

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESULTS AGENDA:  
Unpacking the Role Public Servants Play in Institutional Work**

**JACKSON REGGIE**

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School of Political Studies  
The University of Ottawa

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## ABSTRACT

Existing scholarship in public sector results-based management (RBM) mostly conceptualizes implementation as an isomorphic process. Researchers frequently look at implementation from a top-down driven approach which conjures images of public servants as automatons who merely sustain RBM practices due to institutional pressures on behaviour. To that effect, little is known around how agency dynamically intersects with institutions not only to maintain, but also to create and disrupt RBM institutions through implementation. Combining institutional pressures and institutional work as theoretical frameworks, this study deploys qualitative content analysis on institutional instruments such as archival materials, as well as semi-structured interviews with Chief Results and Delivery Officers (CRDOs), to identify the various institutional pressures acting on public servants, the different types of institutional work activities performed during implementation of the *Results Agenda*, and how such actions contribute to the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutional RBM regime within Canadian public sector. The agency of public servants bears heavily on how CRDOs perceive, understand, and respond to implementation pressures from institutional *Results Agenda*. The study finds that *Results Agenda* implementation is not a straightforward, linear, and exclusively top-down political and administrative centre driven activity. CRDOs overwhelmingly perform nuanced and overt actions that at times support, build on, and confront institutional *Results Agenda* imposed by the centres. This unique and evolving dynamic between institutions and agency intentionally and unintentionally reproduces, maintains, and alters institutional *Results Agenda* features within Canadian federal public sector. Given the importance of RBM systems in Canada's federal public organisations, the insights from this study can shed light on how public servants implement institutional RBM and create, maintain, and disrupt centre driven institutional RBM through agency. Finally, this dissertation advances the methodological utility of integrating institutional work for combined empirical and interpretive social action research on institutional RBM implementation.

*Keywords:* Results-based management, implementation, performance management, institutional work, Canada

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## List of Acronyms

Cabinet Committee on Agenda, Results and Communications	ARC
Chief Financial Officer	CFO
Chief Human Resources Officer	CHRO
Chief Information Officer	CIO
Chief Results and Delivery Officer	CRDO
Departmental Results Framework	DRF
Departmental Results Reporting	DRR
Expenditure Management Sector	EMS
Federal Accountability Act	FAA
Government Electronic Directory Services	GEDS
Head of Evaluation	HoE
Heads of Performance Measurement	HoPM
Memorandum to Cabinet	MoC
National Sports Organisations	NSO
New Public Governance	NPG
New Public Management	NPM
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD
Performance Information Profile	PIP
Performance Management	PM
Performance Measurement and Evaluations Committee	PMEC
Prime Minister's Delivery Unit	PMDU
Prime Minister's Office	PMO
Privy Council Office	PCO
Qualitative Content Analysis	QCA
Research Ethics Board	REB
Results and Delivery Unit	RDU
Results-based Management	RBM
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	TB

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"  
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.  
"I don't much care where—" said Alice.  
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.  
"—so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.  
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

In Lewis Carrol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865, p. 89-90)

### 1.1 Results Agenda - Out with the old... in with the new?

The enthusiasm for Michael Barber's *Deliverology* gospel grew considerably within the new Liberal government following the 2015 Canadian federal election. The majority government held a series of cabinet retreats packed with an agenda that featured keynote presentations from Barber's Whitehall-tested results-based management (RBM) approach. Barber had some success with *Deliverology* under the Tony Blair Government in England. During his tenure under Blair, Barber created and led the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) (McKay, 2018). Years later, his perceived *bona fides* led him to Provincial Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty, who sought to adapt and implement *Deliverology* across Ontario ministries (Behn, 2017). Matthew Mendelsohn, the head of McGuinty's Cabinet Office at the time, led the province's "results and delivery" efforts. After his tenure with the provincial government, Mendelsohn was then appointed to adapt and lead efforts to stand up Trudeau's own version of RBM following the elections (Abma, 2016).

As the newly minted federal Cabinet met early in their first term, Barber pitched the new government on the cardinal rules of *Deliverology* (Dyer, 2016). Thereafter, Canadian central agencies, including the Privy Council Office (PCO) and the Treasury Board (TB) of Canada Secretariat, began to adapt and introduce the RBM paradigm into what is now branded as the

*Results Agenda*.<sup>1</sup> TB describes the *Results Agenda* as an instrumental approach designed to “ensure that government clearly defines the results it wants to achieve, carefully measures its progress in achieving them, and then communicates to Canadians what it has achieved on their behalf and the resources used to do so” (2017, p. 1). While Treasury Board acknowledges that departments currently “achieve, track and report on results”, the central agency also states the *Results Agenda* “renews and refines how they go about this” (2017, p. 1).

Canada’s history with results-based management largely evolves from the introduction of “rational analysis into management” (Dobell & Zussman, 2018, p. 372). This includes evaluation and spending review initiated under former Prime Minister, the late Pierre Trudeau. However, it was not until the 1990s that significant progress was made on RBM within the Canadian civil service, especially as central agencies concentrated on refining the concept (Lindquist, 1998; Try & Radnor, 2007). Treasury Board defines RBM as:

[. . .] a comprehensive, life cycle approach to management that integrates business strategy, people, processes and measurements to improve decision-making and drive change.... a process by which an institution ensures, through the monitoring of a set of indicators and the reporting of performance data to its managers, that its processes, products and services are aligned with and contribute to the attainment of its objectives. (Treasury Board of Canada, 2003, p. 1)

Though much of the early focus is oriented by an evaluation-centric perspective, more recent developments include greater emphasis on publicly tracking the fulfilment of government pledges, continuous improvements through ongoing performance appraisal and evaluations at the program and departmental level, and increased transparency through open data (Dobell &

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bakvis and Juillet (2004), central agencies communicate a “distinct corporate direction to all federal government programs and activities” (p. 22).

Zussman, 2018). More recently, the gravitational pull towards a version of RBM characterised as *Deliverology* also underlines an excessive desire for political executive to enhance promissory government by combining activities designed to make civil service more “rational, effective, and efficient” (Dobell & Zussman, 2018, p. 376; Birch & Jacob, 2019).

Under this regime, importance is placed on strengthening performance management (PM) under the new *Policy on Results*, which reflects new requirements around performance reporting, evaluations, key responsibilities, and governance as part of a new institutional RBM arrangement (Dobell & Zussman, 2018; Birch & Jacob, 2019).<sup>2</sup> There is also an ongoing desire from the centre for the establishment of routines and processes to strengthen government machinery and sustain political and administrative attention on key government priorities.<sup>3</sup> The tradition of publicly releasing Prime Ministerial *Mandate Letters* starting in 2016 also reflects a desire for greater transparency and accountability between the Cabinet and Canadian citizens. The creation of a specialized analytical group – the Results and Delivery Unit (RDU) within central agencies – also intensifies command and control style government. The other evolution of RBM within the Canadian context is the premium on the development of performance narratives linked to government results. The *Results Agenda* remains steadfast in its push towards framing performance through storytelling, in order to communicate government results against commitments. This highly curated messaging is instrumental in helping the government communicate their version of performance and influence perceptions and attitudes of citizens regarding government pledge fulfilment (Piotrowski et al., 2019). The final development is the creation of new roles and titles to spearhead the institutionalization of the *Results Agenda*. Chief

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<sup>2</sup> Dobell and Zussman (2018) argue the *Policy on Results* maybe be new, but it is not inherently novel.

<sup>3</sup> Routines are a “way of making a complex and often anarchic world seem manageable” (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010, as cited in Andrews, 2018, p. 165).

Results and Deliverology Officers (CRDO) represent a new breed of institutional RBM agents tasked with both implementing and championing the approach across federal departments. The emergence of these agents, with their own authorities and powers, reflect increased attention by the centre around the operational and change management considerations attached to the *Results Agenda*.

Within this context, scholars identify many challenges associated with the implementation of institutional RBM, including derivatives like *Deliverology*.<sup>4</sup> In fact, writers such as Dobell and Zussman (2018) question whether these new institutional arrangements add anything of value other than reinforcing top-down “delivery-oriented monitoring structure” and whether alternative forms of RBM are more ideal and actually “decentralize responsibility” away from the centre (p. 382). Curran (2016) argues that while RBM approaches like *Deliverology* are promising, they are not well positioned to adapt to the realities and complexities of federal government. Birch and Jacob’s (2019) scathing criticism against *Deliverology* more specifically is that instead of driving improvements in government operations through “policy learning”, it merely bolsters RBM as a form of control by the centres (p. 313). Overwhelmingly, these various scholars spotlight the unintended consequences of implementation, the institutional and structural challenges of new RBM approaches, and the lack of defined and compelling value-add to Canadian public management.

Nevertheless, the reality is that the government’s political executive cadre favours the implementation of RBM, namely the *Results Agenda*. The machinery of government is employed instrumentally by the centre to operationalize the government’s policy intentions. However, Dobell

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<sup>4</sup> Here, institutional RBM is defined as an arrangement of specific practices, ideas and values that include performance management, measurement, promissory government, and strengthened political and administrative governance.

and Zussman (2018) argue that implementation of “policy intentions” requires civil servants to “exercise discretion within a body of public service norms” (p. 382). In effect, the authors suggest this performance demands “fidelity to the text expressing those intentions” but also “interpretation of that text and exercise of discretion in carrying out the performance” (Dobell & Zussman, 2018, p. 382). However, the perennial problem is “whether to exercise that discretion in accord [*sic*] with the black letter text or according to the dictates of particular changing and uncertain circumstances on the ground” (Dobell & Zussman, 2018, p. 382). As Lipsky (2010) notes, bureaucrats have “considerable discretion” because they are expected to be competent professionals in their domain of practice, even when they are restrained by “rules, regulations, and directives from above, or by the norms and practices of their occupational group” (pp. 13-14).

The adage of “letting managers manage” based on their read of the operational terrain while simultaneously working within a “general understanding of the rules” is an objective that also appears difficult to satisfy for implementing agents (Savoie, 2011, p. 153; Dobell & Zussman, 2018, p. 382). Even though experiences from the United Kingdom (UK) – specifically with *Deliverology* – provide some empirical basis for adaptation into other jurisdictions, the prescriptions paradoxically frame the concept as both an art and science (Behn, 2017). This duality is present in communications by top-down agents who steer adaptation and implementation of the UK example into a Canadian brand. However, there is little insight into how this dynamic between art and science plays out in the implementation terrain. Existing reference materials, produced by Barber and others, largely prescribe an ideal-type version of *Deliverology*; however, it lacks any input from the perspective of implementing agents, specifically civil servants that live and breathe implementation of this RBM approach. This is further challenged when implementation calls on what Polanyi (1958) refers to as “tacit knowledge”, where “the aim of skillful performance is

achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them” (p. 49). However, Polanyi (1966) also argues that “we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4). From this vantage point, the role of agents, agency and institutional elements linked to the *Results Agenda* have profound implications on implementation conduct and the intended and unintended effects on institutional RBM. As it stands though, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of implementers tasked with instantiating *Results Agenda* within Canadian federal civil service.

### *1.1.1 Rise of institutional results-based management*

According to Aucoin (1990), the modern Westminster-inspired public management regime is characterized by two core elements: (1) the primacy of those who set policy over those who implement it, and (2) the shift from traditional bureaucratic practices to private sector-style management methodologies. These various administrative and management reforms that transpired over the last several decades have come to symbolize this phenomena as New Public Management (NPM). While much has been written on the features of this concept by the likes of Aucoin (2012), Hood (1995) and others (see Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Peters, 1995), noteworthy attention is devoted to understanding the importation and deployment of private sector performance management approaches in modern public sector organisations.

Writers who investigate these developments within institutional RBM literature highlight critical tensions in its emergence within public organisations. Aucoin’s (1990; 2012) seminal work reveals intrinsic paradoxes and contradictions that materialized between civil servants that are left to manage and elected officials that desire more control over administration. In explicit terms, authors like Aucoin find the outcomes of NPM doctrine challenges the perception of whether RBM driven organisational design can accommodate representative government and public

administration (Aucoin, 2012; Bavkis & Jarvis, 2012). This is partly because the public sector arena is one that is beset with permanent campaign mentality (Esselment et al., 2017). Activities and practices that were relegated to defined election periods are now extended to the entire term of the government's mandate. In this context, there is an overriding concern by the governing party to control the civil service through increased executive attention from the centre (Aucoin, 2012). Aucoin (1990; 2012) oriented the focus towards examination of responses to these pressures under what he eventually deemed New Political Governance (NPG). Peters' (1995) contribution to NPG acknowledged the need to devote attention to investigating how "growing governing pressures and responses are having a broad and significant impact on democratic governance and public management in Canada and in much of the rest of the world" (Bavkis & Jarvis, 2012, p. 14). Citing the increased politicization and strengthened centre, Aucoin (2012) argued this scenario undermined the impartiality of the public service much the same way as partisan-political interference. Nonetheless, relevant insights that incorporate these tensions in the context of institutional RBM practices within public sector institutions are absent.

Considering this, the emerging concept of institutional RBM offers an important view into how the political and public sector terrain have organised themselves in response to these developments. According to several authors, RBM is a "contemporary management approach" designed to propel organisations to define clear outcomes while steering away from concerns with outputs (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, p. 245). It tilts heavily towards quantification of performance and integrates conventional, as well as new practices and methodologies, towards attainment of government commitments. These efforts include planning linked to organisational mandates, establishing key performance expectations, budgeting, collection of performance

information and reporting, enhancement of information management systems, evaluation and continuous monitoring and improvement of performance (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014).

The development of institutional RBM has spawned a range of offerings, with *Deliverology* being one of the most well known in recent times. In many ways, the tenets of *Deliverology* is what inspired the *Results Agenda*. The development and integration of this branded RBM approach defines the way the Canadian federal public sector should organise itself, especially under increased scrutiny from the political and administrative centre. Unilateral and top-down efforts to dictate the implementation of the *Results Agenda* across the federal civil service represents an attempt to resolve tensions from implementation generated by politics-administration dichotomy. To elaborate, this dichotomy is an administrative doctrine that recognizes the separation of activities between the elected class and implementers (Overeem, 2008). The legitimate role of the administrative cadre is to serve as faithful and dispassionate implementers of demands from the electorate (Overeem, 2005). In many ways, the *Results Agenda* consolidates some of the features found within NPG and RBM and bolsters this doctrine. Within a climate of permanent campaigning and intense media and public scrutiny on government performance, the political centre has shifted its concerns towards strengthening greater control over civil servants by weakening bureaucratic tenure (Aucoin, 2012; Esselment et al., 2017; Maor, 1999). In some ways, this fusion of paradigms between NPG, RBM and the dichotomy represents a reactive measure to the current political governance, which is based on a logic of instrumentality, appropriateness, and orthodoxy. However, Birch and Jacob (2019) suggest the concentration of power with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and heavy command and control style governing in general, tends to weaken public sector motivation because it undermines bureaucrats' expertise by treating them as obstacles to implementation. Moreover, to limit deviations by implementers, a renewed interest in

dogged implementation elevates the visibility of cabinet executives and central agencies through more frequent and routine engagements with the civil service. Paradoxically though, the prominent accent on quantification as well as a culture of evidenced-based policymaking and decision-making also re-infuses and intensifies the perception of public servants as professional and dispassionate implementers of policy. In this sense, the maxim of “letting managers manage” is embraced under this new Canadian RBM paradigm (Christensen & Lægheid, 2011a).

Confronting this perceived paradox are the various organisational and technical challenges that plague institutional results-based management implementation (Curristine, 2005; Mayne, 2007). According to Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014), Mayne (2007) and others, organisational challenges include problems with establishing and sustaining results-oriented culture, the fallacy of “mechanically copying” “directives and discourses” of RBM templates from the national setting into “internal organisational standards” without adequate adaptation to “local exigences”, and overly complex components of RBM models (Tamekou, 2018, p. 537; Ortiz et al., 2004; Schatteman & Ohemeng, 2008). On the technical front, researchers point to problems with expertise and capacity, which includes the lack of training and support, inadequate resources attached to RBM implementation, and challenges with integration of performance information with other processes and structures within organisations (Schatteman & Ohemeng, 2008; Mayne, 2007; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014).

Given this reality around instantiation of institutional RBM, the implementation of the *Results Agenda* by public servants within Canadian federal civil service provides a novel case study to observe how the interaction between institutional pressures and agency unfolds. According to Pressman and Wildavsky cited by Tamekou (2018), the “implementation stage is always a key moment in terms of decision-making, and the redefinition or even reinvention of

public policies (p. 537). Tamekou (2018) argues that social, historical, and economic pressures, as well as the “strategies and interests of field agents, and their discretion”, are all factors that “contribute to transforming the reality of a policy” (p. 537). However, in the current context, there is a lack of visibility on how this tension between the centre and implementers is being played out in real-time through the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. On this note, this tug of war is not defined in zero-sum terms with the centre prevailing. Rather, the institutional RBM regime is pitted against agentic forces of implementers. Moreover, agency emerges when ambiguity and grey zones exist in the institutional RBM terrain (see Baier et al., 1986). Unclear in this dynamic clash of forces is whether it results in the faithful reproduction, new additions, and modification of *Results Agenda*.

## *1.2 Aims of research*

Given the developments described above, there are several gaps in the implementation of institutional results-based management literature that warrant attention. Existing scholarship in this area mostly treats the implementation process as isomorphic – that is – behaviour, process or outcome that shares similar form (Gwata, 2007; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014; Swiss, 2005; Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015). Researchers do this for several reasons. First, writers mostly understand institutional RBM as copies between different jurisdictions. This mimetic perspective is mostly driven by observation of public servants who pursue practices that others in their organisational field deem acceptable and legitimate (Modell, 2001). Moreover, researchers who subscribe to this institutional view also treat public servants as automatons who merely reproduce institutions due to regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures on behaviour (Oliver, 1991; Garud et al., 2007; Lawrence et al., 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). The regulative force guides conduct through coercion and sanctions; normative pressures influence action through

norms of legitimacy and acceptability while the cultural-cognitive stresses behaviour through frames of meanings that agents possess and use to interpret their environment (Scott, 2001; Ashworth et al., 2007; Symon et al., 2008).

Second, the limited research on institutional RBM implementation mainly stretches behaviourist considerations to explain anxieties and concerns from implementing agents related to RBM features (Mayne, 2007; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014; Swiss, 2005). While there is undoubtedly a link between these concerns and agent behaviour during implementation of institutional RBM, it is not explicitly stated or revealed in any historical or present research. Likewise, these earlier works primarily offer insights into the re-creation of institutional RBM and neglect the importance of agency during the implementation. In fact, these studies have not fully addressed how individual agency is directly implicated, how agents confront institutional pressures, and the potential effects agentic conduct can have on the implementation of RBM.

This dissertation confronts the overwhelming treatment of institutional RBM implementation as isomorphic by examining the institutional context public servants are embedded in. This includes critically examining various institutional instruments and identifying the various pressures that weigh on public servants and inform their implementation behaviour. The study also challenges the view of individuals as automatons by investigating the assorted ways in which public servant agency manifests from intentional conduct. Finally, the dissertation addresses the widening gap in the literature from an over-reliance on institutional maintenance-based explanations regarding implementation. This study accomplishes this by adopting a full lifecycle view of institutions whereby public servants not only maintain institutional features, but also create and disrupt through conduct.

Based on the above considerations, the primary research question is concerned with generating understanding of how public servants implement the *Results Agenda* in response to institutional RBM pressures. To achieve this, the study borrows the concept of *institutional work*, which is the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions by purposive agents (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). As such, this dissertation examines the dynamic interplay between the agency of public servant implementers and the forces of institutional *Results Agenda* during implementation. The project employs an institutional work framework to analyse the ongoing interaction between agency and institutions to identify and understand how agency informs and triggers performance of specific types of institutional work. Finally, this dissertation discusses the implications of this work on institutional *Results Agenda*. This includes revelation of the pressures facing implementers, the type of institutional work activities performed by public servants in response to these pressures, and the effect of this work on the *Results Agenda*.

### *1.3 Rationale*

To better situate the value in exploring the dynamics between agency and institutions, the following section outlines the main considerations driving the goals of this project. First, the federal government's advancement of an agenda focussed on "results and delivery" represents a decades-old trend of results-based management practices across various public administration jurisdictions (Dobell & Zussman, 2018; Haque, 2007). While some of these institutional practices and norms pre-exist the *Results Agenda*, others are new to the Canadian federal public sector and the public servants tasked with implementation. Institutional perspectives suggest public servants adhere to established institutions and are guided by conformity because they seek social legitimacy in their implementation behaviour (Modell, 2001). However, research by Dillard et al. (2004) finds that for RBM practices to be implemented and endure as everyday practices at the organisational

level, there needs to be “ongoing, reproductive interaction of rules and resources” (emphasis added, p. 521). These practices are constitutive and a consequence of reflexive and knowledgeable human action (Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011; Dover & Lawrence, 2010).

Second, the *Results Agenda* is an institutional RBM approach. Canada’s federal government directed its central agencies, specifically the Privy Council Office and Treasury Board, to develop high-level directives, policies and operational guidance to steer the implementation of the *Results Agenda* by implicated line departments. According to Moynihan (2005), it is common for “elected officials to rely on central agencies to design and oversee” results-based management reforms because they are in a “strong position to select and shape policy ideas to match their preferences” (p. 224). However, two key tensions arise. First, while central agencies provide guidance for the implementation of an ideal-type *Results Agenda* within departments, it is not excessively prescriptive. Vis-à-vis broad prescriptions from the *Directive and Policy on Results* and other external references for implementation, CRDOs are confronted with grey areas that require filling of voids in decision-making during implementation (de Arruda Leite & Buainain, 2013). Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981) suggest implementation behaviour stresses the importance of incentives and constraints to guide agents in “carrying out basic policy decisions” from central authority (p. 20). Yet, ambiguity, lack of clarity and uncertainty can also lead to “leakage of authority”, greater discretion from implementing agents, and greater exercise of agency (de Arruda Leite & Buainain, 2013, p. 145).<sup>5</sup> Second, there is a socio-technical dimension to the implementation of the *Results Agenda* that requires CRDOs to possess knowledge of institutional and organisation-specific RBM practices. Institutional rules can be incoherent and

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<sup>5</sup> Fowler (2021) published a recent study looking at how public servants confront ambiguity and uncertainty when they implement policy. Citing others, he writes ambiguity is a “state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena” while uncertainty is the “inability to accurately predict an event” (Feldman, 1989, Zahariadis, 2014, as cited in Fowler, 2021, p. 583).

contradictory, and as such, they do not provide uniform answers to how agents should behave, which enables agency to inform social action (Beckert, 1999).<sup>6</sup> This is further complicated when public servants not only interpret institutions based on exogenous factors of a given situation, but also in relation to their own “identities, interests and capabilities for action” (Jackson, 2010, p. 18). According to research by Baier et al. (1986), implementing agents often “exercise discretion to improve their local position or address specific problems of interest to them” (p. 201). Therefore, if the *Results Agenda* can be understood by different CRDOs in various ways, then gaps may appear between institutionally prescribed RBM practices and the expected actions that must be filled. This could lead to varied implementation and unintended institutional outcomes (Song, 2019).

To investigate this dissertation’s research question, the adoption of a strictly top-down approach to the implementation of *Results Agenda* can add value. Top-down perspective emphasise institutions as totalizing structures. This account views the effects of institutions as deterministic while portraying individuals as unreflexive and passive reproducers of institutional norms, values, and practices. However, this perspective fails to account for the influence of public servants as “interpreters of central policy” (Schofield, 2001, p. 251). There is seminal work on the topic of what Lipsky (2010) and others – such as Hupe and Hill (2007) – termed bureaucratic “discretion” and “relative autonomy” (p. 13; p. 280). Adding to this discussion is Baier et al. (1986) who note that administrative organisations are “neither reliably neutral or easily controlled” as public servants “persistently modify policies in the course of implementing them” as they

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<sup>6</sup> See Lipsky (2010) on how public servants must navigate ambiguity in particular contexts when there is little guidance. Fowler (2021) also recently studied this problem from “policy-as-written” and “policy-in-practice” (p. 581).

“experiment with different ways of executing tasks as they try to figure out what works best in practice” (pp. 200-201; Fowler, 2021, p. 583).

Important work from the institutional entrepreneurship scholarship does offer a possible avenue to research agency as it relates to implementation of institutional RBM. This domain of institutional research privileges the concept of agency by treating agents as skilled heroes who act strategically based on their perceptions of their social position within their social environment (Leca et al., 2008; Lawrence et al., 2009). Based on this view, institutionally embedded agents are purposive and intentional. However, exclusive adoption of this framework is also problematic for this dissertation’s research question. This stream of agentic-driven scholarship generally overemphasises the agency of individuals, downplays the role of constraints on agents and advances institutional change as the sole outcome of agency. That being said, current social action-based research explains agency-driven institutional dynamics through institutional entrepreneurship literature. Namely, scholars orient their analytical gaze towards individuals and their ability to disengage from their social environment. However, this perspective raises the paradox of “embedded agency” which is the dilemma of how can agents shape institutions through their action if they are also shaped by their external environment (Batillana & D’Aunno, 2009). Another issue is that institutional entrepreneurship tends to promote a hero narrative while underplaying the process of institutional maintenance and alterations in favour of creation.

Considering the issues with both overly deterministic and overly agentic framework, the concept of institutional work, where agents are intentional and purposive, offers significant methodological advantages for answering the primary research question of how public servants implement institutional *Results Agenda* in response to institutional RBM pressures within Canadian federal public sector context. Institutional work is especially useful for investigating the

constitutive relationship between institutions and agency, without privileging one over the other. In effect, a federal public sector organisation with considerable experience and memory with results-based management, that is also mandated to implement the *Results Agenda*, will possess implementers that perform institutional work to create, maintain, and disrupt existing institutional RBM. For this reason, institutional work promotes a broader lifecycle approach for understanding the institutional context public servants are nested in while simultaneously recognizing that they are reflexive and act with purpose to create, maintain and alter institutions through agency.

#### *1.4 Research questions and methodological approach*

To help answer the primary question, the research aimed to answer three sub-questions:

- a) What are the institutional RBM pressures acting on public servants and how do they perceive these?
- b) What are the specific types of institutional work performed by public servants in response to institutional pressures?
- c) Finally, what implications does the institutional work of public servants have on the *Results Agenda*?

Guided by neo-institutional approach, the analysis combined empirical and interpretive accounts of how CRDOs perceive and condition their terrain of action during implementation of the *Results Agenda*. The dissertation then identifies the type of institutional work carried out by these agents in response to pressures from institutional RBM and how the outcome of this conduct bears on the *Results Agenda*.

To help answer these questions, the research design is informed by qualitative methodological choices. The qualitative approach was well suited to explore the dynamic interaction between institutional forces and individual agency. As noted previously, institutional

work is concerned with studying the intentional actions of CRDOs as they create, maintain, and disrupt “social order” represented by institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). CRDO implementation conduct is informed by perceptions of the external environment they are embedded in, and their perspectives on possible choices for behaviour in that specific terrain of action. Additionally, conduct is also influenced by considerations that are internal to implementers not otherwise visible to even the most attentive and discerning researcher.

For this effort, this study employed an interpretive approach using qualitative content analysis (QCA) to identify and study the various institutional forces from objective and subjective sources. In the first case, objective instruments tied to the *Results Agenda* played an important role in communicating key regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pressures to CRDOs concerning their implementation behaviour. Objective instruments served to support and at times, destabilize institutions through the various pressures noted above. According to Baier et al. (1986), bureaucracy is viewed as “instruments of policy” where public servants fulfill official policy intentions based on institutional pressures and incentives (p. 199). Regulative pressures are primarily manifested by coercive forces where agents behave in ways to avoid sanctions and maximize their rewards. Normative pressures are prescriptive and evaluative in nature and guide agents to conform to expected values and norms held by specific groups they associated with. Cultural-cognitive dimensions emphasise the importance of mental schemas and templates in which the logic of orthodoxy prevails in guiding behaviour. From an institutional perspective, actions are largely legitimacy-seeking but also strive to limit deviations from central policy directives (Baier et al., 1986). Moreover, a study on the adoption of performance measurement systems within the Norwegian health care setting by Modell (2001) also looked at the role of instruments on public servants from the lens of institutional pressures. The author found that public

servant behavioural responses to performance measurement instruments were largely tied to institutional context – such as regulative and normative pressures – and their desire for social legitimacy. Though Modell acknowledges that public servants are often viewed as “passive adapters” to institutional pressures, the study found that managerial responses are “based on a continuum of responses characterized by a varying degree of pro-active choice” (2001, p. 437).

Along with empirical and objective evidence, the study also analysed subjective sources by undertaking semi-structured interviews with CRDOs tasked with implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Interviews were designed to collect data and validate the analysis of the institutional context constructed from objective sources. The interviews were also designed to unveil how CRDOs perceived their institutional RBM environment and the type of institutional work they performed in response during implementation. It was intended to reveal under what conditions agency is activated and how implementers created, maintained, and disrupted institutional *Results Agenda*.

### *1.5 Summary of the main findings from the study*

The result of the analysis finds that regulative force is largely linked to top-down efforts to promote CRDO compliance and conformity. This is mostly accomplished through a constellation of internally-generated regulative institutional instruments such as the *Directive on Results, Policy on Results* and its supplementary addendums, and presentation decks. Externally-generated instruments such as learning events, speeches, and interviews on *Results Agenda* mostly prime CRDO action under normative constraints. Cultural-cognitive pressures appear to manifest from beliefs linked to instruments that call on CRDOs unique and contextual experiences with RBM directly. In some cases, all three pressures converge under one or more instrument to drive obligations and expectations on CRDOs, so they behave in a common way. The result of the

institutional analysis of both internally and externally-generated instruments reveal six key institutional features of *Results Agenda* that include: 1) *Sustained attention and accountability through routines and internal/external performance reporting*, 2) *Culture of continuous performance improvement*, 3) *Creation of new roles, governance authorities and responsibilities to support implementation*, 4) *Emphasis on implementation to fulfill government promises*, 5) *Stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre*, and, 6) *Organisational learning and capacity development*.

That being said, when facing these six major forces, the analysis of archival material and interview transcripts using the framework of institutional work also reveals that public servant agency is an essential factor during implementation. The study finds that institutional *Results Agenda* implementation is not straightforward, linear, and exclusively driven by top-down political and administrative centres of government. In effect, agency bears heavily on how CRDOs perceive, understand, and respond to implementation pressures from institutional *Results Agenda*. CRDOs overwhelmingly perform nuanced, as well as overt actions that at times support or confront institutional *Results Agenda*. Rather than predictably moving towards isomorphic tendencies during implementation, the research finds that institutional work significantly affected *Results Agenda* institutional patterns through creation, maintenance, and disruptive activities.

Additionally, the literature on institutional work widely views intention-based conduct as leading to predetermined outcomes envisioned by implementers; however, the results of this dissertation suggests that this taken-for-granted assumption is not relevant in cases where uncertainty exists in the terrain of action. For example, agentic work surfaces even when institutional pressures drive CRDO behaviour towards complying with expectations and obligations from agents-in-context. In certain situations – to be elaborated on in *Chapter Five* –

institutional work emerges when either one or more pressures exist. The analysis from the research also suggests that the presence of institutional forces is not a conditional requirement for institutional work to manifest. At times, institutional work will emerge due to a compelling need by CRDOs to resolve uncertainty. As such, the research reveals that while institutional pressures are vital, it is not a necessary condition for active agency. In fact, the analysis provides a more robust understanding of how various conditions for CRDO agency emerge and can lead implementers to undertake different types of institutional work.

In sum, the discovery of how this unique and evolving dynamic between institutions and agency reproduces, maintains, and alters institutional *Results Agenda* features within Canadian federal public sector. Based on this work, it is revealed that institutional features of *Results Agenda* are affected by institutional work of creation, maintenance and disruption performed by CRDOs during implementation. However, the study also identifies several nuances to this. First, although all three types of institutional work are observed, they sometimes all emerge simultaneously, while at other times, they are encountered in pairs. Second, the type of institutional work performed is not exclusive to a specific regulative, normative, or cultural-cognitive pressure. Creation, maintenance, and disruption can occur whether institutional forces exist alone, together, or when they are absent.

### *1.6 Significance of study*

Much of the implementation scholarship has drawn from case studies in policy and with relatively little attention paid to RBM practices across public sector settings. Many of these case studies focus on details of implementation while neglecting the macro-level considerations that structure the implementing behaviour of public servants. Moreover, the *Results Agenda* is a relatively new concept within Canadian public management and existing studies on the topic are

limited. Recent studies cover the concept of *Deliverology* from a variable-oriented perspective on implementation; however, they offer no insights on the role agents in the implementation (see Birch & Jacob, 2019). An article from Robert Behn (2017) raises issues with uncertainty around the operationalization of *Deliverology* due to confusion around framing the concept as both science and an art; however, these issues mostly focus on normative aspects. Finally, a recent study by Dobell and Zussman (2018) provides an institutional perspective on *Results and Delivery* from a Canadian context; however, the dominant focus is on the macro, which is achieved at the expense of attention on implementation at the micro-level.

This dissertation addresses these gaps in the subset of implementation literature focussed on institutional results-based management by generating knowledge on how public servants perform institutional work during implementation within public organisations. This dissertation makes four main contributions. First, it calls researchers to acknowledge and recognize that public servant agency can emerge for a range of purposes, under various institutional contexts, including whether institutional pressures are present or absent, and when they operate in isolation or together. The second contribution reveals that when institutional forces operate at the same time, they can align and intensify pressures against public servant implementers. The third contribution is how public servant agency – in the performance of institutional work – can manifest causally from institutional pressures and in their absence. These contributions expand the theoretical understanding of how institutional RBM ideas, practices, and policies are implemented by relevant implementing public servants. While the object of study is the *Results Agenda*, the findings could also offer pathways to understand how implementation behaviour does not only lead to maintenance of institutional RBM – which is designed to sustain existing RBM – but also create

and disrupt since actions are highly dependent on the diverse perspectives and purposive action of implementing agents.

The final significant contribution is the enhanced methodological value of linking neo-institutional theory and institutional work to empirically investigate case studies regarding institutional RBM implementation since existing research on public organisations is largely underrepresented. Studies by Kasale et al. (2020) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) fuse these perspectives; however, both exercises specifically target case studies of PM systems within developing countries. Through a qualitative case study, this project advances rich empirical and interpretive research by testing the applicability of institutional work to understand the RBM implementation phenomenon and expand the methodological utility of combined approaches for social action research. This is especially useful for researchers who wish to build a stronger connective tissue to explain the constitutive relationship between micro-level and macro-level forces. From this, the exploratory research generates new insights into institutional RBM implementation, with a focus on the Canadian federal public sector and contributes to greater understanding of how public servants contribute to the creation, maintenance, and alteration of centrally-driven RBM through institutional work.

### *1.7 Structure of dissertation*

This dissertation is structured along six chapters. The present chapter provided an overview of the context and background that informs scholarly interest and relevance of institutional results-based management implementation research. It discussed the significance of institutional RBM in the context of implementation within public organisations, including various problematization encountered by implementers. A primary research question and sub-questions were presented along with a brief outline of the methodological choices the study employed to answer these. It

then summarised the main findings and concluded with a brief overview of the key contributions to the institutional RBM implementation literature.

*Chapter Two* offers a curated literature review to situate the aims of the study and anchor the research questions based on various gaps identified. The literature explores the concept of results-based management from an institutional lens and follows that by leading into a detailed review of existing work on *Deliverology* in propelling institutional features that inspired the development of the *Results Agenda*. The section then launches into an implementation perspective of institutional RBM and explores the various themes and challenges encountered by scholars and implementers such as tensions between top-down and bottom-up pressures, and uncertainty in the implementation terrain. The chapter concludes with a review of agentic-infused institutional theory, specifically institutional work, in relation to implementation of RBM.

Following this, *Chapter Three* outlines in detail the research design to support the internal logic for the study's methodological selection. It examines the appropriateness of qualitative approaches to study institutional work, specifically the use of case study and interpretive methods through sampling of key informants. The section details the coupling and deployment of institutional theories – specifically neo-institutional scholarship on pressures and institutional work – in driving analysis through coding of relevant objective and subjective sources to generate insights into the institutional environment and agentic responses of CRDOs in the course of implementing the *Results Agenda*.

*Chapter Four* presents the main findings and analysis from the curated set of objective institutional instruments tagged to the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. The analysis identifies the primary institutional weights that bear down on CRDOs during implementation, such

as regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. The section concludes with an outline of ideal-type institutional features unique to the *Results Agenda*.

Building on the analysis from the previous chapter, *Chapter Five* seeks to validate the institutional pressures by examining the perceptions of CRDOs regarding the pressures they face through the analysis of the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews. The analysis then exposes how CRDOs intentionally – and at times unintentionally – act to create, maintain, and disrupt institutional RBM. Specifically, the analysis constructs and defines the different types of institutional work performed by public servants as they implement the *Results Agenda*. It details the absence of agency against totalizing institutional pressures, and the type of institutional work performed when agency is activated by individual and combined pressures under each of the institutional elements of the *Results Agenda*. Finally, by generating insights into the relationship between institutional pressures and institutional work, the discussion brings these elements together to discuss the effects of institutional work from creation, maintenance, and disruption activities on institutional *Results Agenda*.

Finally, *Chapter Six* concludes with an assessment of the study against the stated aims of the dissertation and the research questions. The section then unpacks the main contributions from the theoretical and methodological choices as well as potential gaps addressed in the institutional RBM implementation literature. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the limitations and potential future research directions for the study of institutional results-based management implementation.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### *2.1 Introduction*

Research studying the implementation of institutional results-based management is relatively recent and limited. Though it is a narrow focus within the broader performance management implementation scholarship, writers do offer key insights to inform this study. With that being said, this chapter first examines literature studying institutional-driven results-based management within public sector along three main areas. The first section pays attention to how institutional RBM is defined and perceived by public management scholars. Much of this work focusses on the main institutional elements that make up RBM – which are the prevailing and enduring practices and ideas that sustain a particular RBM regime. The analysis of the literature then shifts to discussing the role of instruments using an institutional lens. The review of the scholarship also introduces institutional explanations on why RBM practices across public organisations are isomorphic in nature. The review then acknowledges the disproportionate attention placed by scholars on the reproduction of RBM institutions and then narrows its sights on *Deliverology* and its role in propelling institutional results-based management adoption across various jurisdictions, such as Canada. Following this, the section launches into exploring the research that studies institutional RBM from an implementation perspective. More specifically, it discusses implications from agentic and institutional frames and integrates neo-institutional perspectives that target regulative, normative, and cognitive-cultural forces as shapers of meaning and behaviour but also contributing to tensions around uncertainty and ambiguity during implementation.

The coverage of the literature intends to provide a robust historical and conceptual foundation for understanding institutional RBM and its implementation by public servants;

however, there are some limitations that warrant the need for this study. Informed by the review of existing scholarship, issues raised by this dissertation include gaps on: (1) how implementers confront uncertainty from institutional instruments, (2) the over-subscribed belief in a perpetual tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches during implementation, (3) the pronounced lack of importance on agentic conduct in the modification of institutional patterns nested within wider institutional pressures, and (4) the effect of purposive conduct to intentionally and unintentionally alter institutional results-based management.

To address these gaps, the literature review also examines research studying institutional work. The review includes an exploration of agentic inspired institutional theory and centres attention on the role of agents in pursuing intentional conduct to create, maintain and disrupt institutions. The discussion then concentrates on examples of institutional work that confront pressures and ambiguity in the terrain of action and in connection with the implementation of RBM. This allows the study to anchor the theoretical and methodological utility of integrating an institutional work perspective to study how CRDOs perceive their institutional environment, what actions they take during implementation, and what effects – intended or unintended – these have on institutional *Results Agenda* that is otherwise unavailable in existing scholarship.

## *2.2 Results-based management*

### *2.2.1 What is institutional RBM?*

Results-based management is plagued with a definition problem because of variation in how it is characterised and how it is employed by researchers (Hatton & Schroeder, 2007). At times, researchers use the concept of RBM interchangeably with management-by-objectives and outcomes-based management (Papalazarou & Tsoulfas, 2018; Heinrich, 2002). Some writers define RBM as a management approach that relies heavily on quantification through the

development of performance indicators and the assessment of outcomes (April & Bouchamma, 2017; Keevers et al., 2012). Hatton and Schroeder (2007) suggest what is core to RBM is a causal, linear, and participatory management model that emphasises achievement of government objectives through management-guided activities.

Despite the challenges with arriving at a robust conceptual definition of RBM, research on the composition of institutional RBM gives heightened attention to several different perspectives on the identification and description of its features, practices, ideas and constitutive elements. Swiss (2005) suggests the concept of RBM generally shares core elements. When assessed against traditional performance management systems, RBM places a higher premium on strategic planning, measurement of policy outcomes, objectives that encompass both short and long-term, working cross-functionally, and the use of private-sector methodologies and processes (Swiss, 2005). Others like Gwata (2017) identify “change language” as a core component of RBM (p. 1). In addition to these features, the main motivation to pursue RBM approaches is to steer collective action to be more “outcome-oriented, proactive, and agile” (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015; Swiss, 2005, p. 592).

The most seminal and complete description of institutional RBM is found with Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014). They present the main elements common to RBM within an institutional setting that are linked to enduring set of practices, values, and ideas. For one, clarification of customer needs and mandating organisation is a crucial item. Second, the specification of results and performance expectations are seen as necessary. For this, results and outcomes are converted into quantifiable dimensions that include “financial measures, internal organisational processes, and learning and growth” (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, p. 251). In addition, a stronger link between budgets and outputs is emphasised where deliberate effort is

undertaken by mandated organisations to assess and assign delivery of such outputs. Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) also suggest a non-negotiable feature of institutional RBM is the core requirement to make performance available to scrutiny since routine and periodic reporting by organisations makes visible the progress against stated objectives. More importantly, the information collected and reported to relevant stakeholders – both internal and external to organisations – serves as a powerful tool for feedback on the implementation process vis-à-vis inputs like organisational resources. In addition to the reporting requirement, the “promotion of performance analysis and continuous improvement” is also embodied within institutional RBM (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, p. 251). In effect, agents are expected to monitor, and course-correct behaviour based on internal and external feedback on performance, which couples scrutiny from and reporting to others as a central component. Finally, Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) suggest merit-based system in human resources is a prominent feature of broader RBM. In such case, “staff selection, remuneration and career planning are managed professionally” based on the values of meritocracy (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, p. 251).

### *2.2.2 Understanding the origin and features of institutional RBM within public organisations*

The extant literature on institutional RBM focused on public organisations can be understood through an institutional lens. Specifically, the current scholarship emphasises institutional RBM as an isomorphic outcome within public organisations. To a large extent, identification of market-oriented institutional logics and pressures from NPM and NPG lead the way in explaining how 21<sup>st</sup> century public management is expected to operate (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015; Aucoin, 2012). Early scholarly interests identify a mostly one-way diffusion of private sector influenced practices, norms, values into public organisations. Seminal work by Hood (1995) and others (Arnaboldi et al., 2015; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014; Van Thiel & Leeuw,

2002; Cepiku & Meneguzzo, 2011) identify this aggregate change as NPM, which encompasses a set of administrative philosophies in response to common exogenous forces bearing down on public organisations that are linked to: (1) waning confidence in the political leadership by the public, (2) growing fiscal pressures, and (3) orientation towards client-service values. Four decades of structural modifications signal a broader convergence of practices driven by a desire for conformity within public sector organisations across several Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>7</sup> More recent contributions from Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) detailed above suggest these global institutional forces contribute to elements of RBM that include addressing client needs, focus on results, strengthened links between organisations resources and activities, routine reporting, continuous improvement through feedback loops, and emphasis on meritocratic appointments.

Try and Radnor (2007) provide an interesting perspective on the link between the emergence of NPM and RBM. They elevate the role of the political and administrative executives as “results-based managers” and prioritize the leveraging of management philosophies from the private sector in public sector programming and policy work (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 655). While they draw from Aucoin’s work on NPM, their study also references his paradigm of New Public Governance as a direct corollary to the emergence of RBM. Accordingly, Aucoin’s concept refers to the reforms initiated in the eighties and nineties from the effects of NPM that hollowed out the state and resulted in scholars paying attention to inter-organisational relationships between the funders and deliverers of state programming (Aucoin, 2012). This fixation incorporates “pluralist

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<sup>7</sup> In their work examining the link between accountability and performance management, Hildebrand and McDavid (2011) cited that “publicly reporting performance results” was part of a “broader movement that encompassed all levels of government” towards fiscal accountability.

complexities of modern public service” and the “increased focus on public sector performance” (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 656).

While RBM is presented as an institutional design oriented towards improvement of public sector performance, early researchers also detect a rise in managerialism and a pivot from “action controls” as key features of this broader administrative reform agenda (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015, pp. 957, 969; Vakkuri, 2010). Also evident is the characterization of institutional RBM as a continuous and prevalent activity of quantification within modern public organisations (Bouckaert & Peters, 2002). Works from Boland and Fowler (2000), Lee and Kim (2012) and Sutheewasinnon et al. (2016) suggests accountability and evaluation paradigms as a key institutional driver in this space. Some, like Johnsen (2005), assign an instrumental interpretation to this phenomenon in which indicators and performance information are sought after ideals for “rational-decision making” within administrative and political settings (p. 9).

Further to this, institutional researchers mostly turn to regulative and normative pressures to understand the global RBM convergence phenomenon while relatively little attention is paid to the cultural-cognitive dimension. From this institutional prism, the macro is seen as a totalizing force on the micro. From a regulative standpoint, the institutionalist view identifies sanctions and rewards as key drivers for adoption of market-oriented institutional logics across geographic and organisational boundaries. Amongst the literature, the unit of analysis mostly focusses on the organisational and state level where researchers surmise collective behaviour as the main response to external forces (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014). These macro and meso-level pressures include increased scrutiny by the public and regulators, “waning confidence in the political leadership”, and more accountable governance (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, p. 245).

Attention is also placed on the sources of institutional forces and their effects on the behaviour of public servants. Here, academics and practitioners behave as institutional agents that intentionally and unintentionally push isomorphic RBM approaches within public sector. Nevertheless, writing in this area over-values the totalizing influence of institutional pressures. The broad thesis centres on institutions as key shapers of public servant conduct, which encourages institutional homogeneity. In this circumstance, regulative pressures are observed as the dominant force, and they play a critical role on agent behaviour since they seek rewards for conformity. As part of this understanding, human agency is largely ignored, and agents embedded within institutions are treated as passive, who take-for-granted rules, and engage in repetitive interactions that overpower strategic action (Lawrence et al., 2009). In effect, alternative structures or deviations from rules and norms are perceived as threatening the stability and maintenance of institutional RBM.

From a neo-institutional perspective, reproduction of institutional RBM is explained using normative and cultural-cognitive thinking. For instance, the emergence of RBM in public organisations is observed as a decoupling between bureaucratic behaviour that is motivated by achieving technical-efficiency and seeking legitimacy from social agents sharing an organisational field. Writers argue there is a prevailing acceptance of managerialism and institutional logic of market-based practices in displacing technical-efficiency motivations within traditional rule-bound public administration (Greiling, 2006; Ryan, 1999). Several empirical studies broaden this research focus by identifying a multitude of intended and unintended consequences, including the shift away from “action-controls” and a pivot towards outcomes-based control (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015, pp. 957, 969; Vakkuri, 2010; April & Bouchamma, 2017; Keevers et al., 2012). In this context, scholars contend public servant behaviour is dominated by motivations of

acceptability and appropriateness of RBM practices that include increased managerial flexibility (Moynihan, 2006). Additionally, research concentrated on RBM generates insights into value sets that promote greater accountability, transparency, and effectiveness within public sector practice (Gwata, 2017). On the other hand, cultural-cognitive inspired findings settle on explanations of how public servants structure their understanding of institutional RBM from individual and collective experiences around performance measurement practices.

Garud et al. (2007) and Dillard et al. (2004) note that the logic of appropriateness, socially constructed system of beliefs, values and norms, and desire for legitimacy and support from agents embedded within the same organisational field are motivations for conformity.<sup>8</sup> Even research looking into individual behaviour overwhelmingly treats organisations as the same. Works by Greenwood et al. (2014) and Cooney (2007) sought to overcome this research momentum by treating organisations as heterogeneous. Researchers draw on a contingency angle to roughly define how different organisational capacities respond to institutional pressures (Greenwood et al., 2014; Cooney, 2007). Interestingly though, the presumption of difference, not similarity, is the guiding framework for comparative research. This notion of similarity is also raised by Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) when it concerns RBM implementation within developing countries. Even with this perspective, authors notice the persistence, enduring and stable feature of institutional RBM. In fact, at the micro-level, a review of the literature suggests a wider emphasis on reproduction of RBM institutions by public servants (Gwata, 2017; Moynihan, 2006; Borgonovi et al., 2018). Moreover, the tendencies for researchers to narrow their gaze on legitimacy-seeking behaviour to explain isomorphic tendency also promotes maintenance of institutional RBM versus creation and disruption. While the cognitive dimension is used to explain

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<sup>8</sup> Also see Palthe (2014) on how organisations are persuaded to conform to pressures in order to raise support from others in a highly competitive and resource-dependent institutional environment.

maintenance of institutions, the practice setting and the expression of practical knowledge by public servants also contribute towards stability and persistence of RBM regimes.

### *2.2.3 Implications from Rational Choice and Agentic perspectives for institutional RBM*

It is observed that institutional RBM scholars draw on rational choice theories to explain recurrent patterns of behaviour. In such cases, they mostly link this to maintenance of institutional RBM. Though agents socially construct and interpret their world through categories of action, cognition, and emotion, writers also point to deviations, sanctions, and costs as part of an individual's behavioural calculus (Garud et al., 2007; Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). That being said, some writers subscribe to a notion of institutional arrangements as resistant to change because institutions take on boundary-setting characteristics and help standardize social practice for individuals by mitigating opportunistic behavior by rational actors (Tracey, et al., 2011; Garud et al., 2007). Others acknowledge change as the outcome of strategic behaviour by agents who both produce and reproduce social arrangements (Jackson, 2010). An example of this is found in Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) where top-down institutional pressure from one or more dominant agents – specifically the mayor of a municipality who promoted performance measurement reforms – creates opportunities for agency in public servant implementers to emerge and confront institutional pressures. In such cases, scholars accept that for some agents, institutions are not a constraint. Rather, institutions empower agents who are knowledgeable and have stable preferences (Hotimsky et al., 2006; Jackson, 2010). In view of this, the scholarship remains strongly rooted in perspectives that view institutions as normatively driven and paradoxically treating individuals as cultural dopes as well as autonomous and reflexive.

Nevertheless, the classical institutional literature underplays technical and instrumental calculations as shapers of behaviour. While this area of research does account for the role of agency

in institution building, Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Selznick (1956) assume individuals within organisations passively adapt to institutions. Within this setting, human agency is viewed as limited while taken-for-granted rules overpower rational and strategic action. Crucial in this discussion is that self-interest is not always the sole driver for individual conduct.

Despite this, institutions are meant to be stable and predictable. Additionally, agents reproduce institutions because they embrace and operate from a set of assumptions (Scott, 2001). In effect, the implication of agency within rational choice is not synonymous with pursuit of self-interest. Agents can be purposeful and work towards collective goals independent of individual benefit (Scott, 2001). Not surprisingly, neo-institutional theory steers away from the atomist view of agents as perfectly rational and introduces bounded rationality in which agents are “intendedly rational but only boundedly so” (Simon, 1945, p. 88). Therefore, rationally bounded agents are nested within their institutional environment and influenced by its forces.

From a regulative lens, rational choice scholars view public servants as instrumental actors whose conduct is driven by the desire to satisfy their wants, maximize rewards, and minimize sanctions (DiIulio, 1994; Berg, 2006). However, from a sociological perspective, there are limits to employing a narrow rational choice framework to describe public servant behaviour because it “portrays action as simply an adaptation to material conditions” rather than allowing for the “internal subjective reference of action” that welcomes the potential for “multidimensional alternation of freedom and constraint” (Alexander, 1983, as cited in Scott, 2008, p. 67). Another limitation of rational choice to explain agency is the focus on means and ends, which are presumed to be fixed (Scott, 2001). Sociological approaches propose that ends will evolve as agents interact with social structures, new norms, rules, beliefs, and resources. On the other hand, rational choice implies a mix of action driven by calculations over costs and benefits, and action that is driven by

socially defined values (Scott, 2001). From a normative context, the “logic of appropriateness” places limits or replaces individual instrumental behaviour by considering the social web and the public servant’s obligations to others in their network (Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 548). From a cultural-cognitive perspective, rational behaviour is informed and inhibited by “the ways in which knowledge is constructed and codified” (Scott, 2001, p. 82). In these circumstances, the work of Langlois (1986) is taken as evidence to suggest action is a test of “reasonableness” where agents allow for “other kinds of reasonable action in certain situations” (p. 252). In sum, an individual’s action is anchored in their social milieu where the social context articulates values and norms, and define the reasonableness for their conduct.

#### *2.2.4 Deliverology: Old wine in a new bottle? Or paradigm shift in institutional RBM within public organisations?*

To better situate this study based on the review above, it is important to get a general semblance for *Deliverology* and its various iterations because the *Results Agenda* is largely informed by tenets of this institutional RBM approach. The emergence of *Deliverology* can be framed and understood along several tracks. From the perspective of its principal architect, Michael Barber, its appearance is largely explained by a crisis at the heart of modern governance and implementation within public management in the United Kingdom. At the root of this narrative is what Barber refers to as “government by spasm” where public sector activities are oriented towards crisis management and government announcements that are initiated in “anticipation of and reaction to noise” from “conventional and social media agendas” (Barber, 2016, as cited in Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 304). It frames government behaviour as reactionary and largely concerned with perpetually curating its image for the electorate. Though this is not uncharacteristic of most democracy-based governments, Barber’s perspective links more widely to current and emerging

views around New Political Governance. Birch and Jacob (2019) note *Deliverology* can be more readily conceptualized as the means by which NPG is anchored from political developments borne out of Blair's government in the UK. Between the late nineties to early 2000s, pressures from taxpayer dissatisfaction, greater push towards evidenced-based decision-making, a growing climate of public and media scrutiny, and desire to increase confidence in the government provided fertile conditions for the likes of *Deliverology* to take hold and blossom within Whitehall. Effectively, Barber had manufactured a "silver bullet" and loaded the chamber.

With Blair's re-election to a second term in the early 2000s, the political narrative framed British electorate as giving the incumbent government "an instruction to deliver" (Behn, 2017, p. 90). In doing so, Blair appointed Barber to spearhead this resounding mandate through the ranks of the British civil service. As part of setting the stage, Barber shifted his sights on surfacing the inadequacy of public servant performance. Barber squared the blame on bureaucrats for the inability to deliver on political goals. For early proponents, *Deliverology* was rendered instrumental because of implicit assumptions about "shortcoming" in the civil service (Schacter, 2016, p. 4). In its critique, the *Deliverology* manifesto was intended to "take any excuses off the table" since "the traditional British civil service has never been about delivering results" (Schacter, 2016, p. 4).<sup>9</sup>

The earliest iteration of Barber's (2008) *Deliverology* offers no concrete definition for the concept; however, he does refer to it as the "science of marshalling ministerial power to deliver significant measurable improvement in the public services" (p. 79). Barber refines this over several

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<sup>9</sup> It is unclear whether this caricature of the mediocre and unresponsive bureaucrat alerts to problems of incompetence or motivation; however, the choice of words remains inexorably part of established narrative used by *Deliverology* prognosticators. In many ways, assigning blame is the political engine that drives its adoption while simultaneously embedding public servants under a cloud of suspicion emanating from the strengthened political and administrative centre.

years to also include “systematic process for driving progress and delivering results in government and the public sector”, and “the emerging science of getting things done in government” (Barber et al., 2011, p. vii). More recently, the definition was expanded to include “the growing knowledge of how governments can successfully deliver” (Barber, 2016, p. xi). Suffice to say, even with these various addendums, the reference to *Deliverology* as a “science” and lack of precision raises several issues that need to be examined. These will be discussed later in this chapter.

Unsurprisingly, Barber’s reductionist logic perceives and simplifies shortcomings from the public service as failures to deliver. This creates significant attention and desire from the political class for greater control over the administrative class. To a much stronger extent, Barber’s approach re-affirms a closer relationship and greater accountability for the executive branch of government. According to Barber (2015), public officials no longer manage or improve performance. Instead, they should be concerned with delivering while the political and administrative centre should position themselves to play an integral role through “ruthless prioritization”, “more vigorous challenges”, “stronger problem solving and deeper collaboration” (Barber, 2008, as cited in Behn, 2017, p. 90). Supplementing this is the introduction of key components of *Deliverology* such as “delivery chains”, “stock-takes” and “delivery reports”, to name a few (Barber, 2008, pp. 79-101).

According to Birch and Jacob (2019), the core of Barber’s *Deliverology* is to drive policy change, implementation, and reformation of public sector management. The RBM paradigm is viewed instrumentally as a tool for confronting previously discussed systemic issues within bureaucracy. In fact, the normative starting point for advocates of *Deliverology* is that the governing party’s policy decisions and electoral platform is “correct and fully legitimate” and that civil servants are expected to uphold these policy choices through their implementation behaviour

(Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 308). To a larger extent, this reflects the perennial debate regarding politics-administration dichotomy where politicians are perceived as legitimate pursuers of the interest of the electorate and where public servants are viewed as dispassionate implementers who steadfastly observe “neutral competence” in their bureaucratic duties (Overeem, 2005; Demir & Nyhan, 2008, p. 83; West, 2005, p. 148).

Key in this setting is the increased scrutiny of the strengthened centres on public servant activities and behaviour, especially in the context of managing tensions from this conventional dichotomy between the policy making realm and implementation by civil servants. Savoie (1999) wrote extensively on this phenomenon – referred to as the “centralization of power” thesis – where “power in the [Canadian] federal government has shifted away from their departments towards the centre” and towards the “political” (p. 7; Cooper, 2017, p. 591; Lewis, 2014, p. 801). In operational terms under *Deliverology*, this scrutiny is embodied with the establishment of a Delivery Unit nested within UK’s Cabinet Office. From this vantage point, the PMDU becomes the focal point for interactions under this RBM regime. Additionally, the centralization is reinforced through granting of formal and informal authorities and powers to manage conflict from top-down directives on implementation. More specifically, the PMDU’s proximity to the political centre signals to agents a close and ongoing relationship of scrutiny in which legitimacy of the centre is conferred through top-down political steering and challenge function aimed as pushing through implementation barriers endemic to bureaucracies. While Savoie (2011) notes the policy and communications function continues to represent most of the focus within central agencies, Birch and Jacob (2019) argue that a stronger mandate is instilled around relentless implementation. According to Barber (2008), the PMDU’s organisational position is the *force majeure* in

generating the necessary cultural change in government by producing, monitoring, and reporting on outcomes using measures that the electorate can understand (as cited in Birch & Jacob, 2019).

A second element of *Deliverology* is the emphasis on the evaluation of historical and ongoing performance, with a special lens focussed on identifying factors that impede or propel it. What surfaces in the UK context is the continuous process of evaluation in support of executive decision-making in continuing or nixing government programs and activities (Dobell & Zussman, 2018). Under Barber's approach, the hierarchical assessment is no longer just summative and periodic but also ad-hoc and ever-present. This is facilitated by strategically situating Delivery Units at the apex of the bureaucratic hierarchy and deep within executive-level government (Birch & Jacob, 2019). Though results-based management within public sector is a common fixture across many jurisdictions, historically, program and policy decision-making has largely been driven by findings from evaluations (Wollmann, 2003). Under *Deliverology*, the performance management component is supercharged as reams of performance information stream continuously to central agencies and politicians so they can "run a government" that bolsters promissory representation (Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 308). To confront the challenge of bounded rationality from this deluge of metrics and complex processes around collection, monitoring, and reporting, *Deliverology* layers on the importance of establishing routines. Under the guise of routines, the centre maintains a stranglehold on the monitoring of performance through predictable and repetitive set of activities and check-ins between the political executives and implementers. This increased attention to results-based performance by the centre entertains a proactive approach regarding intervention and management of capacity and resources in order to act rapidly to shifting political realities when necessary (Birch & Jacob, 2019).

The final element ties closer engagement of performance with political communication. As previously noted, *Deliverology* is geared towards planning and reacting to a permanent campaign model of representative democracy where governing parties are in perpetual electoral posture (Couture & Jacob, 2019). In this context, the constant management and communication activities embrace a model of democratic accountability where the electorate grants the governing party the mandate to govern but also expects to hold it accountable for its election promises (Mansbridge, 2003). In the wake of this, the attention to results information underpins the pivot towards storytelling and narratives around government performance.

#### *2.2.5 Institutional agents of Deliverology*

Over the years, the public face of *Deliverology* extends beyond Barber himself. The former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is perhaps the second most vocal advocate by having served as a sought-after consultant not only to other jurisdictions but also to heads of state (Behn, 2017). In addition, the former president of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, also marshalled his highly influential tenure with the international financial organisation to extoll the virtues of Barber's vision on the "science of delivery" (Behn, 2017, p. 89). From an institutional perspective, these elite advocates were prominent in creating awareness and framing the value proposition of *Deliverology* as an instrumental tool for improved political governance. Additional legitimacy was generated as other jurisdictions, such Australia, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, and Malaysia, responded to the call as early adopters (Birch & Jacob, 2019; Wanna, 2006; Lindquist, 2006; Karippacheril, 2013; Scharff, 2013; Simson, 2013). Supporting this rise in acceptance was the growing confidence in *Deliverology* as an effective method by which to embody the tenets of promissory government and enhance the ability to respond in a permanent electoral setting.

The successes and lessons learned from the UK example led some motivated adopters of *Deliverology* to perceive it as a “silver bullet” that could be mimicked in their own jurisdictional contexts (Behn, 2017, p. 98). In addition, *Deliverology* also contributes to a globally lucrative and booming public sector management reform industry (Birch & Jacob, 2019). Appeal for the RBM brand is supported by mounting interest from academics and practitioners on results-based management driven reforms. Combined with these factors, Barber drew on his experiences in the UK and his association with Blair to leverage a global network of elite advocates to promote the brand. This includes partnerships with top-tier consulting firms such as McKinsey & Company and Boston Consulting Group, as well as international organisations such as the OECD and the World Economic Forum (Birch & Jacob, 2019). These associations enable Barber to build credibility and advance the legitimacy of his institutional RBM approach. Think tanks, international organisations, consultancies serve as a global platform to distill his model of RBM to a captive audience within jurisdictions that sought to replicate UK’s successes. Similar efforts by institutional agents are identified in a study by Suteewasinnon et al. (2016). They found that external experts, mainly international management consultants, were mobilized by Thai public sector officials to generate normative isomorphic pressure on public servant implementers around implementation of performance management reforms.

### *2.2.6 Critique*

A review of the literature reveals an important contribution from the broader PM scholarships but a limited pool of research specific to institutional results-based management. Nevertheless, this dissertation raises several critiques against current scholarship that informs the research question concerning the interplay between public servant agency and institutional RBM. First, early comparative institutional literature that looks at RBM development treats institutions

as totalizing structures while also privileging path dependent explanations to explain the appearance of RBM practices across spatial and temporal boundaries.

Second, there is limited scholarship on institutionalist approaches to explain how institutional RBM features are diffused through individual agency of public servants, which this dissertation aims to address and build on. As a result, research into the dynamics of institutions and agents only provides a narrow view of public servant agentic efforts linked to RBM adoption. These efforts have not adequately addressed how RBM institutions unfold over time and are implemented by public servants within the federal government context through social action.

Third, despite efforts within the broader scholarship to re-infuse agency to explain strategic action, insights on intentional and purposeful conduct are not readily discussed within this subset of RBM literature. As such, the existing literature does not fully account for the dynamic interaction between institutions and individual and the effects this intersection has on institutional RBM across the public sector.

In general, existing RBM implementation literature does not discuss at length the mechanisms by which institutional ideas and patterns emerge or are prevented from being instantiated through agency. Even so, less attention is paid to the methods by which individuals directly encounter these RBM institutions. These gaps in the scholarship is especially pronounced when it concerns the role of objective instruments and how institutional forces such as regulative, normative, and culture-cognitive forces, are perceived and affect individual public servant conduct. While pressures are essential elements to sustaining institutions and social order, none of the studies examined explicitly reference neo-institutional analytical framework to explain institutional RBM. Instead, studies mostly imply regulative and normative explanations with little derived from cultural-cognitive angles. As such, this dissertation is particularly interested in these

institutional pressures as a way to uncover what public servants encounter when they are faced with new institutional RBM paradigms.

### *2.3 Implementation of institutional results-based management*

#### *2.3.1 Institutional and agentic perspectives on implementation of institutional RBM*

Research on the subset of literature on implementation of results-based management from an institutional perspective is limited. Insights are largely based on scholarship that specifically looks at performance management or measurement systems in general. Within this strand, most studies acknowledge that institutional pressures bear down and have a profound effect on performance management implementation conduct. Authors are mainly interested in understanding implementation by looking at the mechanism of influence, which includes coercive, mimetic, and normative strands.<sup>10</sup> For instance, studies by Munir and Baird (2016), Sutheewasinnon et al. (2016), Alsaïd and Ambilichu (2020), and Kasale et al. (2020) all examine how institutional forces overwhelm implementers who operate in public organisations, banking, social enterprises, and national sports sectors. All draw from case studies in developing countries except Munir and Baird (2016). In the research from Sutheewasinnon et al. (2016) and Kasale et al. (2020), the writers point to legitimacy-seeking and reward-seeking behaviour as key drivers for implementation of performance measurement systems.

Other works – such as those by Mayne (2007) and Pazvakavambwa and Steyn's (2014) – identify the main principles of implementation of results-based management within public organisations. Though Pazvakavambwa and Steyn's (2014) analysis is derived from observations in developing countries, both studies provide the most robust and holistic insights on the

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<sup>10</sup> See DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) seminal work that explores institutional mechanisms.

implementation of RBM from an institutional view. Their research identifies potential organisational and state-level obstacles to implementation. They list key conditions of RBM elements and values that need to be in place for successful implementation within examined countries. This includes “mutual partnerships, accountability transparency, simplicity, organisational learning, flexible and iterative applications, internal ownership and commitment, and performance data management and reporting” (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014, pp. 250-51).

Other writers look at post-implementation rather than the implementation process itself. This is often pursued in the context of unintended consequences in program management and performance improvement functions (Try, 2008). Nevertheless, work in this area benefits from institutional and behavioural approaches as well. Within this literature, researchers unpack macro- and organisational-level formal and informal structures, rules, and standards that inform micro-level implementer behaviour. This is not unusual given that institutional approaches for understanding implementation generally acknowledges that implementers are not independent of their context – which is conduct bound by frames of reference that concurrently shape social interaction with other agents and the implementation process (Hjern & Porter, 1981). Cline (2000) expands on this point by arguing that a study of conduct must place implementers in their “proper institutional setting” since the study focal point is on repeated patterns that lead to appropriate ways of behaving regarding implementation (p. 566). Recent work by Ssegewa and Muzinda (2016) responds to this call and further provides insights into how RBM implementation strategies are anchored in project management context within the development sector.

Some studies are motivated to understand implementation failure perspective from the vantage point of institutional theory; however, RBM specific research is limited. Karuhanga and Werner (2013) and Almohtaseb et al. (2019) offer observations into the challenges of performance

management implementation in public universities in Uganda and Jordan, respectively. These challenges include political and government interference, weak incentive system to implement, and lack of clear roles and responsibilities.

Picking up on the failure perspective, insights can also be gleaned from PM implementation broadly since features of institutional RBM tend to overlap to some extent. Within this stream, attention is spent on the identification of several unintended consequences from implementation. Works by Christensen and Lægreid (2007) and Verbeeten and Speklé (2015) uncover tensions between institutional logics of markets and public sector and resulting incompatibility of values that lead to implementation failure. These authors describe this result as a lack of nuanced appreciation for institutional and organisational structures between the two spheres. Works by Mayne (2007), Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) and Swiss (2005) regarding results-based management implementation supplement these discoveries with insights on what has worked and failed within specific settings. In the case of Mayne (2007) and Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014), institutional and behaviourist views dominate to identify various obstacles to implementation. In this context, the focal point for observation is public organisations within industrial and developing countries. Here, organisational considerations and technical competencies of implementers remain the major impediments of implementation. On the organisational side, there are problems with generating and sustaining results-oriented culture, challenges with setting realistic outcomes, and issues with selecting relevant performance metrics (Mayne, 2007; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014). In terms of technical problems, concerns are mostly found with attribution of activities to outcomes, quality of data, and lack of resources and training on RBM (Mayne, 2007; Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014). Additionally, Swiss (2005) links RBM implementation failures to improper and inadequate organisational- and individual-level incentives, unclear timelines, and

inconsistent rewards systems due to political changes that generate perceptions of unfairness by public servant implementers.

Though the above research provides some insights into RBM implementation, studies situated from the context of public sector are evidently rare. Even so, a scan of general implementation behaviour within public sector exposes a strong emphasis on implementation failure perspective tied to behaviourist explanations. This subset of research is steered by contributions from scholars adopting top-down and bottom-up models. Top-down approaches retain the assumptions of politics-administration dichotomy; however, a preference for linearity also remains. Here, implementation is viewed as a phenomenon dependent of legislative objectives (Ryan, 1999; Tahmasebi & Musavi, 2011). In supporting this division doctrine, Hughes (2003) writes public organisations should return to the ideas of Woodrow Wilson's original maxim of an "organisational split between policy and administration" (p. 62). In this sense, a Weberian approach is legitimized where some scholars identify the use of "control measures and tight boundaries to discretion" (Schofield, 2001, p. 251). Consistent with this, existing literature notices the primacy of instrumentality to explain how "one steering" agent can influence others (Cline, 2000, p. 564). The same study by Cline (2000) argues the primary task of these agents is to "create the context" by which individuals comply to expectations placed on them (p. 566). On the other hand, this view also acknowledges cooperation from implementers is largely a means to minimize tension and conflict from top-down expectations. A study by de Arruda Leite and Buainain (2013) speaks to this broader need for top bureaucrats to resolve conflict between the objective and the subjective environment. The latter is constructed by the individual and defined by the limits of agent rationality. These circumstances also generate a multiplicity of perspectives leading to grey

areas in decision-making.<sup>11</sup> In view of this, the motivating factor driving top-down models is the emphasis on regulative pressures that steer implementers towards advancing the interests of the centre through means of cooperation, reducing conflict, and resolving ambiguity.

Alternatively, the bottom-up approach orients the analytical gaze on the implementers themselves. The agentic-turn investigates the motivations and actions of public servants carrying out the implementation. Scholars pivot their attention towards endogenous forces – such as checks against the domination of central authority – and identify tensions between authority and agency in carrying out implementation within an organisational setting (Schofield, 2001). Moreover, the focus on cognitive drivers like blame avoidance and gaming by public servants is also used to explain implementation failure (Kalgin, 2016).<sup>12</sup>

On the one hand, the analysis of the literature reveals it is virtually impossible to exert “perfect control over human behaviour” because individuals are not strictly guided by rules (de Arruda Leite & Buainain, 2013, p. 146). On the other hand, the same authors suggest the aim of control is fruitless as the “informal organisation” cannot be “objectively defined” since much of what guides behaviour is nested in the unseen and unpredictability of social relations (de Arruda Leite & Buainain, 2013, p. 146). Nevertheless, authors like Ryan (1999) argue there is a shift towards compliance that is implicit in top-down styles linked to various mechanisms. One example is the normative prescriptions tied to mandates from the electorate as legitimate reasons for public servants to adhere to top-down directions. In some cases, formal hierarchal structures supply the necessary administrative rationality for obeying centrally driven directives on implementation.

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<sup>11</sup> This situation is alluded to by Feldman (1989) as ambiguity.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting study by Liston-Heyes and Juillet (2019) also reference the issue of blame-avoidance by public servants when implementing enhancements to accountability processes. They note that greater transparency can at times create “negative externalities” that undermine efforts to improve accountability (Liston-Heyes & Juillet, 2019, p. 671).

Despite this, authors like Sabatier (1986) suggest these perspectives are flawed because they rely too much on the perceptions and activities of agents, specifically implementers, and frames them as “prisoners” who are unable to reflexively disentangle their conduct from pressures placed upon them (p. 35).

The interest in agency when studying RBM also benefits from recent scholarship that details the phenomenon of New Political Governance, especially in advancing the role of public servants in influencing the institutional terrain during implementation. Seminal work spearheaded by the late Peter Aucoin (2012) describes a gradual drift towards increased politicization of civil service in reaction to new social and political governing environments. Aucoin’s NPG concept identifies a corruption of sorts within public service typified by increased control of bureaucracy by top-down political executives. Others note the increased centralization of executive power at the centre tied to desires and public pressure for increased accountability and control. Hogget (1996) refers to this as a “decentralization of operations whilst centralizing strategic command”, which echoes Savoie’s (1999) centralization of power thesis (p. 12). A post-humous volume dedicated to Aucoin elaborates on these tensions in the context of public governance and management (see Bakvis & Jarvis, 2012). Within this edition, Heintzman and Juillet (2012) explore top-down efforts to employ principles of accountability as both a method of control and to instill a culture of continuous improvement due to perceived erosion of the traditional bargain between ministers and public servants.<sup>13</sup> Savoie (2011) notes the maxim of “letting managers

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<sup>13</sup> Public service bargain was initially defined by Christopher Hood (2000) as “any explicit or implicit understanding between (senior) public servants and other actors in a political system over their duties and entitlements relative to responsibility, autonomy and political identity, and expressed in convention or formal law or a mixture of both” (p. 8). Christopher Cooper (2020) further clarified this by outlined three key pillars that uphold Hood’s concept: bureaucracy’s competency – which is the “knowledge and skills public servants are expected to possess; 2) the bureaucracy’s loyalty – which is “whom public servants are expected to work for; and 3) “the rewards that civil servants receive from government in exchange for providing the types of competency [*sic*] and loyalty that governments desire” (p. 37).

manage” emboldened public servants in the early days of RBM and enabled behaviour that was less bound by rules in favour of technocratic expertise that contributed to achievement of results (pp. 153-154). Paradoxically, the exuberance of civil service and permanent electoral campaign also amplified centralization of powers at the political and administrative centres to “make the managers manage” (Aucoin, 2008, pp. 18-19).

The climate of NPG also appears to value approaches that hold civil servants accountable for performance through “hard or measurable results” (Bakvis & Jarvis, 2012, p. 349). However, the ambition for RBM raises several tensions within modern public organisations. Much of it centres around the limits and difficulties with measurement (Pollitt, 2000; Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008). According to Bakvis and Jarvis (2012), there is trouble sustaining RBM or versions of it because of a “pendulum that swings back and forth according to success and failures” (p. 348). Examples of this phenomenon are observed in cases studies examining the UK, the United States and Canada. However, Heintzman and Juillet (2012) argue the push to merge performance measurement and results can also paradoxically grant public servants greater control over policy outcomes.

Evident from the literature is that Canada is not a laggard in its experiments with RBM. NPM reforms aside, the Canadian experience with RBM started over five decades ago; however, only in the nineteen-nineties was there “wide acceptance that managing for results is a key principle of managing in (Canadian) government” with “the political and operational environment” becoming “much more hospitable, leading to renewed interest in management reform, including results-based management” (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 657). Despite this fertile ground for implementation, Try and Radnor (2007) argue that RBM has made limited progress as a “strategic or management tool” because it has “proven to be exceptionally difficult to operationalise” (p.

657-58). The writers lay the fault on several factors including the lack of appreciation for the differences between private sector and public organisations and the lack of management freedom. Moreover, they allude to the paradox of NPG, where efforts to implement are often hindered by tendencies from “politicians and central agencies to re-implement administration controls” (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 658).

### *2.3.2 The role of instruments for the study of institutional RBM*

A review of the diverse body of literature overwhelmingly describes the movement of institutional results-based management as a diffusion or transfer of ideas and practices from one jurisdiction to another. Moreover, instruments appear to matter to researchers interested in explaining administrative changes from an institutional perspective. Instruments are implicated in the process of implementation and provide a concrete view of RBM implementation reforms as visible and discrete objective devices (Pazvakavambwa & Steyn, 2014). They can be employed to generate a radical pivot or incremental change to policy and public servant behaviour. They are not neutral as they are often implicated instrumentally to advance the goals of top bureaucrats (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). Moreover, they are sustained and backed by institutions as they become anchored in everyday practices and administrative structures.

A survey of this domain of literature demonstrates researchers conflate instruments and institutions whenever they are observed together. The fusion of both concepts presents challenges for researchers on how to unpack their interaction. Nevertheless, a look at policy instruments in general offers some reprieve. The most ubiquitous definition lies in the works of Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007). They situate policy instruments within a functionalist orientation where it is “both technical and social” and it “organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representation and meanings it carries” (Lascoumes & Le Galès,

2007, p. 4). They further explain “it is a particular type of institution, technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship” that is “sustained by a concept of regulation” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 4). In their paper, they counter the view that policy instruments are neutral and rationally driven methods without meaning and suggest they have a strong place in implementation-directed research, especially when evaluating the effects they lead to.

Admittedly, agency theory has been especially useful to unpack how public servants recalibrate the current tension between political and civil servants to be more “traditionally centered on the co-existence of the neutral public services and responsible government” (Boston & Halligan, 2012, p. 204). When the goals of the principals and agents conflict, the latter make decisions to advance their own agendas while ignoring the directives of the former (Baier et al., 1986). In such settings, research studying policy instruments have provided a means to understand how sufficiently strong incentives can persuade agents to serve the interests of principals but also minimize their costs (Bakvis & Jarvis, 2012). Against the backdrop of increased scrutiny from the public on elected officials and thereby, increased control of public servants through stronger centralization, writers have written in detail of various types of instruments, mostly regulative, that have recently emerged in response within Canada (Hildebrand & McDavid, 2011; Heintzman & Juillet, 2012). This includes the creation of new roles, legislation that include the *Federal Accountability Act* (FAA), the appointment of Deputy Ministers, federal public sector *Charter of Values*, and management accountability frameworks (Heintzman & Juillet, 2012; Brown, 2013). However, writers such as Boston and Halligan (2012) also acknowledge the perennial problem of modern governing is largely exacerbated by uncertainty, incomplete information, and elevated monitoring costs.

While the definition of instruments provides key insights into how they carry meaning from a regulative standpoint, there are still challenges with reconciling these devices with institutional theory and the forces that support them. On the one hand, Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) prefer to distinguish instruments along several distinct types: social institution, technique, and as a tool. From an institutionalist perspective, the last two types gain wider relevance for this study. Instruments as techniques reflect a “concrete device that operationalizes the instruments” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 4). In this case, institutional demands are reified into objective artefacts that public servants engage with. From a regulative standpoint, they can serve as a mode of regulation that influences and constrains action. Moreover, tools reside as “micro device within a technique” and can reflect types of obligations through texts, or the presence and absence of sanctions (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 4).

Lascoumes and Le Galès’ (2007) publication generates important theoretical contributions to the study of policy instrument as regulative forces. It implicates techniques and tools as instrumental methods to convey expectations and obligations to implementers – discussed in more detail in a study conducted by Phillippe Bezes (2007) on administrative reforms in the French civil service. Bezes (2007) offers significant insight into how policy instruments can impose institutional pressures on public servants around reform implementation. His seminal work mines empirical information from public management reforms to expose how institutional changes have impacted French public organisations over several decades. A closer review suggests the author’s focus remains on identifying the regulative pressures as the driver of institutional reproduction. However, a significant part of his thesis rejects the overwhelming belief that instruments generate radical punctures in institutional behaviour. Rather, they can lead to incremental but compounding effect on conduct (Bezes, 2007). While Bezes (2007) agrees with Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007)

that instruments are “goal-oriented, and highly technical devices”, he also implores that the examination of instruments to study performance offers merit because it “constitutes an important mode of power” (p. 24). This is supported by a study that suggests performance management itself is “not a neutral technique” and is linked to “power and politics” (Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020, p. 450).

As an extension of this, Bezes (2007) engages in an ontological exercise by narrowing his attention to what he refers to as “low-profile instruments”, which not only possess the characteristics noted previously but also has a “discreet dimension” to them (p. 24). In effect, low-profile instruments have low visibility to agents because of their complexity and automatic use (Bezes, 2007). Returning to this theme of power distribution, the author highlights an inherent power differential between the centre, who develops these instruments, and the agents, who are tasked with implementation. Bezes (2007) finesses this context along three key points. First, the use of low-profile instruments is mainly observed in environments that are highly ambiguous due to limited knowledge about conduct. He suggests the instruments serve to “provide new strategic information and to rationalize the process” (Bezes, 2007, p. 24). Second, the political context is not conducive to structural administrative reform due to “high political costs” (Bezes, 2007, p. 24). In this sense, the instruments serve to depoliticize the issue. Finally, use of low-profile instruments are common because they are tightly integrated in the structures of administration and are resistant to change (Bezes, 2007).

### *2.3.3 The paradox of Deliverology implementation*

Since the *Results Agenda* is largely based on the institutional template of *Deliverology*, the literature pulls on this thread to inform and refine the dissertation research questions regarding potential problems encountered by public servants during their implementation of institutional

RBM. In fact, the task of implementing *Deliverology* is problematic from the vantage point of public servants and the focus on what matters to practitioners invites the dissertation to engage critically with new RBM fads within the public sector. One of the challenges is the perception advanced by Barber et al. (2011) and others that faithful implementation of the various components of *Deliverology* will yield visible and measurable results. However, aside from the anecdotal testimonials from elite advocates (see Behn, 2017), there are virtually no empirical evaluations that support this claim. In fact, some like Behn (2017) classify *Deliverology* and its principles as mostly resembling a “management by groping” phenomena where the process is “never a clean, straightforward, linear process” and public managers have no clear sense of where they are going and must experiment to arrive at what works and does not (p. 94).

The insistence on framing *Deliverology* instrumentally as a “science” also primes a captive audience to subscribe to Barber’s approach. As noted previously, the issues of modern public governance motivate civil servants and elected officials to seek out immediate and lasting solutions. Barber has leveraged this desire by promoting adherence to his prescriptions or “rules” (Behn, 2017, p. 93; Simon, 1946). The “knowledge of delivery” he accumulated by running the PMDO and as a consultant culminated into *Deliverology* manuals that call on practitioners to be faithful to adoption. The direct reference to science confers legitimacy for these “rules” since it promotes *Deliverology* artefacts as a collection of “authoritative”, “systemized knowledge” and “general truths... obtained and tested through the scientific method” (Behn, 2017, p. 97). As Behn (2017) notes, Barber allows public managers to infer a scientific connection while simultaneously undermining the attachment by stating that the science of delivery “is still in its infancy, and the more it is applied, the deeper our knowledge of will become” (2016, pp. xviii, 288). Moreover, Barber et al. (2011) elaborate that the nature of *Deliverology* is “not a perfect”, “pure” or even an

“exact science” (pp. 85, 91, 105, 137). In sum, the authoritative dimension of science is at odds with the untested claims about the science of delivery. This paradox also defers to risk-averse public managers to test these claims in their localized context. According to Jakobsen et al. (2018, as cited in Birch & Jacob, 2019):

External accountability regimes (of which *Deliverology* is one) that are not grounded scientifically and empirically tend to “crowd out,” rather than stimulate, the intrinsic motivation of service providers because of mis-matched external incentives and performance indicators, weak consideration of the complexity of policy tasks, and implicit disregard of the importance of intrinsically motivated, autonomous professionals in service management and delivery. (p. 314)

Perhaps the most bewildering issue is the contradictory reference to *Deliverology* as both “science” and “art”. In their book, Barber et al. (2011) suggest that the approach is “much more of an art than a science” (p. 230). Elite advocates – such as Blair and the former president of the World Bank – also reference “art” as an integral component of implementation of *Deliverology*. For Blair, the caution to implementers is not to “ignore the politics and the art that lies in that”, especially when building relationships with the political and administrative centre, as “people get very nervous about people coming in from the outside and telling them what to do and so on” (World Bank, 2013). Beyond this, Barber notes that when results are not moving as fast, managing the political attention “requires political courage and art” (World Bank, 2013).

Subject to the above tensions, Behn (2017) argues that “art” is often included with science in the context of politics, especially in situations where there is tension between the political and administrative sphere around the inhibition of science delivery and the lack of swift improvement on results that leads to greater political scrutiny. This is of specific concern for a civil service

tasked with the implementation of “key features of the science (of delivery) to new circumstances” (Behn, 2017, p. 104). He argues the link to “art” extends beyond the politics and is connected with adaptation of a delivery approach that fits specific contexts (Behn, 2017). As such, current research around “old wine in new bottles” have largely recognized the value in orienting the lens on investigating decision-making of policy and those implementing it (Birch & Jacob, 2019, pp. 313-318).<sup>14</sup> Adding to this problem is the adage that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Polanyi (1958) refers to this as tacit knowledge or “well-known fact” – where “the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them” (p. 49). Behn looks to Polanyi’s definition of tacit knowledge to highlight the difficulty with transferring knowledge in a context of contradictions, ambiguity and tensions. From Behn’s (2017) perspective, Barber “knows more than he can tell” (p. 104). While Barber can provide examples of specific situations where *Deliverology* triggers performance improvements, he cannot convey the “complex creativity, clever subtlety, and determined tenacity with which he did these things” in a different setting (Behn, 2017, p. 104). To a large extent, he may be not fully understanding it himself, which raises issues for civil servants who are themselves strongly compelled to follow his prescriptions for implementation and may be unable to appreciate or navigate the nuances and cues around what is left unsaid in the rules of *Deliverology*.

In the wake of its adoption across several jurisdictions, the appraisal of *Deliverology* invites further criticism. One significant issue is the increasing preoccupation with targets and metrics that have not materialized in measurable impact or results in the public sector. Most critics – such as Dobell and Zussman (2018), Behn (2017), and Birch and Jacob (2019) – challenge the assumed causal relationship that informs civil servant behaviour and executive decision-making regarding

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<sup>14</sup> See works Jakobsen et al. (2018), Laihonon and Mäntylä (2017), and Moynihan (2010).

programs and policies. Furthermore, from an evaluation perspective, Dobell and Zussman (2018) argue *Deliverology* is “highly unlikely to offer empirical or analytical evidence that ministers will see as definitive or even terribly relevant to specific cabinet decisions” (p. 383). Combined with bounded rationality, problems of attribution and varied implementation contexts, the pervasive denunciation of *Deliverology* confronts the dominant narratives advanced by Barber and elites such as Blair and Kim (Birch & Jacob, 2019; Behn, 2017). Others suggest the pressure on dogged achievement of targets above all else results in a “dysfunctional, distorted system where demoralized, cynical service providers manage all the wrong things” (Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 312). In fact, several evaluative studies on *Deliverology* – including one on English healthcare delivery from Bevan and Hood (2006) – reveal that target-based regimes have caused negative adverse effect on both providers and patients. The same study went as far as to suggest that questions remain over the degree to which gaming undermined these performance targets. A different study by Loveday (2006) on police services within UK found an overwhelming pressure from PMDU when it came to issues associated with data collection. Both these studies were also referenced in grey literature from Schacter (2006) regarding problems with *Deliverology*.

A second criticism recalls the earlier discussion that framed problems with electoral promise-keeping as largely resting with bureaucracy. These concerns are exacerbated by permanent campaigning and the increased control and command-style approach of the governing centre (Aucoin, 2012; Savoie, 1999). Barber’s experiences in the UK largely glosses over these matters as a response rather than a contributing factor in relation to demands on administrative resources and the capacity of the civil service to act. In fact, proponents of *Deliverology* do not adequately recognize the implications of this institutional context on implementers and double-down by casting professional civil servants as largely inept or unwilling to support government

mandates. In doing so, they present *Deliverology* as the “silver bullet” of new political governance (Behn, 2017, p. 98). Birch and Jacob (2019) suggest this monist view yields only short-term results that conditions the emergence of a cyclical pattern where politicians are distracted by the campaign ahead and civil servants are perpetually readying themselves for the transition to the next government. In circumstances where *Deliverology* is proven to be effective, Birch and Jacob (2019) argue it is only because it “engage [*sic*] actors collaboratively in defining goals and targets, rather than a standard top-down delivery pattern”, and “[*sic*] grants flexibility to actors to adapt to change” (p. 310).

The most severe criticism calls into question the value-add of *Deliverology* as both a concept and practice. Several studies classify the approach as “old wine in a new bottle”, “fads” and “gimmicks” (Birch & Jacob, 2019, pp. 303, 313; Doberstein & Charbonneau, 2020, p. 8; Blunkett & Flinders, 2021, p. 11). Critics mostly reduce *Deliverology* as repackaged results-based management paradigm that are already in practice. Doberstein and Charbonneau (2020) note *Deliverology* recycles existing RBM practices and bundles them as “new”, even when “newness itself may not have inherent value” given the examples of other public management fads that have travelled across jurisdictions with “few tangible, positive impacts” (p. 8). Commentators suggests *Deliverology* casts aside pre-existing knowledge and expertise” of civil servants while simultaneously nurturing “cynicism and demotivation for the government’s reform agenda” (Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 314). More scathingly, some suggest *Deliverology* is nothing more than an attempt to marry RBM with project management and public policy and labelling it an innovative approach to government “pledge-fulfilment” (Birch & Jacob, 2019, p. 308). Pundits suggest Barber is pushing a solution seeking a problem. While Barber (2008) acknowledges some of the criticisms, he also lays blame for poor adaptation of public sector reforms by government and civil

servants on “agenda shifts,... underestimation of the extraordinary deadweight force of institutional inertia,... bad ideas and gross incompetence” (p. 72).

To rally against the last point, writers mostly counter the indictment on poor adaptation as resting solely with Barber’s conceptualization of his RBM model. They argue the branded concept is largely contradictory and incoherent in terms of its definitions and approaches. For instance, seeking to differentiate itself from other RBM varieties, Barber and advocates repeatedly label the approach as the “science of delivery” (Behn, 2017, p. 89).<sup>15</sup> A recent article by Behn (2017) confronts this deliberate co-opting of definitions and methods of science. His study largely dismisses Barber’s efforts to link *Deliverology* to science as largely a branding exercise to promote its relevance in a post-Blair context. Though Barber et al. (2011) confess *Deliverology* is not “pure science”, it nevertheless contributes to several inferences by practitioners (p. 85). First, it impresses on civil servants that government performance can improve significantly through delivery. Second, it induces a value judgement based on the connotation of science. In doing so, it elevates *Deliverology* practices above mere “traditions, standard operating procedures, or guesses” that “should not be ignored” (Behn, 2017, p. 91). Finally, it plays on the fear of civil servants’ loss of agency and control by intimating that political officials will impose their will on the bureaucracy.

#### 2.3.4 Critique

Within results-based management implementation research, the analysis of the literature raises several critiques that are to be addressed by the dissertation’s research questions. First, the literature favours the view of market institutions as overbearing. Scholars continue to treat public servants as cultural dopes – both as unreflexive and passive reproducers – who largely reproduce

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<sup>15</sup> According to Behn (2017), Barber turned *Deliverology* into a management brand like “Lean”, “Six Sigma”, “Total Quality Management”, “Reengineering”, or “PerformanceStat” (p. 96).

RBM institutions. The research focusses on describing how institutional RBM endures but even still, the process by which implementation affects institutions is not directly referenced or explained. Instead, insight on RBM implementation is mostly understood through post-implementation performance linked to constraints and incentives. Behaviourist lenses also fail to explicitly recognize the important role of agency in responding to institutional pressures. In essence, this approach does not adequately reconcile the macro- and micro-politics that underpin the implementation process, especially the influence public servants possess in their role as “interpreters of central policy” (Schofield, 2001, p. 251).

On the other hand, bottom-up approaches that look at implementation within public sector is overly pre-occupied with the micro behaviour of public servant at the expense of the macro environment they are embedded in. From this perspective, the literature leans heavily towards explaining institutional reproduction. As a result, the paradoxes, contradictions, and trade-offs from implementation – including those discussed earlier regarding *Deliverology* – raises unanswered questions around the creation and disruption of RBM institutions from implementer conduct. Moreover, most of this literature focusses on the perceptions of managers and working-level public servants with one exception from Ohemeng et al. (2018), who look at change agents – namely high-level executive - and the resistance they face when implementing institutional change within organisations.<sup>16</sup> The authors found that challenges with employee commitment to performance management reforms was largely linked to sensegiving practices by the organisation’s leaders. According to the authors, sensegiving is an act of leadership and a powerful vector when appealing to values in order to influence the perception of employees on performance management reforms (Ohemeng et al., 2018). The study found implementation of performance

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, a study by Hammerschmid and Löffler (2015) studies the positive bias from top-level bureaucrats and managers and its links to greater need for diversity and alternative voices from frontline public servants.

management systems in developing countries was difficult because leaders were not able to effectively appeal to the values of employees and convey commitment to reforms as a necessary change that benefits employees (Ohemeng et al., 2018).

Second, in recent years, writers identify various paradoxes, contradictions, and trade-offs from implementation (Bouckaert & Peters, 2002). However, there is limited scholarly attention on unintended consequences of implementing RBM. In fact, researchers of RBM adoption pay little attention to the institutional context in which these reforms are carried out. Scholarship that does extend the gaze to RBM implementation – such as the study from Verbeeten and Speklé (2015) – tend to frame issues through the unidimensional lens of publicness in comparative studies of private and public sector. By doing so, it misperceives and offers a narrow view of implementation of RBM as a direct transfer between jurisdictions that lead to isomorphic outcomes.

The third concern is the lack of a broad lifecycle approach for understanding institutional dynamics of RBM. Despite explanations of institutional pressures that favour isomorphism, the implementation process varies considerably due to “contextual differences”, which make “knowledge transfer and comparisons more complex” (Jarrar & Schiuma, 2007, p. 5). As such, the over-confidence in Weberian and rational approaches are ill-equipped to deal with the ambiguity, complexity, and tensions of implementation (Ryan, 1999). Moreover, the current literature mostly provides an account of powerful agents that are unaffected by doubt. In effect, existing research does not illuminate how public servants behave when faced with an uncertain terrain, even when institutional prescriptions are present.

Given these limitations, the final section of this literature review explores the concept of institutional work and the constitutive relationship between individuals and institutions. In doing so, the dissertation aims to advance the notion that RBM implementation is a complex, ongoing,

and recursive process based on the interplay between institutional pressures and agency. The following section will build the connective tissue between the purposive action of public servant implementers, the conditions that enable certain types of institutional work and the effects of this work on institutions beyond the conventional reproduction perspective.

## *2.4 Institutional work*

### *2.4.1 Conceptualization of institutional work*

Institutional work surfaces to overcome some of the traps generated from views of institutions as totalizing and overly agentic-centric theories on conduct. It was noted in the earlier parts of this chapter – specifically the section that analysed RBM from an institutional lens – that public servant behaviour is primarily driven by external and totalizing pressures that constrain and direct how they should legitimately conduct their implementation activities. However, the literature has a limited view of the role of agency. When public servant agency is accounted for, institutional RBM forces are seen to overwhelm agency while implementers are understood as conforming to expectations that are external of the individual. However, these insights do not account for how institutions change, as they often do. Secondly, the institution-infused literature also treats implementers as possessing a collective understanding of their environment and assumes that they all face and react to the same pressures – whether regulative, normative, or cultural-cognitive – in the same ways. Finally, when public servants respond to these pressures, writers overwhelmingly identify institutional preservation as the primary task. As such, insights into disruption and creation are hidden from interested readers.

Confronting this reality, institutional entrepreneurship was identified in this same chapter as a way to account for the role of agency during institutional change, though there is no specific mention of the concept as it relates to research on institutional RBM implementation. Nevertheless,

institutional entrepreneurship is mainly mentioned here to argue how this framework alone is not well-suited for pursuing this dissertation's research questions. First, institutional entrepreneurship researchers largely accept an unimpeded institutional agent that operates without any limits, whether cognitive, cultural, or structural. Individuals or groups of people are viewed as "socially skilled" and "heroes" who can strategically act in triggering and manifesting institutional change based on available resources (Battilana et al., 2009, pp. 67, 80). When factoring the reality of bounded rationality in public servants, this approach is problematic. The second trap from an overly agentic focus is the issue of embedded agency noted earlier (see page 15). When institutional entrepreneurship picked up steam amongst scholars, writers including Garud et al. (2007), Seo and Creed (2002), and Weik (2011) all pondered how agents who are shaped by institutions can also envision new arrangements and persuade others to accept them. Work by Battilana (2004) sought to address this theoretical paradox by proposing that individuals are nested in different institutional environments at any given time and the incompatibilities between these different pressures trigger opportunities for agency to emerge. Though this provides a possible pathway for researchers to explore the link between institutions and agency, two major issues surface even from this approach. It creates obstacles in reconciling agents who passively and unreflexively accept institutional pressures since entrepreneurship always prioritises choice. The other issue is that the literature appears to suggest that agents confront uncertainty only when different institutions intersect, with little to no acknowledgement of ambiguities that form within a single institution. As Holms puts it, "while institutional change may be triggered by external events, the outcome will be shaped through internal processes structured by the institutions themselves" (1995, p. 418). That being said, Battilana (2004) acknowledges these issues in her

“contingent model”, which calls on researchers to address (p. 15). In that regard, Weik (2011) briefly mentions institutional work as a new frontier for researchers pursuing this aim.

In light of these developments, Lawrence et al. (2011) define institutional work as the “physical or mental effort aimed at affecting an institution or set of institutions” (p. 53). This strand of research supplies accounts of intentionality by positioning agents as acting with purpose to maintain, create and disrupt institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Batillana & D’Aunno, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Garud et al., 2007; Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). Unlike deterministic models advanced in earlier institutional iterations, the turn towards institutional work re-infuses agency in institutional analysis without dis-embedding agents from their environmental context. It also orients attention towards micro-institutional processes to explain how reproducing or maintaining social structure is not the sole outcome of actor agency (Symon et al., 2008).

According to seminal work completed by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), institutional *creation* work involves three main types which includes “overtly political work in which actors reconstruct rules, property rights and boundaries that define access to material boundaries”, “actions designed to alter abstract categorization in which actors’ belief systems are reconfigured”, and “actions designed to alter abstract categorization in which the boundaries of meaning systems are altered” (p. 22). Therefore, institutional work research looking into creation is mostly concerned with how new institutions or “templates for actions” emerge and become embedded (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 53). Research on *maintenance* activities is largely concerned with production and re-production of practices through the continuation of existing structures. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) elaborate this concept to include work performed “primarily to address the maintenance of institutions through ensuring adherence to rules systems” and “focus efforts to maintain institutions on reproducing existing norms and belief systems” (p. 230). Finally,

*disruption* takes place when existing institutions and practices no longer meet the interests of the stakeholders (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) further define this to include work in which “state and non-state actors worked through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some sets of practices, technologies or rules, attempt to disrupt institutions by disassociating the practice, rule or technology from its moral foundation” and “undermine core assumptions and beliefs which stabilize institutions” (pp. 235-37).

The increased attention to work can generate explanations for non-isomorphic outcomes. Additional insights extend theoretical and empirical efforts beyond the narrow view of institutional reproduction. Writers observe that agents act purposely towards the *creation* and *disruption* of institutions as well (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The holistic approach to bringing agency back into institutions validates the perceptions of agents as purposeful social constructors who can “transcend the totalizing cognitive influence of institutions” (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011, p. 62). Recent neo-institutional scholarship mostly rejects the old institutionalist view of agents as cultural dopes who simply enact social scripts and who are unable to reflexively deviate from rules (Garud et al., 2007).

Concurrently, institutional work also emerges to address shortcomings found in other agentic and social action research based institutional approaches, namely institutional entrepreneurship. Most entrepreneurship researchers privilege the status of the individual as skilled heroes (Hotimsky et al., 2006, p. 41; Leca et al., 2008). However, this raises several key issues. Entrepreneurship overemphasises agency of actors and downplays the role of institutional constraints at the level of the individual. Moreover, its proponents also suggest reflexive agents can disengage from their social environment but offer no explanations on how this is accomplished. Additionally, the pivot towards individuals as the main vector for endogenous

institutional reform raises the problem of analytical individualism (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011; Abdelnour et al., 2017). Therefore, a key advantage of the institutional work literature is the recognition of agents as embedded within institutions but also possessing reflexive purposefulness (Lawrence et al., 2013). Writers suggest this reflexive intentionality is achieved through permanent and ongoing interaction with agency and institution. This reflexivity not only accounts for the agent's institutional embeddedness but also their capacity to reflect on this embeddedness and their own social identity. The cognitive and sociological literature also contributes to understanding institutional work because it acknowledges actors as “interpreters of ambiguous symbols and constructors of meanings” and where they possess different identities and worldviews (Garud et al., 2007, p. 962). In sum, institutional work provides a holistic approach to action research by bringing agency back into institutions. It also validates agents as purposeful social constructors who are subject to institutional shaping.

#### *2.4.2 Types of institutional work*

In addition to the importance placed on agent intentionality, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) explain how the manner in which institutional work is carried out hinges on the dynamic interplay between agency and institutional pressures. In effect, the decisions that agents make on the type(s) of work they perform is influenced by this intersection. Researchers have investigated which conditions contribute to certain types of institutional work (see Garud et al., 2007). For example, studies by Mollering and Müller-Seitz (2018) and Perkmann and Spicer (2007) reveal how agents confront uncertainty and institutional instability through convening. Both studies find that uncertainty is a condition for agent action to emerge and pursue collective maintenance work in order to acquire legitimacy for new practices (Mollering & Müller-Seitz, 2018; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007). Mollering and Müller-Seitz (2018) study examines how these conditions influence

the way institutional work is performed by agents while Perkmann and Spicer (2008) provide one of the earliest attempts to understand how management practices are institutionalized within organisations. Their empirical efforts join institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work, and identify how institutionalization is linked to political, technical, cultural work performed by embedded agents. They define political work as being aimed at the creation of new arrangements of actors and the establishment and reconfiguration of rules (Perkmann & Spicer, 2007). Technical work involves the design of frameworks that recommend or prescribe a particular path for action, while cultural work establishes or reframes beliefs and values by linking practices with more widely established discourses (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007).

Additional work from Taupin (2013) examines how agents perform “justification work” by using moral arguments to support their institutional work. A study from Kasale et al. (2020) also finds that resource constrained environments and limited financial opportunities create a significant dependence by agents on stakeholders who control financial resources. As a result, the motivation from agents to maintain current institutional arrangements in favour of disruption work is much more likely given the need to ensure continued funding support for organisational survival. This supports seminal work by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who note that organisations will undertake mimetic behaviour to gain legitimacy in order to ensure survival.

Further to the importance placed on agent intentionality and various conditions for certain types of institutional work, additional insights are gleaned between “how” institutional work is conducted vis-à-vis the typology of creation, maintenance, and disruption. Accompanying the study from Perkmann and Spicer (2007), research by Cloutier et al. (2016) also propose and define a model with four types of work associated with the implementation of policy reform. This includes “structural, conceptual, operational and relational work” (Cloutier et al., 2016, p. 266).

Additionally, a study by Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) borrows from Perkmann and Spicer's (2007) framework to investigate institutional work in the context of implementation of performance management systems within a developing country. Their typology advances understanding of how public servants respond to institutional pressures by implicating creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions. Others like Symon et al. (2008) expand the categorization of institutional work by adding rhetorical work. Under this type of activity, the authors find that researchers aim to promote the practice of qualitative research as a legitimate form of resistance while simultaneously framing quantitative efforts as illegitimate. In that same study, this type of institutional work is performed to re-configure institutions within the academic setting. In fact, most studies link the type of institutional work to the intended consequences of agency while also acknowledging that reproducing social structure is not the sole outcome. On the other hand, writers like Lawrence and Dover (2015) and Zilber (2009) describe how these intentional actions through local practices are a means to sustain higher-order ideas, including institutional logics. Several studies also provide novel insights into how institutional work can serve as a useful heuristic device to explore tensions between competing institutional logics (see Dahmann & Grosvold, 2017; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Zilber, 2011).

#### *2.4.3 Institutional work and implementation*

The primary research question of this dissertation is concerned with how implementation of results-based management occurs through institutional work. Given the existing gap in understanding the dynamic process by which RBM institutions are created, maintained, and disrupted, this dissertation is also interested in revealing the effects of public servant implementation conduct on institutional RBM features. It does so by exploring the link between the full lifecycle view of institutions without strictly focussing on maintenance. To inform this

question, several studies have responded to growing calls to link institutional work to implementation within the public sector, albeit without a premium on RBM.<sup>17</sup> Advocates of this approach want to demonstrate its utility in generating categories of institutional work based on public servant conduct during implementation. An empirical case study by Breit et al. (2016) deploys the lens of institutional work to examine how implementation of public sector reforms can lead to institutional transformation. In their study, the authors adopt institutional work to highlight the role of agency to influence and respond to institutionally driven reforms. The type of institutional work undertaken includes institutional creation based on development of new front-line practices and skills, as well as institutional maintenance linked to protecting the legitimacy of pursuing a high-level of client service (Breit et al., 2016).

Additional work by Cloutier et al. (2016) also offers a closer inspection of implementation of public sector reforms through the lens of institutional work. Their research builds on policy reform implementation, which details how managers within Québec's healthcare system undertake different forms of institutional work to influence implementation on the ground, despite contradictions they encounter between new top-down policy proposals and existing practices. Further to this, Perner and Skjøelvik's (2018) study also advances institutional work in the implementation of regulations by finding that the implementation process shifts along "waves" from top-down driven institutional change that begin with initial impact, response, recovery, and stability (p. 143). In line with the Cloutier et al. (2016) study, Perner and Skjøelvik's (2018) research underlines the relevance and importance of confronting ambiguity and gaps to implementers from new and existing institutional prescriptions. By acknowledging that shock and ambiguity can lead to unexpected "outcomes, conflicts, and resistance", they find that bottom-up

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<sup>17</sup> See Brodtkin (2013) and Winter (2012).

driven institutional work by implementers is an effort to “adjust the regulation to local settings” and not “a unidirectional process” but rather, a “bidirectional process of actions and counter-actions that move forward until a resolution is reached” (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2018, pp. 138, 151).

By all accounts, institutional work research on the topic of institutional RBM implementation within public sector setting is not prevalent. Given this gap, this dissertation is at the frontier of theoretical and empirical advancement within this subset of implementation literature. However, there are two recent studies by Kasale et al. (2020) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) referenced earlier that help inform the way forward on the research questions for this project. While both studies focus exclusively on implementation of performance management and measurement systems within developing countries, they also provide valuable insights in the gap generated from combining interests on implementation, institutional work and RBM. The study by Kasale et al. (2020) details how institutionally propelled performance management reforms are implemented within national sports organisations (NSOs) in Botswana. They seek input from both the implementers and top-down agents introducing the PM reforms. The authors combine the framework of institutional work and DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) typology of institutional pressures – such as coercive, mimetic, and normative – to identify pressures acting on officials, how and why these officials respond to these organisational forces, and whether these responses lead to the creation, maintenance, and disruption of PM practices. The authors note that individuals respond to institutional pressures around implementation for different reasons. For instance, when coercive pressures exist, officials would perform creation work through advocacy. Advocacy is a type of work activity engaged by individuals to change laws and modify the “nature of the pressures they faced” because officials felt that the NSOs no longer served their interest (Kasale et al., 2020, p. 15). When normative pressures persist, officials responded by ensuring their NSOs

behaved in a professional manner set by the demands and expectations from the Botswana regulatory entity that governs sports organisations. Against normative pressures, officials performed maintenance work through routinization. Routinization consisted of individuals reproducing PM practices with every funding cycle because it was a habit that had “already been adopted and accepted”, which suggests motivations to pursue legitimacy-seeking from others in their social network (Kasale et al., 2020, p. 16). Finally, mimetic forces were the least prevalent pressure found to exist. Nevertheless, officials within NSOs responded to mimetic pressures by replicating practices from other successful sports organisations. However, the authors of the study have little to say on disruption work as they felt the developing country’s “resource constrained environment” presented limited financial opportunities for NSOs (Kasale et al., 2020, p. 16). As a result, maintenance of existing institutional patterns was necessary for individuals to increase their chances of continued funding and organisational survival. Given this institutional reality, officials were not “motivated to perform any disruption work” (Kasale et al., 2020, p. 17).

The second study’s authors adopt an almost identical theoretical and methodological approach that fuses institutional pressures with institutional work to explain implementation of performance measurement systems in developing countries. Though Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal’s (2020) case study centres on the local Indonesian public sector experience, the research provides useful insights into the types of institutional work performed by public servants when faced with top-down driven institutional pressures regarding reforms to performance measurement practices. Their methods identify key institutional pressures acting on implementers, specifically heads of department, and gather qualitative data to explore the types of institutional work pursued by these same agents in response to pressures during implementation. Nevertheless, like the Kasale et al. (2020) study, these authors consider the perspective of top-down agents – in this case the mayor –

in introducing performance measurement changes. The authors borrow Perkmann and Spicer's (2008) typology which concerns political, cultural, and technical work. They find that institutional pressures and institutional work are strongly interrelated since it involves agents with "differing institutional work skills" (Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020, p. 452). They identify maintenance to be the most common type of institutional work performed by heads of departments. However, the authors suggest that department heads responsible for implementation used "various ways to present a façade of compliance" because they viewed performance practices as "unimportant" (Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020, p. 456). In such cases, despite top-down regulative pressures directing all city departments to implement specified performance measurement reforms, heads of departments did not integrate these changes in favour of maintaining the existing PM culture. With creation and disruption, authors examine both the perspective of the mayor in altering the existing institutional arrangement that bears down on the municipality, and the heads of departments that respond to top-down directions. Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) find that the mayor relied on regulative pressures to influence implementation behaviour of city officials. In this sense, the mayor "vested the planning agencies with authority to exclude programmes that were not aligned with the City's strategic plans" and a new performance measurement approach. These powers include exclusion of programs and budget reductions (Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020, p. 457). The authors reveal that heads of department complied with implementation of performance measurement practices in order to avoid sanctions. In terms of disruptive work, the study explicitly looks at the mayor's action and overlooks the heads of department tasked with implementation. Nevertheless, the findings suggest existing performance measurement practices are disrupted largely by the mayor's use of "hierarchical power and power over resources" (Siti-Nabiha &

Jurnali, 2020, p. 462). In this instance, heads of department are viewed as largely passive and as working to maintain existing practices, rather than outright disrupt, or challenge them.

#### 2.4.4 Critique

While insights derived from applying institutional work to implementation are fruitful, they also give rise to a few issues regarding the current literature. First, previous research – such as those from Symon et al. (2008), Taupin, (2013) and Cloutier et al. (2016) – treat institutional work activities and institutional work of creation, maintenance, disruption as conceptually and analytically the same. Though it is the same conceptually, the issue with the analytical conflation is the inability to articulate the fine-grained details of *how* institutional work activities relate to the conventional institutional work typology, and the potential effect agentic conduct can have on institutions.

Second, existing research links intentionality with anticipated institutional outcomes. However, a recent study from Song (2019) sheds light between institutional work and the unintended consequences of purposive action. His work raises the challenge of uncertainty faced by agents that can lead to varied institutional effects. This insight is important for this dissertation's research questions in several ways. It reveals non-isomorphic institutional outcomes from an agentic lens. In doing so, it orients the research question away from predominantly looking for isomorphic outcomes linked to agentic conduct during implementation. This is important given the excessive treatment from studies noted above around direct transfers of institutions, the complex and ongoing adaption to local settings, and the bounded rationality of public servants. Moreover, it also illustrates how institutional work can extend theoretical and empirical efforts beyond the narrow view of institutional reproduction and convergence. Additionally, by orienting the analytical gaze on the "who" and treating institutional outcomes as unpredictable, a whole-of-

institutional lifecycle validates agents as knowledgeable and reflexive, and their resulting actions as rooted in their unique context.

Third, even when existing research addresses some of the shortcomings of overly deterministic and overly voluntaristic approaches, most of it focusses on connecting institutional work with intended effects all the while ignoring the issue of whether agent conduct is successful at shaping institutions, have no effect or have significant but unanticipated effects (Lawrence et al., 2013). In fact, few studies have combined agentic and social action theories to explain how actors implement institutional RBM when faced with uncertainty. While existing research invites researchers to recognize the situated knowledge of agents that enables them to respond to institutional forces, it is also weak in explaining how agents confront uncertainty and the conditions under which agents act or do not act. Research from Sutheewasinnon et al. (2016) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) sheds some light into the agent's role by turning to institutional entrepreneurship; however, both of their studies are concentrated on developing countries and applies more broadly to performance measurement systems in general, which presents challenges for generalizing the findings to Canadian context for two main reasons. On the first point related to challenges, authors such as Mayne (2007) and Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) note both the organisational and technical obstacles, which were briefly discussed in *Chapter Two*. Regarding the second point, the topic of performance measurement narrowly focusses as a tool or instrument of performance management and does not directly link back to results-based management in general. There is marginal research linking institutional work and implementation, and virtually none that link to the subset of results-based management specifically within Canadian federal public sector.

Fourth, there is criticism to be levelled against the literature regarding methodological considerations. Existing approaches rely on retrospective accounts of institutional work and provide limited insight into how cognitive and cultural factors are implicated in the dynamic and constitutive interaction between institutions and agency. As such, this unduly encourages future studies to primarily concentrate on gathering retrospective account of institutional process and the intended effects. This includes works by Dover and Lawrence (2010) and Lawrence et al. (2013) that reveal there are unintended consequences of agent's intentions and limits to the ability to uncover, understand and explain the messy everyday practices of institutional work.

Finally, with regards to institutional pressures, none of the studies explicitly examine cultural-cognitive dimensions. Research that merges institutional forces, implementation, and institutional work from Kasale et al. (2020) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) is promising; however, they are largely concerned with mimetic, regulative, and normative aspects. Very little is presented in terms of the cognitive and cultural frames that permeate and influence agent conduct during implementation. In fact, the two studies overlay regulative and normative as the dominant pressures. This gap challenges researchers to provide a robust accounting of how public servants, as "interpreters of central policy", understand, interpret, and manifest their intentions (Schofield, 2001, p. 251). The dissertation will address this gap by incorporating the cultural-cognitive dimension as a central component of how public servants perceive and react to their environment and this specific institutional pressure. The research from Kasale et al. (2020) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) also does not provide a clear picture of the existing institutional setting for performance measurement. In many ways, both studies neglect to offer an ideal-type performance management frame of reference to assess how institutional work creates, maintains, and disrupts sedimented practices. In light of this, this void in the existing literature directs the dissertation to

develop a robust approach to answering the research question that links to how public servants create, maintain and disrupt institutional RBM through implementation.

## *2.5 Conclusion*

A recap of the analysis of the diverse body of literature gives rise to several important considerations that drive this dissertation. From an institutional theory standpoint, results-based management institutions appear to mostly overwhelm individual agency. Agent behaviour is vulnerable to influences from various operating pressures such as coercive, normative, and regulative, which are designed to compel conformity to institutional RBM features (Kasale et al., 2020; Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020). While some pressures are directly implicated through objective instruments, such as rules and sanctions, others are more cognitive in shaping individual action, namely through mental templates and taken-for-granted assumptions. At the micro-level, individuals are at times aware of macro-level RBM pressures and at other times, they are oblivious to how this weight affects their conduct.

When it comes to the implementation of institutional RBM, the tensions between top-down efforts to control public servants and bottom-up agentic behaviour remains deeply embedded in the literature. The political and administrative centre concentrate on goals to limit deviations from prescribed practices linked to institutional RBM and the evidence from experiences with *Deliverology* reveals the role of elite advocates as allies that energize these systems and structures of power. On the other hand, the implementation landscape concerning RBM appears to defy most treatments of institutions as totalising force that contributes to isomorphic tendencies. This weighs heavily on why this dissertation examines Canadian federal public sector case study. This is because active defiance by implementers to central policy is not the concern but instead, whether uncertainty and ambiguity in the institutional landscape is the primary threat against central

authority expectations on implementation behaviour from public servants. Alternatively, the manifestation of individual agency can fill voids in the implementation terrain and contributes to sustaining the paradox of centralization and increased autonomy for implementing agents. Examples of contradictions from other jurisdictions that tangled with *Deliverology* suggests various tensions in the implementation space as well. These reveal a nuanced, complex, and dynamic interaction between micro behaviour and macro forces. However, the limited research in this domain leaves unique opportunities for this project to gain greater depth of understanding in how implementation behaviour affects wider institutional RBM.

To address this gap, the discussion in the final section on institutional work concerns efforts to understand the implementation perspective of institutional RBM through a holistic view. Here, institutional work emerges to balance overly totalizing perspectives of institutions that privilege their overwhelming effect and the emergence of agentic-turn research that dis-embeds agents from their institutional context. Through this framework, active agency is initiated not only in response to the institutional pressures but also in its absence. Moreover, the premium on purposive behaviour also orients the analytical gaze towards intentional and unintentional effects of implementation conduct by public servants not only to create, but also to maintain and disrupt institutional RBM. Nevertheless, existing research combining all of these elements is marginal and obscures the ability for researchers to gain deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between institution and agency. To build the theoretical and empirical case for pursuing this study and address this acute gap, the next section details the research design for the project, including the methodological choices that will enable answering the primary and sub-research questions on how CRDOs conduct institutional work in response to institutional RBM pressures while they implement the *Results Agenda*.

## Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

### 3.1 Introduction

This dissertation aimed to study and reveal the conduct of agents as they implement the *Results Agenda* as part of the broader Canadian federal public sector results-based management institution. Institutional RBM represents a set of practices, norms and ideas that guide and influence public servant behaviour. While civil service implementers are embedded within this broader RBM context, they are also reflexive and purposeful in their actions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). As such, resulting implementation conduct is both influenced by institutional pressures and agentic behaviour from the dynamic interaction between social agents and instruments. In this regard, institutional work acknowledges that despite the overbearing stress from institutional pressures, public servant conduct can also alter and modify institutions at the macro-level. To this effect, this research was interested in unpacking this dynamic duality between macro-level institutional RBM and micro-level agent conduct and its effects on wider institutional results-based management setting of the Canadian federal public sector.

To achieve the stated aims, the research design and methodological choices are explored below. As a reminder, the research questions are as follow:

- 1) How do public servants implement the *Results Agenda* in response to institutional RBM pressures?
  - a) What are the institutional RBM pressures acting on agents and how do they perceive these?
  - b) What type of institutional work do agents perform in response to institutional pressures?
  - c) What are the implications of institutional work on institutional *Results Agenda*?

The research design harvested qualitative data from primary and secondary sources and utilized interpretive methods to answer these questions. The first part of this chapter explores the suitability of case study approaches for this type of social action research. This is followed by a brief identification and justification of the chosen unit of analysis. Then, the discussion centres on the appropriateness of integrating case study and interpretive approaches to study the phenomena of RBM implementation conduct by senior public servants.

Under the *Methods* section (see page 86), the discussion focusses on two types of evidence sources: objective and subjective. Under objective evidence, internally and externally-generated sources linked to the *Results Agenda* are identified and analysed. These documents represent instruments that bear on the behaviour of individuals as they implement the government's RBM approach. Institutional theory on pressures is borrowed from Scott (2001; 2008) and applied to the instruments to identify institutional pressures such as regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. For the subjective data, both institutional theory on pressure and institutional work is employed to generate insights from semi-structured interviews with executive-level public servants, specifically Chief Results and Delivery Officers, to reveal and validate pressures and the types of institutional work performed. Additional details on the coding scheme is also presented.

The *Data analysis* section (see page 98) explores how these sources of evidence were interpreted based on relevant analytical and theoretical frameworks. It discusses the use of qualitative content analysis (QCA) as an analytical framework to extract and assemble data from the textual materials, and the adaptation of neo-institutional theories that discuss pressures as well as institutional work from previous studies to answer the research questions and achieve the aims of this project.

The final section deliberates on the various limitations encountered with the deployment of this research design. The discussion centers on the challenges faced in the data collection process, specifically those that involved semi-structured interviews, and tactics used to overcome these issues.

## *3.2 Methodology*

### *3.2.1 Case study approach*

The research design was informed by existing approaches within institutional work and results-based management studies. Writers mostly advocate for the suitability of case studies, with some preferring a single-case approach (see Kasale et al., 2020; Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020; Cloutier et al., 2016; Breit et al., 2016) while others adopt a comparative approach (see Song, 2019; van Bochove & Oldenhof, 2020; Perner & Skjølsvik, 2018). In the case of RBM focussed research, Try and Radnor (2007) are a prime example for advancing the use of exploratory case studies. More precisely, the relevance of their technique is applied to point-in-time selection of a case study within the federal government of Canada. Their work offers a strong precedent for comparative research on RBM implementation. According to Yin (2003), case studies are generally preferred because they support an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context”, which is particularly helpful in “. . . research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate” (p. 13; Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 548). According to Try and Radnor (2007), case study approach is a particularly useful strategy when investigating the “how and why”, “when the researchers have little control over events”, and when the “focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 660). By all accounts, the deployment of case study was well suited for gathering rich data, capturing complex processes over time, and identifying relevant agents and events. This was especially relevant in the context

of the answering the primary research question concerning how public servants implement the *Results Agenda* in response to institutional RBM pressures.

Given this, the dissertation's case study focussed on federal public organisations mandated to implement components of the *Results Agenda*, such as the *Policy on Results* (TB, 2016a). However, there were more than 100 public organisations composed of agencies, crown corporations and departments of varying sizes and mandates. Relevant work by Kasale et al. (2020) faced a similar selection issue in their study that looked at national sports organisations. To narrow their sample, they applied a categorization scheme inspired by an existing policy framework developed by the Botswana government for the distributions of resources – such as funding – to NSOs. Drawing inspiration from their approach, this study deferred to the Government of Canada's *Financial Administration Act* (1985) in order to limit the sample size to only include federal departments listed under “Core Public Administration” of *Schedule IV - Part I*. Moreover, since only federal departments are mandated to develop a Departmental Results Framework (DRF) as part of the implementation of the *Results Agenda*, this approach further supported the narrowing of the sample to this group of public organisations (TB, 2016a). Since federal agencies, crown corporations and commissions are not mandated to implement the *Results Agenda*, they were excluded from this study (TB, 2016b). By applying this filter, the sample size was narrowed to 21 departments of different size and mandates (see Annex A). The study by Kasale et al. (2020) also yielded diversity in the NSOs participating in the study. However, since their aim was to study how and why agents within organisation responded to pressures acting on their organisations and not how different NSOs with different capacities dealt with institutional pressures acting on them, this approach was well suited for this dissertation.

### *3.2.2 Agents-in-focus and agents-in-context*

According to Harris et al. (2016), it is important to trace the agents who influence and make decisions around implementation. This begins with the agent-in-focus. Researchers argue agents-in-focus possess three types of property that include: (1) “perceived power or capability in relation to others”, (2) “adequate knowledge of relevant external structures including alternative avenues of possibility”, and (3) “ability to gain requisite reflective distance from their conditions of action” (p. 1181). To help fill the institutional gap in empirical research, seminal work on structuration theory and subsequent elaboration in strong structuration theory by Stones (2005), Jack and Kholeif (2008), Adhikari and Jayasinghe, (2017), Coad et al. (2016) and Elbasha and Wright (2017) also generate insights into agents-in-focus with respect to confronting external pressures, such as institutional forces.

An understanding of implications for agents-in-focus also benefits from including agents-in-context because they are directly and indirectly implicated in the implementation conduct of public servants (Harris et al., 2016). In many ways, the conditions of action for agents-in-focus can be influenced by “networked others” (Adhikari & Jayasinghe, 2017, p. 100). As such, it is useful to put the lens on agents-in-context because they influence the hermeneutic frame of agents-in-focus and their decision-making environment (Stones, 2005). The agents-in-context engage in the socialization process and agents-in-focus act based on the expected feedback from this former group. According to Harris et al. (2016), agents-in-context are the conduits by which agents-in-focus understand expected behaviour. When it concerns implementation, there is also the presence of a dialectic of control from top-down directives and policies; however, it is unclear to what extent agents-in-focus are aware of the expectations from agents-in-context, including the rewards and sanctions that stem from their behaviour. That being said, this study sought to broaden the circle

to include agents-in-context because they enabled opportunities to raise understanding of implementation behaviour. Their involvement was largely as primary authors of the institutional instruments – such as *Results Agenda* implementation documents – they made available and circulated to agents-in-focus.

### *3.2.3 Qualitative and interpretive approaches*

To gather data on social-action research linked to institutional work on RBM, the research design was also informed by current qualitative approaches. In this regard, institutional work studies (see Kasale et al., 2020; Suddaby, 2010; Song, 2019) promote a research strategy that favours interpretive approaches rather than positivist methods since it provides a more robust and fine-grained account of how agents-in-focus interact with institutions, especially when it concerns agency. For this study, agency is defined as the ability of public servants to intentionally pursue interests based on their sense-making of their environment and to have some effect on the social world by altering the rules or the distribution of resources, mobilize resources to transform social structures and operate at different levels of social reality (Battilana, 2006; Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009; Cooney, 2007; Abdelnour et al., 2017). By implicating institutional theories on pressure and work to understand how this dynamic unfolds, it provided significant potential for qualitative research, particularly in the investigation of the interplay between agency and institutions.

An interpretive approach was also helpful because the primary goal was not to produce an objective and singular truth but rather, to generate explanations of how implementers “socially construct and understand the worlds in which they are embedded and the logics they use to navigate those worlds” (Fujii, 2018, p. 74). In many instances, these frames or templates are “partial, conflicting, ambiguous, and contradictory” and the resulting myriad of understandings of the social world leads to “different ways of acting in it” (Fujii, 2018, p. 74). From an epistemological

standpoint, exposing these meanings can help explain and understand why people behave the way they do under certain conditions or circumstances (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). To expand, interpretive approaches propel scholars to recognize that meaning and action (or lack thereof) are inexorably linked, and the task of the researcher is to “notice these differences” and provide an understanding (Fujii, 2018, p. 75).

The second important feature of adopting interpretivist methods is its intimate connection to research questions with a “particular setting... a particular set of actors, ... or with some combinations of those” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 57). This is especially useful for research that draws on archival materials, such as this dissertation, where the choice of artefacts under investigation informs further deliberations on setting, agents, and texts as a means to explore the research question(s) (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). More importantly, in contrast with the controlling nature of positivistic and quantitative traditions, interpretive approaches focus on the “humanity of the research participants” by treating them as “agents in and of their own settings” because the relational characteristics of interaction between researcher and participants considers their “full human-ness and not just as a means to an end” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 59).

Subject to this, the view of public servant implementers and researchers as social constructors of meaning exposes how closely entwined they are in “co-generating data and truth” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 79). According to Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012), the data does not pre-exist outside of the research question(s) and wider project. It is the researcher that reifies and makes visible the data by rendering and making choices around relevant “objects, acts and language” as evidence (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 42). In this sense, the interpretive frame is also one that is incomplete since the focal point for evidence is filtered and linked with the investigator’s research question.

### *3.2.4 Combined case study and interpretive approach to study institutional work of RBM implementation*

For qualitative case studies, Benbasat et al. (1987) suggest that two or more different types of data sources are important so as to collect a “rich set of data surrounding the specific research issue, as well as capturing the contextual complexity” (p. 374). This is achieved in the following ways. First, institutional work studies encourage researchers to explore the under-examined role of material artefacts – such as documents, reports and visuals that serve as the means by which “strategies and designs are represented and communicated” and “become critical to what is understood and implemented” (Lawrence et al., 2013; Thornton et al., 2012; Whittington, 2003, p. 121). Importantly, studies on agency from Battilana and D’Aunno (2009) and Dover and Lawrence (2010) reveal actors engage with material artefacts, tools, and instruments in institutional work. More recent research (Song, 2009; Breit et al., 2016; Kasale et al., 2020) turn to analysing archival documents to study the role material instruments – such as documents, visuals, and guides – play in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions. Second, combined with archival documents, semi-structured interviews are the most common method for qualitative data collection in institutional work. From the institutional work literature, justification for its use mostly focuses on the recall of respondent’s subjective interpretation and how they experience institutions, which helps satisfy the fine-grain details alluded to earlier on page 83 (Dahlman & Grosvold, 2017).

Accordingly, a fair number of qualitative case studies on institutional work (see Kasale et al., 2020; Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020; Breit et al., 2016; Cloutier et al., 2016) blend archival document analysis with interviews. Some institutional work studies focus exclusively on either interviews or archival documents as the sole source for data collection. In the case where interviews are the only source of data, there is a lack of robust consideration around what informs

the selection of respondents, the interview questions and subsequent analysis (van Bochove & Oldenhof, 2020). In situations where the study relies solely on document analysis, such as Song (2019), it ignores the role of subjective agents in carrying out institutional work. However, studies that join these two approaches for data collection pay particular attention in tracing implementing agents in order to guide institutional work researchers in establishing a connection between institutionally propelled practices and implementers.<sup>18</sup>

With the combined use of archival sources and semi-structured interviews, institutional work framework can serve as a sensitizing device to explore when and how these agents-in-focus engage in certain types of institutional work in response to federal institutional results-based management forces. The next section provides details of the methods employed for the study, including the steps for data collection and data analysis that informed the dissertation's findings.

### *3.3 Methods*

#### *3.3.1 Data collection*

For the initial data gathering on institutional RBM pressures, the research identified, reviewed and analysed internally and externally-generated *Results Agenda* instruments that were developed and circulated by agents-in-context. Instruments will be discussed in more detail below; however, within government, the agents-in-context are those with institutionalized power that is vested through formal authority and codified by rules. While power can be a bottom-up phenomenon, in the context of the *Results Agenda*, the analytical lens stressed the tracing of vertical structures of power with a focus on top-down imposition of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pressures on implementers. In this particular case, central agencies such as the

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<sup>18</sup> See Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) and Kasale et al. (2020) specifically for details on their study of combined institutional work, institutional pressures, and implementation of performance measurement systems.

Privy Council Office and Treasury Board Secretariat are responsible for developing the rules, norms and expected behaviour for agents-in-focus tasked with federal public sector *Results Agenda* implementation.

The purpose of this exercise was to discover and unpack how these instruments are used to support *Results Agenda* social order and institutions more broadly through regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. This included, where possible, identification of the various institutional forces that informed and influenced CRDO implementation behaviour. To this extent, archival documents that make explicit reference to the specific concept and practices of *Results Agenda* were analysed. Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) adopted a similar approach in their methodological strategy for studying institutional work and implementation of performance management systems. They reviewed documentary data that specifically touched on performance management systems to be implemented in a local government setting. This comprised of archival sources developed and prepared by agents-in-context. This is important because according to Johnson et al. (2006), for “new actions to be legitimated, they must be locally accepted” (p. 60). Once these actions are “constructed as valid social fact, they are adopted more readily by actors in other local contexts (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 60). From a legitimacy-seeking perspective, agents-in-context confer legitimacy to implementing agents through cultural and political support (Scott, 2001; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992, p. 700). Since PCO and TB stress obligations, compliance to rules, conforming to common frames of reference, and templates as the basis for legitimacy by public servants, they were critical agents in providing a robust picture of the institutional pressures acting on agents-in-focus (Scott, 2001). In addition, this dissertation also examined agents-in-context that operated externally of the federal public sector. Therefore, the instruments developed by institutional agents such Delivery Associates, Performance and Planning Exchange, Institute on

Governance, and Canada2020 were also examined. These agents-in-context and the instruments they produced were especially important in revealing normative forces and cultural-cognitive pressures that shaped public servant perception and behaviour around *Results Agenda* implementation. While the regulative pressure may be weaker in these cases, cultural-cognitive pressure is nevertheless embedded within multiple and complex cultural and social layers, thereby influencing the templates for action for implementing agents (Scott, 2001).

To ensure a robust accounting and analysis of relevant instruments, agents, and instruments, the research looked at internal and externally-generated documents. For both types of sources, a curated list is presented in Table 1 which identifies the different formats used to convey institutional pressures.

**Table 1 - Results Agenda instruments**

Internally-generated instruments	
<i>Directive on Results</i>	The <i>Directive on Results</i> is a formal instrument that “outlines requirements for supporting the implementation of the <i>Policy on Results</i> , including the identification of roles and responsibilities for Canadian federal departmental officials” (TB, 2016c). The instrument performs two functions. First, it is a publicly available document that communicates obligations and accountabilities for the implementation of the <i>Results Agenda</i> . Secondly, the document codifies requirements for public servants tasked with implementation of the <i>Results Agenda</i> .
<i>Policy on Results</i>	The <i>Policy on Results</i> codifies obligations and advances the interests of the centre through designation of new and existing roles, and governance structures. Through the <i>Policy on Results</i> , the central agency sets forth objectives for implementers to pursue.
<i>Addendums:</i> a) <i>Chief Results and Delivery Officer</i> b) <i>Establishing a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee</i> c) <i>Governance, Roles and Responsibilities</i>	Addendums supplements the <i>Policy on Results</i> ; however, they are only made available internally to <i>Results Agenda</i> implementers.
<i>Decks:</i>	Decks are intended to be concise communications products delivered in presentation format. The purpose of decks will vary;

<p>a) <i>Its Approved... Now What?</i>  b) <i>Setting the Stage for Delivering on Results</i>  c) <i>Results and Delivery Canada - Building the Culture and Systems</i>  d) <i>Results and Delivery - Making the Connections</i></p>	<p>however, they often set additional context for target audiences and convey high-level messaging around government policy and direction. Decks can be highly informative because they distill content in a portable and accessible manner to audiences. In the case of the <i>Results Agenda</i>, several decks were developed to inform, educate and guide conduct on the implementation. These instruments act as conduits for institutional pressures and influence implementation efforts to reflect practices, beliefs and preferences of the agents-in-context that produce them.</p>
<p><i>Guidance on Results Agenda</i></p>	<p>The <i>Guidance on Results Agenda</i> provides general context for the aims of the <i>Results Agenda</i>. It also offers details on roles and responsibilities of different agents, specifically CRDOs. As such, they inform behaviour during implementation. The responsibilities for agents-in-focus reflect closely with the content in the <i>Policy on the Results</i>.</p>
<p>Externally-generated instruments</p>	
<p><i>Results and Delivery Manual</i></p>	<p>The <i>Results and Delivery Manual</i> is effectively the most pertinent external instrument attached to the government's <i>Results Agenda</i>. It is a reference document designed to bridge the branded concept of <i>Deliverology</i> into practical and operational terms.</p>
<p><i>Learning event:</i>  a) <i>Delivering Results Across Government</i>  b) <i>The Government of Canada's approach to Results and Delivery: What it all Means</i></p>	<p>Learning events are mostly designed to inform practice. The format includes a panel of mostly practitioners reflecting on their lived experiences with institutional results-based management and <i>Results Agenda</i>. The target audience also includes agents-in-focus.</p>
<p><i>Interview - Matthew Mendelsohn: Results &amp; Delivery in a Digital Context</i></p>	<p>Interviews involve one or more persons and follow a question-and-answer format. Interviews are semi-structured in nature and seek to generate information from the interviewee on the topic of <i>Results Agenda</i>.</p>
<p><i>Speech - The Canadian Government and the Innovation Agenda</i></p>	<p>Speeches are delivered by agents-in-context who present content on the <i>Results Agenda</i> to a captive audience of public servant implementers.</p>

For internally-generated instruments, documents such as *Directive on Results*, *Policy on Results*, and decks published by Canadian federal central agencies were analysed as they are the dominant tools by which institutional *Results Agenda* is communicated to public servants tasked with implementation. Decks are generally short, concise documents often used for presentations

within Canadian federal public sector. Other examples of internally generated instruments include the DRF, Departmental Results Reporting (DRR), Mandate Trackers and GC Infobase.

In addition, reports, guides and manuals on *Deliverology* produced externally of the Canadian government were included. One such example includes the *Results and Delivery Manual* published in 2016 by Delivery Associates. It provides details around key concepts and operationalization of *Deliverology*. Agents-in-context also pursue their interests through institutional pressures using other externally-generated instruments. These vectors of communications are used to socialize expected values, norms and rules about the *Results Agenda* and its features to agents-in-focus. More precisely, they are conduits by which agents-in-context apply regulative and normative pressures on the implementation conduct of agents-in-focus. While these instruments are employed instrumentally by the centre and others, not all relevant agents-in-focus are aware of or consume these same sources. Nevertheless, these externally-generated sources were selected because they often feature agents-in-context from the centre, and occasionally agents-in-focus.

For external pressures, various other instruments were identified. In addition to the *Results and Delivery Manual*, several video sources were also examined. The videos were viewed in full to identify verbatim quotes through an institutional lens and to drive subsequent analysis on the varied institutional RBM forces present during implementation. Interviews, learning events and speeches serve as the primary content of the videos. Interviews involve one or more individuals and generally follow a question-and-answer format. It is a semi-structured interview method which mostly seeks to gather information to flow unidirectionally from the interviewee to the interviewer. Learning events are mostly designed to educate and inform practice. The format includes a panel of mostly public service practitioners reflecting on their experiences with institutional RBM and

*Results Agenda*. The target audience also includes agents-in-focus. The final contributor to institutional pressures by the *Results Agenda* are speeches. In this format, one speaker will present content to a captive audience. The audience is typically a gathering of public servant implementers. The analysis of these sources generated an objective understanding of the institutional pressures from public sector results-based management that bear down on federal public servants tasked with implementing the *Results Agenda*. In that regard, these instruments are not an exhaustive list. However, they are implicated because they directly link or reference the *Results Agenda* through influence from agents-in-context. It is assumed that not all CRDOs consulted these materials as part of their implementation efforts. Instead, the curated list of materials was an attempt to provide the general institutional RBM context that CRDOs are embedded in and confront during implementation. It also informed iterations of questions that were deployed in the subjective interview phase of this study. A similar process is undertaken by Perner and Skjølsvik (2018), Møllering and Müller-Seitz (2018), and Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) to explore implementation of topics unrelated to RBM.

To gather subjective accounts of institutional pressures and identify the institutional work performed in response, the focus turned inwards on the perceptions of the agents-in-focus: Chief Results and Delivery Officers. CRDOs are departmental executives that have a central role in mediating the *Results Agenda* because of their proximity to the concept when it concerns enterprise-level operationalization. Though street-level bureaucrats or working-level implementers are implicated in this process as well, they are largely embedded within specific functional groups and responsible for overseeing implementation of specific components of the *Results Agenda*, including the Departmental Results Framework, Performance Information Profiles or evaluations. On the other hand, CRDOs are generally involved and responsible for

steering the overall implementation of the *Results Agenda* by marrying the various components of this RBM, and engaging with key decision-makers internal to the department, e.g., P MEC, and with senior-level agents-in-context at PCO and TB Secretariat. CRDOs are privy to high-level discussions and can exercise stronger material effect on working-level staff. In this role, CRDOs have access to information otherwise unavailable to working-level staff and can influence and shape implementation behaviour of the latter group.

The data was constructed from the CRDOs perspective through semi-structured interviews. Writers such as van Manen (1990), Seidman (2012), and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) argue that phenomenological interviews can enable a researcher to generate detailed descriptions of respondents' experiences about a phenomenon through open-ended questions about their perceptions and understanding, explore a wide range of factors related to the topic, and pursue connections among those factors. According to Vagle (2014), these descriptions can serve as the basis for reconstructed interpretations of the phenomenon. In light of this, the first step was to identify how CRDOs perceived their institutional environment as embedded implementers within the public sector. This was followed by capturing their knowledge, perceptions and expectations of institutional RBM vis-à-vis their social roles and expected tasks in the implementation of the *Results Agenda* in their respective department. Work from Try and Radnor (2007) on RBM implementation specifically targets executive-level implementers from line departments. They argue these specific agents-in-focus were selected for their "in-depth knowledge of results-based management, their key role in developing and implementing the policy framework, or their practical expertise" in the areas of RBM (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 660). The authors also include agents-in-context as part of their interviews in order to gather "official policy perspectives" from central agencies (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 661). As for line departments, they classify these agents-

in-focus as “officials responsible for RBM” underpinned by a logic that seeks “input and opinion on executives who are directly responsible for implementing results-based management at the departmental-level” (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 661).<sup>19</sup>

To this effect, the study conducted point-in-time, semi-structured and open-ended interviews with individual CRDOs in different departments. Try and Radnor (2007) adopted a similar approach in their discussion on RBM within Canadian federal government because it enabled them to gather insights into the wider historical context related to performance management reform as well as identify implementation issues within specific departments. Considering this, each interview for this dissertation was treated as distinct and separate, and engaged on the experiences, expertise, and knowledge of the CRDOs. However, Try and Radnor (2007) suggest the aim of gathering subjective accounts through interview methods is not to “seek an objective truth, but rather to uncover the breadth of perspective, and refinement of the research topics” (p. 660). In fact, even differences between perspectives can expose the lack of meaningful research on the topic.

### *3.3.2 Identification of the agents-in-focus*

To identify potential CRDO respondents, the Government Electronic Directory Services 2.0 (GEDS) was employed. GEDS 2.0 is a publicly accessible directory of civil servants working across Canadian federal public sector. A keyword search for “Chief Results and Delivery Officer” was conducted; however, only four results that matched this term were returned. The keyword

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<sup>19</sup> Try and Radnor (2007) also include additional agents-in-context as part of their study, which include academics and consultants with experiences in results-based management. The primary motive to include these specific agents rests on the researcher’s desires to incorporate “knowledgeable academic perspective and role that theory plays and to provide a “cross-departmental view” of RBM implementation because agents have worked for numerous departments but also, are “relatively impartial” in admitting what “works and what does not work” (Try & Radnor, 2007, p. 661).

search was broadened to only return outputs with the word “results”. While this yielded dozens of matches, the results also listed non-executive public servants involved in results and delivery functions. Moreover, there were considerable variations in the positional titles of public servants across departments. Some organisations listed executives at the Director-General and Director-level, while others only displayed individuals at the managerial or working-level. As such, based on the directory search, the title of CRDO was not commonly or consistently applied across all departments. Second, no less than 10 departments were listed in the matches. That being said, researchers suggest there are no rules for how many interviews are sufficient because research is considered partial, and the focus of each project should be to contribute understandings to a larger field of study (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Flick, 2017). Finally, there was wide variation on where these agents-in-focus were nested organisationally within individual departments. Some were under a dedicated RDU, others were part of strategic policy groups, data groups or horizontal coordination units. As such, it was a black box on which agents-in-focus were the most relevant for selection in the study.

To better triangulate the CRDO, a snowball sampling method was attempted to reveal executive-level informants. Snowball sampling enables researchers to access potential CRDO respondents through contact information that is provided by other confirmed participants. Frey (2018) defines the method as a way for researchers to “generate a pool of participants for a research study through referrals made by individuals who share a particular characteristic of research interest with the target population” (p. 1532). Snowball sampling turns to respondents to make visible other potential participants for the study. It is the most widely used tactic for qualitative research in the social sciences and especially useful for sampling enrichment through access to new respondents when other contact avenues are unavailable (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling has

also been used in institutional work (see Bartram et al., 2020). Moreover, CRDOs that accepted to be interviewed also served as a proxy for endorsement of the researcher when faced with reluctant participants, which may contribute to increased responses rates. At the end of the interviews, all participating CRDOs were consulted on whether an existing *Results Agenda* community of practice exists and if they were willing to provide a list of equivalent agents-in-focus from this network. None responded with additional contacts by the time the interview data collection phase was completed.

Based on the information available in the GEDS 2.0 search results, a total of 14 public servants were contacted. The interviews were arranged through emails sent directly to CRDOs. An email script was prepared and modified slightly to reflect details relevant to each CRDO. Eight responded from those initially contacted, six participated while the remaining declined.

### *3.3.3 Interview process*

Once dates and times were confirmed, interviews with CRDOs were conducted using open-ended questions and focussed on their perceptions, practices and social interactions specific to instruments and conduct linked to the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Qualitative studies employing interview techniques recommend researchers record the responses, usually in the form of a digital recording (Wengraf, 2001; Hai-Jew, 2015; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Interviews can be conducted in-person or by phone; however, there are trade-offs for each. In-person interviews elicit more thoughtful responses from respondents, are more effective with complex issues and enable greater likelihood of self-generated responses (Sykes & Collins 1988; Shuy, 2002; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Nevertheless, given the uncertainty with COVID-19 and implementation of physical distancing directives, respondents were offered the option of videoconference along with telephone interviews. Though several online video-based platforms were offered to interviewees,

Microsoft Teams was the primary tool selected by participants. Recent studies by Nehls et al. (2015), Deakin and Wakefield (2013), and Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) found several advantages to conducting interviews using videoconferencing including higher comfort-levels for participants and allowing for a richness of data from the ability to pick-up on non-verbal and emotional cues that are similar to in-person interviews. The interview session with CRDOs were recorded using a digital device that captured audio only. Most participants elected to receive the interview questions in advance for several reasons. Some wanted time to reflect and develop their responses prior to the scheduled interviews to ensure effective and impactful session within the allotted timeframe. Others demonstrated risk-aversion and requested the opportunity to “vet” the questions and curate responses based on their comfort level. Despite this, no objections or challenges were received regarding the questions, during and immediately after the sessions. Additionally, participants were informed that research findings would not be used for official government audit or evaluation purposes.

Interview questions were divided under three key themes with a total of five primary question stems. Questions were read out one by one in sequence and then pivoted to the participants for a response after each question. Sub-questions were also tagged under each main question stem. These were mostly designed for in-depth probing of concepts related to the main question. In some cases, the initial response would address sub-questions and as such, no further elaboration was necessary from the CRDOs. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were offered the opportunity to provide any additional comments or follow-up as desired. Most interviews lasted no longer than an hour.

Following the interviews, transcriptions of recordings were completed over a period of several weeks. To ensure transcriptions accurately captured what was discussed, participants were

offered the option of receiving an unedited, transcribed copy of their interview for review. This would give respondents an opportunity to reflect on their responses, elaborate or suggest revisions. No follow-up interviews were required.

#### *3.3.4 Main challenges with the interview method*

Three main challenges arose from deploying a semi-structured interview method. The first concerns videoconferencing. As noted above, interview audio was captured using a digital recording device, with the latter used for transcription, data analysis and eventual publication of selected quotes. Given the visibility of CRDOs in their departments and the limited number of CRDO respondents in this study, there may have been reluctance by some implementers to answer interview questions in an open and transparent manner due to fear of reprisal from agents-in-context and perceived lack of trust. Since this study concerns research with human subjects, it was first necessary to gain permission from the University of Ottawa's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (REB). This process is often required in order for the REB to "assess the ethical acceptability of a research project through consideration of the foreseeable risks, potential benefits and ethical implications of the project" (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018). An informed consent form was prepared and shared with participants seeking their permission for their personal information to be collected during interviews. The interview guide that conforms to the research topic was also made available. Interviews were also transcribed and shared with participants to confirm whether collected data accurately reflected what was communicated during the sessions.

Second, the implementation of the *Results Agenda* is an ongoing process that began in late 2015, therefore, relevant agents-in-focus and historical changes are often best discerned through longitudinal case studies that include a number of different agents (Stones, 2005). However, issues with accessibility of respondents and the desire to publish research finding within a compressed

timeline presented challenges. Because of this, the intention to conduct interviews at one point-in-time was designed to encourage respondents to reflect on their past while striving to identify the outcomes of those decisions based on their recall.

### 3.4 Data analysis

To facilitate the analysis of the collected data, a three-stage process was deployed. The goal of the first stage was to empirically identify the institutional forces and institutional work at play in both the archival material and transcripts. With that in mind, the analytical framework was informed by qualitative approaches that sought to answer the sub-research questions of this study. In order to accomplish this, qualitative content analysis was deployed to drive the data analysis. According to Nair (2018), QCA applies “logical, rule-guided procedures used to analyze the informational content of textual data” (p. 2). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) further define QCA as a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” from sources such as documents and interviews (p. 1278). Coding can be especially practical for mining large amounts of data, and leveraged with content analysis, it can produce a “systematic examination of communicative material” (Mayring, 2004, p. 266).

To extract the relevant data regarding institutional forces, a directed method from QCA was preferred because it provided “predictions about the variables of interest” and helped “determine the initial coding scheme” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281).<sup>20</sup> Directed approach stems from deductive use of existing research to drive the analysis and develop further insights into the phenomenon studied. In the case of revealing institutional *Results Agenda* forces perceived by CRDOs, an anchor label of “institutional pressures” was assigned with regulative, normative

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<sup>20</sup> This is often referred to as concept-driven coding.

and cultural-cognitive categories nested under the label. The analysis then turned to institutional research on pressures for the development of operational definitions for each pressure to empirically study of the text and identify forces acting on CRDO behaviour.<sup>21</sup> Following this review, a set predetermined codes were established under each force to target, identify, and to help organize the codes linked to specific pressure or pressures in the text. According to Bengtsson (2016), these “meaning units” represented by the codes consists of texts broken down to the “smallest unit that contains some of the insights the researcher needs” (p. 11). The central aim for establishing the meaning units was to make “sense of the whole” from large number of texts in order to answer the “questions set out in the aim” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 11). As such, the codes guided what words or phrases to look for in the textual data.

The type of content – such as manifest and latent – to be analysed was also carefully considered in the coding exercise. Manifest analysis generally takes information at face value and is coded based on the presence of the term in the material (Nair, 2018).<sup>22</sup> Latent analysis seeks a deeper level of interpretation with the text to identify “hidden meanings” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 12).<sup>23</sup> Bengtsson (2016) suggests manifest and latent analysis as an either/or approach; however, there was considerable value in adopting both given the nature of this study. For instance, codes linked to seeking out regulative pressures from *Results Agenda* instruments benefitted from manifest level of attention. This included matching and highlighting words such as “compliance”, “requirements”, “obligations”, “rules” in the various documents. The latent level was helpful to identify pressures more closely linked to normative and cultural-cognitive dimensions. This

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<sup>21</sup> Seminal work by Scott (2001, 2008), Kasale et al. (2020), and Bowen (2009) were examined.

<sup>22</sup> Some refer to this as descriptive coding (Gibbs, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Gibbs (2012) suggest this aligns closely with analytical coding. Graneheim et al. (2017) who go into some details regarding the interpretation degree and abstraction level regarding qualitative content analysis.

included seeking and assessing keywords around beliefs or expectations around behaviour and carefully considering the meaning units within the context of the overall text or quotation.

During the coding process, it was discovered that some of the text did not fit the pre-determined codes or could not be defined discretely under a specific category or pressure. Upon re-examination, institutional forces were at times operating simultaneously. As such, these were coded differently in subsequent readings and some of the analysis was re-coded in order to accommodate these new findings. The final list of codes was reviewed once more and amalgamated as necessary. Not all the codes were included in final list, and some were discounted when deemed to be irrelevant to the research question.<sup>24</sup> For instance, for institutional pressures, the initial codes were grouped under their respective pressure consisting of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. New categories were created that represented the stacking of institutional pressures, with theories from institutional writers such as Scott (2001, 2008) and others, providing additional theoretical backing. With this devised coding and analytical framework, multiple readings of the archival documents were performed until no new codes or categories were generated.

In the case of the second sub-research question that concerned types of institutional work performed by CRDOs in response to pressures, the interview transcripts were the primary source document. Like the first sub-research question, directed content analysis was followed and leaned on previous institutional scholarship. The literature helped identify codes for behaviour and instances when it was linked to a specific pressure. First, it was necessary to identify which

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<sup>24</sup> It is not uncommon for researchers to reduce and discard codes as they re-read and re-analyse their data (Alhojailan, 2012). The coding process is iterative and often begins with a broad category (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The data reduction strategy is often necessary to strengthen reliability connecting the data to the theoretical framework employed in the study and arrive at relevant themes supported by the various codes (Alhojailan, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

pressures were perceived by CRDOs, since not all implementers had access to the same Results Agenda materials listed on page 88 and 89. The same analytical framework based on institutional pressures used on archival materials was applied to the transcripts. However, the literature was mostly silent when it came to coding agency whenever institutional forces were perceived as absent, therefore, new codes were created in these instances. Additionally, existing formulations of institutional work rested in the domain of the abstract and this was problematic when trying to develop codes for identifying concrete agentic behaviours found in the text. These works deployed a coding template that sought to directly link concrete activities and behaviour of individuals from observed the data to the highest-level concepts of creation, maintenance, and disruption. However, this tactic lacked a stronger connective tissue between the micro and macro which could have been achieved if researchers included a more detailed understanding of the concrete practices moving to general, and to the abstract. A few recent studies (see Perkman & Spicer, 2008; Cloutier et al., 2016) that operationalized the concept of institutional creation, maintenance and disruption linked to concrete activities proved useful as a starting point to reveal agentic action; however, this too raised challenges when adapting these meaning units to the current study's aims. A problematic issue of strictly depending on the directed method – specifically from relying on previous research for answering this sub-research question – was that the previous coding frameworks were often specific to a study's observational setting and conditions. This made transferability unfeasible since the analysis and coding of subjective materials of this project, specifically the interview transcripts, focused on agents-in-focus perceptions of institutional *Results Agenda* pressures and their descriptions of implementation conduct performed within Canadian federal public sector. While institutional models of work developed by others were useful for the interpretation and validation of some of the responses from CRDOs, adoption of a singular framework did not

adequately fit the contours for this study. Moreover, existing research served as a departure point for coding to identify specific activities linked to implementation; however, it was essential to be open-minded about what might fall outside of these pre-established boundaries defined by other writers. As such, this study favoured an inductive approach that focussed on the opportunity to discover phenomena that might not otherwise fit specific institutional work typologies from past research.

With this in mind, a conventional approach to content analysis was also adopted, especially for the interview transcripts. Some writers consider conventional approaches to be unstructured when compared to directed methods; however, the former's dependence on an inductive process is especially useful when researchers encounter gaps in theory or when the literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, scholars also call on researchers to "avoid preconceived categories" and "allow categories and names for categories to flow from the data" and be grounded from the respondent's experiences (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). By using this inductive process, each of the six transcripts was first read carefully, at random, from start to end, and highlighted keyword and phrases that described behaviour based on the respondent's words. This initial open coding method was designed to create descriptive labels rather than significant interpretation or development of codes (Graham, 1998). While the previous directed approach uncovered institutional norms, perceptions, and rules that bear down on agents-in-focus around expected behaviour and interactions regarding the *Results Agenda* based on theory, special attention was also placed on identification of the salient purposive behaviours and actions by implementers through conventional content analysis.<sup>25</sup> Further readings using open coding enabled the development of

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<sup>25</sup> There are some interesting discussions on adoption of theory of planned behaviour (TPB) for content analysis of theoretically based interview transcripts (see Francis et al., 2010). TPB emphasises a variable-oriented approach

preliminary codes, which were then applied during additional passes of each transcript. According to Bengtsson (2016), development of these “meaning units” produced inductively through open coding “may change as the study progresses” and “as more data become available” (p. 12). Moreover, researchers advocate performing the coding process repeatedly, “starting on different pages of the text each time to increase the stability and reliability” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 12). As a result, a recursive process was adopted where each transcript was re-read at random, re-coded against the previously coded template, with new codes generated whenever text data did not fit the parameters of meaning units. The stopping criterion for the coding process occurred when no new information or codes could be generated from the transcripts, with the focus not on capturing all possible codes but rather, the most salient or important ones from the responses (Weller, et al., 2018; Francis, et al., 2010). The textual data for each of the final code list was re-examined and similar codes were condensed, where possible. Unified with the directed approach to understand what *should* be examined regarding pressures and to some extent, institutional work, the conventional content analysis enabled new insights to emerge and gain fuller understanding of the different and complex agentic activities that unfold under the weight of institutional *Results Agenda*.

The second stage involved axial coding, which consists of reviewing and utilising the researcher’s own judgement to create categories by linking similar codes borne out of the open coding exercise (Graham, 1998). Rosenthal (2018) suggests that coding through content analysis enables “construction of a system of categories” (p. 191). Morse (2008) describes categories as the “what”, which “identify and define groups of codes that share common characteristics in order to

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around behavioural, normative and control beliefs. While useful, this theoretical framework was not utilized in this study because it largely supports achievement of reliability from coding through team-based research rather than independent or single researcher projects.

compare and contrast them with other categories, to divide them into smaller subcategories, or to pool them into broader categories” (p. 727; Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 32). Bengtsson (2016), Nowell et al. (2017), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate the process of coding into categories because it enables the researcher to efficiently summarize key features from a large set of codes by assigning “empirical material” (p. 61).<sup>26</sup> While the categories can represent “explicit” or “inferred” communication, the goal is to “provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” and reduce the textual data without losing its meaning (Bengtsson, 2016; Nair, 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). During this stage, the analysis shifted from direct observations to the more general by finding the best fit for each discrete grouping of institutional work activity and institutional pressure. For categorising types of institutional work activities, axial coding was invaluable when analyzing the transcripts for agentic behaviour to reduce the large amount of textual data from the conventional and open coding process. Though category formation involves reducing the actual observed data, the insights supplied from conventional content analysis is grounded on the respondent’s unique lived experience. This involved making deliberate, interpretive choices on how to define each category of activity based on the data, which involved constructing a specific definition for each type of institutional work activity.

For the creation of categories from institutional pressures, the directed content analysis already provided a reliable and robust template because the meaning units for coding were based on existing literature on institutional forces. Moreover, the three different types of pressures served as a natural taxonomic structure from the coding exercise. Nevertheless, axial coding was also necessary to make sense and condense codes linked to multiple institutional pressures operating at

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<sup>26</sup> Kasale et al. (2020) and Siti-Nabiha and Jurnal (2020) used a similar method in their studies.

once in the institutional *Results Agenda* terrain. The last step from this process of moving from the general to the abstract involved identifying unifying themes running through several categories. According to Graneheim et al. (2017), themes bring “meaning to a recurrent topic or experiences and its various manifestations”, are abstract, and involve a significant amount of interpretation (p. 32). As such, the categories from the coding of the archival material enabled the characterization of the main elements of institutional *Results Agenda*. Subsequent readings interpreted and clustered the pressures thematically under individual institutional element of the *Results Agenda* and the respective regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive, and multiple pressure acting on CRDOs. Additionally, the thematic conversion also interpreted how the different categories of institutional work activities conducted by CRDOs related to the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutional *Results Agenda*. The themes of institutional work were based on definitions drawn from Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Some of the categories were also shared across multiple institutional work categories.

Taking this into account, the final stage bonded the efforts of first and second stage analysis of objective and subjective sources to answer the final sub-research question regarding the implications to *Results Agenda* from insights into how CRDOs exercise agency while embedded within their institutional RBM environment. Specifically, the approach generated insights into how public servants responded through agency (see Kasale et al., 2020; Siti-Nabiha & Jurnal, 2020; Song, 2019). Bengtsson (2016) refers to this as the “compilation phase”, where researchers “attempt to find the essence of the studied phenomenon” by maintaining “objectivity and a neutral perspective during content analysis” (p. 12). To this effect, a narrative approach was deployed for each type of institutional work and used to convey how CRDOs exercised agency to implement and affect *Results Agenda* by revealing the type of institutional work activities they performed

based on the institutional pressures that might bear down on them. To support this, both manifest and latent analysis was re-applied. At the manifest level, the analysis needed to “refer back to the original text” since it enables researchers to “stay closer to the original meanings and context” while latent analysis argues that the researcher’s task is to “immerse” themselves in the data to “identify hidden meanings” and analyse how respondents “make sense of experience and transform experiences into consciousness” based on the quotations selected (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 12). This involved returning to the institutional work literature to review the conceptual definition of creation, maintenance, and disruption, and link CRDOs agentic work activities relate to them. To clarify, institutional work activities are conceptually the same as institutional work of creation, maintenance, and disruption. However, to generate greater insights into the implementation process, the analysis further refines *how* creation, maintenance and disruption occur through agentic conduct linked to implementation of the *Results Agenda*. This approach addresses the challenges outlined in *Chapter Two* concerning research from Symon et al. (2008), Taupin, (2013) and Cloutier et al. (2016), among others. By rolling up these various types of institutional work activities under the broader institutional work typology, it enabled speaking to the insights with greater specificity about the different ways CRDO agency affects institutional *Results Agenda* through implementation. Moreover, this approach also enhances and preserves the methodological utility of combining frameworks on institutional work and institutional theories that focus on pressures. That being said, informant responses did not always identify clear intentions. To aid in this effort, the research adopted a similar approach from a study by Song (2019). The author integrated an interpretive approach by first making sense of the agent’s “manifest intentions” (objectives, goals, etc.) at the time they performed the conduct (Song, 2019, p. 7).<sup>27</sup> In this study,

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<sup>27</sup> In cases where action is not clear, the researcher can engage in a counterfactual exercise to rule out implausible goals of the agent and identify the most likely action related to the conduct (Song, 2019). He draws from methods

the intentions based on the type of work activity were clustered under categories of institutional work and supported with fulsome and verbatim quotes from respondents.<sup>28</sup>

### *3.5 Limitations*

A select number of issues emerged before and during this process that pose some limitations to this study. However, considerable planning was also undertaken to avoid pitfalls often associated with qualitative inquiry, especially when it concerns insights derived from interviews.

#### *Sample size*

One of the key challenges from the data collection was the relatively limited sample size ( $n = 6$ ) from the semi-structured interviews with CRDOs. As noted previously, the study was largely interested in studying the agentic behaviour of executive-level implementers tasked with implementation of the *Results Agenda*. This narrow scope for “who” was to be selected was not arbitrary but informed by a priori considerations linked to the characteristics of the sample size from the wider population of implementers, the nature of the topic, and the interpretivist methodology for this project. First, attention towards CRDOs was oriented by references to the main target group found in the various internally and externally-generated documents noted on pages 88 and 89. Agents-in-context specifically identified CRDOs as key focal points in driving the overall strategy of instantiating the *Results Agenda* across mandated departments. They are assigned and correlated with specific authorities, accountabilities, and expected behaviours by

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used by historians and asks whether the action would have occurred if not for the preceding action and whether the action would have occurred anyway if no institutional pressure existed.

<sup>28</sup> According to Morrow et al. (2005), “An overemphasis on the researcher's interpretations at the cost of participant quotes will leave the reader in doubt as to just where the interpretations came from... the actual words of participants are essential to persuade the reader that the interpretations of the researcher are in fact grounded in the lived experiences of the participants” (p. 256).

agents-in-context. As such, the newly created roles of CRDO offered a unique and unexplored vantage point of implementation when compared to working-level or street-level bureaucrat involvement. Secondly, for this project, the *Results Agenda* is defined as an institutional concept. While this rests in the domain of the abstract, reference to this specific institutional RBM also packages various operational and tactical components and activities carried out under the concept. CRDOs ultimately bear the responsibility for overseeing and marrying these various moving parts. They are also much closer to grappling with higher-level concepts than staff at lower levels of a department's structure. At the working-level, program officials are typically involved in only a select set of areas or activities linked to the *Results Agenda*, e.g., updating DRF, Mandate Letter trackers, and populating PIPs. These activities are largely carried out by each group's functional domain where they manage part of the whole. Working-level staff may interact with different implementers and activities convened under institutional *Results Agenda*; however, they are not identified as responsible for ensuring an enterprise-level implementation of the institutional concept of *Results Agenda*. Finally, by virtue of their hierarchical and positional authorities, CRDOs are intimately engaged with a wide variety of agents within the implementation terrain. They have direct access to key decision-makers within the department, various agents-in-context, and working-level staff. This embeddedness provides a unique viewpoint for gathering rich and textured data regarding the *Results Agenda*. CRDOs are privileged in that they have fuller context of conversations linked to whole-of-government and departmental implementation of RBM but also opportunities to influence it. In effect, access to CRDOs can offer unique insights on key pressures from implementation and their role in steering it. This particular agents-in-focus also has powerful material effect on working-level behaviour as their decisions can sway the types of

activities working-level groups perform, which can include satisfying demands created by CRDOs themselves.

These elements informed the selection of these specific agents-in-focus from the wider population of implementers. At the time of the study, the purposive sampling identified 21 core departments where CRDOs may be selected from. As discussed previously on page 81, the sampling group for which federal organisations to include was based on requirements in the objective instruments prepared by agents-in-context, namely TB and PCO. However, it was important to distinguish between overseeing the implementation of the institutional *Results Agenda* as an integrated practice, and the implementation of a specific component of it, such as the *Policy on Results*. Though CRDOs are not directly identified in the *Policy on Results*, central agencies largely treat them as the keystone for the integrated implementation of *Results Agenda* concepts and practices. Nevertheless, locating CRDOs within each of the 21 departments was hampered by inconsistent use of titles used by different organisations. Attempts to triangulate based on organisational structure was also futile because of variations in how departments organized themselves. Even when agents-in-focus were identified, GEDS 2.0 often had incomplete contact details. Against these challenges, the original sample size was reduced to 14 organisations with potential agents-in-focus occupying the role of CRDO. Contact was initiated with all 14 potential respondents and of those, eight responded. Some requested additional context for the study above what was included in the initial email script requesting participation, which was provided. Some of the initial and subsequent emails to CRDOs went unanswered. Effort was also made to connect with key contacts – such as executive assistants and administrative assistants – to confirm potential respondents and solicit and arrange interviews. These contacts often acted as gatekeepers and triaged information based on level of importance, urgency, and schedules of

agents-in-focus, which further challenged access. Of the eight replies, six agreed to participate while the remaining declined. Confronted with this reality, during the course of the interview, respondents were asked if they could suggest additional CRDOs to consult; however, snowball sampling was rendered ineffective as no further participants were identified by the end of the study. After the unforeseen attrition from the initial sampling group of 21 core departments, the ratio of organisations with identified CRDOs ( $n = 14$ ) and those that ultimately participated in the interviews ( $n = 6$ ) represented a nearly 43 percent response rate.

Though the resulting samples for the semi-structured interviews were purposively selected to support deep case-oriented analysis action research, scholars argue the size of the sample also implicates questions of rigour and credibility of the findings (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Of note, samples in qualitative studies tend to be small; however, there continues to be debate amongst researchers on the question of “how many” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Many of these deliberations within qualitative research is driven by the lack of transparency and justification on sample sizes used across research (Boddy, 2016). While some suggest research concerned with “conceptual developments and empirical investigations” should aim for richness of information and one that sufficiently answers the research question, Morse and Field (1995) argue the central tenets on determining sampling size should be “appropriateness and adequacy” (as cited in O’Reilly & Parker, 2012, p. 192).

With respect to addressing appropriate size, writers argue the aim of sampling should not be concerned with a “fixed number” but rather, on the ability for researchers to gather “new and richly textured understanding of the phenomenon under study” through “sufficient depth of information” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012, p. 195; Vasileiou et al., 2018, p. 149). Gaskell (2000) goes further and advocates for a fulsome and pragmatic approach when pursuing this aim which

includes considering the “nature of the topic” such as complexity and accessibility, resources available, and study design (p. 6). According to a recent publication by Mthuli et al. (2021) examining research that established a priori sample size determination linked to interpretive phenomenological studies using semi-structured interviews, they found the minimum sample number could begin at three (see Dukes, 1984; Morse, 1994; Creswell, 2002; Smith et al., 2009). In light of this, the scope of the present study and the subjects of interest led to 21 core departments from where to source respondents, with only six CRDOs agreeing to the interviews. Nevertheless, the dissertation acknowledges that interviews with additional CRDOs would have been ideal. The one-hour interviews with each agent-in-focus generated nearly 60 pages of singled-lined content for the analysis. This is in addition to the various internally and externally-generated documents that were also analysed. The interview data helped drive the exploratory nature of the research into CRDO *Results Agenda* implementation behaviour within Canadian federal public sector. According to Sandelowski (1995), the value-add of the purposive sampling is not to generalize to larger populations but to gain direct access to “direct and personal knowledge of some event” that individuals “are able to and willing to communicate to others” (p. 180). In that vein, each transcript provided information-rich accounts to answer the research questions. Since the position of CRDO is a relatively new role within federal government, the focus was to gather their individual experiences and compare them to identify meaningful similarities and differences in their perceptions of pressures, and implementation behaviours. The insights gleaned from the data contributed to theoretical development of institutional work, especially with the addition of new typologies for activities linked to institutional creation, maintenance, and disruption.

On the topic of adequacy, reference to saturation is largely tied with evaluating sufficiency of sample size. It is often viewed as the “gold standard” for indicating when researchers have

attained a “point of satisfactory data collection” (Mthuli et al., 2021, p. 2). Like the debates on sample size, saturation too is not immune to various tensions. Some qualify saturation as inappropriate in all cases of qualitative inquiry (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). Others suggest it is the one “we know least about”, while some outright reject the concept (Morse, 2015, p. 587; Nelson, 2017). That being said, Saunders et al. (2018) argue saturation has “differing relevance and a different meaning, depending on the role of theory” (p. 1898). To advance this argument, they differentiate saturation in several different ways, with the hybrid inductive and a priori thematic saturation being the most relevant for this present study. Inductive thematic saturation focusses on prevalence of new codes, categories, and themes borne out of the analysis while a priori saturation concerns the researcher collecting data that represent existing theory (Saunders et al., 2018). The former is based on code saturation, where no additional codes or categories emerge from the analysis while the latter emphasises the representation of pre-determined codes or categories in the data. In this present study looking into institutional pressures, a priori saturation was the standard since codes were informed deductively by existing literature and theory and compared with the textual data in the archival material and interviews for matches. However, inductive thematic saturation was also applied through revelation of new codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the analysis regarding pressures concerning *Results Agenda*. In the case of institutional work, inductive thematic saturation served as a reasonable test of rigour for sample size; however, Weller et al. (2018) suggest that it is not necessary to capture “all the ideas and themes” and instead to look for “important and salient ideas” (p. 13).<sup>29</sup> Francis et al. (2010) further elaborate that this is accomplished with the identification of “views or beliefs that are more frequently mentioned,

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<sup>29</sup> Weller et al. (2018) go as far as to argue that complete saturation “where few or no new ideas are observed is not a useful concept” to justify sample size because it is “sensitive to domain size and the amount of information contributed by each respondent” (p. 13).

independently, by participants, in response to open questions” (p. 1233).<sup>30</sup> Utilizing an inductive approach, sample size adequacy was based on empirical observations of when stabilization of preliminary and final codes occurred, which then led to formation of categories representing the different types of institutional work activities. Here, the emphasis was not only manifest analysis of the codes but also understanding their meaning. This consisted of ongoing and retrospective review and analysis of the data from both archival and transcripts sources.

The above discussion regarding sampling size and saturation is designed to foster increased transparency about the limitations linked to challenges in the recruitment of CRDOs for this qualitative study; however, satisfying trustworthiness, rather than saturation, is the most reasonable aim given the limitations identified. Given the importance of qualitative content analysis employed in this study, the pivot to assessing trustworthiness concerns concepts such as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability to bear (Bengtsson, 2016; Nair, 2018; Graneheim et al., 2017). With respect to credibility, the crucial factor is on selecting participants who have direct knowledge or experience of the phenomenon under study. The study relied on a set of clearly articulated research questions for the purposive sampling of CRDOs tasked with implementation of the *Results Agenda* within Canadian federal government. While effort was taken to expand the sample size to include more than six respondents, the directed and content analysis of both the transcripts and archival material offered significant and rich data points to provide “variation in content and multiplicity” towards the aims of the study (Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 33). The coding effort was also highly iterative and comparative because it relied on both deductive and inductive ways of analysing the vast amount of data to refine, validate, and assemble

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<sup>30</sup> Though useful for this research, the writers also subscribe to a data saturation view of sample sufficiency where shared beliefs are paramount while “idiosyncratic” ones are discarded (Francis et al., 2010, p. 1233). This is problematic for QCA because it dismisses the meaningful insights that can arise from a single respondent.

the codes into relevant categories and eventual themes. The coding process included multiple read throughs, and at random, with the latter focussed on keeping temporal issues linked with QCA at distance. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that there are limits to content analysis, since the highly interpretive nature of the exercise may not capture a “complete understanding of the context, thus failing to identify categories” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280). Research suggests ways to establish credibility on this front can include getting consensus from colleagues (Bengtsson, 2016). However, given the nature of this dissertation as an independent exercise, Bengtsson (2016) argues this “should not be recommended to a novice researcher” (p. 13).

Dependability is synonymous with reliability or stability, which is the extent to which the data “change over time” and the “alterations made in the researcher’s decisions” during the analysis (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 13). Despite best efforts, “human errors are always possible in coding data” because of “fatigue, personal bias, and perception” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 319). This study relied heavily on interpretive techniques and on the researcher’s judgement. In fact, as the familiarity with the data increases due to repeated and close readings of the qualitative data, interpretations of definitions may evolve and undermine reliability (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). This was especially problematic when coding for institutional pressures acting on agents-in-focus. Institutional forces can often be perceived or interpreted differently based on CRDOs. Without direct validation from respondents or other researchers, it is not completely assured that the observation is an accurate interpretation, which can invite deviations during the coding and categorization process. The other challenge with the analysis was to avoid conflation between action and outcome when discussing institutional work. There were ongoing conceptual challenges to ensure the analysis acknowledged that types of work activities do not causally *lead to* but rather *are* the act of creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions.

In order to best ensure research procedures were kept stable, the inspection for institutional forces drew on literature for definitions for each pressure to assemble the preliminary codes. For the interview material, responses were largely nuanced, and the inductive nature of the analysis resulted in building out preliminary codes and refining through subsequent readings. Once the coding template was finalized, the transcripts and documents were analysed multiple times and in different sequence. According to Jensen and Laurie (2017), if the chosen codes does not explain the data, they argue that researchers may need to construct or modify the codes. While one of the advantages of the coding process is that it allows researchers to “closely engage with the actual words and ideas of participants”, researchers warn against “cherry picking the data extracts based on what fits pre-existing assumptions about a topic” (Jensen & Laurie, 2017, 09:53). Instead, they argue that researchers will face “uncertainties, contradictions and unexpected patterns in the data” (Jensen & Laurie, 2017, 09:53). This process was highly iterative to ensure coding and resulting themes were conducted thoroughly and consistently. Finally, a causal logic was maintained to link how agents-in-focus perceive the institutional environment they are nested in and the agentic behaviour they pursued. Given that institutional work is strictly focussed on purposeful behaviour, any passive behaviour was altogether ignored as it did not contribute to the understanding of factors and circumstances of when agency is activated. That being said, deliberate care was taken not to conflate agency with outcome. A conceptual and causal leap was made based on higher-level abstraction to describe the social phenomena at play.<sup>31</sup>

Concerns of transferability are largely focussed on the generalizability of the results of the study to other groups or settings (Bengtsson, 2016). Given the exploratory nature of this qualitative inquiry, including its small-N and case study methodological choices, the claim for generalization

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<sup>31</sup> Mollering and Müller-Seitz (2018) speak of engaging in “creative leaps” in their study as a way to “condense raw data into more abstract researcher-induced categories” (p. 36).

is limited. The insights are based on rich, contextualized data from interviews with CRDOs within specific departments. The analysis and coding of subjective materials focused on the unique perspectives of agents-in-focus regarding institutional *Results Agenda* pressures and their descriptions of the conduct they performed under these conditions. While their lived experiences, perceptions, and skills vary considerably during the implementation of the *Results Agenda*; there were also common categories of institutional work activities that emerged with respect to their agentic conduct. However, similar to categories found in other institutional work studies (see Perkman & Spicer, 2008; Kasale et al., 2020; Cloutier et al., 2016), a prudent approach is necessary if other researchers apply this project's categorical scheme to fit the contours of the coding and thematic groupings to their studies. Instead, the dissertation's findings can add to existing institutional work models and serve as departure point for researchers who pursue deductive and inductive methods to identify specific activities linked to implementation. The timing of the study also presents challenges because it largely narrows the focus of inquiry on CRDO recall of perceptions and behaviour from 2015 onwards, which was when the *Results Agenda* as an RBM concept was first introduced. Therefore, any generalization is largely limited to CRDOs who were tasked with implementing this specific brand of institutional RBM within a federal government context. Despite these limitations, insights from the research can advance the utility of combining theories on institutional pressures and work to drive explanatory studies that examine agentic behaviour concerning implementation of institutional RBM.

In much the same way, confirmability of the findings is limited. Confirmability relates to the "objectivity and neutrality of the data" but also its relationship to trustworthiness (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 13). Others expand on this statement to include confirmability achieved through replicability, and whether the collected data would yield the same results if performed again (Nair,

2018). In post-positivist traditions, especially those with an interpretivist lean, qualitative inquiry does not involve the pursuit of “truth” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 13). Though great methodological care was taken to assemble, iterate, and justify a coding and categorical scheme using inductive and theoretical basis, the task of interpreting and analyzing the data would still be subject to considerable variations between different researchers, especially during latent level deliberations based on the meaning units. Moreover, the inductive process employed in this study sought an open-minded approach about what might fall outside of these pre-established boundaries defined by other writers. As such, the inductive method invariably invites opportunities for other scholars to discover phenomena that might not otherwise fit specific institutional work typologies and activities identified in this dissertation, which diverts from seeking a specific truth and generalization (Rolfe, 2006).

#### *Insights from agents-in-context*

Attempts were also made to include agents-in-context from central agencies, namely PCO and TB, in order to gain first-hand perspective and validation of assumptions surrounding the motivations and intentions for producing the *Results Agenda* institutional instruments. However, no responses were received by the time interviews were held. As such, discussion of agents-in-context in the context of this study is largely informed by perceptions from CRDOs and limited to interpretive analysis performed by the researchers on internally-generated objective instruments, such as the *Directive, Policy on Results* and addendums, to name a few.

#### *Interviewee obligations to truth*

There was a strong risk-aversion element that emerged. Despite assurances around anonymity and transcript vetting privileges, some agents-in-focus declined to participate, even when interview questions were circulated in advance of the session. Some declined to participate

because they felt they were not the appropriate agents-in-focus to speak about *Results Agenda* implementation, despite serving as the incumbents for the role of CRDO. Others alluded to perceived risks where participation in the study may undermine their working relationship with agents-in-context.

Against this backdrop, interviewees had no obligations to report the truth. The interview questions required individuals to be reflexive of their lived experiences when developing a response. At times, sensitivities around the topic or questions can generate discomfort or apprehension for interviewees when choosing to disclose a fulsome or accurate accounting of their experiences and beliefs (Larson, 2019; Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Although the threshold for sensitivity will vary between individuals, researchers suggest this may invite social desirability bias since respondents may want to appear better to the interviewer (Carian & Hill, 2021; Nederhof, 1985). Subscription to the truth can be further undermined if agents-in-focus feel compelled to present themselves in a more positive light to the interviewer. In this project, there were no pre-existing relationships with the interviewees before the sessions, which if there had been, might have incentivized respondents to be forthright and more open in their answers. Additionally, despite the reflexive nature of the exercise, there can also be cognitive limitations on memory. The respondents were asked to recall past and present implementation behaviour, which may not always be remembered accurately or in its entirety.

### *Pandemic*

Circumstances from the pandemic required maintenance of social distancing practices. As a result, all interviews were conducted virtually, which presented some limitations not otherwise present when held in-person. For instance, one session had some minor audio distortion while

another experienced lags with internet connections that required repeating questions which disrupted the flow of the discussion.

To address concerns around risk-averse mentality of respondents, each CRDO was presented with the opportunity to wield greater editorial control over the content found in the verbatim transcripts. The transcripts from the audio recordings were shared with respective participants so they could review, validate, and identify any concerns with the transcribed versions. CRDOs could modify or eliminate part of, or entire responses if they felt it addressed their concerns.

Given the perceived risks associated with interviewing, a premium was placed on reminding respondents of their right to withdraw consent at any time. According to Fielding et al. (2017), the ability to withdraw is a central feature of informed consent. Though agents-in-focus signed and returned the consent forms, they were also assured that consent would be ongoing and extend beyond the interview sessions. This permitted CRDOs to feel more in control of the interview process and the collected data.

### *3.6 Conclusion*

The study of executive-level public servant implementer behaviour, namely CRDOs, during the implementation of institutional *Results Agenda* presents an opportunity to discover new insights into social action research. The research design was carefully considered and selected to enable the detection and description of this social phenomena. The extant literature from institutional theory on pressures and institutional work guided the methodological choices around qualitative approaches. As noted extensively in the current chapter, studies informed by qualitative research support the combination of both empirical and interpretive methods to study how agents of interest perceive their institutional environment and configure their actions in response.

Since this dissertation is interested in the varied implementation efforts of CRDOs within the federal public sector context, a case study method is uniquely suited for the parametrization of social action within defined space and time. While the research is framed by theoretical considerations from *Chapter Two*, the exploratory nature of case studies enabled concentrating attention to a specific cluster of departments mandated to implement the *Results Agenda*. To support this effort, the research design further refined the unit of analysis to gather details directly from agents-in-focus and carefully considers networked others such as agents-in-context who operate within the institutional arena where implementation occurs.

Through archival documents and semi-structured interviews with CRDOs, the data collection facilitated the construction of rich empirical and interpretive data. Moreover, the interpretive component drove the analysis of both objective and subjective sources. With the deployment of a three-stage approach, the in-depth QCA revealed and validated institutional forces that are present, and how agents-in-focus reacted and undertook institutional work in response. Surprisingly, the utility of this approach also revealed instances where agency manifested even in the absences of causal triggers, such as those from institutional forces. Though empirical evidence is key to building the institutional RBM framework under which CRDOs are nested in during implementation, the analytical method adopted also acknowledged the sociological dimension to generate insights from the social construction activities of implementers.

In sum, despite undertaking a robust review and deployment of the research design, limitations were encountered that are not uncommon to qualitative and interpretive studies. Efforts were made during the data collection phase to address and enabled gathering of rich data on CRDOs as they implemented institutional *Results Agenda*. Building on this, the following chapter examines and discusses the data in detail to derive insights into the institutional environment of

*Results Agenda* and the institutional work carried out by executive-level public servant implementers.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis – Institutional context

*“Without institution there is no management. But without management there is no institution.”*

Peter Drucker (1986, p. 3)

### 4.1 Introduction

Drucker believed that institutions and management are a duality. He argued that management – especially within public service – is supported through institutions. However, for institutions to be effective, there must be intervention to shape and stabilize preferences to for a desired institutional pattern. In this sense, interventions through management can safeguard institutions in order for the latter to fortify the former. In such a case, institutions are the results of interventions by individuals that favour a specific design for social behaviour. These patterns are usually composed of stable preferences, enduring ideas, and persist in the actions of individuals. Importantly though, for ideas and practices to prevail as a bounded set within a particular environment, they must be communicated and conveyed to individuals. When looking at institutional results-based management, recall the set of features that permeate across many different public sector jurisdictions and contexts. The mechanism of transfer for this bundled set of RBM practices advances the important role instruments have in instantiating institutional patterns within public sector organisations.

As noted in *Chapter Two*, instruments are tools by which to convey rules, prescriptions, and cognitive representations by one agent to another. Instruments are also designed to influence behaviour; however, the way they are used and the effect they have on conduct vary. It was also mentioned that instruments are not neutral devices as they are infused with power. This suggests that instruments can serve as modes of power for those attempting to shape ideas and actions of

others. This was observed in Bezes' (2007) study on administrative reform implementation in France.

Against this backdrop, this chapter is concerned with answering the research question looking at what institutional RBM pressures are acting on public servants through various instruments. Above that, the analysis examined how instruments operate as vehicles for the transmission and establishment of *Results Agenda* within federal public sector organisations. Table 1 (see pages 88 and 89) in *Chapter Three* identified a curated list of materials used in this analysis. An analysis was performed on these instruments because they directly implicate *Results Agenda* ideas and practices. The analysis was steered by two main objectives. First, it concentrated on the application of a neo-institutionalist lens to identify and explain regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures that manifest from the instruments. This was designed to uncover and build a robust understanding of the implementation terrain facing CRDOs. The second aim was to pull on this analysis and construct the institutional pattern of the *Results Agenda* within Canadian federal public sector.

Looking back on the quote from Alice at the start of the dissertation suggests the central character is embedded in an environment created and defined by Carrol. This represents Alice's terrain of conduct. Carrol constrains and dictates the range of action for Alice. In this vein, a review of the analysis revealed that agents-in-context, such as the political and administrative centres, and those external to federal public sector, use regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures via instruments to propel their desires and objectives regarding *Results Agenda* implementation. The analysis exposed manifestation of various top-down forces linked to specific instruments. To facilitate the discussion of instruments under each pressure, Table 2 below provides a list of definitions from the instruments inventoried previously in Table 1.

**Table 2 - Institutional areas and implementers affected by institutional pressures**

Title	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-cognitive	Affected implementers
<i>Directive on Results</i>	Increased centralization, roles and responsibilities, routines, reporting, interaction, temporal, and rules	None applicable	None applicable	DM, HoPM, HoE, CHRO, CIO, PMEC, Program officials
<i>Policy on Results</i>	Increased centralization, routines, and temporal	None applicable	None applicable	President of TB, Ministers, DM
<i>Addendums</i>	Increased centralization, roles and responsibilities, and interaction	Roles and responsibilities	None applicable	CRDO, DM, HoPM, HoE, CHRO, CIO, PMEC, Program officials
<i>Deck</i>	Increased centralization, reporting, interaction, and temporal	Roles and responsibilities, competencies, and culture	Experiences, and interactions	CRDO, President of TB, Ministers, DM, HoPM, HoE, PMEC, Program officials, CIO, ARC
<i>Guidance on Results Agenda</i>	Increased centralization, and reporting	Roles and responsibilities	None applicable	CRDO, HoPM, HoE, CIO, PMEC, Program officials
<i>Results and Delivery Manual</i>	Increased centralization, and rules	Preferred implementation method, roles and responsibilities, competencies, and culture	None applicable	CRDO, Minister's exempt staff, DM, Data lead, Program officials
<i>Learning event</i>	Increased centralization, and reporting	Preferred implementation method, competencies, and culture	Skills and expertise, and reporting	Not specified
<i>Interview</i>	None applicable	Culture	Skills and expertise	Not specified
<i>Speech</i>	None applicable	Culture	None applicable	Not specified

## *4.2 Institutional pressures at play*

Earlier, it was noted that a number of the instruments were selected in order to reveal the various pressures exerted by agents-in-context on CRDOs during implementation of the *Results Agenda*. The findings that were generated from this analysis of the instruments are weaved under each of the respective pressures, namely regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. The adoption of this layout enables to better characterize the strength of each pressure vis-à-vis the implementers and expose how these instruments compound to influence CRDO behaviour.

### *4.2.1 Regulative pressures*

#### *i) The centre grows stronger by the day*

One of the key themes from the review of the results-based management literature is the increased interest in centralization by the political and administrative centre. As Aucoin (2012), Esselment et al. (2017) and others have noted, increased scrutiny by the public and adoption of the maxim of “letting managers manage” has resulted in greater attention and concern by the centre to intervene in and control public sector activities (Vakurri, 2010, p. 999). A review of the instruments exposes desire and effort by agents-in-context to increase concentration of powers with the implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

The top-down pressure spotlights the strength of the administrative centre and their increased engagement with public servants as they implement. Both central agencies have expanded the scope of roles related to centre oversight. This is expressed in several areas. First, PCO assumes responsibilities for orienting public sector attention towards four to six top order priorities for each department (2016). It is important to remember that PCO sits at the juncture of the interaction between the political and civil service. The centre is the channel by which decisions flow out of cabinet committees such as the *Cabinet Committee on Agenda, Results and*

*Communications* (ARC). ARC is a cabinet committee responsible for agenda setting, tracking results on government priorities, and communicating government-wide messages (PCO, 2016). As such, PCO is conferred with privileges to dictate how the public service should build systems that target a narrow set of government priorities. Second, TB and PCO are the focal points for directing how interactions should occur between the civil service and the political realm. Agents-in-context set the “frames, rules and approvals” for accountability and resource allocation, which creates significant regulative pressure on departmental agents-in-focus to obey (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). The centres direct CRDOs to “respect the policies put in place to support that accountability” (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). On the other hand, a dichotomous set of responsibilities also exist between the centres. PCO believes its primary role is to drive the narrative on priorities. Alternatively, TB leads the development and implementation of management oversight policies. Together, the central agencies align to foster interactions between senior officials within departments and the political realm that based on an outcomes-based model of RBM. In effect, the central agencies view themselves as the primary drivers of structural and cultural change for the *Results Agenda*, which concentrates central agency power.

An analysis of the *Policy on Results* suggests Treasury Board also leverages regulative institutional pressure to concentrate administrative powers and influence agent-in-focus conduct with regards to implementation of the *Results Agenda*. For instance, the central agency has the statutory mandate to develop and enforce corporate government-wide policies, which includes results-based management practices (TB, 2018). Equally, the *Directive* explicitly regulates public servant behaviour by dictating rules to agents-in-focus.<sup>32</sup> It is an objective document that sets out

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<sup>32</sup> The Government of Canada does not define the concept of a directive. However, a review of various government directive statements employ common keywords to narrow the concept which includes “expectations”, “requirements”, “obligations” and “compliance”. Consequently, a turn to the academic literature suggests directives are primarily interpreted as a regulative instrument and entrench a coercive dimension in their use.

requirements to CRDOs and obligates them to fulfill. This codified instrument influences implementation behaviour by defining expected structures, norms, practices, and interactions in relation during implementation. In this context, the *Directive* can be categorized as a control system from the centre designed to set boundaries on conduct through coercive measures. That being said, even though the *Directive* is employed instrumentally by TB to pursue their goals for public sector management, sanctions are implied and not explicit. It is a means by which central administrative power is exercised formally to maximize and achieve the interests of top-down agents-in-context.

The expectations from the centre on governing relationships also places additional demands on public servants through regulative pressure. The *Directive* is explicit in establishing the institutional authority of the central agency – namely Treasury Board – over agents-in-focus and departments with regards to implementation. Institutionally, TB possesses authority to exercise a challenge function in the area of departmental expenditure management (Savoie, 1999). While the inclusion of performance information is embedded as a crucial oversight criterion for expenditure management decisions by the centre, the *Directive* formally nests this institutional authority to demand report performance data under the *Results Agenda* by expanding the scope of scrutiny by TB (McGeough, 2014; Njonde & Kimanzi, 2014; Jimenez, 2014). These formal powers direct public servants to adhere to TB demands by ensuring that the central agency receives performance information, “as requested” through submission of annual departmental evaluation plans, evaluation reports and summaries (TB, 2016c). In sum, the power to compel agents-in-focus to comply is totalizing. This statement reinforces a strengthened administrative centre through the codification of institutional oversight functions linked to the *Results Agenda*. While sanctions are not explicitly conveyed, the institutional pressure induces agents-in-focus to adhere to governance

oversight dictated by the centre. In doing so, there is strong regulative pressure on individuals towards compliance.

Likewise, Treasury Board introduced and bolstered new and existing tools of accountability to strengthen their scrutiny powers. The deck, *Results and Delivery - Making the Connections*, serves as a regulative instrument to remind public servants to adhere to the *Policy on Results* and Cabinet products, such as Memorandum to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions. The last two products are tools of the centre and designed to seek policy and funding authorities, respectively. While these instruments pre-exist the *Results Agenda*, the central agency combines these tools with the introduction of Results and Delivery Charters (hereafter referred to as Delivery Charters). The Delivery Charters “outline the Top Government-Wide Priorities and how progress on them will be measured” (TB, 2017). They also detail the contribution of individual departments to each priority. In addition, the *Guidance on Results Agenda* specifies Mandate Letters which “set out the Prime Minister’s individual ministers’ commitments” and “reflect a combination of the [sic] measurable results and milestones” (TB, 2017, p. 4). TB’s *Guidance on Results Agenda* instrument obligates CRDOs to align these various tools and submit them for additional audit by the centre. By surfacing these connections between these tools and agents-in-context, CRDOs experience additional institutional weight to fulfill obligations as part of their implementation efforts. Furthermore, this deliberate emphasis in the *Policy on Results*, the deck, and the *Guidance on Results Agenda* instruments gesture to public servants that centres are increasingly relying on the machinery of government to compel departments to contribute to top-government wide priorities.

Additionally, the push for greater centralization is expressed in a regulative manner through new performance reporting practices linked to the *Results Agenda*, which invites further oversight

by the centre. As previously noted in *Chapter Two*, results-based management obsesses over performance data. Treasury Board insists on this facet of *Results Agenda* when they implicate GC Infobase to report on “top-drawer results and priorities” to the Canadian public (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). GC Infobase is a repository of performance data that can answer “almost any question one may have about how government spends and where they spend” (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). TB views the introduction of GC Infobase as a principal driver of departmental reporting, which underscores greater public scrutiny on departmental performance through internal and external accountability. More than that, the central agency stresses “they (TBS) will be paying close attention to” this system by working closely with PCO, implying coordinated pressure from both agencies (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). This forces agents-in-focus to cooperate with the central agencies and “work through some of the systems and process challenges” (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016).

The pressure towards increased centralization by the administrative and political centre is further enhanced by obligations on CRDOs to “participate in Results Table” committees (TB, 2016d). These committees convene executive-level public servants from various departments, as well as political and central agency staff. The Results Table committee is where the centres undertake whole-of-government scrutiny on performance. Since Treasury Board carries formal authorities to perform a challenge function against department officials with regards to performance, it creates a regulative burden on CRDOs to comply.<sup>33</sup> Though TB casts these meetings as opportunities for CRDOs to “champion and advise on the results and delivery agenda”, agents-in-focus are nonetheless under heavy political and central agency scrutiny to “report on

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<sup>33</sup> Central agencies by design perform a challenge function to assess compliance against departmental policy in areas such as expenditure management, program performance, human resources, and information technology.

their department’s progress on achieving the Government’s priorities and other key commitments” (TB, 2016d).

Finally, the *Results and Delivery Manual* also intensifies the concentration of power at the centre by external agents-in-context. For instance, the Delivery Associates developed the manual in consultation with the Privy Council Office’s Results and Delivery Unit. Since PCO is a leading agent-in-context for the *Results Agenda* within the Canadian federal public sector, the manual serves to advance the centre’s interest for the implementation of a uniquely federally-branded institutional RBM. Given the involvement of the PCO in inputting their perspective for the manual, the instrument seemingly propels expectations as coming from the central agency. In effect, there is a tenuous but visible link between the centre and the manual that adds regulative weight on CRDOs to adhere to its instructions.

#### 4.2.1.1 *Obligations*

##### *i) Do what I ask, and no harm will befall*

When it concerns responsibilities, a deeper dive into the various instruments reveal insights into how they regulate professional roles. The analysis of the *Directive* found it creates and bounds implementers to new roles – such as Heads of Performance Measurement (HoPM) and Head of Evaluation (HoE), program officials, departmental Chief Financial Officers (CFO), Chief Information Officers (CIO), and Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) – linked to being members of the Performance Measurement and Evaluations Committee (PMEC). The *Directive* specifies PMEC needs to provide review and advisory functions for the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Functions include the “establishment, implementation and maintenance of the Departmental Results Framework and Program Inventory with its related Performance Information Profiles”, which are key departmental reporting instruments introduced under the *Results Agenda*

(TB, 2016c). That being said, scholars suggest that regulative pressures also grant certain agents with new powers (Scott, 2001). In this sense, PMEC members are empowered with special privileges to shape and influence senior-level bureaucrat decisions on implementation, which are absent at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy. In doing so, PMEC members have greater visibility and access to decision-makers to shape *Results Agenda* implementation.

On the one hand, the regulative dimension from the *Directive* reveals its overwhelming reach on how individuals are expected to behave in their roles. It is glaringly represented in the assignment of responsibilities and governance relationship dictated by the administrative centre. Responsibilities for implementers include “ensuring”, “reporting”, “demonstrating”, “supporting”, “following”, “obtaining”, and “submitting to” Treasury Board vis-à-vis key accountability functions (TB, 2016c). For some public servants, responsibilities are tagged to specific instruments linked to the *Results Agenda*. For example, HoPM is directed to ensure that “Performance Information Profiles (PIPs) exist and are being implemented for each program” (TB, 2016c). HoE is directed to support verification efforts to ensure that “plans for performance information and evaluations are sufficient and that information on past evaluations is accurately represented and balanced” for each MoC and Treasury Board submissions. Alternatively, CIOs are directed to “ensure that the department has the necessary information technology applications and tools to support the timely collection and use of quality performance data by departments” (TB, 2016c). The articulation of these responsibilities that are tagged to specific roles reflect sustained scrutiny emanating from external pressures by agents-in-context.

The previous section elaborates on regulative forces exerted on implementers of results-based management practices. It offers insights into how instruments dynamically inform implementation conduct based on key institutional pressures linked to the *Results Agenda*.

However, there is no direct reference to implications on Chief Results and Delivery Officers within these instruments, who are the subject of this study. Though in practice these instruments implicate CRDOs, agents-in-context nonetheless developed the *Policy on Results - Chief Results and Delivery Officer* addendum to directly attribute responsibilities to CRDOs for the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Treasury Board identifies CRDO's as having a "key role" in supporting the implementation of the *Policy on Results* (TB, 2016d). More specifically, they are accountable for how government results are "tracked and delivered" by serving as the "key contact point" within the departments and the Privy Council Office's RDU (TB, 2016d). Institutionally, these instruments harden CRDO implementation practices to align with wider "commitments set out in the government's *Results Agenda*" (TB, 2016d).

*ii) Rinse and repeat*

The establishment of routines is a dominant regulative call to action under the *Results Agenda*. Treasury Board's *Policy on Results - Chief Results and Delivery Officer* instrument exerts strong institutional pressure on CRDOs to establish routine processes to report on departmental performance and identify progress towards fulfillment of government priorities. The instrument codifies into practice the requirement to "identify top departmental priorities, ensure a delivery plan, measurement strategy and reporting structure" (TB, 2016d). These responsibilities are directly tied to meeting routinization of internal performance reporting and satisfying the needs of the political cadre on government commitments.

PCO is equally preoccupied with efforts to ingrain routine behaviour as part of the *Results Agenda*. For PCO, an enduring and predictable practice associated with the *Results Agenda* is for CRDOs to set clear objectives, sustain their attention on performance, and devote effort towards collecting evidence. These areas of focus are reinforced through regulative approaches that

promote routine behaviour on governance and RBM activities. For instance, in *Chapter Two*, it was discussed how performance measurement systems are intimately tied to institutional RBM trends aimed at improving transparency and accountability of government (de Lancer Julnes, 2006). The *Results Agenda* builds on these core RBM values by committing to regularly assessing and sharing departmental performance with stakeholders outside government, including the Canadian public. As such, visibility on performance now extends scrutiny of departmental performance beyond internal government agents as external stakeholders now comprise part of this new RBM regime. Moreover, as part of this commitment, PCO mandates departments to routinely update performance information on the *Canada.ca/results* website, which publicly tracks progress on individual Mandate Letter commitments (PCO, 2018). The government also committed to enhancing its open data principles. In light of these developments, PCO deployed a centralized system to report performance data through its online portal, GC InfoBase. This repository of data compiles and make accessible performance information from across federal public sector (TB, 2021). These routine performance disclosures and updates are designed to enhance transparency and accountability; however, they also embed significant regulative pressure on CRDOs to comply with increased reporting burdens.

*iii) Report and be managed*

Reporting is a critical fixture of results-based management and this emphasis continues under the *Results Agenda* institutional regime. Administrative agents-in-context – chiefly Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office – broadcast their own preferences and decisions to the civil service while also serving as proxies that convey expectations from the political executive such as the Prime Minister’s Office and Cabinet on government commitments. Compliance to political demands is tied to the legitimate role of public servants as faithful implementors of the

government's electoral mandate.<sup>34</sup> Under the banner of institutional RBM, commitments enter the public domain through government announcements and are laid bare for public scrutiny by Canadians, Parliament, and other external agents of the public sector. As such, an analysis of the *Guidance on Results Agenda* instrument embeds two new components borne out of the *Results Agenda*: the Delivery Charters and Mandate Letters. These two components apply downward regulative force on CRDOs for reporting through governance mechanisms. While departmental contribution can be found in other *Results Agenda* tools – such as the DRF, Performance Information Profiles and Cabinet documents – the Delivery Charters invite even closer scrutiny from the centre. It is a tool designed to compel agents-in-focus to codify their performance expectations and report against government priorities while the Mandate Letters are accessible to the public and are designed to increase transparency and accountability of Minister's and the government on their progress towards top priorities. These commitments are directly reflected in the fixtures of the *Results Agenda* and linked to a department's DRF and PIP. Further to this, departmental officials, such as CRDOs, are obligated to report on progress to central agencies and Cabinet through regular high-level briefings with the Prime Minister's Office, Ministers, and senior executives at both central agencies. These "Stock-takes" serve as political-level inspection of departmental progress against key government objectives (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). Agents-in-focus are obligated to participate and engage with their portfolio Minister and the PMO during this process of reporting scrutiny by the political cadre.

Continuing with this theme, PCO's *Results and Delivery Canada - Building the Culture and Systems* instrument retains a premium on governance and increased oversight when it concerns reporting. It exposes regulative pressure based on scrutiny and codification of obligations imposed

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<sup>34</sup> There is extensive research on the topic of public-administration dichotomy within public management from scholars like Overeem (2005), Rosenbloom (2008), and Tahmasebi and Musavi (2011).

by top-down agents-in-context. For instance, ARC meetings engender significant political scrutiny on CRDO regarding departmental performance. PCO expects CRDOs – as executive-level public servants – to sediment values and obligations linked to repetitive reporting engagement with this political executive committee (PCO, 2016). The effect of this obligation is to institutionalize *Results Agenda* as an enduring, predictable, and stable feature of *Results Agenda* within federal public sector.

In the course of the analysis, the relationship between political and administrative agents-in-context is revealed to act as a conduit for the transfer of regulative legitimacy. PCO's RDU track commitments tagged to individual Ministers through newly established Mandate Letters. As noted previously, Mandate Letters are addressed to individual Cabinet Ministers and serve as highly visible public instruments of accountability. It binds Ministers to specific portfolio commitments and priorities set out by PMO. Fundamentally though, civil service is responsible to fulfill these promises. From a public accountability lens, the Mandate Letters directly implicate the Ministers and the government in power; however, PCO and TB translate these demands as accountabilities for agents-in-focus through the DRF, Mandate Trackers, Treasury Board submissions and other instruments of the *Results Agenda*. This dynamic transfer of legitimate authority from the political to the administrative centre imposes formal accountabilities on CRDOs. Therefore, it compels agents-in-focus to place disproportionate and sustained attention on reporting and implementation activities that satisfies achievement of Mandate Letter commitments.

The deck titled *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?* also prioritizes reporting through regulative pressures. The instrument is prepared by the Program Performance and Evaluation Division in the Expenditure Management Sector (EMS) of Treasury Board. The EMS

unit is largely responsible for financial oversight functions, with a special focus on implementing government initiatives, programs, and policies. The deck underlines key elements of the *Results Agenda* by combining performance reporting with routines, which was surfaced in an earlier section of this current chapter. However, the deck also signals a higher reporting burden on CRDOs by requiring them to adhere to rigid structures and content requirements for the DRF. Effectively, regulative forces prevail against CRDOs as they are mandated to comply with TB requirements under the *Financial Administration Act*. In fact, CRDOs are obligated to structure and report their performance against Core Responsibilities, which originates from statutory requirements and requires them to consider the department's "guiding legislation, mandate and mission" (TB, 2016a). Moreover, in the learning event series – *Government of Canada's approach to Results and Delivery: What it all Means* – central agencies endlessly refer to building an ecosystem that encourages upfront consideration of a limited number of government priorities (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). They accentuate outcomes-focussed approaches when reporting to Canadians and reinforce the linking of operational elements and activities to departmental Core Responsibilities and programs. From a regulative standpoint, CRDOs are obligated to orient departmental attention towards implementation of this practice as a core element of the *Results Agenda*.

*iv) Setting the terms of engagement*

The obligation to interact with the centres is another key institutional feature propelled by regulative forces. In fact, requirements to engage appear regularly in the instruments. For instance, the *Directive* codifies how public servants are expected to behave when they engage with others during the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. PMEC is responsible to review, advise, and provide recommendations to Deputy Heads for approval while the HoE is required to report

annually to PMEC on matters related to “availability, quality, utility and use of performance information” (TB, 2016c). In the case of program officials, the *Directive* mandates they collaborate with the HoE in the “conduct of evaluations” (TB, 2016c). In sum, the instrument specifies in narrow terms how public servants are to engage with each other based on their incumbent roles, which attracts an additional layer of constraint around behaviour during implementation.

Interestingly, there is regulative obligations around interactions concerning CRDO conduct with other public servants that are trapped under the influence of institutional *Results Agenda*.<sup>35</sup> For instance, Treasury Board sets parameters for how the relationship between the CRDO and HoPM and HoE is expected to unfold during implementation. CRDOs are directed to work with these other implementers and determine how their departments will support “Top-Government Wide Priorities” (TB, 2017, p. 2). Further to this, the *Policy on Establishing a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee* employs signal phrases to express strong regulative pressure on agents-in-focus. For example, TB does not “specifically prescribe” who must be on the committee; however, it does restrict membership to senior departmental officials, including CRDOs, to support implementation efforts of the *Results Agenda* at the department (TB, 2016e).

The *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?* deck also imposes specific obligations on CRDO when it requires interactions with the centres. This is conveyed through adherence to governance processes when seeking formal approvals from agents-in-context. The initial draft of the DRF must be approved by Treasury Board while the final version by the respective departmental Minister. On the other hand, central agency endorsement is not required for PIPs. Though some of these obligations on seeking approvals through governance are listed in other

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<sup>35</sup> The role of Data Leads is also introduced in the instrument. Data Leads are absent in previously discussed instruments; however, they “ensure the departments develop and implement a data strategy”. TB considers these agents distinct from CRDOs and refer to them as “bridging agents”. Along with CRDOs, Data Leads serve an instrumental purpose for the centre (TB, 2016e).

regulative instruments such as the *Directive* and *Policy on Results*, the deck provides some additional clarity for CRDO as it relates to specific *Results Agenda* components. That being said, the regulative burden on interaction behaviour also generates greater gravitation pull of powers towards the centre under the *Results Agenda*.

v) *Pressure of time*

Time is relative; however, it is a dimension of institutional pressures that is ever-present yet rarely discussed and its treatment is even rarer in the context of RBM implementation. An analysis of the instruments revealed how important this layer of temporal stress is on public servants during implementation of the *Results Agenda*. The *Policy on Results* conveys two immediate obligations on CRDOs. First, it requires officials to implement various sections of the *Policy* within a compressed timeline. Second, the *Policy* replaces and consolidates the *Policy on Reporting of Federal Institutions and Corporate Interests to Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat* (2007), *Policy on Evaluation* (2009), and the *Policy on Management, Resources and Results Structures* (2010) (TB, 2016f). These changes implicate pressures on CRDOs in two ways.

First, the relatively nascent introduction of the *Policy on Results* and “implement by” dates by which federal departments are expected to instantiate the components of the *Results Agenda* fuels regulative pressure on CRDOs. Agents-in-focus must keep a watchful eye on arbitrary milestones set by Treasury Board because of the close scrutiny they face from central agencies concerning progress. Second, existing institutional considerations by CRDOs around the resets previous policies, adding a layer of uncertainty around implications for implementers. The assignment of new roles, responsibilities, practices, and governance arrangements from the new *Policy* overlays additional requirements on public servants. As such, the temporal and institutional

stresses contribute significant strain on CRDOs to act promptly and decisively to address TB obligations.

Additional analysis of Treasury Board's *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?* instrument shows CRDOs are further impacted by timelines for deliverables around *Results Agenda* implementation. Firm and tentative timelines are codified in the instrument. Tied to this temporal signal is the compelling pressure on public servants to report their planned trajectories for implementation activities with Treasury Board. The expectation communicates to CRDOs when agents-in-context, specifically TB, anticipates key activities and *Results Agenda* components to be implemented. This type of regulative pressure impacts on the agency of CRDOs in several ways. It introduces temporal stresses on individual conduct. As CRDOs navigate the ambiguity around roles and responsibilities noted in the previous section, top-down imposed timelines further compound regulative pressure on CRDOs during implementation. Additionally, it forms constraints on possible trajectories for behaviour. In the face of implied sanctions from TB, agents-in-focus may avoid pursuit of alternative or more effective paths given potential anxieties linked to adherence to top-down directed timeframes. In such cases, CRDOs may pivot towards regulative instruments to guide conduct to confront these pressures, thereby re-enforcing the coercive strength of internally-generated instruments like the deck. These concentrated pressures from deliverable dates accelerates and contributes to convergence of implementation practices due to constraints on agency amongst CRDOs. Nevertheless, TB acknowledges organisations are dissimilar and their state of readiness to implement will vary. The central agency clarifies this context by classifying departments as either first-wave or second-wave adopters (TB, 2016a). While it leaves discretion to departments to determine where they land based on criteria shared in the deck, TB requires implementers to complete this assessment and confirm status by a fixed date.

Turning to PCO's *Results and Delivery - Making the Connections* deck suggests the instrument is primarily deployed as a regulative instrument. Though it is designed to promote routines as part of the implementation of the *Results Agenda*, it also demands CRDO develop a critical path for implementation for their department. PCO telegraphs annual milestones linked to a set of expected activities to be performed. The first year fixates on plans, communication of priorities, launch of new systems and structures, and implementation of early delivery. The following year introduces the development of initiatives, application of systems and structures and the commencement of data collection. The process is linear and causally determined. Importantly though, PCO's expectations convey to public servants the key points of convergence for action and integrates a temporal dimension to assess appropriate level of progress. Similar to the *Its Approved... Now What* instrument from Treasury Board, the temporal stress layers mounts pressure on CRDOs to meet deliverables that are defined by the centre, which signals to agents-in-focus to place a disproportionate amount of attention on these areas during implementation. In effect, it anchors a marker on how PCO will evaluate appropriate pace and progress regarding implementation activities by CRDOs.

#### 4.2.1.2 *Binded to the rules*

Following obligations, the second area that emerges from the institutional analysis concerns the emergence of rules. As noted previously, rules are generally perceived by institutional theorists as coercive mechanism to regulate agent-in-focus conduct (Scott, 2001). They are externally derived and conceived by agents-in-context to propel their self-interests while agents-in-focus are compelled to obey to seek legitimacy, avoid sanctions, and gain rewards (Scott, 2001). Rules pre-exist the *Results Agenda* since organisations within public sector are informed and shaped by a statutory context that is both imposed and self-generated. Nevertheless, even under

this heavily regulated environment, the opportunity to introduce additional rules for implementers is not missed. In fact, the *Results and Delivery Manual* is one prime example of attempts by external agents-in-context to impose specific rules linked to implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Table 3 lists these “Ten rules of Results and Delivery” taken directly from the pages of the manual.

**Table 3 - Ten rules of Results and Delivery** <sup>36</sup>

Prioritize (really prioritize)
Define success early (you don't have to call it a target)
Identify your coalition (the ones you need to be able to count on)
Set strategy and policy (and avoid initiatives)
Ensure implementation planning (the detail matters)
Align the resources (if the aim is clear, it's easier to find the resources)
Use routines to drive progress (and report it)
Solve problems as they arise (and don't give the benefit of the doubt)
Persist (in the face of adversity and challenges)
Engage stakeholders and the public (constantly)

According to the instrument, the rules provide a “roadmap” on “what the Results and Delivery effort should look like” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 8). External agents-in-context do not identify sanctions overtly; however, rules are designed to advance a version of institutional *Results Agenda* based on *Deliverology* through coercive pressures. The instrument does this in several ways. First, rules serve as a “checklist to evaluate current work” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 8). This implies instituting a self-regulative mechanism within CRDOs where they are to self-monitor and evaluate behaviour against this objective source. Second, compliant behaviour from coercive pressures manifests in the absence of obvious sanctions. What is meant by this is that the CRDOs should align closely to rules so they can maximize the “chances of achieving Results and Delivery goals” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 8). Under these circumstances, legitimacy-seeking CRDOs obey so they can receive approval and support from the administrative centre. Interestingly, *Delivery Associates* do not have direct institutional authority over CRDOs.

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<sup>36</sup> Adapted from Delivery Associates, including comments in parentheses (2016, p. 11).

However, their consultations with PCO on the development of the manual serves as a proxy for central agency authority. Agents-in-focus are aware that the manual is endorsed by PCO and as such, the implied connection between external and internal agents-in-context raises institutional constraints on behaviour. Finally, the manual surfaces case studies of *Deliverology* in practice from other jurisdictions. This is intended to strengthen external validity of the Delivery Associates institutional RBM approach. For instance, to support the rule on needing to “define success clearly”, Barber and associates share in-situ practices from their time with the PMDU in the UK (Delivery Associates, 2016, pp. 15-16). The jurisdictional context varies between UK and Canadian federal public sector; however, their recall of tacit experience is framed as empirical evidence of successful implementation of *Deliverology*-inspired principles and practices within public sector. The supposed external validity promotes a legitimacy narrative for following these rules. This compelling call to action invariably persuades CRDOs to comply in order to mimic its success. Importantly, as implementers embed these practices through routines, the rules referred to as “a roadmap” and “checklist” become social facts over time. In turn, the rules gain increased regulative strength that further constrain behaviour of implementers other than CRDOs with regards to implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

#### 4.2.2 Normative pressures

##### 4.2.2.1 Valorization of preferred implementation methods

The institutional analysis of the instruments suggests that normative pressures are an effective guide for conduct amongst CRDOs and a much less forceful influencer on public servant implementation behaviour. In fact, the analysis reveals a strong preference from agents-in-context towards the production of a specific form of *Results Agenda* as envisioned by the centre. It is found that top-down agents-in-context favour the adoption of a logic of appropriateness to steer

implementation conduct. Importantly, the agents-in-context valorize actions that conform to a specific template of questions – as seen below in Table 4 – presented to CRDOs.

**Table 4 - Template of questions to guide implementation of Results and Delivery approach** <sup>37</sup>

What are departments are trying to do?
How they are planning to do it?
How at any given moment will they know they are on track?
If they are not on track, what are they going to do about it?
How can get back on track?
What are your core responsibilities?
Why are your organised this way?
What are you trying to achieve in response to those responsibilities?
How are you going to measure them and identify success?

Implementers are expected to orient and organise their implementation according to this schema. The above template of questions reflect a citizen-oriented view rather than a program activity and output perspective. The program activity perspective is a common feature of institutional results-based management presently; however, the questions attempt to challenge this dominant view encouraging CRDOs to deliberately reflect. Taken from the learning event on *Delivering Results Across Government*, the reference questions are a guidepost for implementers on where they should orient their limited attention and capacity, and how they are expected to organise themselves to implement the *Results Agenda* (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). The learning event on October 2016 by the Performance and Planning Exchange titled *The Government of Canada’s Approach to Results and Delivery: What it all Means* also adds an evaluative component on agents-in-focus. Agents-in-context reference in part the questions in Table 4 and fortify efforts to steer CRDOs towards appropriate ways of performing implementation. Throughout the learning events, Treasury Board deploys these questions to sandbox CRDO thinking towards a preferred implementation. They describe this roadmap as the

<sup>37</sup> Adapted directly from Performance and Planning Exchange (May 2016).

“north star” and expect practitioners of *Results Agenda* to “continuously and rigorously ask these questions” in their day-to-day work framed by a results-based and citizens-view approach (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). Consequently, this influences CRDO perceptions that legitimate practitioners of *Results Agenda* should bind themselves to this perspective.

Expanding on the above, normative pressures are further strengthened by the desire to converge CRDO mindset through additional prescriptions shared in the *Results and Delivery Manual*. Acceptable ways to re-configure existing RBM culture into one favoured by agents-in-context is for CRDOs to “focus on priorities at all times, solve problems in real time while support others to deliver and transfer effective practices” and “serve as a role model for the culture and behaviours of delivery, building capacity, and helping delivery agents to achieve priorities” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 9). These norms emphasise the preferred institutional order and how CRDOs should sustain this RBM regime through a logic of appropriateness.

#### 4.2.2.2 *Roles and responsibilities*

Another unique finding from the analysis is the significant amount of attention that normative pressures play on dictating specific roles and responsibilities to CRDOs. According to institutional scholars, roles have a sociological dimension to them (Scott, 2001; Selznick, 1948). Roles are normative in that they convey to agents-in-focus specific goals and how they should be pursued. The logic of appropriateness rather than instrumentality or consequence is the key driver (March & Olsen, 2004).

##### *i) If you report, you are part of the tribe*

Though the previous section examined regulative pressures as the primary mechanism by which obligations around reporting are assigned to public servants, normative considerations are

also implicated in the constructions of expected actions linked to this institutional task. On reporting, Treasury Board notes in the *Establishing a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee* addendum of the *Policy on Results* that implementers should support “effective use of performance information in decision making”, “enhance the credibility, value and understanding of performance information in the department” and conduct “objective and transparent communication and reporting of performance information, both inside and outside the department” (TB, 2016e). These criteria are envisioned by the centre but framed as normative expectations to bolster collective goals for the *Results Agenda*. This particular addendum motions to CRDOs the appropriateness and institutional value of reporting by attaching institutional RBM elements of performance improvement and accountability to their titles. Here, pronounced emphasis on evidence-based decision-making, oversight, transparency with internal and external stakeholders, and collaboration and coordination between departments is promoted. As such, legitimacy of CRDO behaviour on reporting requires adoption and practice of collective values and norms of the *Results Agenda*.

*ii) Consultations and communication*

How interactions between CRDOs and others in their social network should unfold is also an important element discovered from the analysis of the different *Results Agenda* instruments. It was discussed earlier in this chapter how regulative pressures strengthen the coercive resolve of agents-in-context on *when*, with *who*, and *how* CRDOs are to engage on implementation of the *Results Agenda*. However, the normative considerations place greater emphasis on less direct means for how and why social interactions are expected to occur. For instance, program officials are expected to work closely with CRDOs. From the *Guidance on Results Agenda* instrument, TB prescribes interactions mostly in cases where programs are linked to top government-wide

priorities. In such cases, these same program officials are encouraged to “work with” CRDOs to develop their PIPs and align performance measurement to the delivery of the priority (TB, 2017). Though these social boundaries provide narrow space for legitimate interactions, it does not characterize the type of relationship, which begs the question as to whether the engagement is formal, including hierarchical, or informal, such as consultative.

Treasury Board also places a degree of importance on two key normative conduct: (1) the need to consult, and (2) the need to communicate. Drawing on the *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?*, engagement with specific social agents and adoption of specific communication practices advocates for wider involvement and input from internal and external “stakeholders and communities” within and outside public organisations. The central agency views the solicitation of feedback as a legitimacy-seeking exercise for the *Results Agenda* implementation process (TB, 2016a). Consultation and communication are further underlined by the *Results and Delivery Manual*. The instrument propels a normative tilt for CRDOs to “renew and refocus its (public service) work” and emphasise “collaboration” and “co-creation” with elected officials and relevant stakeholders (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 4).

#### 4.2.2.3 *Be better, get better*

Whenever discussions of normative prescriptions appear, writers are often attracted to the development of insights around how conduct is shaped by professional roles. Much of this focuses on competencies and skills linked to roles. This appreciation also drives the analysis for *Results Agenda* instruments. The findings expose that an appeal to professional competencies dominates the normative discourse within instruments. In fact, agents-in-context bound expertise and professionalism as leading features of *Results Agenda*. This is accomplished in several ways. First, considerable discretion is devolved to CRDOs on how to perform engagement and communication

activities. An examination of the *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?* deck suggests this discretion assumes rational behaviour from a professional and competent public servant as they are intimately aware of the various stakeholders and their preferences. TB implicitly acknowledges CRDO expertise on deciding who to engage and how to perform this engagement. Second, Treasury Board prescribes how communications should be performed in narrow terms. According to the central agency, agents-in-focus should “keep language simple and plain” and “avoid using buzz words or jargon” (TB, 2016a). Two implications can be drawn from codifying this as a normative element. One interpretation is that existing forms of communication within federally-situated results-based management regimes are overly complex, technical, and ambiguous, which creates confusion for stakeholders. The second implication reflects broader desires by the centre for standard and consistent communication practices. TB expects agents-in-focus to simplify communication with stakeholders unfamiliar with institutional RBM jargon. The call to avoid the use of RBM-specific lexicon is a targeted push by the centre towards encouraging CRDOs to converge on *Results Agenda* communication practices during implementation.

Support for competency-based normative pressures also includes promotion of values associated with evidence-based RBM practices. Take the example discussed earlier of how Treasury Board valorizes governance that favours open and transparent information in the practice of RBM. The central agency diagnoses a major problem with the proliferation of performance information because it creates a murky and unsustainable picture regarding progress towards government priorities. Given this, the centre is increasingly concerned with alignment of civil service attention towards identifying appropriate collection and use of performance measurement data. It is an appeal to CRDO competencies by linking norms to performance measurement practice. The centre’s prescriptions for CRDOs are intended to avoid the traps – noted earlier –

that are common with public sector accountability systems. Further to this, agents-in-context propose public servants adopt a “measured approach to information collected, and the thing measured” since there is a “risk of obscuring the forest for the trees” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). To satisfy this competency under *Results Agenda*, implementers are to “guide, rationalize, reduce, control, manage and challenge the exuberance that exists for results-based management” in order to convey results that are “compelling, helpful and parsimonious” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). In the same learning event, TB and PCO advocate that *Results Agenda* components such as PIPs and DRFs should not steer CRDO behaviour towards deciding on what to measure. Instead, the agencies propose that acceptable behaviour is to nest measurement considerations not on outputs but around broader outcomes at the departmental-level.

Finally, as a reminder, central agencies mandate federal departments to implement the *Results Agenda*. They also maintain a preference for regulative instruments to mandate some competencies. However, normative pressures are also relied upon to complement efforts around legitimate conduct of agents-in-focus, especially when pursuing implementation that considers the unique structures and processes of different departments, since each organisation confronts unique challenges. A close look at the *Results and Delivery Manual* reveals that contributors acknowledge the implementation approach may need to be “adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of individual organisations and users” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 2). Stemming from this, the various agents-in-context underscore the importance for CRDOs to reflect, engage and work collaboratively on implementation with the centres and implicated stakeholders, including CRDO communities of practice.

#### 4.2.2.4 *Desired Results Agenda culture*

Construction of a preferred culture for the *Results Agenda* is a significant normative theme across many of the instruments. The instruments are deployed by agents-in-context to shape the perceptions of CRDOs on key concepts and structures. This is done in order to implement an ideal vision of the *Results Agenda* advanced by agents-in-context. Back in 2016, a speech titled *The Canadian Government and the Innovation Agenda* delivered by Mendelsohn – the Deputy Secretary to Cabinet on Results and Delivery at PCO at the time – impressed on norms focussed on increased collaboration as a means to challenge the prevailing policy development model within public sector. For Mendelsohn, the dominant “industrial models” of practice where ‘bureaucrats identify a problem, identify evidence, consult with stakeholders and produce options’ was “collapsing”. This powerful sentiment by Mendelsohn dispatches to CRDOs that legitimate *Results Agenda* practice departs from the status quo of traditional civil service practice (Canada 2020, November 2016).<sup>38</sup>

The emphasis on a cultural shift from short-term, output and program activity perspective to long-term, results-based mindset rears its head. Normative forces are generated in several ways to compel CRDOs to move in this direction. First, agents-in-context believe CRDOs “need a change in attitude” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). With this in mind, they direct public servants to pursue implementation that focus on concepts such as “goals, urgency and irreversibility” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). In a speech with the Institute on Governance (June 2016), Mendelsohn also invokes his positional authority as a highly visible agent-in-context embedded at the nexus of politics and administration to convey the same message. As Deputy Secretary, he retains regulative powers that confer him with legitimacy to dictate the pace of culture change and evaluate the speed of implementation by CRDOs. That being said,

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<sup>38</sup> See Ryan (1999) on the role of “instrumental rationality” in policymaking (p. 39).

Mendelsohn's approach is more subdued than coercive. For him, the appropriate way forward is for CRDOs to "have a vision that is longer-term" and to "think of themselves as stewards" of an organisation (Institute on Governance, June 2016). He calls on normative forces in order to pressure public servants to evaluate their conduct. Specifically, the evaluative criteria are directly tied to the role and identity of the CRDO. Supplementing this effort is the Privy Council Office's advocacy for CRDOs to adopt a future-oriented view of performance that stretches beyond immediate outputs. In doing so, it ties in logics of instrumentality and appropriateness. To strengthen their case for culture change, agents-in-context diagnose performance implementation problems as the legacy of the past. Public sector of the past is constructed as a persistent culture of "risk-aversion" where public servants seek to maximize their control over outputs and gravitate towards shorter-term results to avoid sanctions from political and administrative centres (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016; van Dooren et al., 2015; Peters & Pierre, 2012). To resolve this, Mendelsohn, and the centre draw heavily on normative pressures to steer implementers to collectively overcome the incessant risk-aversion mindset and by grounding implementation behaviour to templates such as the ones noted in Tables 3 and 4.

Finally, implementation efforts to change public sector culture towards a specific RBM vision based on the *Results Agenda* varies "according to the specific needs and circumstance of individuals" (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 6). The rules listed in Table 3 are intended to guide this change using coercive methods. However, the rules only act as an objective reference point. Instead, a reference to the *Results and Delivery Manual* suggests pressures around entrenching cultural change is largely fostered by normative considerations. The manual identifies expected tasks specific to CRDOs and the wider social network of implementing agents. It includes "facilitating the development of each step in the manual", "brokering progress", "providing

stewardship and resources to enable the Results and Delivery approach” and advancing the centres goals on implementation by “relying heavily on various corporate enablers such as evaluation, performance measurement, audit, finance and information management colleagues” (Delivery Associates, 2016, pp. 6-7). In effect, demands on CRDOs from being embedded within a collective of implementers exerts significant normative pressures to advance towards a desired *Results Agenda* culture envisioned by agents-in-context.

*i) Reporting focussed on results*

In the previous section, the discussion centered on the broader desire by agents-in-context to influence RBM culture shift. Now, the discussion concentrates on reporting as it relates to culture change. Specifically, it discusses how agents-in-context - such as Treasury Board, Privy Council Office and Delivery Associates – collectively embed normative statements and ideas regarding *Results Agenda* reporting within respective instruments. The messaging in TB’s *Policy on Results - Setting the Stage for Delivering on Results* includes “instilling a strengthened culture of measurement, evaluation and innovation”, and a “focus on results” to “get the results we want, and Canadians deserve” (TB, 2016g). Broadly speaking, these value-based statements are not contemporary influences since they reflect existing paradigms tied to historical results-based management regimes found in Canadian federal public sector. What is novel though is the unification of these values under the banner of *Results Agenda*. As a consequence, this packaging orients CRDO attention away from reporting as mainly a concern around output-driven expenditure management exercise between the centres and departments.

Interestingly, the same deck from TB promotes organisational culture change around reporting through a normative tact. The central agency engages in this task by comparing caricatures of present and future states of public organisations, which was previously mentioned

earlier in this section. In the present state, TB describes public sector in Weberian terms. They describe federal public organisations as “static, rigid and hierarchical” (TB, 2016g). This social construction assigns negative connotation to public sector experiences. Conversely, the future state is portrayed as a “more simplified but dynamic approach that uses data tagging to customize data mining and reporting” as well as “a flexible and focussed evaluation function that provides strong evidence to support improvement and allocation” (TB, 2016g). This aspirational context carries normative signals to CRDOs during implementation. It legitimates evidence-based practices and continuous reform as a desired outcome. Evidently, a *Results Agenda* reporting culture is presumed to be only possible through entrenchment of a flatter organisation, simpler and agile performance measurement practices, and closer links to data in order to drive resource decision-making.

The merits for shifting reporting through normative pressures is not lost on the Privy Council Office either. Their *Results and Delivery Canada - Building the Culture and Systems* deck advances this desired future state on reporting through the pursuit of three primary objectives: (1) emphasis on clarity around outcomes, (2) “sustained attention on implementation of a limited number of priorities at [*sic*] highest levels”, and (3) “being purposeful about measuring results and tracking progress” (2016). Part of these goals align closely with Treasury Board desires for the *Results Agenda*, specifically on outcomes- and evidence-based approaches of RBM noted earlier. The alignment between both agencies compound normative cues for agents-in-focus and in that vein, several implications can be drawn from this. From an institutional perspective, the centres expect public servants to devote disproportionate amount of attention to top-drawer government priorities in their reporting activities. Second, CRDOs are directed to be intentional in their efforts to track progress on departmental contributions towards political commitments. The agents-in-context articulate this demand through a series of normative prescriptions represented by

principles. For instance, to prime CRDOs for implementation, PCO attaches principles that call on a version of federalism through partnerships with provinces and territories, “commitment to cabinet government”, “strong Ministerial authority”, and the importance of deep collaboration within public sector and external partners (PCO, 2016). In doing so, the principles fashion a *Results Agenda* paradigm that blends in the branded concept of *Deliverology* with some existent RBM practices. In fact, PCO openly acknowledges the Canadian context is “unique” and “requires adapting” *Deliverology* into a “made in Canada” approach (2016). Finally, the *Results and Delivery manual* advances a results-based mindset on reporting that “cannot be the dollars spent” but instead on the “difference made in the lives of Canadians” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 4). It signals a pivot to CRDOs on what is considered appropriate reporting aims within this specific RBM context.

*ii) Not going at it alone*

PCO’s *Results and Delivery - Making the Connections* instrument converges around prescriptions in which fulfilment of government promises “requires collective effort” (2018). This is encompassed broadly under normative values that entertain relentless implementation, public communication of results and reliance on routines and systems. The accent on collective behaviour to meet government objectives aligns with those of Treasury Board instruments noted earlier; however, this prescription raises several direct consequences. First, notions of collective action insist on conformist behaviour that expose a targeted strategy by central agencies to influence CRDO perceptions and conduct around implementation. Second, the norm to embrace collective effort infers potential concerns from PCO that early stages of *Results Agenda* adoption are unstable and unpredictable. Finally, it uncovers how implementing agents are not automatons. Instead, agents-in-context must actively intervene to propel isomorphic behaviour from CRDOs if they

desire to advance their interests on *Results Agenda* as the dominant institutional RBM strand within federal public sector.

As noted earlier, government insists public servants should steer away from activities-based measures and track closer with efforts that link program resources that impacts Canadians. Complementing these desired ends regarding performance measurement activities, agents-in-context identify expected norms such as to “innovate, give evidence-based advice and collaborate across departments and partner with other governments and stakeholders” as legitimate ways for CRDOs to pursue these goals (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 4). Therefore, underpinning this pressure is the activation of norms that encourage CRDOs to collaborate with and mobilize stakeholders outside public sector to deliver on government commitments. Equally, the stress on a culture of collaborations also instills evidence-based practices and fixes the gaze on improving transparency through principles of open government.

Interestingly, normative institutional pressures are further amplified through references to regulative tools from the centre. According to the Privy Council Office, the “mission to improve effectiveness and accountability of government” is tied to the Delivery Charters. They serve as tools for horizontal coordination and collaboration between departments; however, they also invite scrutiny from the centre on performance. That being said, PCO notes that the Delivery Charters are not a “chain of authority” because they do not represent a relationship of hierarchies between different stakeholders (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). Rather, it is a regulative tool intended to foster a culture that minimizes hierarchies in favour of collaboration between implementers.

The final set of meaningful institutional forces are ones exerted through normative views designed to expand collaborative behaviour. As discussed previously, internally-generated

instruments such the *Policy on Results* and its addendums codify expected collaborations through regulative pressure; however, learning events and other externally-generated sources tap into normative considerations to influence conduct. The *Delivering Results Across Government* learning event and the *Results & Delivery in a Digital Context* interview with Mendelsohn stresses on CRDOs to collaborate with other government departments, the centres, and external stakeholders. The instruments attach values of collaboration that advocate for CRDOs to proceed with implementation “prudently and transparently” (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). To some extent, this normative effort seeks to legitimize and unite “whole-of-government” approach with partnerships outside federal government (Canada 2020, November 2016). Both the centres and Mendelsohn instill expectations on implementers to foster integrated and coordinated efforts to meet government objectives. The adoption of collective action to confront major policy issues – such as mitigating adverse effects from climate change and addressing homelessness – mirrors wider structural and cultural shifts from RBM within public sector by leveraging new funding and solutions.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the continued premium on evidence-based approaches signal to CRDOs to adopt norms that promote proactive and upfront consideration of data needs and measurement in the program development phase with partners. More importantly, agents-in-context strike a firm but ambitious tone on breaking down departmental silos. In sum, public servants should be “winning the hearts and minds” of partners through proactive, sustained, and strategic engagement (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016).

*iii) Commitment to fulfilling government priorities*

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<sup>39</sup> Considerable scholarship is available on whole-of-government shifts with some mention of RBM from authors such as Christensen and Lægheid (2011b), Baker (2007), Halligan et al. (2011), Carayannopoulos (2017), and Day (2009).

If it is not immediately clear, the implementation of the *Results Agenda* is meant to improve efforts on achievement of policy pledges set by government. According to the *Results and Delivery Manual*, the civil service is expected to “implement the agenda of the elected officials” (Delivery Associates, 2016). This telegraphs to CRDOs that the motive for implementation is primarily about satisfying the interests of the political class. An analysis of the manual reveals the concept of promissory government is very much at the heart of Canadian federal RBM reforms. First, the political-administrative relationship is intensified through structural and cultural changes in order to prioritize government-wide “Results and Delivery” to support government “promises” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 5). This signals the “what” to CRDOs, which is to orient their efforts vis-à-vis specific government objectives. Second, it telegraphs how to structure these efforts through performance of departmental activities. Linking all of this are the norms, which relay to agents-in-focus how they ought to support these ends through conduct. One example of this found in the manual is operational prescriptions to “clarify priorities or desired outcomes, use data to understand what it will take to achieve these priorities” and “establish routines to drive and monitor performance”, among others (Delivery Associates, 2016, pp. 5-6). This specific instrument also proposes changes to existing cultural practices where CRDOs are to embody “uncompromising focus on outcomes, implementation, and achieving results for Canadians” (Delivery Associates, 2016, p. 6).

In this chapter, the analysis of the instruments previously surfaced the presence of norms that encourage CRDOs to frame fulfilment of government priorities from a citizen-oriented view rather than program manager perspective. In such cases, normative forces compel CRDOs to concern themselves on macro – which are effects from public sector interventions manifested at societal level - rather than the micro impacts – which are directly attributable effects in the short-

term that are linked to individual action. However, the analysis of Mendelsohn's *The Canadian Government and the Innovation Agenda* speech also prescribes values linked to motivations of public service that indeed propel a results-driven mindset. In the speech, Mendelsohn creates a caricature of the consummate civil servant as not "in it for the money" but rather in it for the advancement of public good (Canada 2020, November 2016). His appeal calls on a collective public service ethos to be very much part of the *Results Agenda*.

Finally, the concept of establishing routines resurfaces again in other normative ways. The narrative around routines is a dominant feature linked to achievement of government priorities. Both central agencies identify implementation "dips" as the primary issue of public sector failure in meeting government objectives (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). As such, the centres petition CRDOs to devote significant attention to the establishment of routines to plow through implementation hurdles. A discursive strategy – such as appealing to a public service ethos – is used by TB and PCO to instrumentally bind CRDOs to not just accept the "goal of policy" but also the "suffering that goes along with achieving the goal" (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). While operational and cultural challenges are normalised as part of the implementation experience, routines and a public service ethos are bound together under *Results Agenda* as the method by which to meet wider government objectives.

#### 4.2.3 Cultural-cognitive pressures

##### 4.2.3.1 Recalling experiences

Regulative and normative pressures operate frequently throughout the various instruments analysed while cultural-cognitive pressures are much less prevalent. Cultural-cognitive pressures inform CRDO behaviour through mental schemas (Scott, 2001). Agents-in-focus draw on these cognitive templates to decipher the terrain of action. A logic of orthodoxy prevails because there

is no significant leeway for alternative conduct (Scott, 2001). Despite its relative limited appearance, there are several examples when this pressure is observed.

The deck *Policy on Results - Its Approved... Now What?* registers cultural-cognitive pressures by encouraging CRDOs to reflect on whether they have a “common understanding” of what they do and how they do it when it concerns activities and programs (TB, 2016a). This reflexive exercise engages CRDOs to lean on their experiences and past knowledge to build their understanding of the implementation task that is ahead of them. That being said, the notion of a “common understanding” is somewhat of a reductionist view on the complex implementation process. Nevertheless, it does afford CRDOs the opportunity to perform individual sense-making of their implementation conduct vis-à-vis their organisational and institutional environment. As such, there are certain practices of RBM they are bound to instantiate because they see no complementary path when faced with the strength of cultural-cognitive constraints. Such practices might include specific governance and approvals processes that are exclusive to their department. It may also involve placing greater emphasis than other departments when it comes to managing risk during implementation. These examples speak to differences and not similarities in orthodoxy-driven conduct. As such, encouragement by Treasury Board for CRDOs to reflect and validate their “common understanding” reinforces actions on RBM implementation that are taken-for-granted.

#### 4.2.3.2 *Skills and expertise*

From a competency-based perspective, agents-in-context such as Mendelsohn believe driving implementation through the public sector requires leaning on the expertise and leadership of CRDOs. He acknowledges the importance of “bringing together the right talent and skills” (Institute on Governance, June 2016). The deference to CRDOs paints them as capable and

competent implementers, even though the *Results Agenda* is a relatively nascent RBM paradigm within Canadian federal public sector. Nevertheless, the framing of CRDOs as skilled public servants informed by “20-30 years” of performance culture within the public sector (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). This institutional knowledge of RBM practices carries weight and relevance for the *Results Agenda* implementation emerging before public servants. Mendelsohn’s remark suggests an endorsement of CRDOs expertise and as such, calls on them to rely on their past experiences to inform the present. Paradoxically, in a different learning event, Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office support CRDOs challenging these same orthodoxies and to migrate beyond theoretical guideposts when contemplating the implementation of the *Results Agenda* (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2016). In effect, these competing claims between the Deputy Secretary and the agencies sets up an ambiguous terrain for CRDOs to navigate. It is one in which cultural-cognitive templates can resolve but also compound challenges.

#### 4.2.3.3 *Interactions*

Regulative and normative pressures on how CRDOs are expected to interact with others during implementation have been detailed extensively in the previous section. Even so, cultural-cognitive pressures appear as important drivers to inform CRDO conduct in this area. As noted earlier, the *Policy on Results*, the various addendums and the decks call on implementers to engage with others. For instance, under Treasury Board requirements, CRDOs are expected to work with program officials to develop comprehensive and robust PIPs. Though the instruments do not specify how engagement between these two roles is to unfold – especially given the differences in positional authorities – cultural-cognitive templates provide direction on legitimate ways for CRDOs to act. Federal public servants are heavily socialized to work in vertical hierarchical structures. This is a function of delegated authorities that flow from the Deputy Minister downward

through the department. The statutory authorities serve as a reference point for public servants, but they also infuse legitimacy into cultural templates and instruct public servants on how they should respond to vertical organisational structures. Understanding this, it is worthwhile to assume that CRDOs – as senior departmental officials – are the primary focal points for initiating and driving engagements with internal departmental officials. In fact, when it concerns fulfillment of federal priorities, programs officials and other internal stakeholders serve at the pleasure and interests of CRDOs. While the central agencies prompt implementers with a template on “who” should be consulted, it is left to CRDOs to ultimately decide on who they want to bring into the fold and they draw on cultural-cognitive templates to guide decisions on preferred or relevant stakeholders.

#### 4.2.3.4 *Reporting*

Unsurprisingly, reporting functions also have a place in the discussion on cultural-cognitive pressures. Under institutional *Results Agenda* instruments, scrutiny of civil service performance is a taken-for-granted assumption for both agents-in-context and agents-in-focus. The current cultural-cognitive template for reporting involves “setting up a program and coming back at the end to evaluate” performance, and then “feeding that back up” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). However, in their learning event, the centres contest that this mindset “does not always drive the behaviour” they want as well as allow for “course correction” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). Registering this criticism about public sector norms into account, PCO and TB use this learning event to argue that routines are a “gift” to senior leaders because they causally link a culture of improvement with systems that invoke repetitive use of data and engagement to assess progress on priorities (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016).

### 4.3 Main institutional elements of the Results Agenda

Institutional results-based management pre-dates *Results Agenda*. As noted in *Chapter Two*, Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014) and others illuminate key components of public sector RBM. Many of these elements permeate across the federal public sector and are amplified by existing approaches linked to the *Results Agenda*. In addition, the list of rules from the Delivery Associates (see Table 3) derive and expand on institutional RBM experiences. Barber’s manual interprets these as features in more practical and operational terms under a *Deliverology*. Several implementation features are aligned while others less so. Table 5 below provides an assessment of this comparison.

**Table 5 - Institutional features of results-based management and Deliverology**

Results-based Management <sup>40</sup>	Deliverology <sup>41</sup>
Clarifying customer needs and mandating the organisation	Prioritize, define your coalition, and engage stakeholders and the public
Specifying results and performance expectations	Define success early
Linking budget allocation to output delivery	Set strategy and policy, ensure implementation planning, and align the resources
Requiring performance reporting	Use routines to drive progress and report it
Promoting performance analysis and continuous improvement	Solve problems as they arise, persist
Employing a merit system in managing human resources	No equivalent

An interpretive leap is undertaken to generate this comparison; however, the general sense is that elements of institutional RBM and *Deliverology* mostly align and reinforce each other.

<sup>40</sup> Adapted from Pazvakavambwa and Steyn (2014, p. 251).

<sup>41</sup> Adapted from Delivery Associates (2016, p. 11).

Employing a merit system in managing resources appears to be largely absent in the Delivery Associates manual, however.

In light of this, agents-in-context argue the *Results Agenda* is not entirely “new in a sense” (Performance and Planning Exchange, May 2017). The centres employ regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive weights to validate and connect to historical and current RBM activities, knowledge, and expertise. This approach energizes existing templates for action by representing the *Results Agenda* as an incremental disruptor to existing institutional RBM practices and that “success of this initiative will depend fundamentally on enthusiasm, involvement and expertise” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). On the other hand, the dynamics of the institutional pressures also reveal radical changes to institutional results-based management within the Canadian federal public sector. In fact, the analysis above offers important insights into the main features of *Results Agenda* that converge and diverge from existing institutional RBM within the public sector and *Deliverology*-inspired practices. As such, the dynamic interplay between internal and externally-generated instruments and institutional RBM produces a uniquely Canadian federal public sector experience for Chief Results and Delivery Officers as implementers.

Based on the insights from the analysis above, six main elements are identified to form the institutional backbone of the *Results Agenda*. These are: (1) *sustained attention and accountability through routine internal/external performance reporting*, (2) *culture of continuous performance improvement*, (3) *creation of new roles, governance, authorities, and responsibilities to support implementation*, (4) *emphasis on implementation to fulfil government promises*, (5) *stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre*, and (6) *organisational learning and capacity development*.

1. *Sustained attention and accountability through routines and internal/external performance reporting*

Accountability is the primary goal when collecting and reporting on performance information to internal and external stakeholders. The *Results Agenda* maintains and builds on institutional RBM through an emphasis on sustained attention and establishment of routines. Agents-in-context sediment greater central agency scrutiny on departmental performance through various instruments. This includes fulfilling requirements to integrate both short and long-term outcomes-based performance information into Departmental Results Frameworks, Performance Information Profiles, Delivery Charters, and Mandate Letter Trackers. CRDOs are tagged with the role of establishing routines to enable the political and administrative centres to assess performance and to report on priorities publicly to Canadians. A premium on evidence-based approaches is favoured in order to advance goals around performance improvement linked to transparency and principles of open government. Integral to this new paradigm is the proactive communication of government performance with the electorate.

The *Results Agenda* also assigns agents-in-focus with different roles to ensure the smooth operation of governance and reporting processes. From a governance perspective, the *Results Agenda* advocates sustained attention to government priorities through the creation of new governance committees, such as ARC and PMO Stock-takes. Implementers are routinely confronted with executive-level political scrutiny where they are to explain implementation challenges and progress against government objectives. An added temporal dimension is layered on to reporting and governance through key milestones and timelines for implementation.

2. *Culture of continuous performance improvement*

The culture of continuous performance improvement remains embedded as part of the *Results Agenda*. This feature is common within historical RBM practices and prioritized as part of *Deliverology*. Unique to institutional *Results Agenda* is the importance on the role of agents-in-focus in supporting this effort directly through governance, reflexive thinking, and promotion of performance improvement culture broadly within departments and communities of practice. Routines continue to play a significant role and they are seen as geared towards driving internal culture of improvement. Instruments are relied upon by agents-in-context to link scrutiny of past performance with improvement efforts designed to support progress against government commitments.

Governance committees also feature prominently and CRDOs are tasked through their roles to engage with executive-level committees – such as the Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee – to advance performance improvement considerations from a departmental and whole-of-government perspective. Along with adoption this collective mindset, a unique feature of the *Results Agenda* is for implementers to engage in reflexive activities based on key templates created and circulated by Treasury Board and the Price Council Office. Finally, *Results Agenda* promotes a culture of innovation and evidence-based approach as an ideal-type future state advanced through proactive monitoring and management of performance.

### *3. Creation of new roles, governance authorities and responsibilities to support implementation*

Another component of institutional *Results Agenda* is the importance placed on the creation of roles, governance, and responsibilities. The instruments play a profound role in regulating specific roles assigned to CRDOs. The centre mandates that executive-level implementers perform a range of activities that include collaborating with other implementers, participating in

performance management committees, and serving as focal points for reporting on key *Results Agenda* components such as the Mandate Letters and DRF. Premium is placed on working through governance authorities, such as PMEC and political-level meetings such as PMO Stock-takes and ARC. In addition, TB and PCO impose on CRDOs to engage more broadly with internal and external stakeholders and fixate on clear and regular communication.

The creation of new roles and responsibilities also envisions CRDOs as stewards who lead efforts to shift departmental mindset from one of short-term thinking to longer-term outcomes-based approach. A significant institutional weight is placed on implementers to break down silos through collaboration. In this sense, CRDOs are expected to identify and develop competencies, skills and expertise that drive wider culture change that establishes the *Results Agenda* as the primary RBM approach within federal public sector.

#### 4. *Emphasis on implementation to fulfill government promises*

Fulfillment of government promises is the primary motivation for deploying the *Results Agenda*. Addressing implementation challenges is viewed as the main task to meet the political goals of elected officials and therefore, an emphasis on “how” implementation should occur is a significant feature of this institutional RBM environment. Confronting implementation obstacles is identified as the primary charge of CRDOs. This context gives rise to strong institutional pressure on CRDOs to drive the government’s political agenda with sustained attention to top political priorities through internal culture change. More specifically, implementation of RBM culture elevates attention on macro impacts of policy to Canadians instead of pre-occupations with micro and organisational concerns. Therefore, agents-in-focus are advised to consider upfront consideration of government priorities when developing departmental policies and programs. Attention to top-drawer government commitments also prioritizes implementation conduct

focussed on collaboration and working through the machinery of government. This is viewed as the means by which to deliver on the government's mandate. In addition, *Results Agenda* components such as Delivery Charters and Mandate Letters serve as instruments to steer collective efforts around broader outcomes to Canadians. There is a recognition that intervention from the centre through the exercise of institutional authority is appropriate under this environment of dogged implementation.

5. *Stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre*

The powers from the political and administrative centres are strengthened through the *Results Agenda*. Centralization is observed from increased pressure on agents-in-focus to comply with centre driven corporate policies. Agents-in-context impress on CRDOs to consider historical RBM policies but also to look at newly adapted versions that dictate expected roles, functions, and authorities. Central agencies assemble greater control through accountability and approval functions to instrumentally steer CRDO in fulfilling implementation goals linked to a desired RBM state. This includes expansion of the challenge function authorities and creation of rules that grant agents-in-context with additional powers to undertake greater scrutiny of CRDO implementation behaviour.

Additionally, agents-in-context exercise their authority granting powers by assigning new roles to CRDOs. These roles grant new powers to implementers but also enable greater control from the centre by linking to accountability, which are also scrutinized and evaluated by the centre. When CRDOs perform these roles, including serving as faithful implementers of *Results Agenda*, they legitimize the centre's power to dictate rules and expectations on public servants. Finally, the emphasis on the temporal dimension connected to implementation further enhances the centres'

power. Agents-in-context set timelines for CRDOs and attach key milestones to evaluate and dictate acceptable implementation progress by agents-in-focus.

#### 6. *Organisational learning and capacity development*

The final institutional feature of *Results Agenda* centers on the importance of organisational learning and capacity development to effectively implement institutional RBM. The centre places considerable emphasis on informal networks for development of competencies and expertise. In fact, PCO encourages the establishment of and participation by agents-in-focus in CRDO communities of practice. A premium is placed on CRDOs to collaborate with these informal learning networks to confront and crowd-source solutions to various challenges linked to implementation within departments. More specifically, CRDOs are expected to serve as change-agents within these communities to help promote collective *Results Agenda* culture and practices. In their role, agents-in-focus are also expected to draw on their expertise and act as leaders within their departments to drive understanding of *Results Agenda* practices.

#### 4.4 *Uncertainty and ambiguity from institutional Result Agenda pressures*

The institutional architecture of *Results Agenda* discussed above focusses on proactive management of organisational resources based on simplified communication of departmental performance that are tied to larger government priorities. The increased transparency and communication to the Canadian public, and the importance of professionalization of results-based management practices are deeply embedded features of this uniquely Canadian concept. To support these aims, increased centralization by the political and administrative centre is observed as a means to achieve isomorphic implementation outcomes across the federal public sector. CRDOs are treated instrumentally by agents-in-context to achieve this desired end. The centres employ various internally and externally-generated regulative, normative and culture-cognitive

institutional *Results Agenda* instruments to directly and indirectly influence CRDO implementation conduct.

That being said, conjuring desired behaviour through instruments also presents challenges, especially when institutional pressures are the primary mechanism to convey rules, expectations and meanings. Sometimes, institutional forces can generate confusion and uncertainty for agents-in-focus (Scott, 2001).<sup>42</sup> In fact, ambiguous, incoherent, or vague rules and expectations can create ideal conditions for agency to surface and fill the void (Battilana, 2004). Moreover, varied institutional effects on agents-in-focus can also threaten institutional convergence desired by agents-in-context. As such, a review of the instruments reveal a number of inconsistencies that present opportunities for CRDO agency to develop during implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

To begin, CRDOs are the agents-in-focus for this study; however, not all instruments explicitly identify these officials within the instrument. The absence of explicit references to CRDOs is also problematic since they are identified as key focal points between departments and central agencies. They are expected to serve as change agents in the implementation of *Results Agenda*, and yet, they are not directly implicated in the *Directive on Results*. As such, significant uncertainty is generated around the bounds of expected conduct for these agents-in-focus, especially when CRDO roles and responsibilities are influenced by social interactions with other implementers named in the instrument, such as Deputy Heads, HoE, and program officials. Therefore, normative, and roles-based designations can generate ambiguity that is left for these agents-in-focus to address.

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<sup>42</sup> According to an article from Dequech (2001), complexity is not necessary for uncertainty to develop. In fact, ambiguity may exist in the absence of complexity mainly because “information that is relevant is unknown” to agents (Dequech, 2001, p. 916).

Codification of norms, expectations and obligations offer some clarity to CRDOs on implementation conduct; however, the *Directive* also creates ambiguity for implementers. Several statements in the instrument are open to alternative interpretations, depending on the cultural-cognitive frames of agents-in-focus. For instance, PMEC members are responsible for conducting reviews and delivering advice to the Deputy Minister on evaluation planning and activities. However, the *Directive* also states that such activities should be “adequate” and “useful” (TB, 2016c). The use of these loaded terminologies presents several concerns for implementers. First, departmental differences in mandate and resources create opportunities for variation in application of this *Directive*. Second, the unintended consequence of ambiguous or context-specific terminology creates a void in the terrain of action to be filled by interpretations and agency. Third, despite attempts to narrow conduct around specific domains, activities and roles, the *Directive* does not account for all scenarios and circumstances encountered by CRDOs, which may create further pressure to act with agency to address uncertainty.

Reflecting on the above, there are several implications for CRDOs during implementation. The *Directive* is a regulative instrument intended to enforce practices that contribute to the centres’ preferences regarding *Results Agenda*. However, they also generate uncertainty for CRDOs in cases where agents-in-context demand performance information from officials “when” or “as requested” (TB, 2016c). This uncertainty exerts pressure on implementers to perform calculative considerations on the capacity of their departments to fulfill unexpected demands against the centre’s homogeneous view of organisations. In reality, these obligations are filtered through a public sector that is defined by heterogeneity of mandates, structures, budgets, and personnel.

The implementation timeframe and replacement of existing policies raise additional considerations for CRDOs. First, the sunseting of past RBM policies by TB – such as those listed

in *Chapter Two* – challenges the sedimented cognitive-cultural templates entrenched by historical institutional RBM practices and processes. These past policies created and institutionalized practices, norms, and structures based on expectations and obligations from different stakeholders, including the centre. Meanings have been stable and contributed to predictable agent-in-focus behaviour regarding federal RBM practices. These institutional patterns endure and are reproduced by implementers. However, the emergence of a new policy modifies these practices. The reset and consolidation of policies under the umbrella of the current *Policy on Results* disrupts cultural and cognitive schemas. As public servants are directed to implement the new *Policy*, they are also confronted with previous institutional RBM arrangements. While the *Policy on Results* dictates certain action and roles, it does not account for all possible scenarios when implementation is underway, which leads to uncertainty around expected behaviour. In this case, individual agency fills the void created by the unknown. Additionally, departments are equipped with different resources and capacities. They carry different mandates and have varying organisational cultures and structures. Despite this heterogeneity, TB directs all departments to implement the *Policy on Results*. The presumption of similarity instead of difference is embedded in this mindset. Consequently, the instrument does not provide a clear path forward on how agents-in-focus should implement given organisational differences. CRDOs may respond to this obligation to implement through agency. Finally, these pressures can be distributed differently across implementers. For instance, the *Policy on Results* names Deputy Heads as the primary agent accountable for the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Additionally, responsibilities such as monitoring, and reporting are also assigned to the department head. As such, the instrument entrenches different magnitudes of pressure on implementers, raising even greater challenges for some CRDOs as they confront temporal and institutional RBM uncertainty.

Ambiguity also emerges when CRDOs are faced with fulfilling the needs of certain agents. These responsibilities are organisation specific and may include “developing or contributing to the development of the DRF, “participating in PMEC” and “supporting the delivery of results for all departmental business” (TB, 2016d). From this, two major implications arise. First, uncertainty prevails around which additional responsibilities will be imposed on implementers since the department’s specific organisational and operational needs will vary. Second, CRDOs are also interacting with departmental agents that have clear and publicly defined roles, such as HoPM and HoE. In many cases, these roles pre-date CRDOs and the *Results Agenda*, thereby possessing greater legitimacy around conduct guided by institutional pressures. The roles and responsibilities are also entrenched in the wider institutional setting of evaluation and performance management functions. Alternatively, the role of CRDO remains a relatively novel introduction to Canadian federal public sector. As such, CRDOs are confronted with uncertainty around conduct during implementation due to different cultural-cognitive frames concerning the *Results Agenda*.

The various institutional forces employed by the agents-in-context are aimed at steering CRDOs towards conformity and compliance; however, some instruments invite discretion from these public servants. For instance, TB acknowledges some organisations may have the same individual perform multiple roles. The CRDO can serve as the HoPM and on the PMEC. Other departments might designate specific individuals for each role. For public servants that perform multiple roles, this scenario may create considerable ambiguity around behaviour as institutional pressures may overlap or become incoherent. Under these pressures, CRDO may turn to agency to navigate these pressures and chart a path forward on implementation. In other cases, cultural-cognitive frames developed through socially constructed templates informed by past experiences in similar roles can offer direction on appropriate and expected conduct. By most accounts, the

concentration of these forces remains problematic, especially when implementers are embedded within different operating institutional layers that have unstable and porous boundaries. For example, CRDOs may operate as Head of Evaluation and as such, they are nested within the broader institutional field of evaluation. This includes subscribing to various rules, norms, and practices in the fulfillment of their functions as members of an evaluation community. On the other hand, the same CRDOs are also embedded within the broader context of institutional RBM where pressures to conform to expectations and obligations are dictated by the *Results Agenda*. The cultural-cognitive lens suggests implementers draw on existing meanings and experiences to frame their understanding of their environment; however, many of the features of the *Results Agenda* may be new to CRDO and there is uncertainty on how this will unfold. In essence, the integration of different institutional logics creates challenges on arriving at discreet bounds of conduct.

At times, instruments dictate incoherent demands. The *Policy on Results - Governance, Roles and Responsibilities* applies external pressure by defining expected responsibilities for the roles of certain implementers. For instance, Deputy Heads are obligated to ensure “adherence” to the *Policy on Results* while HoPM – at times performed by CRDOs – are tagged with leading the departmental performance measurement function (TB, unknown). In this context, the instrument strengthens regulative pressure nested in the *Directive*. On the other hand, the policy addendum describes what agents are “supposed to do”, which introduces incoherence. In both instruments, the agents-in-context dictate PMEC should perform advisory and oversight functions for the Deputy; however, the responsibility to “integrate” performance measurement and evaluation is not specified in the *Directive* despite its presence in the addendum (TB, unknown). These numerous and subtle differences raise ambiguity, which public servants must confront during implementation. This incoherence is further accentuated in other roles. A review of the

responsibilities unearths language not codified in the *Directive*, raising additional uncertainty around implementation, and weakening the regulative forces conveyed through this specific institutional instrument. For agents-in-focus, the addendum states they are expected to ensure “solid” performance measurement across department (TB, unknown). However, a definition is not provided. The reference template for what TB means by “solid” is socially constructed and framed by public servants’ experiences and interpretations of institutional RBM. Under these conditions, there is potential for variations in interpretations by CRDOs, which cedes additionally territory to agentic behaviour during implementation. The cultural-cognitive perspective suggests implementers are nested within the broader institutional setting of RBM while drawing on the institutional templates of the *Results Agenda* to fulfill expectations around its implementation. What remains obscured is how agents-in-focus exercise agency to negotiate the various institutional layers to implement the *Results Agenda* and what effect this has on institutional *Results Agenda* across federal public sector.

In addition to the above, the relationship between CRDOs and other implementing agents, e.g., HoE, program officials, and others, are informed by taking into account the various components of the *Results Agenda*, which include DRF, Program Inventory, PIPs and Evaluation Plans. The *Policy on Results* specifies boundaries for roles and responsibilities. This complements what is found in the *Directive*. For instance, HoE and HoPM are both responsible to advise on indicators related to the DRF. Concerning the DRF, PMEC is also responsible to review and advise the Deputy Head. For the PIP component, the same implementers are implicated with additional responsibilities falling on the HoPM to establish, maintain, and implement. Though TB identifies relationships between roles, the agent-in-context do not speak to the nuances of these interactions, specifically the lateral and hierarchical considerations. In effect, the instrument only transmits

partial information to CRDOs on expected implementation behaviour when it concerns collaboration with other implementers in their social network. Even with the aid of the *Directive*, the presence of regulative and normative pressures are largely strengthened by cultural-cognitive templates to inform CRDO conduct around social interactions. In fact, the cultural-cognitive pressure performs a crucial role in confronting these realities through agency since CRDOs are suspended in their own norms, rules and values that are of their own making in order to perceive their environment and guide conduct through uncertainty (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). However, taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings derived from experiences based on existing institutional RBM will also vary by CRDOs.

Finally, the political realm forms a strong downward pressure on agents-in-focus. From a governance perspective, CRDOs are obligated to respond to demands within the structure of departmental hierarchy. Stock-takes, ARC committees, and Results Tables all serve as governance conduits for political officials to influence the government's broader agenda on priorities. To support oversight and coordination goals for political executives, CRDOs are required to adhere to various requests and timelines. Regulative forces instruct agents-in-focus to finely attune their attention to pick up these signals from the political leadership. Though CRDOs are routinely engaged with demands from governance, drawing on cultural-cognitive templates offers limited utility as many of these *Results Agenda* engagement practices are new to CRDOs. Therefore, instruments sometimes provide little in the way of how to structure and implement at the departmental level to support these critical political oversight functions.

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

Recall from the quote at the start of this dissertation where Alice is wandering aimlessly somewhere in *Wonderland*. She is embedded in the environment constructed by Carrol. The setting

of *Wonderland* represents Alice's terrain of action, which is confined by what Carrol writes on the page. Of course, as the omnipotent writer, Carrol can willfully impose limits on her range of actions. Like Carrol, agents-in-context from the centres also construct their own RBM environment by attempting to establish the bounds of action for the implementation of institutional *Results Agenda*.

To help understand the implementation landscape in which CRDOs are embedded in, this chapter concentrated on answering the research question that focussed on what institutional RBM pressures are acting on public servants during implementation. It was noted earlier in *Chapter Three* that this answer is to be primarily constructed from the researcher's point of view. The analysis on the objective institutional instruments reveal they do indeed play a profound role in the transmission of key elements of institutional *Results Agenda* to CRDOs through regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive signals.

On the regulative side, internally-generated materials such as the *Directive on Results*, *Policy On Results*, its various addendums, and decks generate significant weight on CRDOs regarding expected implementation conduct. Broadly speaking, behaviour informed by sanctions and incentives are not explicitly stated. However, institutional power based on statutory and functional authorities qualify as regulative mechanism that influence implementers to comply. Conformity to reporting, oversight and accountability requirements are largely driven by demands from agents-in-context such as Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office. In fact, TB appears to be the dominant agent from the centre in driving key elements of institutional *Results Agenda* through institutional instruments and pressures. The central agency is largely responsible for setting the corporate, structural and to some extent, the cultural sandbox for implementation. Though TB generated instruments shape behaviour through implicit reference to their preferred

goals, PCO motives are more transparent for its audience and appear to approach the task differently than TB. Privy Council Office mostly spearheads efforts to shape CRDO implementation behaviour though the pursuit of culture change tied to the *Results Agenda*. Regulative force from externally-generated instruments are also linked to external agents-in-context with close connection to the political and administrative centres. For instance, Barber and his team play a significant role in influencing CRDO behaviour by leveraging the institutional authority of PCO and TB. In this scenario, Delivery Associates have a profound effect in shaping the regulative context of *Results Agenda* implementation based on tenets of *Deliverology*.

In normative cases, both internally and externally-generated instruments compel CRDOs to behave in ways that conform to values and norms prescribed by their social networks. Values around key components of the *Results Agenda* are centred around adoption of results and outcomes-based mindset rather than short-term program view. Additionally, norms, collaboration, engagement, and clear communication appear to be the main elements manifested from normative forces. Instruments such as learning events transmit desired ends along with legitimate and appropriate ways for how CRDOs should pursue them during implementation. An obligatory and evaluative dimension is implicated when examining behaviour vis-à-vis other implementing agents in their social network, such as HoPM and HoE.

From a cultural-cognitive sense, mental schemas and taken-for-granted assumptions inform agents-in-focus behaviour surrounding implementation. Though instruments often dictate specific conduct, agents-in-context compel CRDOs to turn towards existing and historical cognitive templates to harden institutional RBM practice. This includes deferring to orthodox behaviour linked to their role as faithful implementers of government policies and acknowledging their obligations to accountability to Canadians. Agents-in-focus are embedded within a wider

historical institutional RBM which strengthen obligations linked to reporting on performance and participating in governance structures and systems of the *Results Agenda*.

The analysis also revealed that institutional RBM is indeed strengthened when institutional pressures overlap. Instruments create ideal conditions where public servants bear the totalizing effect of institutional *Results Agenda*, which compels them to perform implementation in expected and desired ways envisioned by the centres. On this note, alternatives or deviations are unlikely and isomorphic tendencies are expected from individual conduct on implementation. On the other hand, the existence of one or more pressure can also create ambiguity that leads to uncertainty for CRDOs. In such cases, opportunities to fill the vacuum with agency is high as CRDOs seek to resolve the tension and identify a path forward on *Results Agenda* implementation.

Building on the analysis linked to objective sources, the next chapter aims to discover and validate the above findings against data collected from semi-structured interviews with agents-in-focus – namely CRDOs. To re-iterate, the analysis and the construction of data in this chapter was performed from the researcher's point of view. *Chapter Five* pivots to CRDO perspectives. This includes the capture and analysis of implementer perceptions about the *Results Agenda* institutional environment and the type of institutional work they perform through agentic behaviour. Though *Chapter Four* suggests CRDO behaviour on implementation is informed by instruments, not all of the materials are consumed by these senior public servants. As a matter of fact, it is unknown if these instruments are made available to all implementers. Importantly, the instruments are objective accounts, but they are not self-generated or inert. They are assembled and constructed over time by different agents-in-context. They embody power through influence and are generated by other social individuals. Some of it is objective while others are dependent on the social constructions of the individual consuming it. Therefore, its use is not innocuous, and

the perception of its institutional effect will vary based on the implementer. As such, the following chapter will endeavour to answer the research question on how public servants perceive these instruments, what are the specific types of institutional work they perform in response to institutional pressures, and what implications this work has on the *Results Agenda*.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis – Institutional work

### 5.1 Introduction

Recall the quote from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* found in *Chapter One*. Alice is unfamiliar with her path forward and asks for guidance from the Cheshire Cat. When the Cat replies by asking where she wants to go, Alice is uncertain of her ultimate destination. Despite operating within unknowns, Alice is confident that she wants to reach "somewhere" (Carroll, 1865, p. 89). The Cheshire Cat obliges that as long as she walks, she will get there (Carroll, 1865). Carroll's quote is not meant to be interpreted as dismissive of Alice's concerns but rather, illustrates a view into individual action that is not necessarily linked with pre-determined outcome or even a grand design. Rather, when agency is concerned, the chosen path can diverge as individuals reflexively consider their terrain and make choices about where they want to go.

Picking up on that thread, the data constructed in *Chapter Four* revealed a great deal in terms of the various institutional pressures that exist and the ways in which they manifest through objective instruments of the *Results Agenda*. It shined a light into the preferences of agents-in-context and how they went about communicating these stable preferences to CRDOs in order to establish the design for *Results Agenda* within federal public organisations. Moreover, the result of the analysis of objective instruments also enabled the identification of six main institutional *Results Agenda* elements. These core features permeate across internally and externally-generated instruments and set the institutional context for CRDOs during implementation.

What is often the case within existing implementation literature around results-based management is the privileged status that institutional pressures possess in steering and directing individual action towards conformity. There is a dominant view that top-down directives are totalizing and individuals respond by submitting to the wishes and preferences of agents-in-

context. Moreover, there is a grand institutional design that is reproduced faithfully from regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive based constraints on agency. However, the analysis of the interviews with implementers suggests this is not entirely the case and challenges this monist understanding. Like Alice, the findings from the analysis reveal CRDOs are not strictly bounded by the path laid out by pressures but also exercise agency on which path they want to pursue. While the road of implementation is informed by pressures from institutional *Results Agenda*, CRDO agency also rises to meet these constraints through institutional work. To be clear, individual agency is not the outright rejection or resistance of top-down institutional pressures toward conformity. Rather, it is a nuanced, reflexive, and purposive effort by individuals to pragmatically implement results-based management given challenges with uncertainty, balancing their preferences vis-à-vis those of top-down agents-in-context, and bounded rationality.

The following section builds on what was revealed in *Chapter Four* regarding the pressures that operate as part of the implementation landscape and integrates insights from the analysis of the perceptions of these pressures based on respondents' views. It was noted in *Chapter Three* and *Chapter Four* that it is unknown if these instruments are made available to all implementers. Given this, the answer to the second part of the research question was focussed on what institutional RBM pressures are acting on public servants. Therefore, it was vital to understand how individual CRDOs themselves perceive some of these institutional pressures and their effects. This was accomplished by applying the same coding framework linked to institutional pressures – such regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive – to the interview data and surfacing evidence of which pressures were perceived by agents-in-focus and the various types of institutional work they pursued through agency. This method enabled a more robust validation of pressures acting on CRDOs discovered from the objective instruments. Along with this validation, the chapter also

answers the sub-research question on specific types of institutional work activities that CRDOs perform in response to institutional pressures. It introduces a typology from this analysis that defines and reveals the diversity in the type of work activities engaged by public servants when it concerns implementation of the *Results Agenda*, especially in situations when pressures are perceived to be absent, when multiple pressures operate simultaneously, and when uncertainty exists.

Finally, the current chapter answers the last research question concerned with what implications the institutional work of public servants has on institutional *Results Agenda*. The analysis establishes the connective tissue between the types of institutional work and their effects on institutional *Results Agenda* because existing research on RBM implementation does not offer any insights into the recursive process by which institutional ideas, orders, and practices are affected by creation, maintenance, and disruption activities. Namely, the chapter addresses this gap by providing deeper understanding of institutional dynamics between institutional pressures and CRDO agency. It does this by exploring how these diverse types of implementation conduct tie into institutional creation, disruption, and maintenance of institutional *Results Agenda*. With respect to the type of work performed and its effects on institutional *Results Agenda*, the combined analysis of institutional pressures and institutional work revealed that agency is manifested in several ways by CRDOs. The chapter discusses these methods by weaving different institutional work activities specific to this study in narrative format. This narrative explains how these various types of institutional work activities – that are rolled up under creation, maintenance, and disruption – are linked to intentions around CRDO conduct as they respond to one or more pressure, in the absence of institutional pressures, and as attempts to resolve ambiguity linked to implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

## 5.2 Institutional work at play

As a recap, institutional work concerns the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions by intentional agents (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Through the application of institutional work frame, this section links with the analysis on institutional pressures from *Chapter Four*. In doing so, it generates insight into how institutional *Results Agenda* is affected by the dynamic intersection of institutional forces and agency during implementation by CRDOs. To begin, Table 6 lists and defines the different types of institutional work activities performed by public servants during their implementation. This list was generated based on categorization from the coding exercise from the interview transcripts, which was described in detail starting on page 98 of *Chapter Three*.

**Table 6** - *Definitions of institutional work activities*

Type of work activities	Definition
Adaptation	Pursuit of efforts designed to strategically expend energy to achieve and maintain viable social relationships to ensure efficient functioning and survival of the organisation (Cohen, 2013).
Alignment	Process of calibrating constituent parts into position and in relation to other parts.
Appraisal	Activities that establish value or the act of valuation.
Capacity mobilization	To actively assemble human expertise and knowledge to drive RBM implementation.
Challenge-function	Intended to drive greater scrutiny of ideas and practices against a prescribed standard or expectation.
Coalition-building	Strives to build a social network that work collectively towards a common objective and towards achievement of a specific purpose through exercise of power.
Collaborative	Consists of actively seeking to join efforts with other agents-in-focus towards the pursuit of one or more goals.
Community-building	Seeks to create a network of institutionally-embedded social actors based on common values and experiences. Generates legitimacy through support from a network of targeted allies through the development of a community of practice.
Consolidation	Activities that bring processes, activities, or structures under a single point of control.

Creation	To deliberately bring processes, structures, practices into existence or being. This state of being can be either tangible or intangible and individuals can interact and engage with them socially or cognitively as an abstract concept or objective product.
Demystification	Elimination of obscurity for others that are part of their immediate social environment.
Discovery	Involves behaviour designed to expose what is invisible and often pursued to address awareness and knowledge gaps.
Education	Practice of actively developing the cognitive capabilities of others through formal instruction.
Guidance-seeking	Seeking out clarification from trusted agents within the institutional environment.
Innovation	Intentional act of introducing new ideas and methods into embedded practices.
Leadership	Act of influencing and steering a group of individuals to pursue a collective objective.
Learning	Comprised of behaviour focused on self-motivated and independent individual capacity development.
Legitimation	When implementers make something legitimate or normative.
Reconciliation	Pragmatic approach adopted by individuals to bring vague situations into a state that is free of inconsistency or conflict.
Reflexive thinking	Involves exercising self-awareness through contemplation of one's own conduct and its impacts on their institutional environment.
Sensemaking	Occurs when individuals assign meaning to their experiences.
Socialization	Efforts by individuals to promote internalization of norms by other social agents.
Validation	Act of authenticating practices and ideologies by agents-in-focus.

The types of institutional work activities listed above provides an additional layer of specificity that forms the basis for the following discussion concerning the interaction between pressures and institutional work of creation, maintenance, and disruption. Considering this, the analysis found that this dynamic interaction is complex and multi-faceted. As such, a narrative approach is adopted – as detailed under the analysis section of *Chapter Three* – to facilitate understanding of this intersection between institutions and agency during implementation. Table 7 below provides a summary that is designed to guide the narrative around how institutional work of creation, maintenance and disruption is performed through different types of institutional work

activities whenever CRDOs confront individual and multiple pressures at once, when there is an absence of such forces, and when there is uncertainty.

**Table 7** - *Summary of institutional work*

Institutional work	Type of institutional work activity performed	Activation of institutional work
Creation	Coalition-building	Regulative, normative
	Demystification	Multiple
	Education	Normative, none
	Leadership	Regulative, normative, none
	Reflexive thinking	Cultural-cognitive, multiple
	Validation	Cultural-cognitive
Maintenance	Alignment	Regulative, cultural-cognitive
	Appraisal	Cultural-cognitive
	Capacity mobilization	Cultural-cognitive
	Collaborative	Regulative
	Community-building	Cultural-cognitive
	Creation	Regulative, none
	Discovery	None
	Guidance-seeking	Normative
	Innovation	Regulative
	Learning	Cultural-cognitive
	Legitimation	Regulative, normative
	Sensemaking	Cultural-cognitive
	Socialization	Normative
Disruption	Adaptation	Regulative, none
	Challenge-function	Cultural-cognitive
	Consolidation	Regulative
	Reconciliation	Multiple

### 5.2.1 Creation work

As a review of the discussion from *Chapter Two*, institutional creation work involves three main types. It tracks “overtly political work in which actors reconstruct rules, property rights and boundaries that define access to material boundaries, actions designed to alter abstract categorization in which actors’ belief systems are reconfigured” and encompasses “actions designed to alter abstract categorization in which the boundaries of meaning systems are altered

(Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 22). CRDOs engage in creation work through *coalition-building*, *demystification*, *education*, *leadership*, *reflexive thinking*, and *validation* categories of activities.

One of the main challenges implementers faced was uncertainty. In some cases, regulative instruments generate ambiguity on what is expected of CRDOs as they implement the *Results Agenda*. In the case of the *Policy on Results*, respondents noted the instrument did not directly implicate considerations around risk:

We've seen that one of things that the *Policy on Results* is quiet on is the role risk plays in all of this. That was something I was seized with early on and we've been developing a bit of support internally and there's a community of DGs that are getting together because we haven't been getting guidance from centre necessarily on the role risk plays within this overall context.

From this statement, the consideration around risk is a significant preoccupation for CRDOs in their functional roles and thus, its absence in the *Policy on Results* is perceived as an opportunity to build in this component and fill in the void. As such, they actively tried to influence internal departmental deliberations in order to integrate a risk lens as a legitimate consideration of implementation practices. In view of this, they were compelled to build this support internally through *coalition-building* activities in order to bring about legitimacy by uniting support from specific agents for the adoption of a risk perspective during implementation. In effect, it is a political activity designed to create backing for new ideas under the *Results Agenda*. Moreover, agents-in-focus pursue this type of purposeful conduct in order to expand practice and conceptual boundaries of *Results Agenda*. Though the regulative pressure to report performance is embodied in institutional *Results Agenda*, *coalition-building* work reflects CRDO desire to integrate risk considerations while complying with reporting requirements.

Creation work through *coalition-building* activities are also evident when normative forces are present. Evidence of this is found when CRDOs respond to normative pressures that valorize partnerships and consultations as key elements of institutional *Results Agenda*. This pressure jolts them towards co-development activities with stakeholders, even those outside of traditional public sector. It is conceivable that *coalition-building* activities are viewed as a means for CRDOs to generate legitimacy by consulting and integrating perspectives from relevant non-governmental entities on government policies. In some cases, stakeholders include end-users or recipients of policy programming. In other cases, it involves engagement with proxy representatives linked to the primary recipients of services and funding. As one CRDO noted:

You have the (external organisation name omitted) that is working in close collaboration with Indigenous organisations that are doing work in results-based management. We partner with them and we're trying to advance the *Results Agenda* in a co-development spirit.

Based on the analysis, end-users confer legitimacy to these proxies through deferral to expertise or capacity. In such situations, respondents chose to work with intermediaries to progress *Results Agenda*. As such, the response from implementers to the normative pressure to co-develop is to undertake *coalition-building* and expand the collection of stakeholders. In doing so, CRDOs perform creation work by re-defining the boundaries of “who” is a legitimate stakeholder under *Results Agenda* and generating support for the implementation of the *Results Agenda* through partnerships with proxy representatives.

Another form of creation work is performed through *demystification* activities. CRDOs appear to be concerned with resolving uncertainty for other agents-in-focus in their social network. For instance, a focus on whole-of-government approach is embedded in the roles and

responsibilities linked to implementation of institutional *Results Agenda*. According to one respondent:

We absorb the difficulties, and my team makes it smooth for everybody else. That was the purpose of standing up that unit. It was to try to reduce the complexity and to at least make sure that PCO and TBS know who the main interfaces are and then everybody else in the department also know who their interface is.

This combined regulative and normative pressure to work with others in a collaborative manner on key results identified in such instruments as the Delivery Charters, often raise uncertainty and ambiguity around horizontal responsibilities and accountabilities. To deliver on results, the clarification of mandates and responsibilities is crucial. As such, CRDOs undertake *demystification* activity to resolve uncertainty faced by other implementers in their institutional environment. This includes framing and configuring meanings as well as process and activities linked to the implementation of the *Results Agenda* so other CRDOs and implementers have a better understanding of the demands on them from top-down administrative agents-in-context.

Institutional creation is also encountered when CRDOs engage in *education* work activities during implementation. In this case, implementers are either triggered by normative forces or when there is a void of institutional pressures. *Results Agenda* driven normative forces that are linked to building capacity around clear communication of results to Canadians appear as immediate pressure facing respondents. In the interviews, CRDOs acknowledge they conduct “a lot of education internally and it's to clarify for Canadians what we're doing”. This is done intentionally to build internal capacity and develop a standardized approach to communicating results to the public. In situations where there are no active pressures, respondents valorize the importance of raising staff knowledge about the *Results Agenda*. As one CRDO stated:

The other thing we did was we went to external experts as well. We brought in some in-house training. We did training sessions for staff on results-based management and the new results lens.

They pursue formal methods for capacity development through knowledge transfer activities about results-based management theories, practices, and application of a results lens to departmental activities. In both situations, CRDOs develop and promote formal education to contribute to organisational learning and build capacity within the department. The act of creation through *education* is designed to assign meanings of positive valuation on the development of skills and expertise, and advancement of a culture of continuous performance improvement, which is critical to *Results Agenda* practice.

Looking at creation work through *leadership* activities reveals how public servants scope out defined arenas for certain types of discussions to be held and stakeholders to be involved in the implementation. In this case, CRDO conduct is informed by strategic design which favours guiding the development of a network of internal implementation agents. This work is not dictated by the centre but rather, directed by specific CRDOs through discussions and engagement with other implementers to specify how results and performance expectations are to be understood. One factor driving this is that some CRDOs view leadership as a core function of being an executive-level public servant within their department. As members of the high command, they are responsible for steering organisational resources through decision-making authorities. These functional authorities grant public servants formal powers to influence and alter “access to material boundaries” through collective action on the *Results Agenda* implementation, which is often accomplished through varied *leadership* work activities (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 22). However, it is important to avoid conflating the function of a higher-ranking position of a superior

with that of acting with purpose as a leader. In this case, creation work through *leadership* is achieved when CRDOs intentionally act to pursue specific goals that alter the “abstract categorization of meanings” of other implementers (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 22). For instance, CRDOs pursue *leadership* activities when regulative and normative pressures are present but also when these forces are absent. Public servants respond to regulative pressures when they collect and report on departmental performance under the *Results Agenda*; however, implementers often seek out mechanisms by which to exercise their agency through their positional authority. In the case of reporting requirements, one respondent noted that “chairing that performance advisory committee enables us to provide guidance on how we're going to manage performance data as an organization”. For this CRDO, creation work is accomplished through *leadership* activities when they oversee a committee of executives so they can exert influence on the management of organisational performance data. In other situations, *leadership* activities emerge to re-configure expectations around social interactions derived from normative constraints. For instance, implementers operate in an institutional environment where norms compel them to collaborate. Under these conditions, public servants pursue *leadership* through chairing a committee of specific executives, namely DGs:

I chaired a DG results community which brought together the DGs, and we met every two weeks when there were lots of things going and we were bringing all the different pieces together. For instance, when we were developing our current policy framework, we were talking about the desired results at that table. When we were first trying to develop this data office and all the data that would come to this table.

The activity of coalescing into one group of senior decision-makers is intended to resolve some of the uncertainty around implementation of the *Results Agenda*. In effect, *leadership* activities are

viewed as an attempt to leverage collaboration to strengthen a community of practice through collegial dialogue and coordination. In so doing, CRDOs attach supremacy on engagement through *leadership* as a way to alter key DG belief systems that are working under the *Results Agenda* paradigm. That being said, the practice of *leadership* does not strictly operate under institutional pressures. While serving as chairs, implementers also demonstrate agentic behaviour in their desires to drive discussions on implementation. Specifically, one respondent shared:

As an aside, one of the things that we did within (department name omitted) and it wasn't part of our formal governance, but I chaired a committee on DG results. We brought together some key members of the results community, from a data perspective, from an audit and evaluation perspective, from a program perspective, from a policy perspective and also our folks from IT (information technology), to be able to have ongoing discussions in order to drive it. That was something that we did that was not part of formal governance but that's important.

They felt this type of work enabled them to promote dialogue and attention to issues specific to implementation. Again, creation work through *leadership* alters abstract configuration of what issues warrant attention during engagements between implementers embedded within the same social network. On the other hand, CRDOs also reveal *leadership* efforts enable them to “make sure we have the right people together and develop a results culture”. Implementers perceive their role as chair as an opportunity to shape, establish and foster a set of *Results Agenda* cultural boundaries by gathering or excluding implementing agents based on their preferred selection criteria. In this case, when it comes to the DG-level network, CRDOs instrumentally establish frames of meaning that advance engagement and legitimate activities as being concerned with “appropriate performance measurement culture in the department”.

To add to this, the activity of *reflexive thinking* with regards to creation work is found when CRDOs alter implementer frames of meaning regarding what they believe constitutes robust implementation. CRDOs modified this template of institutional *Results Agenda* by purposefully adding a risk paradigm. The addition of risk perspectives was raised earlier under *coalition-building* efforts by CRDOs; however, in this case, the identification of gaps in the implementation process from *reflexive thinking* activity represents intentional effort by CRDOs to enhance institutional *Results Agenda* practices. In fact, *reflexive thinking* is a common type of creation work performed by CRDOs, which includes valorizing introspective analysis vis-à-vis their wider organisational setting. This activity is aimed at expanding the boundaries of institutional *Results Agenda*. The practice suggests public servants acknowledge a heightened self-awareness of their conduct – directly or indirectly – on the institutional terrain as well as on other social agents. This behaviour is common across several pressures. When cultural-cognitive pressures exist, CRDOs examine their own belief systems in relation to other inputs based on their organisational environment. For instance, CRDOs appear pre-occupied with the assumption that risk considerations should be an integral part of *Results Agenda* implementation. One respondent replied how “We started thinking for ourselves on what we thought made sense from (department name omitted) perspective. We started thinking about risk from three different perspectives”. In sum, *reflexive thinking* serves civil servants in identifying operational gaps within their organisational context as it relates to implementation of RBM, and then filling those with orthodoxic views about how it should be addressed. When regulative and normative pressure are aligned, *reflexive thinking* is also triggered. Respondents acknowledge they are constantly aware of their requirement to implement the *Results Agenda*. On the other hand, they simultaneously recognise a disproportionate normative pull towards the need to align financial decisions with other

resources. This pressure is often compounded when the implementers serve as both CRDO and in senior financial roles within their organisations. As a result, *reflexive thinking* offers a pathway for implementers to consider the intent of the *Results Agenda* and align this with expectations around financial decision-making. This careful deliberation on how to integrate these pieces vis-à-vis what is expected of them in their roles and the operational circumstances of their department links to creation work because it sees them introduce ideas around risk during implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

The final method by which institutional creation manifests is in relation to *validation* work activities. At times, implementers are confronted with uncertainty, and cultural-cognitive pressures prevail to guide CRDOs. This pressure prompts CRDOs to expediate sharing of best practices with other public servants. In broader terms, this type of agentic enterprise re-configures cognitive boundaries through information flows. This activity is designed to enhance understanding and improve the quality of social interactions in order to clarify the way forward on implementation for CRDOs. Respondents recall several instances when *validation* activities were performed as part of creation work. In most cases, *validation* occurs to counteract ambiguity encountered during implementation when CRDOs are unsure on which path to proceed regarding reporting and accountability under the *Results Agenda*. One respondent admitted:

This (*Results Agenda*) was brand new and none of us really knew exactly how to do any of this at the beginning. We were all learning at the same time. We ended up having a very close relationship with him (TB analyst) and we consulted at every juncture as we developed our DRF and making sure they (TB) were on board with what we were doing. CRDOs identify regular touchpoints with agents-in-context to signal-check and guide their implementation. This pattern of behaviour is also evident in situations where CRDOs employed

other departmental implementers – such as PMEC and HoE – in an instrumental way to validate implementation choices. Likewise, another CRDO acknowledged:

We have the audit and evaluation committee. The departmental audit committee, as well, is a key player in supporting us. So we use that committee a lot in term of a sounding board for the work that we are doing.

In other instances, *validation* is pursued in the absence of any available guidance from the centre or internal experts. Under these circumstances, CRDOs oriented their efforts on sharing best practices with their CRDO counterparts in other departments. Here, the practice of *validation* is intended to authenticate implementation activities through a community of like-minded practitioners. Likewise, cultural-cognitive dimensions also enable *validation* activities. Under this institutional constraint, CRDOs place a premium in the belief that knowledge and experience can drive the right way to implement. Public servants defer to their historical RBM experiences to attest current *Results Agenda* practices that are underway. In a way, a taken-for-granted assumption takes hold where CRDOs resoundingly believe that their knowledge of RBM is the best way to corroborate the implementation of the *Results Agenda* in their department.

### 5.2.2 Maintenance work

According to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), maintenance work is performed to “primarily address the maintenance of institutions through ensuring adherence to rules systems” and “focus efforts to maintain institutions on reproducing existing norms and belief systems” (p. 230). Maintenance work is the most popular type of institutional work performed by agents-in-focus when they implement the *Results Agenda*. CRDOs undertake maintenance work when they perform *alignment, appraisal, capacity mobilization, collaborative, community-building, creation,*

*discovery, guidance-seeking, innovation, learning, legitimation, sensemaking and socialization* activities.

Regarding *alignment*, it is mainly performed in response to both regulative and cultural-cognitive constraints. From a regulative standpoint, the activity of *alignment* is often pursued to reinforce sustained attention to reporting requirements under *the Results Agenda*. CRDOs purposefully align departmental reporting efforts with administrative centre requirements with regards to reporting frequency. This is to preserve performance reporting obligations mandated under institutional *Results Agenda*. One implementer noted:

We also leveraged this to increase awareness more generally in the organization or on the importance of results and performance measurement and we linked the PCO exercise with our own efforts within the organization both with the data strategy and also on the TBS *Policy on Results*. For us, those were the opportunities that were certainly presented.

In this context, *alignment* work consists of integrating centre requirements with departmental efforts. Equally, maintenance work aimed at enhancing performance is also achieved through *alignment* activities. Public servants do so largely in response to cultural-cognitive forces, namely around pressures to maintain the pursuit of rational efficiency goals regarding public service activities. This involves CRDOs scanning their environment and adopting a calculative approach in the use of departmental resources. This belief is deeply embedded in the bureaucratic identity.<sup>43</sup> Unsurprisingly, this institutional thinking permeates across multiple respondents and is manifested as maintenance work through *alignment* activities. As one CRDO expressed:

Some departments became insular, and they did their own product, and then they would consult with Treasury Board on it. We did it, I would say, in lockstep with each other, and

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<sup>43</sup> See Murray on the “efficiency question” (1975, p. 369).

we also, at the time, we're trying not to reinvent the wheel in the sense that if we had indicators or result that would touch on the mandates of other like-minded departments, that we were working with these different departments and trying to figure out where they were going with their results and indicators so that we were aligned and that it made sense when we're telling the story.

In view of this, respondents appear motivated to avoid duplication and unnecessary use of organisational resources. This frame of reference directs them to implement in conjunction with agents-in-context and other CRDO counterparts. In this specific case, *alignment* is a purposive act performed by CRDOs by fixating on signal-checks with others in their social environment. It constitutes legitimacy-seeking behaviour driven by a desire to maintain rational efficiency considerations during implementation.

However, some CRDOs experienced challenges with their alignment activities. As one CRDO reflected on the pressure to conform to reporting requirements and fulfill government commitments in the midst of organisational change:

At the time, when Indigenous reconciliation agenda became a top priority for the government, we were completely re-thinking how we were going to do this, how we were going to deliver, how we're going to organize ourselves, and the decision to (reason and name of department omitted). The reason I'm saying all of this is because our perception or our experience with the policy came at a time when it was really challenging. Even if there was no policy (*Policy on Results*) and Mandate Letter commitments, it was a challenging time. We were constantly changing, organizational, structures, etc. A (name of department omitted) is being created. There was a lot of culture change at the same time at different levels. The routine, your daily life had changed because you were no longer part

of this group because you were now reporting to group, so it was “change above change above change”.

Another respondent recounted similar frustrations through their alignment work, specifically in response to central agency demands:

The requirements from PCO changed frequently in the beginning and in the first two years, there were three format changes, RDU updates, and stock takes that were cancelled at the last minute. There's always a huge amount of extra that is going into feeding all of this. I would say in the beginning it took us a little while to find our happy place and there's obvious minor frictions that resulted because of that but it's from a good place because everybody wants to be helpful and wants to try to support PCO as their delivering but also to make it useful for us. It can't just be about feeding the central agency machine.

*Appraisal* activities are also observed in the responses. They are pursued in cases where cultural-cognitive pressures concerning expertise and knowledge of RBM implementation weigh on CRDOs. In such circumstances, this type of activity valorizes the development of capacity and expertise in personnel. It is viewed as a key requirement when pursuing an integrated approach to implementation. In doing so, it institutionally maintains the prevailing belief that meritocracy and professionalism are the primary enablers to building organisational RBM capacity and contributing towards effective institutional *Results Agenda* implementation. In most cases, *appraisal* often accompanies cultural-cognitive beliefs linked to accrued knowledge or expertise. Some CRDOs identify past experiences with RBM implementation as crucial to guiding current *Results Agenda* implementation within their departments. Both formal education and tacit experience in these areas are perceived as valuable currency by these same implementers. At times, *appraisal* activities include both the valuation of self and others. For instance, one respondent assigns a relatively

elevated valuation of their own formal education and professional experience with RBM based on the limited resistance to *Results Agenda* practices within the organisation. They noted that they are “very literate in that work and we do it in a very integrated way in my organization”. *Appraisal* from others can also fortify or undermine valuation. In the previous example, one respondent noted that “I have a lot of people who will be contacting me because of my reputation and because I'm known in the community, and I've done a lot of it in my career”. In this case, the respondent's positive self-assessment is causally linked to other social agents because the informal interactions and perceptions with their counterparts confers legitimacy for their own actions. This specific CRDO perceives that their expertise helps them to effectively pursue an integrated approach to implementation within their department. As such, the respondent's appraisal of their own experiences is designed to maintain the institutional pressure that expertise and knowledge is essential for effective *Results Agenda* implementation.

Expanding on this, when CRDOs maintain institutional ideals on meritocracy, they do so through *capacity mobilization* activities that respond to cultural-cognitive pressure. Similar to *appraisal* activities, *capacity mobilization* emphasises the reproduction of institutional *Results Agenda* beliefs that propel implementation through meritocracy. CRDOs purposely establish essential skills and competency requirements as a precursor for robust implementation. Through *capacity mobilization*, they deliberately sought experienced staff when forming their implementation teams and when building organisational capacity. Essentially, CRDOs generally hold taken-for-granted assumptions that effective implementation requires relevant and sufficient expertise. Insistence on building a knowledgeable staffing complement is based on a logic of orthodoxy where alternatives to robust organisational capacity for driving implementation are unavailable. This unchallenged view about the need to adequately define capacity compels CRDOs

to outline their criteria for personnel inclusion based on satisfying their perceptions of sufficient expertise. One respondent noted the following criteria for the departmental implementation team:

I'll start with the number one which is having a very solid team. A very solid team in the sense of knowledgeable, vast amount of experience, and stable team. Not a team that has a high turnover – people coming in, going out. The team live and breathe results and that's within my group and it's responsible for planning and performance at the corporate-level, not necessarily at program-level. We support on that front. Their knowledge, them reading it, reviewing it, bringing to light “we've gotta do XYZ”, “I've got questions”, that was critical number one, having a solid team in place otherwise it would have been very difficult.

While no measurable threshold is mentioned for this requirement, the expectation of technical expertise and tacit experience with RBM implementation is reported as vital. Additionally, as part of *capacity mobilization* efforts to maintain meritocratic ideals, public servants also promote continuity and stability as an ideal component of building their implementation team. This is informed by CRDO having experienced high staff turnover, which has frustrated their implementation efforts. The respondent admits that stability in tenure enables sedimentation of implementation practices because it leverages corporate memory. Further to this, *capacity mobilization* activity is pursued as a way of reproducing cultural expectations about the importance of a *Results Agenda* approach. Moreover, the CRDO prioritizes mobilization of staff that demonstrate strong engagement with the results paradigm, which further defines the sandbox for inclusion and entrench their perceptions of what constitutes effective and robust implementation.

Not surprisingly, maintenance work is also performed through *collaboration*. CRDOs are weighed down by regulative pressures to comply and they reproduce demands for accountability

that are linked to internal and external reporting requirements under the *Results Agenda*. Sometimes implementers undertake *collaboration* in order to discover new information and coordinate their implementation efforts in relation to this regulative pressure. As such, *collaborative* activities manifest in circumstances where CRDOs face uncertainty about what other public servants are doing on implementation. Emergence of uncertainty is particularly poignant when multiple departments contribute to one or more government priority. Evidently, collaboration is a significant expectation under institutional *Results Agenda*, especially as it relates to working horizontally across public sector to achieve government objectives. Through *collaboration* work activities, CRDOs sustain reporting obligations under institutional *Results Agenda* by exposing the unknown and aligning organisational efforts towards government priorities. They also initiate *collaboration* to resolve ambiguity related to implementation when operating within horizontal structures. For instance, respondents noted that development of targets and performance of activities that contribute towards fulfilment of these targets often overlapped multiple departmental mandates. This context triggered CRDOs to collaborate with other implementers to discover and clarify boundaries for departmental responsibilities and accountability on results objectives. One respondent noted they undertook this *collaborative* activity to discover “where like-minded departments were trying to go” so that they “were aligned”. Against regulative pressures to comply with and maintain reporting requirements under *Results Agenda*, implementers intentionally sought to join efforts with other CRDOs to reduce ambiguity and coordinate implementation at the operational level.

Beyond this, *community-building* work activities also signals an effort by public servants to maintain *Results Agenda* institutional expectations that are fixed on organisational learning and capacity development. That being said, implementation is fraught with uncertainty and CRDOs

experience implementation challenges that often parallel those of other public servants within their social network. Interestingly, implementation is often performed in obscurity and internal sources of guidance are somewhat limited or non-existent altogether. To that effect, CRDOs consulted with central agencies to seek clarity, while navigating efforts to maintain some degree of departmental autonomy on *Results Agenda* practices against the totalizing pressure from the administrative agents-in-context. By recognising this, *community-building* activities represent CRDO-led efforts to invest resources into a community of practice designed to validate common issues and generate backing for collective practices. It is a purposive practice to build wider organisational capacity through crowdsourcing of their own counterparts. More importantly, *community-building* is not restricted to seeking collective solutions to implementation issues. It is also intended to generate solidarity amongst CRDOs by drawing on their collective experiences. Maintenance work on organisational learning from *community-building* also unfolds when cultural-cognitive pressures are directed towards implementers. When such institutional forces are present, this activity is anticipated to build a sense of belonging amongst implementers. Even though solution-seeking is one motivation for community of practice involvement, respondents also note that validation about their implementation practices by others is a key driver for pursuing *community-building* efforts. For instance, one CRDO described:

My guys felt they were toiling a little bit in obscurity and wanted to reach out to their colleagues and figure out “are we all experiencing some of the same issues”, “are there ways that we could be mutually supporting each other”. Two or three levels below the CRDOs, this community of practice was established and helpful for everybody, even if it was just to share pain points.

Knowing this, it is clear CRDOs are not exclusively motivated to seek out solutions to implementation challenges, but rather, to mutually support each other through validation and a sense of belonging. Solution-seeking appears to largely be an ancillary benefit from the overall goal of creating a space for members to feel visible and supported, despite initially being meant for maintenance of capacity development and organisational learning goals.

Interestingly, under maintenance work, *creation* is the most popular type of activity performed by respondents. This was mostly to preserve accountability ideals under institutional *Results Agenda*. It is often triggered by regulative pressures in the institutional environment. Implementers perform *creation* for different purposes and in reaction to different regulative forces weighing on them. For instance, CRDOs are often under significant weight to respond to pressures linked to the implementation of various components of the *Results Agenda*, such as the DRF and PIPs. These obligations are outlined in various instruments including the *Policy on Results* and others previously mentioned in *Chapter Four*. In response to this, one CRDO created a “new division” within their branch. The intention behind this was to enhance internal operational capabilities against *Results Agenda* institutional demands on reporting to the centre. While the directive from the centre is to implement *Results Agenda*, CRDOs also leveraged agentic powers to decide how they wanted to fulfill this requirement, and there is a myriad of ways they engaged in *creation* to respond to pressures from compliance. For example, in situations where they need to coordinate a more efficient response to routine reporting requirements from Mandate Letters involved leveraging a network of personnel across space and time. The CRDO related:

We've set up a network across the department of delegated leads and so now everybody knows what they have to do when they get the email that says, “time for you to update” the

mandate letter trackers for instance. We've used workers in different time zones in order to respond more quickly to requests.

In this sense, the activity of *creation* is motivated by a desire to improve internal accountability through greater awareness-raising and establishment of formal departmental structures. Another example that speaks to compliance is the accountability to increase capacity of departmental staff regarding the *Results Agenda*. Of their perceptions on the *Results Agenda*, one respondents stated “it became something everybody had to look at, but nobody had the expertise at the program level necessarily to jump into the implementation”. As such, educating internal staff on the accountability requirements of the *Results Agenda* is an obligation imposed on CRDOs by the centre. One implementer stated:

What we did at (department name omitted) in terms of a model to implement and this is from an internal capacity side, we have dedicated senior results advisors. They are specialists. They work with a portfolio they manage of our sector clients.

These newly formed roles are focal points for departmental staff on matters related to reporting linked to the DRF and PIPs under the *Results Agenda*. These advisors are tasked with raising collective situational awareness through formal training and promotion of results-culture in the department.

In fact, the activity of *creating* new roles is not a unique reaction to the responsibility of building organisational capacity. It is in fact a common response from public servants during their implementation – especially when they confront regulative pressures from instruments. Take for instance the whole-of-government shift towards evidence-based policymaking. The development and reliance on the collection and dissemination of data has become an integral component of departmental responsibilities. In such cases, departments were also required to develop data

strategies by the centre. Though independent of the *Results Agenda*, this is very much embedded within institutional RBM practices. In light of this, one respondent stated “data champions” were established in response. Implementers conceived this role as a way to address a narrow set of obligations imposed on them, specifically around structuring and managing the collection of performance data within their departments. Given the pressure on CRDOs to maintain compliance activities through individual components of the *Results Agenda*, such as the DRF and PIPs, implementers demonstrated latitude on how to achieve this through agency. From an operational standpoint, one respondent stated:

We created these results working groups to do these deep dives whenever we decide we might overhaul the DRF, which is not something I advocated right away and figured we would do little tweaks, but I want it to be able to create the right structure for conversations within the department to inform any future changes we may be able to make and how well it's doing in terms telling that results story. It also made a really big difference I think in terms of how we were able to explain the story of the department. If you were to look at any of our DPRs, planning documents that were done before the DRF versus what we have now, where we have our core responsibilities, we really have results story and give the DPR to an employee, they're going to get a flavor of what the work of the department is. I'm not sure those documents were nearly as strong before we had the DRF. It provided us with the right frame to be able to tell a story and we're a few years out now so we're starting to take that for granted but that was a really big change and a big improvement in how we tell a holistic and coherent story of the department

In effect, the creation of these groups is intended to coordinate and improve collective analysis and framing of performance data of the department through the DRF instrument. Others responded by forging a “performance advisory committee”. The CRDO justified this by stating:

We created a performance advisory committee in order to support the whole-of-the-department on the PIPs and the DRF, to make sure that there was a common look and feel and that we were able to pull out lessons, that we were able to give advice in a coherent way. It's also pulling in colleagues from elsewhere in the department that have oversight responsibility because the oversight responsibilities actually lie in a couple of different places. It sits in evaluation, some in corporate planning which sits under the CFO, there's quality assurance folks as well. All of them come together within that pack that we've created.

The intent for these committees is to influence standardization of performance and data tools and leverage policy learning to improve implementation of various *Results Agenda* instruments. CRDOs also undertook *creation* activities to maintain and support the development of a culture of evidence-based policy and continuous improvement, which are structurally integrated as part of institutional *Results Agenda*. Additionally, implementers dedicate energy to enhance internal operational capabilities to improve their ability to react to regulative pressures linked to implementation. In the same vein, *creation* activities involved purposive effort to improve departmental accountability through coordination. These types of value-added improvements are meant to respond to routine reporting requests more efficiently through greater awareness of responsibilities and establishment of new departmental structures. Though the above *creation* activity is linked exclusively to regulative pressures, the practice is also observed in cases where pressures are absent. For instance, one respondent revealed they were instrumental in initiating a

“government-wide community of practice among different Results Units”. No institutional pressure is perceived by the respondent, yet their conduct is guided by a desire to create an internal network of CRDOs that share lessons-learned and best practices to improve implementation of *Results Agenda*. In another example, the respondent noted:

...There had been small results and delivery unit which was doing that PCO angle, and that was merged into my team, and I became the CRDO. They had their own consultation mechanisms where they were working through PCO and were building relationships around town with partner departments who had similar interest to us.

This specific scenario reveals an agentic decision by public servants that is designed to centralize formal and informal engagement with the centre and other departments.

Maintenance work dedicated to institutional concerns around continuous improvements also include performance of *discovery* activities by public servants. For instance, CRDOs are pre-occupied with undertaking thorough and robust analysis of implementation to identify gaps in practices and processes. While the motivation to expose gaps is not evidence of clear strategic design, its efforts does connect more broadly with the presence of uncertainty. Revelations from *discovery* work activity unveil new considerations, expose deficiencies in the implementation process and support development of new implementations paths by CRDOs who seek to address these issues. The findings illustrate that to maintain continuous improvement objectives, CRDOs perform *discovery* activities to resolve uncertainty they encounter during implementation. The collection of data or information enabled implementers to contemplate how to proceed. From this activity, one implementer explained:

“We were looking at building risk within our Performance Information Profiles which was not something that was required by Treasury Board but something that we thought made

sense. I think we were curious; we were asking questions to the results team about where their (TB) thinking was. They hadn't really given much thought at that point because they were so busy getting the result off the ground, the DRF, the PIPs, that they hadn't really turned their attention to risk. They were aware that questions were coming but I don't think they had themselves organized in a way to be able to give any real guidance on it and I'm not sure if that's evolved or not.

Though the injection of a risk lens was not required by TB, CRDOs felt compelled to gain greater insight on what the centre's view was in this area. In effect, *discovery* activities entail learning what gaps exist in the *Results Agenda* terrain and for CRDOs to self-guide implementation in order to maintain continuous improvement practices from the addition of a risk perspective.

CRDOs who engage in *guidance-seeking* look to maintain organisational learning as a core feature of institutional *Results Agenda*. These CRDOs noted they encountered friction points during implementation. These tensions represent ambiguities that emerge as the implementation processes unfold vis-à-vis their unique departmental context. To resolve these impasses, respondents often lean on other CRDO counterparts to clarify the implementation path. They frame other CRDOs as resources that serve their instrumental needs so they can confront more acute challenges and achieve broader capacity development goals. However, *guidance-seeking* is not restricted to seeking advice from these communities of practice. Instead, it includes effort by public servants to seek counsel from individual CRDOs by leveraging existing relationships. Generally, implementers concentrated on locating resources that clarify and resolve ambiguity in their terrain of conduct. They would secure the assistance of other CRDOs because as one respondent noted, "it really encouraged working-level clarification and resolution of any friction points that existed related to the first mandate". Alternatively, another respondent turned to agents-in-context directly.

They would “reach out to their colleagues in PCO to try and clarify matter and overcome whatever uncertainty existed” in the implementation. Whether at the central agency or working-level, CRDOs frame trusted agents as key resources in order to clarify implementation challenges and maintain organisational learning through *guidance-seeking* work activities.

For the reproduction of institutional *Results Agenda* practices linked to accountability through reporting and performance improvement, the analysis turned to *innovation* work activities. *Innovation* manifests in improvements to processes that enhance internal accountability. As noted in *Chapter Four*, expectations to routinely communicate performance information is a regulative pressure that bears down on CRDOs from agents-in-context. Top-down forces from the centre include periodic and ad-hoc reporting requirements whereby implementers are expected to collect and transmit performance information linked to specific government policy outcomes. This obligation is not new to public servants, but it does remain an embedded practice of institutional *Results Agenda*. As part of *innovation*, implementers reformed reporting processes through the adoption of new tools – such as the introduction of a departmental Mandate Tracker – to reinforce reporting links and demonstrate progress against government promises. The internal departmental tracker is intended to enable CRDOs to monitor progress against milestones and targets. It also supports departmental efforts to evaluate expected performance against commitments and timelines, as well as communicate and manage expectations with various internal stakeholders. Though it was introduced as part of *innovation* activities, the tracker serves as an objective, CRDO-built regulative instrument to maintain and improve internal accountability.

Maintenance work is also observed when CRDOs purposefully seek and adopt lessons-learned and best practices to build capacity in order to improve implementation efforts. Since institutional *Results Agenda* calls on the adoption of a continuous improvement mindset on

performance, CRDOs intentionally undertake *learning* activities to reinforce and preserve conduct that promotes self-motivated and, at times, unstructured opportunities for the development of their own competencies and skills. One respondent noted they often “engage with international counterparts (OECD and the United Nations) and benefit from their thinking”. This activity infuses agency into action because respondents seek opportunities to self-educate without any direct or compelling institutional reasons.

Once again, implementers affirm the *Results Agenda* is a method to improve on existing RBM approaches. Despite the mandate from the centres to implement, CRDO agentic conduct is also meant to endorse current *Results Agenda* practices as an improvement over past RBM regimes. *Legitimation* activities contribute to maintenance of institutional ideals for continuous improvement under *Results Agenda* by deferring to internal sources rather than external references. To clarify, *legitimation* is the recognition by public servants that *Results Agenda* practices are the most appropriate alternative in the evolution of RBM within the Canadian federal public sector. Though *legitimation* is also triggered by regulative pressures to comply with demands from the centre to implement the *Results Agenda*, CRDOs move beyond compliance and actively endorse the concept of the *Results Agenda*. For example, one respondent unequivocally stated, “I should say in frankness that we embraced the Results and Delivery agenda to leverage it to really enhance our overall approach to performance measurement”. Broadly speaking, the endorsement from agents-in-focus infuses a value-judgement in the implementation of institutional *Results Agenda* and dampens the regulative dimension for CRDOs. Depending on the perceived reputation of implementers, the weight of this endorsement also carries added legitimacy with other implementers within their social network. Additionally, the affirmation of value to *Results Agenda*

practices bolsters norms that compel CRDOs to implement *Results Agenda* as an appropriate method for improving performance within Canadian federal public sector.

For the maintenance of *Results Agenda* practices linked to outcomes-based approaches specifically, CRDOs undertake *sensemaking* activities. They do this by linking resources to outcomes through various artefacts – such as DRF, PIPs, and Cabinet documents. CRDOs undertake *sensemaking* as a boundary-setting exercise of their department’s mandate. Targeting this area with this type of activity is meant to reinforce central agency directives that are designed to compel individuals to perform work that flow directly from their department’s Core Responsibilities. These responsibilities are originally established and vetted by the agents-in-context – namely TB – and remain embedded in various components linked to the *Results Agenda*. The regulative pressure to comply leads implementers to undertake *sensemaking* practice as a method to define the boundaries of the department’s mandate and develop an outcomes-based perspective around performance. In doing so, public servants legitimize the increased powers and purview of the centre to scrutinize and challenge departments to comply with their core mandate. However, it also couples both cultural and social dimensions for behaviour since *sensemaking* enables CRDOs to infuse rationality to actions within their social environment. This activity often manifests when implementers face ambiguity and there is a compelling need to resolve it during implementation. Respondents undertake *sensemaking* to clarify and understand their departmental goals in the specific context of the *Results Agenda*. One CRDO noted they held “internal discussion about what is [*sic*] our mandate and how we are going to demonstrate results and outcomes”. As such, the affirmation of an enterprise-wide mandate instills meaning to CRDOs experiences during implementation and emphasises commitment to *Results Agenda* objectives.

Finally, maintaining a focus on fulfilling government commitments is largely tied to *socialization* activities performed by CRDO during implementation. Public servants purposefully create and drive departmental awareness of the *Result Agenda* by entrenching a results culture designed to promote its implementation as an essential component of delivering on government promises. In effect, CRDOs act as advocates for the centre on institutional *Results Agenda*. Therefore, performance of *socialization* fortifies values tied to being a public servant – which is to faithfully and dispassionately implement government demands. Even though pressures on increasing departmental awareness are not seen to operate directly, CRDOs nevertheless engage in *socialization* to promote internalization of norms by other CRDOs and implementing agents within their social network. In this instance, *socialization* is concentrated on exerting influence on other implementers in order to legitimize the *Results Agenda* practices as primarily focussed on achievement of government objectives through the coupling of public sector ethos of the dutiful implementer with that of performance management.

However, one CRDO's experiences revealed socialization activities also raised tensions in during the implementation, especially concerning regulative pressures around new performance reporting obligations. As they recalled:

They set up a process and people follow it. The idea of getting in [*sic*] place and then habituating the system was very important. They (central agencies) would say “here it is, month after month after month, we’re doing the same thing” and then people sort of say “Oh yes! OK, this is on my desk now. I’ve seen it before many times. OK, so what do I need to look at?” That process was painful but habituating that process is important to instilling it in the operations of any Department and across the government and just saying

“this is going to happen”. In that sense, there was a lot of growing pains but at the end of the day it's “OK”.

### 5.2.3 *Disruption work*

Following the discussion on creation and maintenance, disruption is concerned with “work in which state and non-state actors worked through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some sets of practices, technologies or rules”, “attempt to disrupt institutions by disassociating the practice, rule or technology from its moral foundation” and “undermining core assumptions and beliefs which stabilize institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, pp. 235-37). Implementers engage in disruption work when they perform *adaptation*, *challenge-function*, *consolidation*, and *reconciliation* activities.

*Adaptation* is a relatively common activity performed by CRDOs during implementation. Implementers perform this activity mostly in response to regulative pressures. The pressure activates agency when agents-in-context demand that CRDOs demonstrate progress on government commitments. The institutional pressure to report weighs on CRDOs and they undertake a deliberate calculus between internal capacity and external needs on how to respond to such forces. In doing so, they adopt a pragmatic perspective to implementation that suits their perceived operational realities. While *adaptation* acknowledges compliance with reporting obligations as an embedded as part of institutional *Results Agenda*, CRDOs also confront demands from the centre by filtering it through their own environmental context. In such cases, perfect compliance is not assured as CRDOs consider relevance, departmental capacity, and needs on whether to comply or deviate with every aspect of reporting imposed by the centres. In some instances within a regulative context, the motivation by CRDOs to perform *adaptation* actually serves to satisfy their own instrumental needs. For instance, there is significant pressure on

implementers to empirically demonstrate performance against established targets linked to DRF and other reporting instruments tied to *Results Agenda*. Frequency and format for reporting is largely dictated by agents-in-context – both political and administrative. However, respondents noted there is ambiguity around reporting performance internally and across government because it is a “new process”. CRDOs responded to this by stating:

When it started, we changed how we presented things. We’re giving them (senior management) more info. But now, it's “I'm (senior management) going to a meeting somewhere, I want some information on this. I saw this presentation at one point, there is data”. So, it's bringing a lot of fact-based information.

In this sense, the intention is to showcase performance based on needs of agents-in-context through a pragmatic approach. This pragmatic mindset reveals the intention to comply with demands from the centre but also to exercise agency through deliberate choices related to how performance information is framed and contextualized. Furthermore, a calculated decision is made by CRDOs to go above and beyond what is expected in reporting of performance data. This is done as a way to pre-empt additional scrutiny and demands from the centre. *Adaptation* is also performed to address regulative stresses from perceived reporting burdens. In such cases, the pragmatic trend continues to guide implementation behaviour. One respondents stated:

The challenges were that it was a new process, so you learn and adapt, and I think we have adapted to some extent by moving away from the monthly to a quarterly (reporting) with the understanding that some issues are not going to be right for this agenda.

For this reason, CRDOs pursue implementation that consider their organisational resources and their capacity to sustain higher frequency reporting. In fact, implementers acknowledge it is not possible to resolve every issue linked to the *Results Agenda* implementation. As a result,

*adaptation* embraces a reasonableness test towards implementation that reflects efforts to balance organisational capacity and its long-term survival. In other cases, *adaptation* activities are performed in the void of institutional pressures. While forces are not directly perceived by CRDOs to be in operation, public servants do self-evaluate implementation based on their own internalized view of *Results Agenda* and their organisational context. Respondents directly acknowledged this form of work by stating that “we've internalized it in a way that I think is consistent with what the purpose is, adapted it, cut it to our own environment as we continue to learn and evolve”. It reflects purposive effort by implementers to shape the *Results Agenda* based on the contours of their organisational setting. In effect, the conduct of CRDOs is a deliberate efficiency-driven exercise by weighing the purpose of the *Results Agenda* against departmental mandate and resources.

*Challenge-function* activities also disrupt central agencies' institutional oversight powers. TB and PCO possess authorities and oversight functions to compel CRDOs to behave in certain ways. They do this by scrutinizing *Results Agenda* implementation against imposed standards. Their institutional authority grants them legitimacy to develop these types of instruments. However, CRDOs confront the dominant challenge-function role of agents-in-context in the belief that they can perform the same task more robustly than the centres. Public servants believe their expertise and skills extend beyond those of agents-in-context and as such, perceive the centres' abilities in this area to be inadequate. In light of this, implementers adopt a strategy of overcompensation by leading a more robust implementation effort than the one prescribed by the centres. This invariably undermines core assumptions where central authority powers are viewed as the exclusive arbiter on effective *Results Agenda* implementation. In fact, implementers are motivated to perform a more robust scrutiny of their departments efforts because they valorize their own experiences and expertise as a value-add to implementation. A causal logic operates

since they believe they can legitimately challenge their organisation. They perceive their knowledge of RBM implementation possesses intrinsic value to the department. Not only is this conduct meant to meet expectations set by the centers around implementation, but it is also designed to address perceived capacity gaps inherent to TB and PCO.

Additionally, CRDOs perform disruption work when they purposefully undertake efforts to increase operational efficiency through *consolidation*. This activity is intended to minimize reporting burden imposed by Treasury Board. Through the alteration of internal reporting structures, CRDOs define how the central agency accesses and receives departmental performance information. For example, TB demands the collection and reporting of performance information from public servants. The central agency uploads this data into a central repository – GC Infobase – that publicly displays unprocessed data as well as contextualized performance information. Under the weight of reporting requirements, CRDOs identify a need to generate efficiencies in their data collection and reporting processes. One respondent indicated they pursue *consolidation* by amalgamating all their performance measures. The CRDO stated:

Another example is that we're compiling a repository of all of our performance measures. TBS has done that as well and that cross match. We should be spending far less time in terms of the actual data preparation and having more of our time spent on undertaking the analysis in identifying issues and how to address issues.

While they acknowledge the regulative weight of TB requirements on reporting, they also pursue *consolidation* to facilitate information transfer, despite no formal requirement from the central agency to engage in this type of work. To a greater extent, *consolidation* work is primarily an instrumental exercise. For CRDOs, the integration and crosswalk of performance information is designed to smooth out their reporting burden under the *Results Agenda*. However, an unintended

consequence of *consolidation* is that it also confronts increased centralization efforts by agents-in-context, which is a central feature of institutional *Results Agenda*. The re-configuration of structures by CRDO through *consolidation* in order to enhance efficiency is meant to disrupt the centre's power and gain greater control over some reporting pressures imposed by TB.

The final institutional disruptor looks to *reconciliation* activities performed in response to multiple pressures acting on implementers. As noted earlier, the requirement to report performance data is strongly embedded in institutional *Results Agenda*. Often, requests and tasking are issued by agents-in-context from the political and administrative centre and CRDO are expected to comply as dutiful public servants. However, when CRDOs seek a balance between reporting requirements and preserving accountability through *reconciliation* activities, they undermine the totalizing effect from the centres. In fact, public servants adopt rational-efficiency considerations when faced with directives to report. In such cases, *reconciliation* assists CRDOs to develop pragmatic approaches around how to adhere to reporting obligations, such as practical and operational considerations of the department. Further to this, the weight of multiple pressures on CRDOs creates ambiguity during implementation. Under these circumstances, implementers are presented with opportunities to resolve uncertainty through *reconciliation*, which ultimately disrupt institutional *Results Agenda*. For example, when CRDOs confront mounting regulative pressure to implement the *Results Agenda* while also pursuing rational-efficiency concerns, they point to the need to “unpack the *Policy on Results*” and “reporting up” through governance committees. However, CRDOs also operate under the belief that any process they develop should be a “do once and use often, as much as possible” approach. In response to the dual regulative and cultural-cognitive pressure, implementers reveal they “figured out our happy place internally”, and one that seemingly disrupts centralization efforts by the centre. In such circumstances,

performance of *reconciliation* strives towards establishing a balance between reporting accountabilities and reporting capacity based on rational-efficiency goals rather than ensuring unimpeded compliance to centre demands.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The research questions for this chapter were primarily focussed on understanding how CRDOs perceived their institutional environment, how they reacted through specific institutional work activities during implementation and what effect this had on institutional *Results Agenda*. On the first question, the insights gathered from applying the coding template and subsequent analysis on the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews revealed a number of important insights into the institutional pressures perceived by CRDOs. First, *Chapter Four* noted a variety of different internally and externally-generated instruments. The instruments are designed to propel institutional *Results Agenda* features on CRDOs through regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. However, it was also noted that while these instruments contribute to setting the institutional frame for implementation, not all public servants have access to refer to these specific instruments. However, the analysis of the responses found that CRDOs do perceive institutional pressures to be acting on them from both internally and externally-generated instruments such as the *Directive, Policy on Results*, decks, and learning events.

From a regulative standpoint, CRDOs generally perceived these pressures through additional reporting requirements and greater scrutiny from the centres. This is mainly due to increased expectations around frequency of engagement between implementers and the political and administrative agents-in-context. Proactive management of performance reporting tools such as DRF, PIPs and tracking of Mandate Letters are explicitly noted by CRDOs as obligations of

*Results Agenda* implementation. In addition, CRDOs identified there was a profound desire for increased centralization from the centre because of the weight from strengthened and frequent challenge function powers. These regulative pressures from the *Directive, Policy on Results*, the decks, and various addendums weighed heavily on CRDOs with respect to their implementation tasking. Subsequently, the analysis of the transcripts also validated normative pressures tied to outcomes-based approaches which extend beyond programmatic and departmental boundaries, and towards achievement of broader government objectives. Legitimacy in this sense, is closely tied to the roles of CRDOs as key enablers for embracing and driving culture change, partnering with external stakeholders, and collaborating internally with other CRDOs and other implicated public servants in the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. These perceptions are closely linked to instruments such as the decks from PCO, speeches, interviews, and learning events as they are key contributors for crafting the normative institutional frame for *Results Agenda* implementation. Finally, the cultural-cognitive dimensions are fortified through internally and externally-generated instruments when CRDOs are triggered to recall their own historical experiences with results-based management, such as orthodoxic ways of pursuing implementation conduct. Moreover, CRDOs also perceive cultural-cognitive pressures from instruments as hardening the politics-administration dichotomy, which includes preserving and embodying the ethos of dispassionate implementers of government policy. In fact, the analysis revealed no outright rejection of the top-down imposed RBM approach, with CRDOs overwhelmingly accepting to implement the *Results Agenda* in their role as Canadian federal public servants.

In terms of the type of activity performed during implementation and its effects on institutional *Results Agenda*, the combined analysis of institutional pressures and institutional work revealed that CRDO agency is manifested in several ways. Creation work emerged when

pressures individually weighed against CRDOs during implementation. Whether it is regulative, normative, or cultural-cognitive forces, implementers responded with different types of institutional work activities in order to expand conceptual and practical boundaries linked to institutional *Results Agenda*. For instance, when regulative forces exist from instruments and generates uncertainty for implementers around risk considerations, *coalition-building* served as a way for CRDOs to build in this component by uniting internally with other CRDOs and implementers. Under normative circumstances, public servants were seen to pursue *education* to valorize internal capacity within staff. For cultural-cognitive pressures, CRDOs undertook creation work through *validation* activities by pulling on their historical experiences with RBM implementation and integrating potentially new perspectives into institutional *Results Agenda*. When pressures were not perceived by CRDOs, creation work is still performed through *demystification*. Here, CRDOs took on the role of resolving difficulties and complexities in the implementation environment. Finally, *reflexive thinking* was engaged during creation work when there are multiple pressures operating against CRDOs. In such cases, this activity served to expand the *Results Agenda* institutional boundaries by factoring in risk paradigms during implementation.

Similar to creation, maintenance work also responded to similar pressures that exist in the institutional environment. In fact, maintenance is the most popular type of institutional work performed by CRDOs during implementation. That being said, agentic activities dominated when there was a void of pressures. For instance, *community-building*, *creation*, *discovery*, *learning*, *sensemaking* and *socialization* all occurred to support preservation of institutional *Results Agenda*. *Discovery* activities happened when uncertainty prevailed and contributed to *Results Agenda* concerns around continuous improvement. In other cases, *socialization* activities emerged to support the focus on fulfillment of government commitments. This was accomplished by CRDOs

that intentionally but without prompt, drove activities that entrenched a results culture as a feature of institutional *Results Agenda*.

Finally, under disruption work, regulative pressures were the key drivers for agentic activities, though they did also occur when pressures were aligned or when they were absent. When regulative pressures tied to reporting against government promises exists, CRDOs responded through *adaptation* activities. In this case, there was a deliberate attempt to find a pragmatic approach where the intention was not to fully comply but rather to filter reporting requirements from agents-in-context through departmental operational realities facing CRDOs. More specifically, the behaviour was not an outright rejection of top-down reporting obligations. Rather, it was a practical consideration by CRDOs of their department's capacities to adequately fulfill these demands. However, the unintended consequence of this conduct directly challenged efforts by the centre to increase their powers under institutional *Results Agenda*. This specific feature of institutional *Results Agenda* is further disrupted when CRDOs granted themselves greater challenge function powers than those held by the centre. This is largely based on their own perception of what consist as robust implementation, and not linked to any institutional pressure. However, this behaviour confronted the overwhelming belief that the most capable and legitimate challenge function authorities are vested with the centres.

In sum, the analysis generated from both objective and subjective instruments provides a unique picture into how CRDOs perceive, respond, and potentially affect institutional *Results Agenda* through agentic behaviour. CRDOs are reflexive, knowledgeable, and skilled implementers that integrate their understanding of the wider institutional terrain – including its pressures – to drive their implementation conduct. That being said, institutional forces need not be present for agency to exist and even prevail. Though institutional pressures are an important factor,

they are not a necessary condition for action. As is shown throughout this chapter, agentic behaviour can often override the lack of institutional direction – both from instruments and agents-in-context – especially when uncertainty abounds in the implementation arena. At times, the effect of agentic behaviour vis-à-vis institutional pressures denotes intention to specific desired outcomes through action. Other times, CRDOs are not operating under any great strategic design and yet, they can still have pronounced and unintentional effects on institutional *Results Agenda*.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

When Alice replies that she does not care much for where she goes so as long as she gets “somewhere”, it is clear she is not consumed by the need for directions from the Cheshire Cat (Carrol, 1865, p. 89). Like the titular character, this is not to say that CRDOs are ambivalent of where they need to go with regards to implementation of the *Results Agenda*, since there is clear and direct oversight by agents-in-context. Rather, for public servants, implementation is ongoing, and their actions are not defined by serving as unreflexive automatons whose implementation behaviour is strictly dictated by a defined path laid out by the centres. If anything, the mindset of CRDOs is to strive for – deliberately or not – a pragmatic approach that factors in institutional forces, their perceptions, and agentic conduct. As the Cat suggests, “if you only walk long enough”, you are sure to get somewhere (Carrol, 1865, p. 90). That “somewhere” is the border between where the expectation and obligations from agents-in-context and where CRDOs experiences and understanding of *Results Agenda* implementation meets.

Recapping from the *Introduction* chapter, this dissertation was interested in addressing the gap concerning the limited view into implementation of results-based management within Canadian federal public sector. As noted several times throughout this dissertation, this narrow stream of implementation literature overwhelmingly treats public servants as automatons who replicate RBM institutions from top-down pressures. Current scholarship assumes that institutions are overbearing and that individuals will unreflexively comply with the direction set by institutional pressures in order to retain, and at times, gain legitimacy from behaviour that conforms or adheres to expectations from agents-in-context, their counterparts and their own assumptions. Keeping this in mind, it is reasonable to privilege the role of institutional *Results*

*Agenda* instruments as a way to achieve the preferences of agents-in-context on *Results Agenda* implementation. This is based on assumptions within the literature that implementation behaviour is predictable, and uncertainty is largely mitigated through institutional forces. However, institutional work tells a different story about what can happen when public servant agency is factored into social action. Instead of tendencies towards isomorphism in terms of practice and outcome from implementation, institutional work perspectives demonstrate that agency has a profound affective dimension on institutions. Instead of conformity and compliant behaviour that emphasise strict reproduction or maintenance of institutions, creation of new institutional patterns as well as disruption of existing arrangements also takes place. By incorporating this framework, institutional work integrates a full lifecycle view of institutional RBM. Moreover, the gap generated from adopting purely isomorphic understanding from behavioural explanations linked to pressures is that it largely ignores the compound effect of RBM implementation that are new or confusing to public servants. As such, the complexity and uncertainty of the terrain is a reality that must be confronted by CRDOs during implementation. In thinking about this, this research was interested in the answering how public servants implement the *Results Agenda* given these institutional contexts.

To answer this primary question, three sub-questions were developed to: 1) help better situate CRDOs within their institutional environment, 2) identify, describe, and explain the type of work activities they perform during implementation in response to pressures, and 3) explain how this work ultimately affects institutional *Results Agenda*. The research concentrated on qualitative approaches that involved analysis of archival materials – such as *Results Agenda* instruments – and semi-structured interviews with CRDOs. These efforts focussed on constructing data through interpretive means driven by qualitative content analysis. The data from the

instruments was informed by a researcher-oriented perspective while the interviews drew on respondent perspectives. Data analysis for both included applying a coding template based on directed and conventional qualitative approaches, categorizing the data, and constructing themes that considered institutional theory and institutional work frameworks.

The focus on answering the sub-question was linked to identifying the institutional pressures that operate. This analysis examined an inventory of relevant internally and externally-generated institutional instruments linked to *Results Agenda* implementation. This was intended to identify the institutional pressures for implementation and the primary features of institutional *Results Agenda* that permeate across Canadian federal public sector. The analysis of both internally and externally-generated instruments on how Chief Results and Delivery Officers are to conduct themselves revealed insights into how these varied instruments contribute to propelling key features of *Results Agenda* through regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. These forces shape the perceptions and behaviour of implementers and sustain agents-in-context desires for a specific institutional RBM regime. The analysis identified six main features of institutional *Results Agenda*:

- 1) *Sustained attention and accountability through routines and internal/external performance reporting*
- 2) *Culture of continuous performance improvement*
- 3) *Creation of new roles, governance authorities and responsibilities to support implementation*
- 4) *Emphasis on implementation to fulfill government promises*
- 5) *Stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre*
- 6) *Organisational learning and capacity development.*

The same analysis also determined how uncertainty and ambiguity from *Results Agenda* institutional instruments create opportunities for agency to surface. The analysis of the transcripts from each interview looked at answering what CRDOs perceive as pressures, how they respond to them through institutional work, and how these actions ultimately affect institutional *Results Agenda*. The content analysis helped assess and validate the six main institutional elements that CRDOs are embedded in when they implement, and the deployment of an institutional work model supported discussion on linking institutional pressures to the types of agentic activities implementers pursued during implementation to create, maintain, and disrupt institutional *Results Agenda*.

## *6.2 The study's main findings*

### *6.2.1 What are the pressures and their implications on CRDOs?*

Throughout this study, it was found that RBM implementation literature favoured explanations of social action by looking at the role of collective ideas, concepts, and beliefs in shaping the behaviour of individuals. Existing literature by Scott (2001) and others (see Hung & Plott, 2001; Dillard et al., 2004) portrayed behaviour as largely legitimacy and reward-seeking pointed towards conformity. Regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures were thought to overwhelmingly guide public servant conduct during implementation. Regulative forces promote the view of conduct as guided by a logic of instrumentality that seeks to minimize sanctions and maximize rewards; normative pressures sought to prioritize behaviour driven by evaluative and obligatory dimensions; and cultural and cognitive pressures framed conduct based on orthodoxy (Scott, 2001). Unlike coercive forces generated by regulative pressures, normative conduct is largely informed by what is expected of individuals from others. Therefore, appropriate behaviour is informed by repeated interactions within an embedded network of social agents.

Under cultural-cognitive contexts, public servants engage in behaviour based on taken-for-granted assumptions. The cultural elements help to frame cognitive processes and define boundaries of behaviour within that particular social context.

By pulling on this framework for understanding institutional pressures, the analysis of internally and externally-generated materials were seen to primarily drive compliance and conformity through regulative pressures. This was mostly accomplished through the *Directive*, *Policy*, addendums, and decks. Learning events, speeches, and interviews mostly primed CRDO action under normative constraints. Cultural-cognitive pressures appeared to manifest from beliefs linked to instruments that called on CRDOs unique, direct, and contextual experiences with RBM. In some cases, all three pressures converged under one or more instrument to drive obligations and expectations on CRDOs, so they behave in a common way.

#### *6.2.2 Insights on regulative pressures from Results Agenda instruments*

When it comes to regulative pressures, the primary goal is to promote performance reporting, and intensify centralization and scrutiny from the administrative centre. Regulative pressures are widely perceived as sanctions and rewards by agents-in-focus (Scott, 2008; Urbano & Alvarez, 2014). Agents-in-context create rules that generally set boundaries for what is expected behaviour from CRDOs during implementation. Formal instruments include legislation, directives, and other objectives external sources such as government policies (Busenitz et al., 2008). From a legitimacy-seeking perspective, agents-in-focus generally tend to comply when they face pressures (Scott, 2001). At times, this behaviour can be considered rational, self-interested, and oriented towards minimizing sanctions and maximizing rewards (Bruton & Ahlstromb, 2003). While avoidance of sanctions can drive compliance, agents-in-focus may also comply when they want additional rights or privileges conferred by others (Scott, 2001; Urbano & Alvarez, 2014).

Agents-in-context with top-down institutional authority rely on regulative pressures through a combination of internal and externally-generated instruments in order to set the conceptual and structural boundaries for *Results Agenda*. For instance, central agencies frequently reference the *Policy on Results* as the primary source material for governance, performance measurement practices and interactions for CRDOs implementing the *Results Agenda*. Agents-in-context stress DRFs, PIPs and other components as necessary tools for the development of clear outcomes and establishment of robust monitoring and performance tracking systems. In the same vein, they also implicate additional agents-in-context to layer pressure and increase legitimacy of *Results Agenda* components. For instance, PCO cite collaborations with the Canada School of Public Service and Delivery Associates as ways to drive “common learning across government and make sure agents are working from the same basis of concepts” (Performance and Planning Exchange, October 2016). This convergence between different agents-in-context amplifies regulative pressures on CRDOs to comply with instruments of the *Results Agenda*.

Respondents overwhelmingly identify PCO and TB as primary agents-in-context for setting expectations around implementation of key features of the *Results Agenda*. In this context, institutional authority vested in central agencies remains a key component of regulative pressures exerted on CRDOs as the latter consciously and repeatedly look to the centre and the instruments for how the *Results Agenda* is defined conceptually. For instance, CRDOs identify the *Policy on Results* as a primary source document to understand expectations from the centre. According to several CRDOs, the policy document was developed and imposed by TB without consultations with departments. Nevertheless, implementers turn to the *Policy on Results* as the “base guidance, intent and mechanism” for communication of expectations. The regulative pressure further established conceptual boundaries to generate convergence around how the *Results Agenda* should

be understood and the role of implementers. One respondent noted it was an “attempt to standardize (reporting) against commitments made by the government”. For others, this conceptual boundary-setting pressure undertaken by the centre forces them to re-think how RBM is to be understood during implementation. While some respondents acknowledge their familiarity with institutional RBM, they also identify a strong pull towards a conceptualisation of RBM dictated by the centre. One respondent stated PCO has a “longer-term agenda” that “looks at different levels of outcomes” for the “department as a whole”. Additionally, some reported that the centre was concerned with reporting on performance “consistently” and through a “single-voice”.

There is also delineation around the different agents-in-context, explicitly around their perceived and actual authorities. This is largely represented in the structural modifications linked to the reporting process. PCO introduced the Mandate Letter Tracker as a public-facing instrument designed to compel agents-in-focus to report on progress against government commitments. Several CRDOs identify a requirement to periodically complete the Mandate Letter Tracker as a formal, top-down imposed tasking. One respondent noted they “get this tasking from PCO and then we’ll have to fill in it” on “what we’re to report on”. Equally, structures imposed by TB are also seen as a regulative feature that drive CRDOs to “demonstrate progress against timelines”.

Despite the pressure to comply, some CRDOs perceived the new requirements and structures as helpful to their implementation efforts. One CRDO reported that a longer-term perspective on outcomes adopted by PCO is “less of a barrier” when compared to more frequent, transactional reporting requirements imposed by TB. Additionally, some responded that the formalization of processes provided “a little more structure”, implying that boundaries offered greater certainty and predictability when facing conceptual modifications to RBM. Apparent from

the above is that CRDOs overwhelmingly reflect on regulative forces as being clear and unambiguous.

### *6.2.3 Insights on normative pressures from Results Agenda instruments*

As it relates to normative pressures, the main goal for these instruments is to encourage increased collaboration with the political and administrative centre and other implementers, partnership with stakeholders, and promotion of an outcomes and results-oriented view of programming activities. In the case where normative forces apply pressure through expectations vis-à-vis the networked relationship with other social agents, legitimacy-seeking behaviour informed by obligatory, evaluative, and prescriptive elements provide the basis for conduct (Scott, 2001). Moreover, specific roles identify and confer privileges, while also constraining the range of action based on collective expectations (Scott, 2001; Urbano & Alvarez, 2014). In an effort to seek and retain legitimacy, CRDOs pursue conduct that are understood as appropriate while embedded within this wider social network. The findings reveal normative pressures have a profound effect on the implementation behaviour of agents-in-focus, especially when it concerns what objectives to pursue and how to pursue them in the eyes of other implementers of the *Results Agenda*.

Respondents acknowledge there were certain functions they feel compelled to perform while engaged in the role of CRDO. These pressures include specific conduct linked to the title. Much of this was not formally assigned but rather, emerged in the context of their interactions within their CRDO network. This informal influence from the collective assisted in the construction of CRDO identities. One respondent noted that CRDOs are described as “champions” of the *Results Agenda*. Implementers interpret this as performing advocacy for this specific brand of RBM, which included influencing and shaping culture and undertaking change management

efforts within departments. There is a collective pressure to be visible and serve as proactive focal points within and outside the departments as part of this role.

In addition, some respondents view their role as a “stewardship function” with regards to the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. This perception is believed to be largely tied to expectations placed on CRDOs as senior executives within the organisation. In this leadership capacity, their positional authority grants them an enterprise view of the organisation and as such, privileges them with access to information and decision-making powers for whole-of-departmental strategic and operational planning. Considering this, incumbents of the CRDO position feel an obligation to effectively guide and manage departmental resources as part of implementation.

In line with this identity, the social network of CRDOs compel individual agents-in-focus to participate in a community of practice. Though central agencies informally promote collective information and knowledge sharing through informal gatherings, these communities of practice are also sustained in large part by implementers of the *Results Agenda*. To a certain extent, respondents feel a sense of obligation to participate in these informal but periodic meetings because other CRDOs want to “share best practices, raise issues, and identify solutions”. In this context, behaviour around how to belong and contribute to this forum represents an important normative pressure for agents-in-focus. More specifically, participation confers legitimacy to community members regarding their own implementation practices. In cases where ambiguity emerges, normative concerns serve an enabling function to resolve uncertainty in the terrain of action. For instance, respondents noted that “coming together” as community is especially important when the centre is silent, especially around questions about the role risk plays in the implementation context.

Values are also widely understood as preferred ends while norms prescribe how an agent ought to pursue those objectives (Scott, 2001; Urbano & Alvarez, 2014). From the analysis, values and norms emphasise *Results Agenda* approaches that include capacity development, collaboration and support amongst CRDOs. Overwhelmingly, agents-in-focus acknowledge external values around RBM as a guiding force in their implementation work. One respondent described the increasing global lurch towards RBM as a “clear expectation of where we have to go as a public administration”. More specific to the *Results Agenda*, some respondents signal stronger pressure within public service to more comprehensively embrace RBM – especially performance measurement – in order to support a whole-of-government approach to achieving public management goals. As one CRDO stated, this includes “concretely advancing the development of more meaningful outcome metrics...bringing forward innovation solutions to data capture and reporting”.

Capacity development through learning is another significant value identified by respondents. In fact, agents-in-focus acknowledge collective learning as a key component to effective implementation of the *Results Agenda*. They overwhelmingly agree collaboration with their counterparts is the appropriate method to pursue this end. Collaboration appears to largely be fixed on developing positive working relationships with other CRDOs. While regulative instruments such as the DRF are the focal points for discussions, agents-in-focus agree that their CRDO counterparts “all try to coalesce together and work in lockstep” in order to “gather feedback and perspective”. These collaborations occur through regular governance mechanism and through informal conduits outside of community networks. In cases where collaboration is conducted more formally through government networks, information sharing with CRDO colleagues is treated as an important value.

Finally, agents-in-focus also reflected on expectations from members of the CRDO community to support each other during implementation. Respondents acknowledge this pressure mostly when there is lack of clear guidance from the centre around reporting. They noted there is an underlying assumption that CRDOs – whose department is considered the primary office of interest for a results item – would lead the coordination around the reporting process, including development of appropriate templates, establishment of timelines, and interface with the centre. Other agents-in-focus whose organisational resources are implicated through horizontal initiatives, are expected to “not only advance results reporting but also to support others in being able to move forward”. As such, there is a significant obligatory and prescriptive element that informs CRDO conduct during implementation.

#### *6.2.4 Insights on cultural-cognitive pressures from Results Agenda instruments*

From a cultural-cognitive perspective, the instruments mainly focus on prompting CRDOs to rely on their own historical experiences. This limited their view into alternative pathways for RBM implementation. The cultural-cognitive pressure orients attention towards the cultural dimension to frame implementation behaviour. Individuals are considered to be nested within a wider cultural setting which provides meaning to action (Scott, 2008). The range of possible conduct for implementers may vary based on their cultural setting as it can influence how they perceive the external and social world. The addition of the cognitive dimension acknowledges the contingent effects of cultural factors on information processing activities (Scott, 2001; Urbano & Alvarez, 2014). In that regard, agents will often pursue behaviour that is bounded by taken-for-granted assumptions (Scott, 2001). In this case, alternative conduct is often an implausible consideration for the individual, and a logic of orthodoxy prevails (Scott, 2001; Zucker, 1983).

Findings from the analysis of the interviews suggests this pressure is a driving factor in the implementation conduct for some CRDOs.

The interviews reveal a strong pre-occupation with rational efficiency. This is not entirely uncommon within public sector organisations, especially in the context of behaving in a professional and technically efficient manner since a culture of rational efficiency largely permeates through systems of beliefs. These beliefs are communicated through what CRDOs feel is the intent and areas of focus for implementation. For instance, one camp of implementers is convinced that the Departmental Results Framework is solely a reporting instrument. In this sense, they feel activities should conform to meeting this deliverable. Another group of respondents reject this assumption and argue the DRF instrument is a tool to “inform resource allocation”. The dichotomous frames of understanding undeniably influences how CRDOs perceive and pursue conduct linked to implementation of the *Results Agenda*.

Under the same rational efficiency template, respondents also raise the importance of how implementation should be performed. Overwhelmingly, there is a prevailing orthodoxy that effort should be spent on analysis of data and problem-solving, with agents-in-focus noting they “should be spending far less time on the preparation of data”. Negative experiences with RBM prior to the *Results Agenda* largely influence this belief and how to move ahead. Moreover, there is also a strong pressure towards ensuring implementation is performed in a timely manner while treating delays as avoidable.

In addition to the above, implementers indicate a culture of policy learning as a method for improving implementation. Respondents noted there was a proclivity for reflecting on “memory in the system” from previous RBM implementation efforts. This sedimentation of past experiences provides a frame of reference for CRDOs that guide them to make “adjustments” to “serve the

policy needs” of the *Results Agenda*. In this sense, the pressure to undertake informal and cognitive evaluations of their historical implementation experiences provide a roadmap for avoiding pitfalls during *Results Agenda* implementation and potentially enhance the value of results-based management practices.

According to the findings, a culture of valorizing learning and professional development is present. Implementers identify learning within the context of capacity development and indicate awareness and building knowledge as an accepted part of the process of implementation. Therefore, they seek to develop competencies through formal and informal methods. For instance, respondents acknowledge they are largely “coming at this without having done this their whole career”. As such, knowledge and competency gaps exist for individuals tasked with implementation. Moreover, there is taken-for-granted assumptions that incumbents only remain in the position temporarily and eventually move on to a different role within a few years. As a result, CRDOs believe this presents an “opportunity” to learn and develop competencies not otherwise available in other roles.

That being said, the perception of a temporary tenure as a CRDO also surfaced challenges with regards to a vacuum of corporate memory left behind by incumbents. Respondents contend this dilemma is resolved by a culture of learning from peers. One CRDO explained how “a lot of people are coming at you” to learn. This specific implementer sees themselves – by default – as a resource for their CRDO counterparts. In addition, some agents-in-focus acknowledge the importance of tacit learning as a key feature of pursuing implementation. Respondents recalled how the absence of formal training led them to pull on experiences from their past. One implementer cited their experience with risk-management across different departments as a critical enabler for navigating uncertainty in the implementation of RBM. Therefore, respondents often

default to existing corporate memory from experiences gained in previous organisations to fill knowledge gaps and support capacity development of their colleagues.

#### *6.2.5 Multiple institutional pressures operating at once*

The dominance of one institutional pressure acting on agents-in-focus is a common weight that informs implementation conduct. However, in other cases, multiple institutional pressures also operate simultaneously. When these institutional forces are aligned with each other, Scott (2001) notes they can strengthen these forces. When misaligned, pressures are weaker and can enable agency to surface (Scott, 2001). Following the analysis of interview transcripts, the current study finds that institutional forces do not act alone, and CRDOs perceive multiple forces acting at once, as well as spatially, and temporally. The consolidation of pressures can strengthen or weaken what is expected in terms of behaviour (Scott, 2001). From the analysis, findings confirm the totalizing effect that alignment has on public servant compliance. However, in cases where tension and contradictions prevail; ambiguity forms around how agents-in-focus are expected to behave. In other situations, CRDOs commit to one institutional pressure over another to resolve the tension (Scott, 2001). Alternatively, opportunities to resolve ambiguity also present themselves through activation of agency.

The findings from regulative and normative pressures alignment reveal that they reinforce compliant behaviour in public servants. Respondents acknowledge the ever-present obligations of implementing the *Results Agenda* as CRDOs. More specifically, instruments such as the *Policy on Results* require them to link “resources to results”. Implementers also acknowledge ongoing scrutiny manifested through the challenge-function authorities of the centre as a powerful incentive to comply. To supplement regulative force, implementers also cite the need to “align financial

decisions” based on their roles as executives of departments. Combined, these regulative and normative pressures prop up rules and norms associated with RBM implementation.

Regulative and cultural-cognitive forces also intertwine. In this situation, the regulative pressure belongs to requirements to fulfill reporting obligations along a governance chain. However, cultural-cognitive framework founded on the pursuit of rational-efficiency also bolster compliance towards implementation. In this sense, CRDO compliance towards reporting up is toughened by views on how best to perform this task.

#### *6.2.6 Ambiguity from institutional pressures*

The above findings expose insights into the different institutional pressures that weigh on CRDOs during their implementation work. However, this section mainly discusses the pressures in the context of clarity. Executive-level implementers overwhelmingly perceive these regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces as providing clear and unambiguous instructions on implementation conduct. Even when ambiguity is present, CRDOs lean on institutional forces to guide their path forward.

Despite this, there are several instances where these very same pressures create confusion for CRDOs on how to proceed with conduct. In these particular cases, agents-in-focus are unable to resolve the ambiguity by deferring to their institutional environment. In one example, the instability in departmental mandates create significant “frustration” and confusion for implementers, despite repeatedly having to “do the DRF every year”. For others, the lack of clarity to produce the DRF is mostly derived from “the communication side” of the centre.

Ambiguity from cultural-cognitive pressure is also perceived by agents-in-focus during their implementation efforts. CRDOs noted that limited knowledge of RBM at the executive-level made implementation of the *Results Agenda* “quite challenging”, especially when they also occupy

other C-suite level roles within the department. CRDOs who are “not necessarily super-literate in RBM” disclosed that there is a tension between role expectations, which obfuscates the terrain of action.

### *6.3 Summary of institutional work performed during implementation and its effect on institutional Results Agenda*

The previous discussion illustrated how various pressures weigh on CRDOs during implementation. On several occasions, respondents perceived – consciously and subconsciously – efforts to influence their behaviour towards compliance under regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive constraints. These institutional forces mostly provide clarity for implementation conduct. In other circumstances, separate and combined pressures create a terrain of action with uncertainty and ambiguity for CRDOs. However, discovery of institutional pressures only conveys part of the picture around social action when it comes to implementation of institutional *Results Agenda*. In response to these dynamics, institutional work offers potential insight into how CRDOs confront their institutional environment through agentic behaviour.

As a reminder from *Chapter Two*, institutional work is defined as “purposive action of individuals aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). While “purposive action” is central to the understanding of intentions, writers urge researchers to be mindful of the subtle distinction between purposive and purposeful. Möllering and Müller-Seitz (2018) emphasise purposive to mean “when a plan or design is absent or vague” and purposeful “when a plan or design is strongly and clearly present” (p. 35). Though institutional work is arguably intentional, this study suggests that formation of clear and unambiguous intentions by CRDOs is often taken-for-granted. In some cases, ambiguity often presents opportunities for agency to emerge and engage in “strategy without design” (Chia & Holt, 2009,

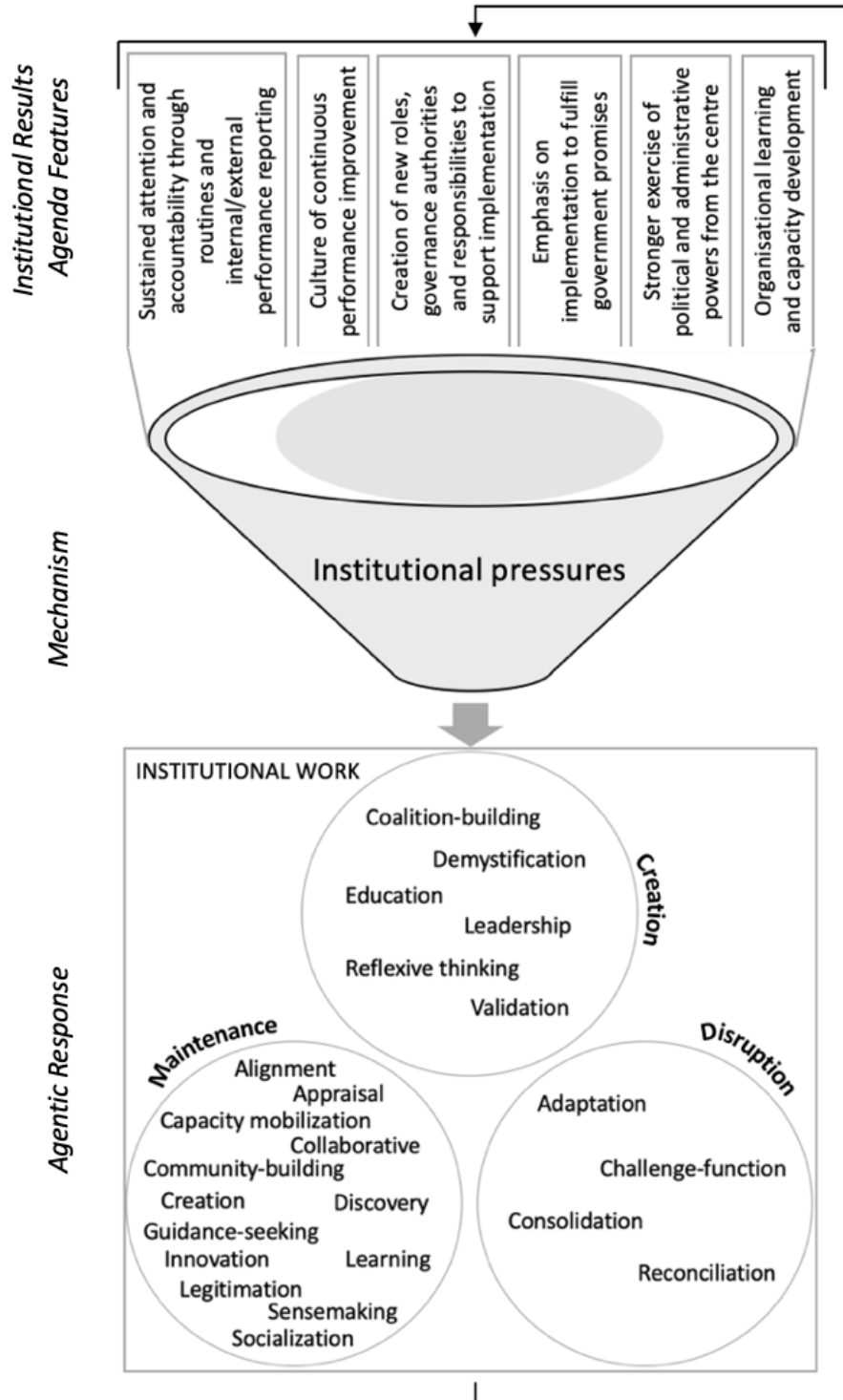
p. 1). In addition, the findings reveal that respondents pursue agentic work even when overwhelming pressure to comply is present. In many situations, one or more pressure – operating alone or together – often serve as triggers for agency for implementers. In most cases, there is a causal logic that permeates when discussing the type of institutional work performed in association with pressures. In linking back to *Chapter Three*, passive and unreflexive behaviour tied to pressures were ignored to draw general insights into how executive-level public servant implementers intentionally respond to one or more institutional pressure, and when they face uncertainty in the terrain of implementation conduct.

That being said, the findings also reveal that the presence of institutional forces are not the only condition for institutional work to manifest. In certain situations, CRDO agentic conduct can emerge in their absence. This can happen in order to confront uncertainty. In this sense, institutional pressures are vital but not a necessary condition for agentic action to surface. Moreover, active agency is not entirely dependent on the presence of institutional forces or when there is ambiguity. In such cases, causal logic is not the driving factor for the emergence of institutional work. Against this dynamic, the findings offer important insights into how these conditions activate agency and lead employees to perform different types of institutional work.

To generate the leap from the purposive and purposeful typology of institutional work activities to the intentional act of creating, maintaining, and disrupting work, it was instrumental to first identify the scope of what constitutes institutional *Results Agenda*. *Chapter Four* provided a reasonable ideal-type contour to assess the effect agentic behaviour has on institutional *Results Agenda* from the implementation work carried out by CRDOs. Also recall in *Chapter Five* the typology of institutional work that detailed the “*what, who and how*” during implementation of the *Results Agenda*. This, combined with the analysis from *Chapter Four* revealed the potential

effects on institutional *Results Agenda*. The below diagram in Figure 1 illustrates conceptually how this process unfolds.

**Figure 1** - Conceptual visualisation of agentic response to institutional *Results Agenda*



Additionally, Table 8 below demonstrates how institutional *Results Agenda* as an institutional RBM of Canadian federal public sector is affected by varied institutional work of creation, maintenance, and disruption performed by CRDOs during implementation.

**Table 8** - Summary of linkage between institutional work and features of *Results Agenda*

Institutional <i>Results Agenda</i> feature	Institutional work
Sustained attention and accountability through routines and internal/external performance reporting	<p>Creation work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – validation (resolve uncertainty)</li> <li>• Multiple (regulative and normative) - reflexive thinking</li> </ul> <p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – alignment, collaborative, creation, innovation</li> </ul> <p>Disruption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – adaptation</li> </ul>
Culture of continuous performance improvement	<p>Creation work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – coalition-building (resolve uncertainty)</li> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – reflexive thinking</li> </ul> <p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – creation, legitimation</li> <li>• Normative – legitimation</li> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – alignment</li> <li>• None – discovery (resolve uncertainty), creation</li> </ul>
Creation of new roles, governance authorities and responsibilities to support implementation	<p>Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – leadership</li> <li>• Normative – coalition-building, leadership</li> <li>• None – leadership</li> <li>• Multiple (regulative and normative) – demystification (resolve uncertainty)</li> </ul> <p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – creation</li> </ul>
Emphasis on implementation to fulfill government promises	<p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – creation</li> <li>• Normative - socialization</li> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – sensemaking (resolve uncertainty)</li> </ul> <p>Disruption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None - adaptation</li> </ul>

<p>Stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre</p>	<p>Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None - leadership</li> </ul> <p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – creation, sensemaking</li> </ul> <p>Disruption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulative – adaptation (resolve uncertainty), consolidation</li> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – challenge-function, reconciliation (resolve uncertainty)</li> <li>• Multiple (regulative and cultural cognitive) - reconciliation (resolve uncertainty)</li> </ul>
<p>Organisational learning and capacity development</p>	<p>Creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normative - education</li> <li>• None – education</li> </ul> <p>Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural-cognitive – appraisal, capacity mobilization, community-building, learning</li> <li>• Normative - guidance-seeking (resolve uncertainty)</li> </ul>

Based on this table, there are some important caveats to note. First, institutional work concerned with creation, maintenance and disruption do not appear simultaneously to confront features of *Results Agenda*. In the case of *sustained attention and accountability through routines and internal/external performance reporting* and *stronger exercise of political and administrative powers from the centre*, CRDOs create, maintain, and disrupt. For all other features of institutional *Results Agenda*, only two types of institutional work operate, with creation and maintenance being the dominant coupling. More specifically, when creation work does unfold, it appears to manifest when individual pressures exist separately, together, and when they are not present. For maintenance work, CRDOs primarily react to regulative pressures within the institutional terrain of *Results Agenda*. Finally, when disruption occurs, CRDOs are generally under regulative pressures. Disruption is also the least likely type of work to occur since it is only observed to confront a handful of *Results Agenda* features, which includes the *creation of new roles, governance authorities and responsibilities to support implementation*.

Second, the type of institutional work activity carried out – as noted in Table 7 in *Chapter Five* – is not exclusive to a singular pressure. This includes whether CRDOs perceive a lone pressure to be dominant, multiple pressures to be operating or when they are absent altogether. For example, *adaptation* is performed when public servants disrupt institutional *Results Agenda* features linked to both accountability through routines and internal and external performance reporting, as well as increased centralization by the political and administrative. On the other hand, *adaptation* activities are also underway to disrupt the *emphasis on implementation to fulfill government promises*, especially when CRDOs do not perceive any pressures acting on them. In another example, *reflexive thinking* can happen when multiple pressures exist simultaneously or when only one force is understood by CRDOs to exist. When normative and regulative pressures combine to propel sustained attention on routines and performance reporting, CRDOs undertake creation work to expand the conceptual boundaries of institutional *Results Agenda* through the activity of *reflexive thinking*. However, when cultural-cognitive pressures emerge to advance a *culture of continuous performance improvement*, implementers also undertake creation work through *reflexive thinking*. In a final example, *education* activity unfolds when pressures are absent or when they are present. When public servants encounter normative pressures around *organisational learning and capacity development*, they perform *education* as a way to engage in creation work. The same type of creation work is observed when there is a void in institutional pressures.

#### 6.4 Limitations of study

Several limitations are acknowledged as part of this dissertation. The study's relatively narrow focus concentrates on Canadian federal public sector. The implementation of institutional *Results Agenda* is a uniquely federal experience and as such, does not lend itself to broad

generalizations of RBM implementation outside of this national civil service context. Though public management mainly draws inspiration on RBM practices from private sector, the results of this dissertation has limited utility for the latter sphere as well.

Second, the sample size of CRDOs within federal public sector is relatively small. Among this group, only a handful agreed to participate in the study and share their lived experiences with the ongoing implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Consequently, despite efforts to incentivize participation, insights into social action around implementation of institutional RBM is somewhat restricted to this small pool. In connection with the reduced sampling size, the focus on C-suite level executives within departments lacked first-hand and direct accounts from agents-in-context that deploy institutional instruments.<sup>44</sup> These includes central agencies as there is significant value in speaking with top-down agents to validate data gathered from objective instruments and subjective interviews. Additional context from working-level implementers would also benefit by giving greater insight into the dynamic relationship and its influence on CRDOs during implementation.

The final limitation concerns timing of the study. The *Results Agenda* was first introduced in late 2015, when the current Liberal government came into power. The socialization and intensity of the implementation process for the *Results Agenda* was more pronounced in the first two years of the government's mandate. Archival sources for implementation from this time mostly remain unaltered and intact; however, data from implementing agents was collected during interviews in the spring of 2021. Only a limited number of CRDOs were present in the nascent phase of implementation due to departmental and positional changes. Therefore, point-in-time interviews collected perspectives on implementation that is based on recall from CRDOs coming into the role

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<sup>44</sup> C-suite are typically executives or leaders of organisation (White, 2020).

at various times over the last six years. Despite this, the limitation can also be interpreted as glass-half full given that implementation is an ongoing process, and these lived experiences provide unique view into the institutional pressures and types of intuitional work that operate over time.

#### *6.4.1 Alternative approaches to present study*

In view of the challenges noted above, several key considerations could serve to better inform the operationalization of the research design and data collection for future studies. First, it is helpful to establish connections early with the respondents. C-suite level respondents often deal with pressures with their schedules. To incentivize participation, it is helpful to make connections early and build rapport with the respondents before soliciting them for interviews. Second, early and meaningful engagements prior to the interview sessions can also help avoid some of the pitfalls around obligations to truth and accompanying risk-aversion tactics. Building trust, therefore, should be a proactive and ongoing process to support robust generation of qualitative data from interviews. In addition, building rapport online can be especially challenging with the absence of visual signals that are often taken-for-granted in an in-person, face-to-face interview (Fielding et al., 2017). To overcome this challenge, it is recommended to share personal information between the respondents and interviewer in order to “develop an online relationship which enabled [*sic*] to ask questions” that are perceived to be more sensitive with regards to implementation behaviour (Fielding et al., 2017, p. 13).

#### *6.5 Contributions of research study, areas for future research, and final comments*

This dissertation’s research was concerned with how Canadian federal public servants undertake implementation of top-down driven institutional *Results Agenda*. More precisely, it sought to address existing gaps in RBM implementation literature by providing a robust view into how implementers perceive RBM institutional pressures they are nested in while also offering a

more nuanced perspective on implementation behaviour vis-à-vis these pressures. As such, existing literature generally favours a view of public servant conduct as mostly constrained or dictated by institutional forces, leading to understanding of RBM implementation as mainly an isomorphic exercise that contributes to maintenance or reproduction of institutional RBM. This narrow interest and understanding of implementation also implicate institutional instruments, which are seen as powerful tools used by mainly political and administrative centres to control and direct public servant behaviour towards their desired ends for RBM implementation. However, several key issues arise from this perspective.

First, recall Polanyi's maxim that "we can know more than we can tell" (1966, p. 4). This perspective tends to privilege the ability of agents-in-context, such as the centres, to convey implementation preferences and directions in a comprehensive and robust way to public servant implementers. However, recent evidence from experiences with *Deliverology* – the main paradigm from which *Results Agenda* is modeled after – reveals that this lofty goal is not a guaranteed outcome, especially when institutional agents promote implementation of the RBM paradigm ambiguously and inconsistently as both an art and science (Behn, 2017). Second, institutional instruments of *Results Agenda* are not neutral device. They are often treated as regulative instruments of power by which agents-in-context – namely the centres – to propel their intentions and desires for their ideal RBM regime. However, research discussed previously shows that public servants often modify policies through their implementation conduct, despite regulative pressures to conform. Existing RBM implementation research mostly seeks to explain this as an ongoing tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches. In fact, the existing scholarship tends to dichotomize understanding as either compliance or resistance without accounting for other types of motivations, especially since the concept and role of agency is not explored prominently in the

research. Third, RBM implementation is generally quiet about how public servants confront uncertainty around implementation. When the research does speak of uncertainty, writers mostly view implementers as strategic or intentional agents, yet nothing is forthcoming on the topic of institutional RBM itself. Finally, even when intentional accounts of agency are factored in, the RBM implementation literature only generates insights into maintenance or reproduction of institutions. However, when faced with uncertainty, contradictions and tensions, public servant agency is not only restricted to sustaining institutional patterns, but also creating and disrupting institutions. Though intention is important, agency can also create and modify institutional RBM without any grand strategic design. In doing so, there is virtually no scholarship that explores how institutional RBM pressures are perceived and confronted by public servant implementers through conduct and accompanying intentional and unintentional effects on institutions.

For these reasons, this research addresses these gaps by contributing exploratory analysis and insights towards institutional RBM implementation literature. It achieves this by integrating institutional work and institutional pressures to generate robust accounts of institutional forces from *Results Agenda* instruments, how public servants perceive these pressures, what actions they take, and what effects this conduct bears on this particular brand of Canadian federal institutional RBM. The research also advances the methodological utility of combining institutional work and institutional pressures to study the behaviour of CRDO conduct during the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. The dissertation achieves this by joining qualitative approaches that focus on a Canadian federal public sector case study along with interpretive methods for analysing internally and externally-generated *Results Agenda* instruments and interviews held with senior-level public servant implementers to reveal institutional pressures and institutional work at play. The data constructed from these sources, such as the instruments, assisted in the identification of key

institutional pressures and *Results Agenda* elements. These features permeate across internally and externally-generated instruments and set the implementation context for CRDOs during implementation. The interview data surfaced evidence of which pressures are perceived by agents-in-focus and the various types of institutional work activity they pursue through agency. To support a robust and thorough analysis of the interview data given the small sample size, emphasis was placed on gathering salient CRDO perceptions about which pressures are present in their institutional environment rather than strictly applying a researcher's point of view. This was intended to facilitate the analysis and construct exploratory insights into the social phenomena of institutional work linked to the implementation of *Results Agenda*. Additionally, this approach supported discussions linked to the type of institutional work and potential effects of CRDO action on institutional *Results Agenda*.

Using this stance, a number of key contributions are made to the understanding of institutional RBM implementation from federal public servant behaviour. The implementation by Chief Results and Delivery Officers reveals a dynamic interplay between agency and institutional *Results Agenda*. The pressures from this institutional RBM intersects with the agency of public servants through different types of institutional work. *Chapter Four* offered important insights into how regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures influence and shape implementation conduct. In addition, the findings also linked how implementers' perception of the institutional terrain can activate certain types of institutional work activities, and how the terrain of action varies considerably depending on the institutional forces at play.

The first contribution invites readers to appreciate that CRDO agency emerges for a range of purposes and under a variety of institutional contexts, such as when pressures exist or not, and whether they operate alone or together. When a singular pressure is present or is the most

dominant, it mostly reinforces expected conduct. Combined with these findings, this analysis found institutional work to be mostly intentional and anticipated. In fact, CRDOs are mostly concerned with maintaining institutional *Results Agenda* in the course of implementation. Though agency prevails, it is not designed to resist or challenge key features of institutional *Results Agenda* and most type of institutional work is initiated to bolster existing pressure, thereby strengthening the institutional context that bear down on CRDOs and others within Canadian federal public sector. From a regulative standpoint, it is evident that this institutional force has a profound coercive effect to constrain implementers to conduct themselves in predictable ways. In most cases, expectations are conveyed through regulative instruments such as formal and objective instruments that foster increased scrutiny from the centres. Scrutiny on performance from agents-in-context is often a powerful method by which CRDOs feel compelled to adhere to requirements. In a normative setting, expectations from members prescribe how CRDOs ought to behave, and communities of practice remain a robust mechanism by which to encounter these norms and values. They provide direction on the necessity to collaborate, share best practices, and support social agents to resolve ambiguity in the implementation space. Given that the specific role of CRDO is relatively new within government, the communities of practice also serve as an integral element for shaping and enabling sedimentation of appropriate norms around *Results Agenda* implementation behaviour. From a cultural-cognitive lens, rational efficiency and a culture of learning defines the boundaries for agents-in-focus conduct. The rational efficiency frame of reference is a taken-for-granted assumption held by implementers and guides efforts to improve and manage implementation through efficient use of departmental resources. Simultaneously, a premium is also placed on capacity development. Pursuit of formal and informal learning are treated as necessary components of implementation, especially in cases where knowledge and

experience of RBM is limited. Therefore, CRDOs often valorize capacity development as a default method to support robust and effective *Results Agenda* implementation efforts.

The second key discovery is that when institutional forces operate together, they can align and strengthen pressures against implementers. Regulative instruments can exert force on CRDOs to comply to certain reporting requirements; however, normative pressures linked to specific roles can also apply an obligatory dimension to how this should be performed. In the context of the *Results Agenda*, some Mandate Letters implicate several departments to report on outcomes; however, CRDOs also acknowledge an obligation with their counterparts to share and coordinate their reporting despite no clear and formal guidance from the administrative centre to do so. The combination of pressures can also create ambiguity for agents-in-focus. In such situations, the terrain of action remains unclear to implementers due to issues of organisational continuity and tensions between different expectations when occupying multiple departmental roles.

The third revelation is the insight into the activation of agency under the context of institutional pressures. Though causal-logic is attached as one facet of institutional work phenomena, the findings reveal that the presence of institutional pressures – such as regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive – are also not a necessary condition for agentic social action during implementation. In fact, public servant agency is observed in a number of different instances. For instance, CRDOs perform institutional work not as resistance to pressures, but rather, in the absence of any clear direction from direct and indirect institutional forces. Here, agency emerges in the void between what is expected and how one should go about pursuing these ends. As such, CRDOs pursue the same type of work activities when confronted by different pressures. For instance, *alignment* is performed by implementers when they face regulative and cultural-cognitive pressures independently. In other cases, certain types of institutional work

activity are more prominent when confronted by a specific institutional pressure. Under normative forces, CRDOs undertake *coalition-building*, *education*, and *leadership* with various aims. While institutional forces play an important role in triggering agency during implementation, the findings also indicate that institutional work activities also occur without any direct cause from institutional pressures. For instance, where it concerns *creation*, *socialization* and *validation*, implementers purposively engage in these types of activities from the void of institutional pressures in the implementation terrain. The desire to resolve ambiguity in the implementation environment also triggers agency within implementers. This is observed in situations where public servants undertake *collaborative*, *demystification*, and *guidance-seeking* activities. In other cases, CRDOs are purposive in their actions because they possess a vague design in their intentionality. Therefore, creation, maintenance or disruption is unintentional and unforeseen. In this situation, CRDOs are largely unaware of the effect of their conduct on broader institutional *Results Agenda*. By combining elements of institutional theory, implementation and institutional work, this dissertation uncovers meaningful variations in social action performed by CRDOs as part of their *Results Agenda* implementation efforts within federal public sector.

Finally, the research builds a connective tissue through institutional work between agentic conduct and institutional RBM implementation. In doing so, the insight from the analysis contribute to understanding of how features of institutional *Results Agenda* are not immune to additions and alterations. Regardless of intentional or deliberate design, CRDOs can also unintentionally sustain, destabilise, and add to institutional *Results Agenda* through their agentic actions.

In light of these contributions, the research does leave some unanswered questions that warrant further study, primarily around the perceptions of agents-in-context and the historical

influence of RBM approaches on current institutional RBM practices, such as the *Results Agenda*. As noted previously, the analysis and resulting insights concentrate on transcripts from interviews with CRDOs. However, expanding the scope for data collection to include perceptions from agents-in-context could invariably provide additional richness and perspectives on the implementation of the *Results Agenda*. Primarily, the gathering of evidence from agents-in-context – specifically those working in the political and administrative centres – can help to inform and validate analysis around internally and externally generated instruments. As mentioned, the methods adopted in this study only included a researcher-oriented perspective. As such, capturing first-hand the expected intentions of these instruments from agents-in-context – who are the producers – could support greater internal and external validity of the present findings. Additionally, it was noted that CRDOs do not perceive or identify their behaviour as a rejection or resistance to top-down pressures. Consulting with top-down agents-in-context – specifically the centres – would provide an opportunity to learn how they perceive and interpret CRDO behaviours that might otherwise appear innocuous to public servant implementers. A future area of research could include examining how agents-in-context react to agentic conduct by CRDOs.

In addition to these possible interests, prospective research may also benefit from concentrated attention on the influence of historical RBM approaches on existing *Results Agenda* practices. Though the dissertation examined the various features of institutional RBM and *Deliverology* in *Chapter Two* as main influences on the development of *Results Agenda*, the review and analysis were narrowed to account for influences in the short-term and within performance management in general. There is potential to expand the frontier of institutional RBM implementation research by building in the temporal dimension beyond the short-term and also

including other public sector functional domains implicated under *Results Agenda*, such as evaluation and risk management.

Like Alice, CRDOs undertake a journey where a number of paths unfold, where they confront uncertainty, and they rely on their agency to chart a path forward. Similar to Carrol's titular character, they want to "get somewhere" (1865, p. 89). This dissertation's findings reveal that – much like the Cheshire Cat's response – executive-level public servant implementers of the *Results Agenda* are sure to get somewhere as long as they "walk long enough" (Carrol, 1865, p. 90).

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**Annex A - List of federal departments**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Canadian Heritage  
Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
Employment and Social Development Canada  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
Finance Canada  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Global Affairs Canada  
Health Canada  
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada  
Indigenous Services Canada  
Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada  
Justice Canada  
National Defence  
Natural Resources Canada  
Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness  
Public Services and Procurement Canada  
Transport Canada  
Veterans Affairs Canada  
Western Economic Diversification Canada  
Women and Gender Equality Canada

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Note: Current as of October 2021.