



Institutionalising Policy Entrepreneurship in the Global South: The Case for a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre in India

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ABSTRACT

India's policy and strategy ecosystem is largely formulated at the centre, with prototyping and implementation proceeding through multi-stakeholder participation across national, sectoral, and regional contexts, typically via pilot phases before pan-India scale-up. This paper examines the case for a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre (PSIC), or similar centres focused on subsectors/subthemes, within India's existing policy architecture as a government-anchored mechanism treating policy design as an iterative supportive mechanism and discipline, analogous to technology incubation. Drawing on comparative literature on public-sector innovation labs, including Denmark's MindLab, the United Kingdom's Nesta and Policy Lab, the Governance Lab (GovLab) at New York University, and Chile's Laboratorio de Gobierno, the paper situates PSIC (or more) within the broader evolution of policy labs and adapts it to the Indian context. It proposes anchoring PSIC (or more) within an existing autonomous, multidisciplinary organisation, independent of any single Ministry or within a given ministerial framework, working closely



with Ministries and industry, tasked with developing a credentialised cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists (as part of cohorts) who contribute to research, identify needs, and carry ideas through the value chain of implementation and engage in guided assignments for ministries or corporates as part of the evolution. PSIC is also envisaged to catalyse think-tanks and enterprises that coordinate with existing institutions, thereby complementing India's innovation infrastructure, such as the central planning supporting organisation, NITI Aayog. Beyond this administrative rationale, the paper frames PSIC in social and cultural terms and conceptualises it as a case of institutional innovation in the Global South.

Keywords: policy labs; policy entrepreneurship; institutional complementarity; Global South; India; public-sector reform; policy incubation

1. Introduction: The Architecture of Policy-Making in India

Policy in India (as well as strategies in the public and private sector) as in most large administrative states, tends to flow from the centre outward: ministries and departments formulate schemes and guidelines, state governments and implementing agencies operationalise them, and feedback from the field, where it travels back to the centre steadily, formally/informally, as mechanisms for course correction. This is to highlight that Indian policy-making has inherent expertise or intent which can be contributed to for accelerated newer initiatives for policy and strategies that the PSIC system can enable policy entrepreneurs to meet the requirement of national missions like Viksit Bharat, Make in India etc., (or potentially newer innovative directions such as ecosystem internationalisation and outcomes like Make in the World with the possibilities of strengthening circular processes within the country's structured national missions). Accordingly, additional institutional space could be created within the existing framework in which an early-stage policy idea can be conceptualised, tested against evidence, piloted at small scale, refined through stakeholder consultation, and only then recommended for wider adoption by expanding its existing focus, scale and complexity in response to Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014 and Wu et

al., 2015, about highlighting the thinness aspects of the policy systems across geographies.

The policy architectures are not simply administrative facts, but also social and cultural features. Who is authorised to originate a policy idea, whose expertise counts as evidence, and how a civil-service tradition accommodates external specialists/experts and younger professionals, are questions about status, hierarchy, and legitimate voice as much as about procedure. Read this way, aspects of the thinness of any policy prototyping space are also a symptom of a wider pattern across the postcolonial Global South, in which technocratic authority remains concentrated in centralised cadres and the social boundary between "policymaker" and "implementer" or "citizen" correspondingly has scope to be further bridged. The institutional proposal developed in this paper responds to that boundary not by proposing a parallel channel that would sit outside the existing hierarchy, but by proposing a mechanism designed to work inside it: a structured front-end that strengthens the centre's own capacity to originate, test, and refine policy before it is issued, rather than a separate track competing for that authority (Chakrabarti et al., 2021). Similarly, it seeks to cater to the strategy roadmap in parallel with the corporate and public sectors such that public-private partnerships are also conceptualised at an early stage. This would be relevant at the different structural and implementation



phases of the value chain of policy and strategy making to rollout/implementation/feedback loops as a sustainable future mechanism involving a combination of grooming youth, middle-level executives etc., with the support and guidance of senior policymaking authority personnel and corporate leadership for multiple sectors.

The scope can be disaggregated into three dimensions. First, there is scope for strengthening ground-level input to shape policy design before implementation, instead of being solicited mostly as feedback afterwards. Second, structured platforms that allow younger innovators and senior practitioners to jointly propose, refine, and champion policy ideas that would be emergent to add to the institutionalised framework. Third, and significantly consequential for long-term state capacity, India and the Global South could develop dedicated cadres of trained policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists: professionals trained and equipped by engaging autonomous bodies, industry associations, public and private bodies and civil societies etc., in a contributory process to the existing policy and strategy framework towards designing, pitching, and carrying policy and strategic initiatives from grassroots identification through to scaled implementation, in the manner that trained product managers and venture-backed founders operate within the technology sector. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Wu et al., 2015)

This paper argues that these three scopes are best addressed not by a new, freestanding institution operating alongside India's existing policy-making machinery, but by evolving institutional mechanisms such as via Policy and Strategy Incubation Centres (PSICs), deliberately designed as a complement to existing machinery(ies). The PSIC is most likely suitable to be conceived as a vertical anchored within a (or) several suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institutions that already participate in

governance mechanisms or strategy rollouts and/or advise government, combining a structured incubation methodology with a six-month capacity-building programme for creating policy and strategy professionals, and channelling every validated output back into the ministries, departments, and state governments that retain final decision-making authority. The remainder of the paper situates this proposal within international practice on public-sector innovation labs, examines the institutional criteria a suitable anchor body would need to meet to house PSIC as a complementary function rather than a rival mandate, sets out the conceptual and operational design of the PSIC, and considers its anticipated contribution to debates on policy transfer and institutional innovation in the Global South.

2. Policy Innovation Labs as an Institutional Form: A Comparative Literature

The application of structured, iterative design methods to public policy is not entirely new; over roughly two decades it has developed into a recognisable global institutional form generally described as the public-sector innovation lab, or policy lab. Denmark's MindLab, established within the Danish government, is widely regarded as the first institution to operate explicitly under this description, and its closure after almost two decades of operation prompted extensive international reflection on what such labs achieve and how they should be structured (Prehn, 2016). The United Kingdom's Nesta and its associated Policy Lab, the Governance Lab (GovLab) at New York University, and Chile's Laboratorio de Gobierno are frequently cited alongside MindLab as the reference set of institutions that mainstreamed design-thinking, empirical experimentation, and living-lab methods within government reform (European Institute of Public Administration, 2025; Fuller & Lochard, 2016; OECD, 2025; Olejniczak et al., 2020)



Comparative research on this institutional form classifies such labs along a spectrum running from government-led labs operating under direct oversight, through government-enabled labs with partial funding but greater independence, to fully independent labs with no direct government funding or oversight (Kattel, Mergel, & Etxaniz, 2020; OECD, 2019). Nesta's 2014 i-teams report, produced with Bloomberg Philanthropies, documented twenty such innovation teams internationally, including examples from Chile, Colombia, South Africa, and Spain, underlining that the model has proliferated well beyond its European origins (Nesta & Bloomberg Philanthropies, 2014). A recurring finding across this literature is that most labs concentrate on the 'front end' of policy work, like defining and scoping problems, rather than carrying ideas through to implementation and institutional scale-up (Kattel, Mergel, & Etxaniz, 2020). A recurring institutional-design lesson associated with this finding, and one this paper treats as central, is that labs which operated at arm's length from government's own decision-making structures found their prototypes harder to carry through to adoption; the government-led and government-enabled positions on the spectrum, which keep the lab tied into existing approval processes, correspond more closely to the complementary design pursued here than the fully independent position does. (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2025; Olejniczak et al., 2020)

It is at this point that the PSIC proposal adds to the innovations, and arguably extends the established international model in three respects, while remaining deliberately embedded within, rather than parallel to, existing government structures. First, where most policy labs are small, centrally located teams of designers and researchers working alongside a single ministry or department, a PSIC is being conceived as a pan-India capacity-building mechanism that works through a national network of regional offices belonging to its anchor institution, connecting

grassroots and sectoral input to the incubation process using channels the anchor institution already operates, or would further build as part of the establishment of a PSIC. Second, where most labs produce policy prototypes and reports as their primary output, the PSIC is being conceived to be designed to also produce a trained, credentialed cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy professionals through a structured six-month programme, closer in form to a professional incubator-accelerator than to a design studio, with graduates/sponsored executives from the public or private sector or participating young civil services cadres as part of cohorts per batch returning or joining to strengthen the ministries, state governments, and existing institutions that sponsored them rather than forming a separate professional track outside government. Third, where labs typically serve government alone, the PSIC is designed to serve both public governance and private-sector strategy needs, positioning it at the intersection of policy design and strategic management, in a manner that widens the anchor institution's existing advisory relationships rather than opening a new, competing line of business (Fuller & Lochard, 2016; Puttick, 2014).

2.1 The Indian Institutional Landscape: A Complementary Space

India already possesses significant institutional infrastructure oriented towards innovation, though concentrated at a different point in the innovation value chain from the one the PSIC seeks to address. NITI Aayog, established in 2015 as India's premier policy think tank, plays a central role in long-term policy formulation, cooperative federalism, and the monitoring and evaluation of government schemes. Its flagship innovation vehicle, the Atal Innovation Mission, has been notably successful in building a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship: its network of Atal Tinkering Labs had reached ten thousand schools by late 2025, with a further fifty



thousand in the process of roll-out (Government of India, NITI Aayog, 2025–26). This infrastructure, however, is oriented toward technology entrepreneurship, start-ups, and student innovation. However, there is scope to evolve mechanisms such as PSICs towards enabling or strengthening the expansion and acceleration of the design, prototyping, and professional implementation of policy and government and private sector strategy as a combinational discipline in its own right to add to the Government of India, NITI Aayog, 2025–2026.

This distinction is central to the paper's argument that there is scope for adding to dedicated mechanisms for policy and strategy development and implementation via developing a PSIC-type incubation mechanism or processes that could add value to the currently practised approaches in India and the Global South. It is being offered strictly as a case for a complementary addition to the existing landscape, not as an alternative. The PSIC is being proposed to add value and a wider base of young professionals as policy entrepreneurs or strategy specialists to the infrastructure that NITI Aayog commands in its mandate, within its overall purview and its existing stakeholder framework. It is proposed as a functional extension that does for policy design and policy entrepreneurship what the Atal Innovation Mission already does for technology entrepreneurship, using comparable logic: a dedicated capacity sitting inside the existing institutional ecosystem, feeding validated prototypes and trained personnel back into that ecosystem rather than building a parallel one beside it. A suitable anchor institution/s with a pan-India network could host PSICs as part of their multidisciplinary technical mandates, and long-standing relationships with ministries, state governments, and international bodies, such as regional productivity, labour, development, and linkages with multilateral organisations, such that

they could position PSICs to add to their function as a natural extension of work they already perform.

3. Institutional Fit: Criteria for a Suitable Anchor Institution/s

The case for anchoring a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre rests on institutional fit rather than on the default availability of any single body/ies, and the indicative criteria suggested below are highlighted to outline that PSICs be absorbed as a complementary function of an existing institution rather than established as a new, independent one. Four criteria appear to be relevant to identifying a/several suitable anchors. First, *autonomous status*: the anchor institution would ideally need to possess reasonable autonomy with strong working relationships with ministries or departments to be perceived as a credible, trusted convenor across government, industry, academia, and civil society, which could be a relevant precondition for any institution seeking to bring competing stakeholder interests into a shared design process. Second, a *multidisciplinary technical mandate*: because policy and strategy themes are not necessarily confined to a given sectoral or disciplinary boundary, a PSIC incubator anchored suitably could integrate attention to multiple sectors besides the institution's sectoral focus or mandates to service the sectoral range that genuine policy-design capacity requires; a suitable anchor would accordingly span domains such as productivity and economic services, industrial and systems engineering, agri-business, environmental sustainability, technology and energy management, human resource development, and applied research etc., so that PSICs can be built on capabilities of an anchor institution already possessing such capabilities or build such or more capabilities when PSICs are established to accordingly address skills acquisitions perspectives reflected by Wu et al., 2015 and Howlett, 2015.



Third, an established track record in *evidence-based advisory work*: decades of past contributions to research, evaluation, and consultancy experience for central ministries, state governments, and public- and private-sector enterprises constitute the institutional memory on which credible policy prototyping depends, and on which PSIC could draw upon when located in suitable institutions. Fourth, ideally a *pan-India or national presence in their specific Global South country context combined with international linkages*: ideally a national network of regional offices of such institutions together with active engagement with multilateral productivity and development bodies, would offer the incubation function both a channel for grassroots and sectoral input and a means of benchmarking, and eventually contributing to, the global policy-lab community discussed in Section 2, again using infrastructure the anchor institution already maintains or can strengthen. (Wu et al., 2015; Howlett, 2015)

Institutions that meet such key criteria, along with long-established, autonomous status and multi-sectoral public institutional roles, whether in India or the Global South, where bodies with national networks and suitable past or decades of advisory experience, and existing international linkages, would be well placed to host a mechanism of this kind such as developing PSICs within the framework as one of their functions, alongside their existing mandates. The remainder of this paper sets out the conceptual and operational design such a mechanism could adopt, independent of the specific institution ultimately selected to host it.

The decision to focus on potential criteria rather than a candidate institution is proposed at this stage of the concept paper. Three considerations support it. First, the paper's contribution is conceptual: it argues that a specific functional scope exists in India's policy ecosystem (and in the Global South) and outlines the

attributes an anchor would ideally need to complement its own existing work, in the manner of a design brief rather than a procurement recommendation. Naming a single body would tend to be an advocacy for any given organisation which is set aside in this conceptual paper. Second, keeping the criteria general preserves the comparative value the paper reflects in Sections 8 and 9: read as a transferable template for policy entrepreneurship in other Global South administrative states, the argument is stronger for specifying the functional attributes an anchor rightly requires than for anchoring it to one particular institution or autonomous body. Third, the choice of anchor institution is, in practice, a future political and administrative decision that properly belongs to the more granular institutional proposals that may emerge as flagged in Section 9, and could be made in consultation with the ministries and bodies concerned, rather than one a concept paper is positioned to preempt. The criteria in this section are offered as the basis on which later, more specific cases could be made, whenever and whichever institutions are eventually willing to propose or adopt establishment of PSICs.

4. Conceptual Framework: Vision and Strategic Objectives

The vision articulated for the PSIC is to function as a Centre of Excellence in Policy Design, Policy Entrepreneurship, and Strategic Management, operating within, and in service of, both the public and private sectors, rather than as a standalone institution seeking recognition apart from them. This vision translates into five interlocking institutional roles, each defined in terms of the anchor institution's existing standing rather than as a new independent profile: operating as a vertical comparable in ambition to leading global think tanks and policy labs, but drawing its legitimacy from the anchor institution's



existing mandate; producing a cadre of policy entrepreneurs able to design, champion, and implement policy at scale within government and existing institutions; developing strategy professionals equipped for public- and private-sector leadership who return to strengthen the organisations that sponsored them; translating ideas into actionable programme and scheme designs for government and industry, submitted through existing channels for adoption; and functioning as a node within a wider think-tank network connecting India's incubators, think tanks, and accelerators nationally and internationally, without displacing any of them. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Mintrom & Norman, 2009)

Around this vision, the PSIC concept is organised into six strategic objectives, each framed as strengthening rather than substituting for existing arrangements: enabling data-driven, evidence-based policy and strategy solutions across socio-economic sectors, in support of the ministries and departments that may ultimately adopt them; building a structured incubation framework combining mentorship, research, stakeholder engagement, and prototyping, that plugs into existing approval processes; fostering collaborative co-creation among policymakers, industry, researchers, and civil society, convened through the anchor institution's existing relationships; embedding a culture of agile, iterative policy-making within government itself, rather than housing that culture only within a separate unit; systematically strengthening the evidence base available to existing decision-makers through field validation and feedback loops; and building long-term capacity through fellowships, structured training, and immersive problem-solving for both early-career professionals and sponsored executives, who are expected to carry that capacity back into their parent ministries, departments, and firms (Wu et al., 2015; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Along with including in

the cohort young graduates across various qualifications in the age group of 21-30, along with a group of middle management executives from government and public sectors, as part of the cohort groups per 6-month batch for an initial proposed period of 5 to 10 years.

5. Institutional Design: Cohort, Methodology, and Curriculum

5.1 Target Cohort

The PSIC is to be designed to serve a deliberately mixed cohort spanning seven categories: early-career graduates and postgraduates in policy, economics, law, social sciences, and strategic management or suitable fields with qualitative and quantitative skills; young executives sponsored by corporates and industry bodies seeking policy exposure; young government officials, including early-career civil service and central service officers and district administrators, sponsored by ministries and institutions; mid-career policy advocates and intrapreneurs from autonomous bodies, civil society, and media; social entrepreneurs seeking to connect ground-level work with policy and programme design; and international or diaspora fellows contributing to India's development agenda; executives of private sector corporate bodies/MSMEs/PSUs etc who may be sponsored by their respective organisations. Because sponsored officials and executives return to the ministries, state governments, and firms that nominated them, the cohort design is itself a mechanism for feeding PSIC's outputs back into the existing system along with creating fresh talent in the policy entrepreneurship and strategy specialists space. This deliberate mixing of entry-level participants (broadly aged 21–30) with senior officials and industry executives is intended to generate cross-idea exchanges between fresh analytical perspective and institutional experience,



and is presented as a point of distinctiveness relative to single-cohort training programmes.

5.2 Incubation Methodology

The PSIC's incubation methodology is proposed to follow a five-stage pathway from idea to impact, with the final stage to be suitably designed as a handover to existing institutions, the initiatives of the PSIC-led innovated and created ideas and implementation efforts. Incubatees begin with idea conceptualisation, drawing on raw policy ideas or challenge prompts issued by ministries and corporations. This is followed by research and validation: deep-dive research, field visits, expert consultation, and data analysis undertaken to build an evidence base. The third stage, design and prototyping, applies structured design-thinking methods to develop policy prototypes and schemes and to design and draft new schemes and programs in addition to strategic roadmaps and initiatives for consideration by government/public/private sectors, etc., in the form of programme frameworks, guidelines, or pilots and so on. The fourth stage, stakeholder feedback, subjects these prototypes to structured consultation with ministries, industry, and civil society for refinement and testing. The fifth stage, scale and mainstreaming, presents refined proposals to the sponsoring ministries and institutions themselves for adoption, implementation, and scaling through their own existing processes, so that final authority over adoption remains with those institutions rather than with PSIC. Three enabling pillars support this pathway throughout: a mentorship network of policy practitioners, academics, industry leaders, and international experts; a design-thinking studio providing collaborative workspace for ideation and co-creation; and a digital knowledge hub offering access to policy databases, comparative case studies, and real-time data systems. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012; OECD, 2025)

5.3 Programme Structure

Each incubation batch is to run for six months, structured in two parts. The first sixty to seventy five days is proposed to follow an intensive curriculum of more than 240 - 300 learning sessions organised across six thematic phases, proceeding from foundational themes in democracy, economic theory, public administration, research methods, and ethics; through sectoral governance across more than twenty domains, including health, education, transport, agriculture, energy, and waste management; systems and tools such as e-governance, geographic information systems, taxation, public procurement, and public-private partnerships; advanced policy themes including energy transition, direct benefit transfer, rural development, migration, and the gig economy; international and legal dimensions spanning trade policy and constitutional, contract, and labour law; and, in the concluding phase, the Sustainable Development Goals, artificial intelligence and big data, hands-on policy prototyping, and strategic roadmaps development. The remaining three and a half to four months constitute an applied project phase, in which incubatees conduct field validation and stakeholder consultation, design policy prototypes that are drawn from real ministry or corporate challenges, and present finished proposals to the sponsoring institutions that will decide whether and how to adopt them. (Wu et al., 2015)

5.4 A Complementary Executive Training Track

Alongside the six-month incubation batches, the anchor institution could develop a companion Executive Training Programme intended to build wider organisational readiness for policy and strategy incubation within existing ministries and institutions, independent of enrolment in a full incubation batch. Where the six-month batches build a dedicated, credentialed cadre from a mixed cohort, the executive track is designed to reach a considerably wider



population of serving officials and executives, including All-India and Central Civil Services officers, state civil service officers and district administrators, (and similarly the Global South administrators and companies), senior public-sector-undertaking and autonomous-body executives, regulatory and planning officials, policy researchers, development-sector professionals, and faculty of the anchor institution and allied public training institutions, offering working exposure to incubator methodology, within their own organisations, where a full six-month engagement is not feasible.

Both formats are and can be progressively mapped to a common competency framework spanning policy entrepreneurship, strategic and systems thinking, evidence-based and behavioural policy design, strategic foresight, institutional design, digital-governance literacy, stakeholder management, change leadership, and facilitation of labs and sprints, taught at foundation level in the shorter format and at an applied, advanced level in the longer format. Both formats, in essence, share a common pedagogical design in which no more than a quarter to a third of session time is devoted to conceptual input, with the remainder given to case discussion, simulation, and capstone work; each session could pair an Indian and an international case example; and each cohort would be expected to conclude with a live, panel-assessed capstone simulation. The programme is intended to be offered in two-day and five-day formats. The former is a compressed orientation culminating in a one-page incubator charter and a pitch to a simulated empowered committee; the latter is a deeper curriculum, spanning strategy formulation, foresight, governance innovation, and leadership, culminating in an integrated Incubator Operating Model document presented to a simulated Cabinet Note or Empowered

Committee and leading to a formal advanced certificate. Positioned this way, the executive track could function as a shorter-format capacity-building funnel that both builds organisation-wide fluency in policy entrepreneurship within existing institutions and creates a pipeline of oriented candidates for future incubation cohorts, reinforcing those institutions' and enterprises' own capacity. (Howlett, 2014; OECD, 2025)

6. Stakeholder Engagement Architecture

The suggested PSICs are to be designed to draw on, and contribute to, several tiers and sectors of India's existing governance and enterprise ecosystem (and similarly in the Global South for their respective countries), precisely so that it operates as an additional channel within that ecosystem rather than as a body standing outside it. Central government ministries can co-design programmes, sponsor young officials, and commission research; state governments can incubate state-specific policy challenges and sponsor cadre officials; industry and corporates can sponsor executives for policy immersion, fund CSR-linked policy innovation, and submit sector-specific challenges; public-sector undertakings can commission research and align strategic planning; academic and research bodies can contribute faculty expertise, joint research, and student engagement; and civil-society organisations and think tanks can contribute ground-level innovation input and monitoring partnerships. In every case, the relationship runs in both directions: the stakeholder both feeds PSIC and receives its outputs back, which is the structural feature that keeps the mechanism complementary rather than self-contained (Voorberg et al., 2018; OECD, 2018). The suggested modes of engagement are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder engagement modalities through which the PSIC is proposed to operate as a complement to India's existing policy system or similarly adaptable in the Global South.



Stakeholder group	Illustrative modes of engagement
Central government ministries	Co-design of schemes; sponsorship of young officials; commissioning of research; adoption of policy prototypes into existing programmes
State governments	Incubation of state-specific challenges; sponsorship of cadre officials; regional policy co-design feeding back into state planning processes
Industry and corporates	Sponsored executive immersion; CSR-funded innovation; challenge submissions; regulatory and trade policy co-design
Public sector undertakings and institutions	Strategic planning alignment; research commissioning; leadership development within existing organisational structures
Academia and research bodies	Joint research and field validation; faculty mentorship; student engagement in live projects
Civil society and think tanks	Ground-level innovation input; monitoring and evaluation partnerships; inclusive co-design

Partnership itself can take several concrete forms, each designed to route PSIC's work through, rather than around, existing institutional channels: financial support for fellowships, infrastructure, and operating costs; sponsored participation of executives, officials, and young professionals in incubation batches, who remain on their parent organisation's rolls throughout; submission of real policy and strategy challenges for incubatees to research and prototype on behalf of the sponsoring body; commissioning of policy briefs, feasibility studies, and programme designs from the PSIC team, delivered to the commissioning institution for its own use; mentorship and advisory contributions from domain experts; partnership in piloting and implementing policy prototypes under the sponsoring institution's own authority; alignment of corporate social responsibility mandates with the PSIC's social-innovation objectives; and knowledge exchange with international institutions around comparative best practice.

7. Anticipated Contributions: Immediate, Medium-, and Long-Term

The PSIC's anticipated contribution can be read across three time horizons, each framed as strengthening the existing system's own capacity. In the immediate term, each incubation batch is expected to produce evidence-based policy briefs and strategic proposals delivered to their sponsoring ministries and departments, programme and scheme designs for ministries and departments, strategy frameworks for corporates, public-sector undertakings, and micro, small, and medium enterprises, and a trained cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy professionals who return to strengthen the institutions that sponsored them. This also has the potential to seed new social enterprises, think tanks, and strategy consultancies founded by alumni, which would sit alongside, and could in turn partner with, existing institutions. In the medium term, the PSIC is expected to contribute to an expanded national cadre of policy practitioners embedded within existing ministries and bodies, the emergence of grassroots policy-innovation ecosystems that feed into established channels, new co-creation models for policy design and implementation that existing institutions can adopt, stronger linkages between policy and practice, and



increased institutional capacity within ministries themselves, rather than capacity that resides only within PSIC (Wu et al., 2015; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013).

In the long term, the paper argues that sustained operation of the PSIC as a complementary mechanism could contribute to a progressively more adaptive, inclusive, and data-driven national policy ecosystem, achieved by strengthening existing institutions; reposition its anchor institution as a national hub for governance innovation, extending its existing sectoral mandate rather than creating a new one; place a new generation of policy entrepreneurs into key positions across India's value chains and similarly in the Global South countries via their respective PSICs, largely within government and established institutions; and constitute a systemic contribution to the Viksit Bharat 2047 agenda for a developed, self-reliant India by the centenary of independence (and similarly contribute to the missions of the respective Global South countries). Beyond individual professionals, the PSIC is also envisaged to help catalyse new institutional entities that would operate alongside, and often in partnership with, existing ones: the next-generation think tanks, social enterprises bridging government policy and last-mile implementation, home-grown strategy consultancies serving ministries and corporate India, and similarly in the respective Global South countries, specialised sectoral bodies in emerging domains such as climate policy and digital governance, self-sustaining fee-based policy-service agencies, and an alumni-based policy-entrepreneurship network linking government and industry over time.

8. Positioning the PSIC within the Global Policy-Lab Literature

Read against both the international policy-lab literature and India's existing innovation infrastructure, four features distinguish the PSIC

proposal and form the core of the case for its adoption as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, that infrastructure. First, it would constitute the first or early phase dedicated, government-anchored function for policy and strategy incubation in India, and similarly in the Global South countries, that is proposedly and explicitly complementary with NITI Aayog's think-tank and technology-entrepreneurship mandates (and similarly for the planning departments of Global South countries). Second, it is proposed to be designed to serve both government and private-sector strategy needs simultaneously, rather than being confined to a single ministry's brief, as most international policy labs are, while still routing every output back through the relevant ministry or firm's own decision process. Third, it combines incubation with acceleration: rather than stopping at problem definition and prototype design, the point at which comparative research shows most international labs concentrate their effort (Kattel, et al., 2020), the PSIC's applied-project phase is explicitly built to carry prototypes through stakeholder consultation to presentation for adoption by the sponsoring ministry or institution itself, so that PSIC's role not only to enable handover but also reflects the availability of trained manpower that can participate with the implementation authority in the rollout of programs, schemes and strategies. Fourth, it is proposed to be designed as co-creation rather than prescription: policy solutions are intended to emerge from structured collaboration between implementers, communities, and policy specialists, in a deliberate attempt to build shared ownership with existing institutions rather than deliver policy from outside them (Olejniczak et al., 2020; OECD, 2025).

These features suggest that the PSIC proposal could be of interest not only to the immediate Indian policy debate but may also be relevant for Global South countries towards institutional innovations. Within the broader literature on policy transfer and



institutional innovation in the Global South, the PSIC can be read as a case of adaptive institutional borrowing: it draws self-consciously on an established international model while restructuring that model's scale, mandate, and sectoral scope to fit the administrative and federal characteristics of a large, diverse developing State, and while deliberately choosing the government-led and government-enabled positions on the international spectrum discussed in Section 2 over full independence, precisely because those positions keep the mechanism tied into, rather than separate from, existing decision-making authority. Whether such adaptation succeeds in practice, and whether the specific institutional choices examined here (an autonomous, multidisciplinary public body as anchor, a professional-incubation format operated as one of that body's functions, and a dual public-private mandate exercised in support of existing institutions) prove durable, remains an open empirical question that would benefit from sustained scholarly attention as the PSIC, or comparable mechanisms, are implemented (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012).

9. Conclusion

India's policy and strategy ecosystem shows evident scope for evolution toward more multi-directional innovation, more structured prototyping of early-stage ideas, wider stakeholder engagement, stronger real-time feedback loops, and, over time, a trained cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists able to carry ideas from the grassroots to the highest levels of implementation. This paper has argued that a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre, anchored as a function within a suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institution, is well positioned to be best understood, and should be pursued, strictly as a complement to India's existing policy-making architecture rather than as an

alternative or parallel structure to it. It also proposes prospects for not just one but several PSICs considered to be established by the central and State governments and academic institutions with suitable developmental focus areas and sectors inclusion. It draws on a recognisable and well-studied international institutional form while extending that form in ways suited to India's scale, federal structure, and dual public-private strategy needs, and while keeping final authority over adoption, implementation, and scale-up with the ministries, state governments, and institutions as well as corporates and public sector units that already hold it (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Wu et al., 2015).

The proposal examined here remains at a conceptual stage; its methodology, financing, detailed operational design, and choice of anchor institution are to be finalised in a subsequent, more granular institutional proposal, one that should preserve this complementary framing at every stage of design. What the present analysis suggests is that the institutional space between policy think tank and policy implementation in India has scope for additional innovative components, that comparative international experience shows this space can be productively institutionalised without displacing existing bodies, and that suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institutions with an established mandate, network, and track record, would be credible first movers in adding such a function to their own portfolio for India and similarly in Global South countries. More broadly, the case examined here offers a template through which other countries in the Global South, facing comparable policy formulation and policy implementation, might consider the institutionalisation of policy entrepreneurship as a distinct administrative capacity that strengthens existing think-tank or technology-innovation infrastructure.



Read alongside the discussion in Section 1, the case examined here is ultimately a case about social and cultural reorganisation as much as administrative design: about who is culturally licensed to hold the title of policymaker in a large South Asian administrative and governance framework, how a credentialing programme might function as a new channel of social mobility into that status without requiring a new institutional home outside the existing hierarchy, and how current administrative

culture could accommodate, a new professional identity built around the interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral mixing described in Section 5. These are questions that comparative public-administration and strategic management scholarship domains may not fully capture, and to which a social and cultural analysis of institutional change in the Global South, attentive to how complementary mechanisms are absorbed into existing hierarchies rather than substituted for them, is better suited.

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