The last chapter showed that DATAR’s effectiveness as a coordinating bureaucracy was related to the interest taken by political leaders in its affairs and therefore that leaders had an impact on DATAR that was linked to their interest in its work. This chapter and the next strengthen the claim by showing how that ‘highly significant’ relationship at the statistical level of principle is affected at the level of political–administrative practice. Blondel (1987: 150) thought ‘the system’ linking political leaders to the bureaucracy was ‘often – perhaps mostly…simply unresponsive or only partly responsive’ to their needs. He assumed that four factors made a difference to how well bureaucrats implemented leadership aims (1987: 168). One, links from the central bureaucracy to other organizations and the general population constitute a special case where DATAR is concerned and will be examined in the following chapter. The remaining factors could apply to all bureaucratic organizations:

- ‘competence’
- ‘administrative organisation – not too light nor too heavy’
- ‘civil servants must…be expected to be reliable…the fostering of loyalty of civil servants by a variety of means – but not at the expense of initiative taking – is a manifest requirement if bureaucracies are to provide a significant help to leaders in achieving their goals’.

Leaders have ‘two types of instruments’ in connection with these factors (Blondel 1987: 171–2): personal mechanisms, such as their prestige and following within the bureaucracy, to obtain greater loyalty and zeal; and institutional mechanisms, such as in the ‘recruitment and training
of the personnel’ and ‘the organization of the service’. However, there would be ‘inevitable trade-offs’ between the various elements.

In setting up DATAR in 1963, political leaders employed ‘personal’ and ‘institutional’ mechanisms to combine reliable orientation towards their interests with operational effectiveness. Its délégué, Guichard, was personally close and loyal to the leadership, technically competent in the domain and able to recruit an enthusiastic team. Early on, he described DATAR as an administration de mission (Guichard 1965: 6), and DATAR and DIACT continued to be so defined: ‘DATAR [DIACT] is an administration de mission of interministerial character’ (www.datar.fr; www.diact.fr). This bureaucratic model (Pisani 1956a: 323–6) is lightweight, project-focused, informal in working methods and interministerial in recruitment and function. The agency was thus potentially capable of a speedy refocusing on a new leader’s aims but by the same token DATAR had relative freedom to pursue its own projects. What resources did political leaders have to ensure this agency evolved in the ways each intended? Did the agency’s personnel and activities respond to their policy priorities? These issues are explored first through an analysis of the leaders’ efforts to choose as délégué someone competent and loyal to their aims. The second part of the chapter judges the ability of political leaders to make an impact on the staffing, budget and work programmes of this organization.

Choosing the top official

The French political leadership’s powers to appoint a top official of its choice can be judged from the rules for such appointments, and from evidence about the délégués appointed since 1963 (Table 4.1 lists them, together with some variables explored in this section).

The political leadership’s powers to appoint

With their decree of 14 February 1963, political leaders gave themselves the positional resources to choose the délégué. The head of DATAR became one of about 500 ‘discretionary appointments’ they made in the regular Cabinet meeting, the Council of Ministers. The president is responsible under the 1958 Constitution for making such appointments, but the decree must be countersigned by the prime minister, the sectoral minister and junior minister to whom the agency is attached, if any. All four signed the decree appointing Pierre Mirabaud as the last DATAR (and first DIACT) délégué in 2004, and that appointing his successor, Pierre Dartout, in 2008. The political leadership has a wide choice