management became an item on the policy agenda during all the episodes studied in this symposium issue, the research tactic of finding differences faces some inherent limitations. However, we can take advantage of the volume's articles in order to consider two instances when public management was not on the policy agenda. In Brazil, the exclusion of public management before 1995 can be attributed to the fight against hyperinflation. During this time, the federal budget was a fiction, with government operations dictated by the flow of cash disbursements as decided in the Ministry of Finance on a day-to-day basis. Doing something about public management in this turbulent context of policymaking and everyday life seemed unimportant and largely futile. In the article on Mexico, Guillermo Cejudo attributes the exclusion of public management from the policy agenda before 1994 to the concerted effort to liberalize the Mexican economy, a multifaceted task that occupied the full attention of the governing technocratic elite during the Salinas presidency. A reasonable conjecture is that placing public management on the policy agenda is normally judged unsuitable when policymakers are consumed with issues of macroeconomic stabilization and systemic economic transformation.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the process dynamics of agenda inclusion involve the formation of new governments and presidential administrations. How heads of government match their identity to such situations shapes whether public management is included on the policy agenda. Relevant to the situation are the systemic agenda and the political stream, as shown in the U.S. case. In that case, the process dynamics involved the emergence of public management issues on the systemic agenda, thanks to *Reinventing Government*, and to the basis of partisan competition between the Democrats and more conservative electoral groups.

However, some cases do not evince the same process dynamics. In the Brazil case, issue inclusion stemmed from the president's identity as a political collaborator of Bresser and the latter's timely advocacy of the issue of reforming the state apparatus. Neither mode of agenda inclusion is consistent with the usual universal explanations, involving travelling ideas and spillovers from economic policy choices.

### *Issue Formulation*

With respect to issue framing, the Spain, Mexico, and Brazil episodes fall into one similar group, while the U.S. and Germany episodes fall into another. The Latin episodes are similar in that the issue was framed in terms of improving organizational practices or civil service management. The specific words used to describe the issue varied from case to case. The need for administrative modernization was the formulated issue in Spain, the need for administrative development was the formulated issue in Mexico, and the need for a managerial reform of the state apparatus was the formulated issue in Brazil. In none of these episodes did the issue become framed primarily in terms of the cost or scale of the public service establishment.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, in the U.S. and Germany episodes, concerns about civil service management were coupled with a desire to reduce the costs and/or scale of executive government at the federal level. We can obtain a better process understanding of agenda setting about public management policy by explaining this pattern of similarities and differences.

In the Latin group of cases, a common processual attribute was the assignment of this policy agenda item to a single central coordinating agency before the issue was formulated with any degree of specificity. In the Spain case, the item was assigned to the newly constituted Ministry for Public Administrations (MAP). In Mexico, the item was assigned to the renamed Ministry of Controllorship and Administrative Development (SECODAM). In Brazil, the item was assigned to the newly constituted Ministry of Federal Administration and Reform of the State (MARE). These newly expanded institutions were also responsible for civil service and labor relations, as well as organization and methods, though not exclusively so. Equally important, expenditure planning and financial management was not one of their traditional or concurrent roles and missions. Given this identity, it was natural to formulate the issue in terms that related to civil service management, barring any overriding factor in the situation. No such overriding factor was present; for one reason, because the heads of government did not clarify how they wished to formulate the issue.

In the U.S. and Germany cases, the public management agenda item was assigned to temporary bodies, whose initial substantive task included offering a problem definition with more specificity than the initial conception. Unlike the central agencies in the Latin cases, neither the U.S. National Performance Review nor Germany's Lean State Expert Council possessed ongoing executive responsibility for any public management policies, let alone a subset of them. Their problem definition could therefore safely touch on matters that would normally be of interest to the budget agency (e.g., Office of Management and Budget, Finance Ministry) and the civil service management agency (e.g., Office of Personnel Management, Interior Ministry). The assignment of the issue to

those temporary bodies helps to explain the breadth of the issue formulation. However, a second, political rather than organizational, factor was involved. Top political authorities had already judged that the same issue should encompass matters relating to both the cost and performance of the federal bureaucracy.

The Thailand episode fits neither pattern exactly. In this case, the issue came to be formulated in terms of both reducing cost and improving civil service management, but the item was assigned to a single central coordinating agency, namely the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC). This divergence from the apparent pattern is explained by policy learning: namely, top authorities decided that the long-standing two percent growth policy, intended to curtail civil service expansion, had not been implemented because OCSC did not possess sufficient power to enforce it. The conclusion drawn was that OCSC needed to be put in charge of solving the problem of civil service growth. The fact that the issue came to be defined in terms of civil service management as well as growth is explained by OCSC's effective advocacy. While the intensity of effort reflects the opportunity presented, the content is due to OCSC's role and mission as a people- and organization-centered central agency. As a result, the issue definition expanded beyond the top political authority's initial formulation. This deviant case suggests the importance of institutional policy entrepreneurship in public management policymaking, and points to the operation of such context factors as past policy failures and such mechanisms as policy learning.

In Brazil and Mexico, political leaders were worried about cost as well as performance, but they formulated the public management issue primarily in terms of performance. That decision may be due to the fact that the central agencies responsible for expenditure planning and financial management were already intensely focused on the cost issue in the context of restrictive fiscal situations, while the political leaders felt that some attention needed to be given to the performance issue. A way to arrange for such attention was to assign this issue to a central agency whose staff was not concerned with expenditure planning and financial management.

Generalizing from this comparative analysis of issue formulation, issue assignment is an important aspect of agenda setting: this choice influences efforts to give fidelity to, as well as advocate, issue formulations. These choices can be understood in terms of the logic of appropriateness examined in the previous section on issue inclusion. As shown by the cases examined here, the situation affecting choice includes not only the political stream and systemic agenda (as in the U.S. case), but also such factors as the posture and direction of economic policy (as in the case of Germany and Thailand) and the legal framework bearing on whether top authorities can easily realign roles and missions within the public management policy subsystem (as in Brazil, Mexico, and Spain).

### *Issue Status*

In the U.S. and Thailand, the public management issue enjoyed an elevated status. In Spain and Mexico, this agenda item's status was rather low. Brazil and Germany are more complex cases. In Brazil, the decisive action of proposing a constitutional amendment was taken very early in the Cardoso administration, thereby broadcasting that the issue was highly ranked. On the other hand, the president delegated the task of moving the amendment through Congress to

Bresser, working in concert with the president's closest aides. In Germany, the broad issue of streamlining the state occupied the pinnacle of the governmental policy agenda. On the other hand, the status of public management policy as an item within this catchall issue was ambiguous. Thus, the cases fall into three groups with respect to issue status: high, low, and ambiguous.<sup>11</sup>

The bare-bones explanation for the high issue status in U.S. and Thailand is virtually the same as that offered to account for issue inclusion. Issue status was essentially chosen by the heads of government, based on the matching of identity with situation. In the situation, public management was already an issue on the systemic agenda in both countries before the turnover in the political executive (through an election in the U.S. and a military-led coup in Thailand). In both cases, the political stream contributed a sense of urgency in undertaking and achieving change in the broad area of public management. In Thailand, the government had in mind allowing the next elections to proceed on schedule, while Clinton and Gore started planning for the 1994 midterm elections and the 1996 presidential election on the heels of the 1992 electoral victory. In sum, the sense of political time and the issue's presence on the systemic agenda characterized the situation faced by both Clinton and Anand, contributing to their taking action that propelled public management to lofty positions on the governmental policy agenda.

The U.S. case is notable for the longevity of the issue's high status. To explain this trajectory, the logic of appropriateness mechanism needs to be seen as concatenated with that of policy learning, as discussed earlier in explaining issue inclusion. This mechanism was linked to experience accumulated during the episode itself. As the episode unfolded, Clinton and Gore drew the inference that the reinventing government issue offered considerable political appeal and presented relatively few risks—certainly compared with such other agenda items, such as health care reform. The experience from which they drew this inference included the ample flow of proposals set forth by the National Performance Review. This aspect of policy learning—involving a causal loop from agenda inclusion, through alternative specification, and reaching back to the agenda-setting process—is analytically noteworthy and will be discussed further, below.

Why a low issue status in Spain and Mexico? In these cases, heads of government seemed fairly satisfied that they had taken care of the subject once they placed a significant figure in charge of restructured central agencies responsible for civil service management. One can furthermore speculate that heads of government preferred a lower- to a higher-status agenda position for this issue. Joaquín Almunia, formerly minister for public administrations in Spain, has commented that elevating the agenda status of public management policy risked drawing steady media attention toward blemishes in the central government bureaucracy's performance, for which the government could be blamed.<sup>12</sup> To these explanatory conjectures, we can add a further causal hypothesis. In neither case was it likely that convincing alternatives would be forthcoming any time soon. Thanks to policy learning, the PSOE in Spain had ruled out pursuing legal reform of civil service employment relations: from the vantage point of 1986, policy alternatives of a different stripe had to be designed, rather than simply selected. Meanwhile, in Mexico, the subject of public management policy had been off the agenda for eight years. A higher issue status would have left the government a hostage to fortune. In this sense, the thinly

populated policy stream helps to explain the low status of public management issues in Spain, as of 1986, and in Mexico, as of 1995.

The apparent dynamic loop between agenda setting and alternative specification seems even more significant once one considers the same cases in later phases of their respective episodes. In Spain, the issue attained a much higher status by 1991, as shown in Raquel Gallego's article. By this point, some four years after MAP's founding, the policy stream was well stocked with alternatives, including a draft administrative procedures law, a program of pilot projects, and a provision for creating executive agencies. This situation emboldened the then-minister for public administrations, Juan Manuel Eguiagaray, to apply his considerable political muscle to moving the public management issue up several notches on the governmental policy agenda. In Mexico, the issue grew in status by 1998, once alternatives for modifying the budgeting system had been designed. As Cejudo argues in his article, these developments readily came to the president's attention because President Zedillo was closely involved with the substance of budgeting issues, understood the terrain from his earlier days as minister of planning and budgeting, and because changes in the political stream made transparency in government an urgent concern. These over-time differences in the Spain and Mexico cases underline the observation that issue status is not a simple artifact of presidential leadership, but reflects the process dynamics of episodes of public management policymaking—in particular a causal loop involving agenda-inclusion decisions, flows of effort in alternative specification, and changes in issue status. This observation will be pursued later in examining the systemic concept of issue momentum.

### *Summary*

The comparative analysis of agenda setting in the public management policymaking process, based on the case studies in this volume, finds that actions taken by heads of government during intervals following elections exert significant influence over issue inclusion, formulation, and status. However, the actions of heads of government are not absolutely decisive for agenda setting. While heads of government may shape the broadest outlines of issues, their formulation is very much influenced by the efforts of the permanent or temporary bodies to which they assign the public management issue. This point is illustrated most strikingly by the Brazil case, but is clearly evident in the Germany, U.S., Thailand, and Mexico cases. Heads of government exercise considerable influence over issue status, in part because their actions are considered strong signals of this quality. For instance, White House ceremonies and executive orders signalled priority for reinventing government in the U.S., just as Prime Minister Anand's full-scale review of the OCSC's working version of its civil service management plan was duly noted. In the opposite direction, Felipe González never became personally identified or engaged with public management issues, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso was notably distant from the reform proposals once the constitutional amendment was cleared by the presidency and sent to the Congress. Heads of governments' actions in this regard appear influenced by their reading of what is required by their role as leaders of victorious political parties and of their overall situation, including the political

stream, other policy priorities, and the depth of the policy stream. Issue status is not a fixed attribute of agenda-setting trajectories. As indicated by the Spain and Mexico cases, issue status can move upwards when the policy stream thickens.

This analysis of agenda-setting dynamics suggests that the influence of travelling ideas and economic policy over public management policymaking are overdrawn. The current findings are indeed more in keeping with the empirical, political science literature that gives substantial attention to political leadership (Metcalf 1993, Campbell and Halligan 1992, Campbell and Wilson 1996). However, before any firm conclusions are reached, we need to examine carefully another component process of policymaking: alternative specification.

### **TOWARD A PROCESS UNDERSTANDING OF ALTERNATIVE SPECIFICATION**

This section compares the case studies in order to develop a process understanding of the alternative-specification process. Alternative specification is a significant component of the policymaking process for two main reasons. First, faster-paced processes can influence the overall trajectory of public management policymaking episodes by building issue momentum, a quality that would affect issue status and thereby the access of issues and proposals to decisional venues. Second, the flow and the quality of effort that occurs in alternative-specification events influences the sophistication of public management policy proposals, a quality that may affect their potential for selection and effective implementation. The first of these analytic issues will now be addressed.

#### **Pace of Alternative Specification**

The cases divide fairly neatly into two groups: fast and slow paced. The alternative-specification process moved quickly in the U.S., Thailand, and Brazil, and slowly in Mexico, Germany, and especially Spain. In the U.S., the National Performance Review produced a rich mixture of alternatives in little more than six months of operation during 1993, with many of the concepts being further refined during the subsequent year. In Thailand, the proposed approach and methods of civil service management was formulated within nine months. In Brazil, Bresser produced an early draft of his managerial reform proposals within two months of Cardoso's taking office, and a draft constitutional amendment was sent to Congress within eight months. In contrast, the alternative-specification process in Spain and Mexico operated on a time scale of multiple years. In Germany, the pace quickened only when Länder governments seized the opportunity to advance their long-standing agendas in these fields of civil service and budgeting.

A simplified line of explanation for these case differences is that, in the fast-paced cases, actors engaged in productive, high-intensity effort, whereas, in the slow-paced cases, effort was less intense and/or bore fruit only after much time had passed. Granted this explanatory approach, two questions arise. First, what explains the intensity of effort among the actors who participated in alternative specification? Second, what explains participants' effectiveness in generating proposals, given a level of effort? The first of these questions is addressed below using analytical concepts drawn from theories of large-scale political and policy

change, while the second question is addressed using analytical concepts drawn from the study of micro-organizational behavior.

### *Explaining Intensity of Effort*

Consider the initial effort in the U.S. episode, leading to the proposals packaged as the National Performance Review (NPR), with its slogan of creating a government that works better and costs less. One causal source of the effort was certification, a social mechanism whose activation typically depends on messages widely communicated by institutional authority figures (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 121). In the U.S., the early selection of such individuals as David Osborne, John Kamensky, and Bob Stone as members of the NPR had the effect of certifying them as valid claims-makers and as presidential agents operating within the public management policy domain. Their identities were shaped, or at least evoked, by the president and vice president's acts of certification. Through a cascade of certifications, the NPR constructed dozens of claims-makers and several presidential agents. Without such certification, it is doubtful that so much energy would have been expended in specifying alternatives.

An analogous story of certification can be told in the other fast-paced cases. In Thailand, for instance, Prime Minister Anand certified both his deputy prime minister and Professor Wijit Srisa-arn, named as acting secretary general of OCSC, as key claims-makers and prime ministerial agents in the public management policy domain. The assignment of the issue to OCSC expanded upon this staff's standing certification as performers of the personnel management function. In Brazil, President Cardoso certified Bresser as claims-maker and presidential agent, and the minister, in turn, certified the staff he assembled, mainly drawing upon individuals associated with the business school of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas in São Paulo.

While the certification mechanism operated in the fast-paced cases of the U.S., Thailand, and Brazil, it did in the slow-paced cases of Germany, Spain, and Mexico, as well. In Germany, Länder government officials were precertified as claims-makers about public management due to the shared administration of government programs under cooperative federalism. For their part, Lean State Expert Council members became certified when this temporary body was set up. In Spain, Prime Minister Felipe González certified Joaquín Almunia as a prime ministerial agent and claims-maker concerning public management policy. Almunia, in turn, certified the team he assembled within MAP. In Mexico, Norma Samaniego was certified as a presidential agent with her appointment by Ernesto Zedillo as secretary of controllership and administrative development. In sum, while certification contributed to effort in the fast-paced cases, this mechanism does not adequately explain differences between the fast and slow paced ones. To account for case differences, we need to reveal other mechanisms that worked in concert with certification in the U.S., Thailand, and Brazil cases, but were not so apparent in the Spain, Mexico, and Germany cases.

What energized the certified agents in the U.S., Thailand, and Brazil was the social mechanism known as "attribution of opportunity" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 43). This attribution was based on actors' interpretation of the unfolding episode of public management policy change and its wider context in motion. In both the U.S. and Thailand, the certified agents received clear

messages that they were working on matters of significant interest for the heads of government. The repeated involvement in the formal process of alternative specification of Vice President Al Gore and Deputy Prime Minister Meechai Ruchubhan in the U.S. and Thailand, respectively, was a convincing signal. In the longer U.S. episode, according to Moynihan's article, similar signals were communicated by White House ceremonies and the signing of a stream of executive orders. In Brazil, a similarly powerful signal was President Cardoso's establishment of MARE, as well as his clearance of the draft constitutional amendment.

This social mechanism—attribution of opportunity—operated much more weakly in Mexico and Spain. In Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo conveyed little indication of presidential interest in efforts, centered in the Ministry of Controllorship and Administrative Development, to develop the modernization program (PROMAP). In Spain, Felipe González expressed no interest in the issue of administrative modernization beyond authorizing the establishment of MAP and discussing its mandate with Almunia in 1986. Furthermore, Almunia himself was sufficiently engulfed by issues related to the Catalans and Basques that he devoted only a small fraction of his own time to administrative modernization.

In sum, the intensity of effort in alternative specification in the fast-paced cases is due in part to the concatenation of the certification and attribution of opportunity mechanisms. Correspondingly, the comparative lack of intensity of effort in the slow-paced cases is causally related to the dormancy of the attribution of opportunity mechanism in these cases. Repeated indications of issue status and presidential or prime ministerial interest in the subject thus appear to have considerable bearing on whether the attribution of opportunity mechanism will be activated in this domain.<sup>13</sup>

### *Explaining Effort Outcomes*

In an important sense, effort is just an input to the process of designing policy alternatives. To explain why some cases were fast paced and others slow, we need to examine the process details of the alternative specification events. Some of these details were part of the initial process design. For instance, the U.S.'s NPR was mandated to complete its report within six months, while Germany's Lean State Expert Council, by contrast, was given well over a year to complete its work. Evidently, deadlines are not the only relevant process design feature.

In this volume, the Thailand case study provides substantial insight into the effectiveness of effort in generating proposals. The process design included frequent, lengthy meetings with Acting OCSC Secretary Wijit, multiple meetings where work in progress was discussed with the deputy prime minister, and a culminating event where the prime minister himself was briefed in detail. The sessions with the deputy prime minister, in particular, can be counted as activating a performance spiral mechanism, as they provided clear, timely feedback from an authoritative source on the quality of the emerging policy proposals. The Thailand case thus suggests that process design influenced the pace of alternative specification. Whether this influence is decisive is difficult to establish on the basis of the case studies, since most of the other articles are less detailed in rendering this aspect of their episodes' trajectories. Nonetheless, the slower pace of alternative generation in the Germany case—where the attribution

of opportunity was probably reasonably high—does appear attributable to the process design of the Lean State Expert Council's work, not least its planned time scale.

### *Summary*

The pace of the alternative-specification process is an analytically significant dimension along which the cases differ. In the Thailand episode, the fast pace is attributable to the concatenation of three mechanisms: certification, attribution of opportunity, and performance spirals. The case evidence suggests that the process dynamics in the U.S. and Brazil episodes were largely similar to those observed in Thailand. In the slower paced cases, at least one of these mechanisms was dormant. In Germany, group performance spirals were apparently dormant, while in Spain and Mexico the only mechanism operating strongly was certification.

### **Further Aspects of Alternative Specification**

This article's analytic focus on process dynamics reduces its concern for several research issues about alternative specification that would otherwise be interesting to pursue. These additional issues will now be mentioned briefly, as some of the case studies provide partial insights about them.

The first issue concerns international policy transfer. The social mechanism of diffusion—linked to vicarious experiences with public management policy change—operated forcefully in Brazil. In this episode, a former British official, who had participated in the Next Steps Initiative, acted as a consultant to MARE over the course of several years, but after the main reform direction had been established. The diffusion mechanism appears to have operated in a weak manner in Spain, where the concept of executive agencies was transferred, leading to the establishment of the Tax Agency. The importance of this mechanism's operation in the other cases is difficult to establish, however.<sup>14</sup>

The second issue concerns the design sophistication or substantive plausibility of the alternatives. As this comparative study has been styled as positive research, this issue is not addressed directly. However, many of the actual policy alternatives have received criticism, including the constitutional amendments in Brazil and the administrative procedures bill in Spain. The case studies, contrary to usual practice in public administration studies of reform, remain agnostic about these concerns, but they could be a subject of enlightening discussion and dialog.

The third issue is the capacity to develop public management policy alternatives. The articles on Brazil, Spain, and Mexico note the challenges of building up knowledgeable, experienced teams, especially when the administrative law profession has been decertified as claims-makers about public management policy. The relative depth of capacity in the U.S. case—distributed among such institutional locations as the NPR and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy within the Office of Management and Budget—is equally notable.

Future case study research on alternative specification might sensibly investigate these and other issues, which lie outside the scope of this focused examination of process dynamics.

## TOWARD A PROCESS UNDERSTANDING OF DECISION MAKING

Before concluding this comparative study, the process dynamics of the decision-making component of the public management policymaking process will be briefly analyzed. This section is brief for one main reason: differences are greater within cases than among them. As an example of within-case variation, consider Brazil. This episode includes a three-year-long decision-making event, involving the high politics of considering a constitutional amendment as well as expeditious decision-making events—e.g., restarting recruitment and selection of career civil servants in public management-related career fields that transpired inside the Ministry of Federal Administration and Reform of the State itself. The U.S. case also varied as between expeditious decisional events, as in preparing executive orders authorizing reinvention labs, and longer ones whose rhythms were typical of statutory change, as in procurement reform. The relatively homogeneous cases were Mexico, Spain, and Thailand, where the decision-making process operated almost exclusively within the executive.

Due to the marked intracase differences, an appropriate tactic of comparative analysis is to pursue a series of paired comparisons (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 80-85). Since only two cases are considered at a time, each can be examined more holistically than has been the style of analysis in this more broadly comparative essay. Paired comparisons can find and explain variation within cases, as well as consider intercase differences.

This introductory essay is not the place to pursue this tactic of comparative research in a fully substantive way, however. Extended discussion of paired comparisons would require a substantial article all by itself. This section develops one paired comparison—between the U.S. and Germany—to provide an indication of how this approach to comparative analysis might be fruitful.

In the U.S. case, policy alternatives were either translated quickly into executive orders, as in the case of deregulating personnel management, or assigned to specialized venues for further design and legislative drafting, as in the case of nondefense procurement reform. The handoffs were smooth and expeditious, contributing to issue momentum. In Germany, proposals were to be handed off to a committee of senior federal officials representing the full range of ministries once the Lean State Expert Council reported more than a year after convening. By the time this committee of high officials received the council's recommendations, their attention was focused on relocating the federal political capital to Berlin, creating significant interference within the decision-making process. In the event, few proposals were acted upon. Based on this partial case comparison, the main differences in decision-making dynamics can be attributed to dramatically contrasting process designs for issue formulation, alternative specification, and decision making—plus the predictable policy interference effect just mentioned.

Shifting attention now to policymaking centered within legislative action channels, an interesting pairing of mini-episodes is between procurement reform in the U.S., on one hand, and budget and civil service reform in Germany, on the other. In some respects, these mini-episodes' decision-making dynamics were similar. For instance, proposals to change statutory public management policies

were enacted in both mini-episodes after months of substantial legislative engagement. The fact that the legislature became a venue for the decision-making process is partly attributable to the legal status of public management policies in the two countries. In the U.S. and Germany, significant institutional rules constituting public management policies have been inscribed in statutory law.

In key respects, however, these paired mini-episodes were strikingly different. In the U.S., the initiative for legislated procurement reform came from the Clinton administration, within which specific proposals had been incubated. The administration decided that it was prepared to run the risks associated with introducing legislation in this field, for reasons discussed in Moynihan's article. In Germany, by contrast, the initiative for budgetary and civil service reform came from state (Länder) level officials. Access to the legislative agenda is explained in part by these officials' efforts—shaped by the logic of appropriateness and sparked by an attribution of opportunity in the context of the high-status streamlining issue—to make use of federal-state cooperation venues within the ministries of finance and interior as well as the strong position of the Länder within the upper legislative chamber, the Bundesrat. Essentially, policy entrepreneurship came from state-level officials in the Germany case and from the federal executive in the U.S. case.

In both cases, the legislative process involved compromise between the legislature and executive, but the role played by the executive in the U.S. was the mirror image of that in Germany. The executive—represented primarily by Steven Kelman, the appointed administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy—was pro-reform in the U.S. case, while the officials within the German finance and interior ministries sought to dilute the relatively far-reaching alternatives favored by Länder officials. These differences are partly attributable to the U.S. system of presidential appointments—typified by Kelman, a Harvard professor, who had written a book demonstrating the need for procurement reform (1991)—in contrast with Germany's civil-servant dominated administrative hierarchy.

The U.S.-Germany paired comparison indicates that the process dynamics of decision making depends on a host of factors, including the form of government; the legal status of public management policies, including margins for executive discretion in this domain; crafted process designs for issue formulation, alternative specification, and application of executive discretion in decision making; patterns of recruitment to high-level executive positions; policy entrepreneurship; and context in motion, leading to policy interference effects. This wide range of operative factors clearly indicates that decision making within the public management policymaking process cannot be understood simply by drawing inferences from facts about the institutional setup of a country's governmental system. Much depends on the dynamic configuration of detailed legal aspects of public management policies, the chosen mode of policy development, and interactive performances—factors to which processual theories of policymaking are keenly sensitive, as depicted in table 1. In narrative processual terms, much of what happens in the decision-making process depends on what has already transpired in the agenda-setting and alternative-specification processes—a fact that is a key analytic generalization stemming from Kingdon's book.

The U.S.-German paired comparison can be taken one step further, to illustrate the kind of insights attainable through systematic pursuit of a process understanding of public management policymaking. Let us start with a discussion of the U.S. case and then take up the Germany case. A relevant attribute of the U.S. episode's trajectory, within the decision-making process, is the White House decision to send procurement legislation up to Capitol Hill. This decision can be understood in logic of appropriateness terms, along much the same lines as were laid out in discussing agenda setting and, specifically, issue inclusion. At the outset of the decision-making event, the situation included a well-developed policy alternative, the momentum of the reinventing government issue, intelligence indicating that Congressional Republicans were open to the proposals, and confidence in Kelman as an expert and political executive.

To obtain a process understanding, this situation must be explained. Many of these situational features can be understood in terms of policy entrepreneurship, considered as a concatenation of social mechanisms. These mechanisms include certification and attribution of opportunity. As suggested earlier, Kelman's certification as a claims-maker and the administration's agent for nondefense procurement reform derived, in part, from the presidential appointments process and his prior authorship of the book, *Procurement and Public Management*. The context factors to which the certification mechanism was linked included the in-and-out system of presidential appointments and the academic community of public management specialists. The context factors to which the attribution of opportunity was keyed included the overall momentum of the reinventing government issue and of procurement reform in the Department of Defense.

Another attribute of the event trajectory was congressional passage of procurement legislation. Policy entrepreneurship is relevant to explaining this aspect of the case, as well. Attention here focuses less on the intensity of Kelman's efforts, but rather on their effectiveness. For this explanatory task, the most relevant social mechanisms, concatenated within policy entrepreneurship, are concept shift and brokering. Kelman succeeded in changing the perception of existing procurement legislation from a bulwark of government efficiency to a pattern of self-defeating business practices. He was also successful in brokering relations among influential congressmen, the administration, and interested parties in procurement reform.

In the case of Germany, a key, parallel analytic question is why civil service and budget reform gained access to the legislative agenda. The effort of state-level officials is part of the explanation. This factor can be explained by the mechanisms of certification and attribution of opportunity, both situated within the broader concept of policy entrepreneurship. As mentioned earlier, Länder officials were certified as claims-makers in the public management policy domain. This mechanism operated because of several context factors in Germany. First, the Länder operate federal programs. Second, public management policies within the Länder are substantially determined by federal legislation. Third, cooperative federalism gives Länder officials seats at a variety of tables within the federal government. For these reasons, these actors were certified even without the German government or federal officials taking any action. As for attribution of opportunity, this psychological process was largely activated by the trajectory of the policymaking episode in its predecisional phase, when the streamlining issue was catapulted to the top of the government's priorities.

In the Germany case, another important question is why budget and civil service legislation passed, albeit in diluted form. Answering this question would require more detailed empirical information about the decision-making process than we have at hand. However, the brokering mechanism was clearly in operation. The specific way it operated depended on the ability of Länder officials to leverage their influence within the Bundesrat, as well as on the limits of their power given the role of the executive—staffed heavily by career civil servants—in the legislative process.

This paired-case comparison suggests that policy entrepreneurship is a common source of public management policy change. The operation of this multifaceted mechanism—especially the component mechanisms of certification and attribution of opportunity—sheds light on the level of policy advocates' efforts to bring about change. The component mechanisms of certification and brokerage shed light on the effectiveness of advocates' efforts in the decision-making process. In this respect, our analytic generalizations track those of Kingdon (1995), as interpreted through the lens of McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001). Also in line with Kingdon, the context of strong issue momentum appears to contribute to advocates' efforts and their effectiveness. In contrast to Kingdon, but in line with McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, the cross-episode comparison of the U.S. and Germany provides additional insight into the influence of relatively stable process context factors, such as form of government and bureaucratic recruitment patterns. In Germany, cooperative federalism influenced the policy entrepreneurship mechanism's operation in a similar way to the U.S. system of presidential appointments. Some stable cross-national differences—like bureaucratic recruitment patterns—do not necessarily imply substantial differences in the process dynamics of public management policymaking.

## CONCLUSION

The scientific goal of this research program is to attain a process understanding of public management policymaking. In this article, the goal has been pursued by comparing six episodes of public management policymaking that vary in analytically significant ways, including issue formulation, issue status, issue assignment, the pace of alternative specification, and the institutional context of decision making. Analytical understandings of the public management policymaking process have been developed by explaining the pattern of similarities and differences, drawing on an explicit explanatory framework. Explanations crafted in these terms pivot around social mechanisms, such as the logic of appropriateness, attribution of opportunity, certification, performance spirals, and brokering. The mechanisms operate in two modes, one of which relates institutional context and context in motion to the flow of individual and collective efforts (including decisions) constituting an episode trajectory.

The substantive conclusions, tentative as they must be, include the following points. First, heads of government, often in concert with close colleagues, exercise unparalleled influence over the inclusion of public management policy issues on the policy agenda. Second, the decision to include or exclude this type of issue from the policy agenda normally transpires during the postelection process of forming governments or assembling presidential administrations. Third, heads of government exercise marked influence over the issue

formulation, though their influence in this respect is somewhat muted compared with that over issue inclusion. They typically exert their influence over issue formulation in choosing who will be responsible for managing the policy issue or proposing recommendations. Within broad limits, the issue formulation normally reflects the role or composition of the body entrusted with such responsibilities. However, the specific issue formulation is influenced to a degree by the individuals whom heads of government certify as their agents in the public management policy domain.

Fourth, issue status changes as public management policymaking episodes unfold. The initial issue status is typically a calculated political decision. When public management policy issues attain a high initial status, it is often because they complement other items on the governmental policy agenda, as in the case of the U.S. health care reform. However, this pattern is far from universal, as evidenced by the case of Brazil. Issue status can become enhanced over time, as a result of the flow of proposals arising from the alternative-specification process, the introduction of legislation, changes in the political stream, and persistent signals of top-level executive interest. Issue status can decline as a result of slow movement within the alternative-specification process, policy interference effects, and the lack of visible top-level concern.

Fifth, the alternative-specification process is a relatively managed affair. However, there is tremendous variation in the modes of alternative specification. A striking difference is in the intensity and the time scale of such efforts. The more intense and temporally compressed efforts, as in the U.S., Thailand, and Brazil, tend to contribute to stronger issue momentum. Sixth, the degree of contact between peak-level executives and the alternative-specification process varies widely, with substantial consequences for issue status and momentum. Top-level government officials may have modest influence over the design details of the proposals that come their way, but they can exert marked influence over the pace of the alternative-specification process and over issue momentum more generally. Seventh, the dynamics of decision making depend substantially on whether the government needs legislation in order to change public management policies and on whether the political leaders in the executive wish to invest the effort and run the risks of the legislative process on the issue at hand. The need for legislation depends in part on the outcome of previous rounds of public management policymaking, and reflects constitutional arrangements. The willingness to propose and support legislation depends on issue status, executive strength over the legislature, and confidence in the agents in charge of moving proposals through the decision-making process.

Thematically, the study shows the importance of political leadership and policy entrepreneurship, along with the social mechanisms of the logic of appropriateness, policy learning, certification, and attribution of opportunity. The relevance of issue assignment and the design of policy formulation and development processes is underscored, as well. By contrast, the mechanism of diffusion, associated with international policy transfer, appears to play a minor causal role, with the possible exception of the Brazil case.

Changing public management policies is not universally or always desirable; nonetheless, the case for reform is rarely without merit. As demonstrated by the case studies, change is not easy to achieve. Research clearly cannot provide precise guidance about how to lead or advocate change, but it can provide

insights into the practicalities of mobilizing effort and making it effective. Actors can think of how to optimize the design for performing a given policymaking function, such as alternative specification, by learning from the analyzed experience presented here. And they can think in detail about questions of design and feasibility by considering historically informed connections between process context factors, processes and mechanisms, and activities. In this way, the combination of single and comparative case study research designs provides insight into the practicalities of bringing about public management policy change. However, lesson drawing is beyond the scope of the present volume.

This article does not exhaust the potential of the case studies included in the volume—plus the case of Germany, separately published—to provide insight into the process dynamics of public management policymaking. Readers will no doubt find their minds stimulated to hypothesize other analytic generalizations on the basis of the articles to follow.

As with any study, this one is subject to limitations. First, the findings are not yet harmonized with the empirical study of the NPM benchmark cases. Second, the implementation process is not analyzed. Third, feedback effects from implementation to upstream policymaking are not considered. These limitations are not due to inherent properties of the research program on display here, but are rather an artifact of the limited, medium scale of effort that was possible to undertake in this instance.

Having said this, one must admire the effort of this volume's contributing authors. These scholars have not only produced stimulating studies of the episodes chosen for investigation and analysis, but they have also coordinated their interpretation and writing so that the overall product is a set of comparable case studies of public management policymaking. This heedful coordination among members of a scholarly community turns out to be the main factor permitting the systematic comparison of episodes undertaken in this synthesis article. A safe conclusion from this project is that vital international scholarly networks and overlapping research designs are among the key ingredients of research providing insights into the practicalities of bringing about public management policy change.

## NOTES

1. Process understandings come in varied forms. One variant is a set of interrelated statements that could be described as a model. Much of the work of James G. March (e.g., Cyert and March 1963), Karl Weick (e.g., 2001) fits this description, as does that of Thomas Schelling (1978). A second variant is an analyzed episode of policymaking. Much of the work of Richard Neustadt (e.g., Neustadt and Fineberg 1983) fits this description, as does my own early research (Barzelay 1986). For this form of usable knowledge, the user is envisioned to construct analogies between the situation at hand (and its antecedents), on one hand, and the interpreted experience or episode, on the other. At a minimum, this effort at drawing out analogies is thought to sensitize the user to latent opportunities and prospective hazards in the process of policy change or organizational transformation. A third variant is a kind of design theory or framework for intervening in a situation. Recent work by Mark Moore (1995) and Eugene Bardach (1998) fits this pattern.

2. References to the article on the Germany case concern Barzelay and Fuechtner (2003). This separately published article (available on-line at <http://journals.kluweronline.com/article.asp?PIPS=5113294>) is fully considered in the comparative analysis presented below.

3. At the same time, we would mention strong parallels between our research design and that used by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) to study a nominally different phenomenon—namely, contentious politics. We return to this point later in the introduction.

4. The quality of the papers reflects the research process. The process of designing the case studies was written up in the autumn of 2001. Authors presented narrative overviews and research designs for their papers at a workshop held at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in June 2002. During the autumn of the same year, versions of some of the papers were presented in Lisbon at the annual congress of the Latin American Center for Administration and Development (CLAD) and in Dallas, Texas at the annual research conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM). In December 2002, a second workshop was held at LSE, where authors presented full drafts and received detailed comments from discussants drawn largely from the same group. Revised papers were reviewed by anonymous referees selected by *IPMJ*. The final versions have taken into account the often incisive comments of the referees.

5. The concept of narrative explanation is discussed in Abbott (1992) and Kiser (1996). The related concept of multiple conjunctural causation is discussed in Ragin (1987).

6. Blanca Heredia's (2002) case study of Mexico, presented at technical meetings of the Regional Dialogue on Management and Transparency, is more concerned with this question and utilizes analytic categories that are central to historical institutionalism as a research tradition. This approach helps to explain why some issues never make it onto the governmental policy agenda and why others do not survive long.

7. Comment by Juan Carlos Cortázar Velarde, whose work on the case of Peru could not be included in this volume.

8. Works that focus heavily on implementation events within the public management policymaking process include Campbell and Halligan (1992), Barzelay (1992), and Zifcak (1994).

9. This conjecture is not fully consistent with an experience outside the scope of this study, namely, New Zealand. But even in this instance, public management issues did not enter the policy agenda until three years after policies to effect a systemic economic transformation were in place.

10. In Brazil, a major issue was the huge cost of public employee pensions, but this was a separate matter.

11. To grasp the ambiguities of the Brazil and Spain cases requires substantial familiarity with evidence about these cases, so I will not pursue them here.

12. Personal communication, London, December 2002.

13. At the risk of digression, further research and analysis should also consider additional influences over attributions of opportunity. The case evidence suggests that attributions of opportunity are causally linked to whether central agencies responsible for expenditure planning and financial management take a

strong interest in the subject. In the case of Spain, for instance, the lack of interest of the Ministry of Economy and Finance put a significant damper on attributions of opportunity over in the Ministry for Public Administrations. This line of analysis is not pursued here, however, because it does not help to explain the case differences of immediate interest: the pace of the alternative-specification process.

14. Compare the claims about the importance of international diffusion in Sahlin-Andersson (2002).