E. Lindquist and G. White, “Analyzing Canadian Cabinets: Past, Present, and Future,” in M. Charih and A. Daniels, eds., *New Public Management and Public Administration* (Toronto IPAC, 1997)

**Overview**

Despite their status, cabinets have not proven immune to the many pressures facing Cdn govts in the 1980s and 1990s – which led to reforms of “managerialism” or “new public management.” Though these reforms were not necessarily targeted at cabinets, they have nonetheless influenced the selection of ministers, as well as the size, structure, norms and support systems of cabinets.

**Background**

* In parliamentary govts, cabinets “are the fulcrum of power”
* Appointed and led by first ministers, cabinets develop the policy agenda of govts and are accountable for the performance of programs and behaviour of officials
* Canadian academics have done relatively little empirical work on cabinets compared to their British and Australian counterparts

Present Challenges

* At first glance, the major changes in Cdn cabinet organization over the past decade would seem to follow naturally from the premises associated with NPM – since early 1990s, the size and complexity of provincial cabinets declined noticeably (and the same trend can be noted at the federal level)
* However, there is a second way to look at this phenomenon – that evolving cabinet systems were essentially an outgrowth of bureaucratic restructuring that was marked by fewer depts./portfolios
* White/Lindquist analysis casts recent developments in cabinet design as more or less a rational tradeoff between how to manage internal and external political imperatives – though symbolic needs should not be underestimated (i.e. gov’t “leading by example”, gov’t “leaner and meaner”)

Future Research

* Adopting new frameworks and metaphors: closer research on the means by which ministers instruct and monitor deputies, hold them to account, etc in era of NPM and beyond
* Closer account of Ministerial support and careers
* Increased focus on managing cabinet operations
* More attention to territorial cabinets

**Conclusion**

* Cabinet is still unquestionably the central organ for the management of public affairs
* First ministers have restructured cabinets and cabinet relations in order to take “macro” control of public affairs
* Yet, the role and structure of cabinet have been powerfully affected by the rise of the NPM paradigm
  + Genuine decentralization and devolution of authority (etc, all hallmarks of NPM) raise difficult and direct challenges to another hallmark of NPM: the emphasis on clear, strong ministerial and cabinet responsibility and accountability
* Also make a strong argument for building up the literature on cabinets based in empirical richness and better modeling (it’s a pretty thin field)