

The Challenge of Coordination in Central Government Organizations

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UNIFOB AS

OCTOBER 2007

Working paper 5 - 2007

Contents

PREFACE	3
SUMMARY.....	4
SAMMENDRAG	5
INTRODUCTION.	7
THE NORWEGIAN COORDINATION CONTEXT.....	8
FEATURES OF THE COORDINATIVE REFORM EFFORTS.....	9
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON COORDINATION	11
DATA SOURCES	14
THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES: ASSESSING DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF COORDINATION.	15
VARIATIONS IN COORDINATION: STRUCTURE, CULTURE AND DEMOGRAPHY.....	18
Bivariate analyses	19
Multivariate analyses.....	20
DISCUSSION	22
CONCLUSION.....	24
REFERENCES	26

Preface

This paper is written as a part of the following projects: “Norwegian central government in a 30 years perspective”, funded by the Meltzer Foundation and “Multilevel-governance in the tension between functional and territorial specialization”, funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The paper was presented at the Study Group on Governance of Public Sector Organizations, EGPA Conference, Madrid 19-22 September 2007. We wish to thank the Norwegian Science Data Service that has conducted the survey for us, and especially Vidar W. Rolland and John-Erik Ågotnes for valuable help. We also thank Anne Lise Fimreite and Paul G. Roness for good comments on an earlier version of the paper.

Summary

This paper addresses the coordination problems in central government by focusing on the Norwegian case. The main research questions are: What are the experiences of civil servants concerning the main aspects of coordination in the civil service: horizontal and vertical coordination, and internal and external coordination? What is the relative importance of structural, demographic and cultural variables for explaining variations in civil servants' perception of coordination along these dimensions? The data base is a questionnaire given to civil servants in ministries and central agencies in 2006. The main findings are that there are more problems with horizontal coordination than with vertical coordination; that generally perceived coordination problems are bigger in central agencies than in ministries; and that a low level of mutual trust tends to aggravate coordination problems. Thus both structural and cultural factors matter.

Sammendrag

Dette notatet analyserer samordningsproblem i norsk sentralforvaltning. Følgende problemstillinger behandles: Hvilke erfaringer har ansatte i sentraladministrasjonen når det gjelder samordning langs følgende dimensjoner: Horisontal og vertikal samordning, intern og ekstern samordning? Hva er den relative betydningen av strukturelle, demografiske og kulturelle variabler for å forklare variasjoner i de ansattes vurdering av samordningen langs disse dimensjonene? Datagrunnlaget er en spørreskjemaundersøkelse til ansatte i departementer og direktorater i 2006. Hovedfunnene er at det er større problemer med horisontal samordning enn med vertikal samordning, at samordningen oppleves som mer problematisk i direktoratene enn i departementene og at svake gjensidige tillitsrelasjoner fører til økte samordningsproblemer. Både strukturelle og kulturelle faktorer har altså betydning for å forstå variasjoner i samordningsproblemer i norsk sentraladministrasjon.

Introduction

The structure and working of public organizations around the world can be described and analyzed according to two central sets of variables: specialization and coordination, both of which have vertical and horizontal components. In his analysis of the US federal administrative apparatus, Luther Gulick (1937) pointed out the importance of these variables, gave them further content and stressed their dynamic relationship. Even though many scholars, such as Herbert Simon, have criticized the definition and use of these principles and considered them ambiguous (Hammond 1990), they have nevertheless been very important both in scholarly analyses and in administrative practice.

The New Public Management (NPM) movement has mainly been characterized by a strategy of fragmentation (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004) adopted mainly with a view to furthering efficiency and transparency, making roles less ambiguous, etc. Vertical specialization or structural devolution seems, however, to have undermined political control, for it has both weakened the structural levers of control and diminished the actual influence of political executives over subordinate levels and institutions. At the same time, increased horizontal specialization, according to the principle of “single purpose organizations”, has created challenges of capacity and coordination (Gregory 2003). NPM has, however, not only furthered fragmentation, but also promoted a number of reregulation measures, such as strengthening the internal instruments of planning and control (Management-by-Objectives and Results), increasing the use of regulatory agencies and strengthening scrutiny and auditing in various ways (Christensen and Læg Reid 2006a, Pollitt et al. 1999).

In post-NPM reform efforts vertical and horizontal coordination problems have received a renewed focus in the form of “whole-of-government” and “joined-up government” programs (Christensen and Læg Reid, 2006b, 2007a and b). In the vertical dimension, directing more central resources towards subordinate institutions and levels and using stronger instruments of central control have become increasingly important ways for political executives to regain political control and pursue consistent policies across levels. In the horizontal dimension, measures like cross-sectoral bodies, programs or projects are increasingly being used to modify the “siloization” or “pillarization” of the central public administration (Gregory 2003, Pollitt 2003). Added to this, a stronger trend towards internationalization and regionalization combined with strong local government has increased the coordination challenges related to issues that are dealt with at multiple levels of government.

In this paper we will address the coordination problems in central government by focusing on the case of Norway. The main research questions are: What are the experiences of civil servants concerning the main aspects of coordination in the civil

service: horizontal and vertical coordination, and internal and external coordination? How do we explain variations in the experience of coordination along the different dimensions? What is the relative importance or significance of independent structural, demographic and cultural variables for explaining these variations?

The main explanatory variables used are structural features such as position, competence, administrative level, policy area, main tasks and administrative reforms; demographic features such as sex, age, education and tenure; and cultural features such as mutual trust, role orientation and identification. We will derive hypotheses based on a broad transformative approach (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a). The main dependent variables will be the civil servants' assessment of how good coordination is along the following dimensions: vertical coordination within own policy area; horizontal coordination between different government policy areas or sectors; coordination with local and regional government; coordination with super-national and multinational organizations; and coordination with civil society organizations and private-sector interest organizations. The empirical basis of the analysis is a survey conducted in 2006 of Norwegian ministries and central agencies. A total of 3,362 civil servants answered the questionnaire.

The Norwegian Coordination Context

As a country with a large, universal welfare state, Norway has a large public sector and there is a relatively high level of mutual trust between central actors and public-sector organizations (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002). Norway can be characterized as a unitary state with a combination of political and administrative decentralization. The principle of local self government is quite strong: there are elected bodies at both local and regional level and these are expected to make their own local policy without too much interference from central government. At the same time, they are also supposed to implement policies coming from central government. In Norway the delivery of the most important welfare services are delegated to the municipalities. Added to this, there are also government bodies at both the local and regional level that are responsible for implementing central government policies, and these also have control and regulatory tasks.

The central government in Norway is characterized by strong sectoral ministries and relatively weak super-ministries with coordination responsibilities across ministerial areas. The principle of ministerial responsibility is strong, meaning that the individual minister is responsible for all activities in his or her portfolio and in subordinate agencies and bodies. The only ministry with strong horizontal coordination power is the Ministry of Finance, but this power is mainly restricted to questions of budget and financial resources and not to more substantial policy issues. The Prime Minister's Office has traditionally been rather small and it has not been a strong coordination body, but it has become more important over the past decade, owing to an increase in personnel. That said, some ministries, such as the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Justice and the Police, the Ministry of Government Administration and

Reform, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, do have some coordination tasks across ministerial areas.

Over the past decade, two development features in the Norwegian central government have affected the coordination pattern. First, the NPM reforms have increased vertical and horizontal specialization, while at the same time trying to balance this with a focus on vertical coordination, mainly within the government apparatus but also between state and local government. Management-by-objectives-and-results has mainly addressed how superior authorities can control their subordinate agencies and bodies via different forms of performance-management techniques and quasi-contractual arrangements. This is also linked to structural devolution efforts that have turned public administration bodies into state-owned companies and given central agencies enhanced autonomy. The problems of horizontal coordination have not been addressed to the same extent, but this does not mean that this is not an important problem in the Norwegian political-administrative system. EU influence on national vertical structural devolution is also part of this complex equation.

Second, Norway's increased integration in the European Union through the Economic Area Agreement has increased the need for horizontal coordination and for a unified Norwegian position to be formulated on various policy issues. To facilitate this eighteen special overarching committees have been established covering both ministries and agencies and different policy sectors. The members of these committees are civil servants in affected ministries and agencies. In addition to these special committees there is also a coordination committee headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thus this contextual situation illustrates the special challenges that civil servants in Norwegian ministries and central agencies face when handling and assessing coordination issues. The Norwegian case illustrates that a number of changes in government have made coordination more difficult and that there is an increasing demand for both horizontal and multi-level coordination (Peters 1998 and 2004).

Features of the coordinative reform efforts

The main goal of post-NPM reforms has been to gradually move public-sector organizations back from the disintegration or fragmentation brought about under NPM to a situation of greater integration and coordination (Christensen and Lægveid 2007a). First, as indicated, fragmentation under NPM has increased pressure for more horizontal integration and coordination. Societal problems can seldom be compartmentalized along sectoral lines, so increasing cross-sectoral coordinative capacity has been important. Second, political executives have been reluctant to accept that NPM has led to an undermining of political control. Whether socialists or non-socialists, many political executives have identified a situation where they are losing control, influence and information and still being held accountable as problematic. This has resulted in efforts to strengthen central capacity and control, particularly in sectors that are seen as political salient. There is an increasing striving for coordination and coherence in public policy, and one answer seems to be a return to the centre (Peters 2005).

Third, confronted with an increasingly insecure world, whether the result of terrorism, biosecurity concerns, tsunamis or pandemics, national states are seeking to strengthen central political control, but also seeing an increasing need for contingent coordination and network approaches (Christensen and Painter 2004, Kettl 2003, Wise 2002). Fourth, the promise that NPM would bring an overall increase in efficiency has been difficult to fulfil, even though some more technically oriented services have become more efficient. There have also been concerns about negative effects of NPM features, like increased social inequality and the declining quality of public services (Stephens 1996).

A second generation of reforms initially labeled “joined-up government” (JUG) and later known as “whole-of- government” was launched, much in contrast to the NPM reforms. Its advocates described it as a more holistic strategy, using insights from the other social sciences, rather than just economics (Bogdanor 2005). These new reform efforts, as a response to increased fragmentation, started in the late 1990s in the most radical NPM countries such as the UK, New Zealand and Australia (Perry 6 2004). The slogans “joined-up-government” and “whole-of-government” provided new labels for the old doctrine of coordination in the study of public administration (Hood 2005). In addition to the issue of coordination, the problem of integration was a main concern behind these reform initiatives (Mulgan 2005). Attempts to coordinate government policy-making and service delivery across organizational boundaries are, however, not a new phenomenon (Ling 2002, Kavanagh and Richards 2001).

The concept of JUG was first introduced by the Blair government in 1997 and a main aim was to get a better grip on the “wicked” issues straddling the boundaries of public-sector organizations, administrative levels and policy areas. It became one of the principal themes in the modernization program of Tony Blair’s New Labour administration (Richards and Smith 2006). JUG was presented as the opposite of “departmentalism,” tunnel vision and “vertical silos”. In the UK, JUG has found its strongest expression at the local level, where it encourages various kinds of partnerships (Stoker 2005). Another special focus of JUG activities has been the assertion of authority in the form of special coordinators and clearance systems. It is, however, not entirely clear what JUG means (Pollitt 2003). Some authors make a distinction between JUG and holistic government (Perry 6 2005). The terms have emerged as fashionable slogans rather than precise scientific concepts and in practice they are often used more or less synonymously.¹

Some common features can be identified. The phrase JUG denotes the aspiration to achieve horizontal and vertical coordination in order to eliminate situations in which different policies undermine each other, to make better use of scarce resources, to create synergies by bringing together different stakeholders in a particular policy area and to offer citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to services (Pollitt 2003). The overlap with the whole-of-government concept is obvious. The *Connecting Government Report* (Management Advisory Committee 2004) defines whole-of-government in the

¹ There are also numerous other terms describing the challenge of improving coordination across policy sectors and service delivery, such as networked government, connected government, cross-cutting policy, horizontal management, partnerships and collaborative public management.

Australian Public Service in this way: “Whole-of-government denotes public services agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal or informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery”.

The scope of whole-of-government is pretty broad. One can distinguish between policymaking and *implementation* aspects, between *horizontal linkages* and *vertical linkages*, and the targets for whole-of-government initiatives can be a group, a locality or a policy sector (see Pollitt 2003). Whole-of-government activities may span any or all levels of government and also involve groups outside government. It is about joining up at the top, but also about joining up at the base and enhancing local level integration, and it involves public-private partnerships.

One example of whole-of-government structures at the municipal level is the new Municipality Act in Norway from 1992 (Tranvik and Fimreite 2006). Another main whole-of-government initiative in Norway is the reform of the employment and welfare administration. In 2005 the Storting (parliament) decided to merge the employment and national insurance administrations and to establish a more formal collaboration with the local government social services administration. This comprehensive reform is affecting vertical sector coordination and horizontal coordination, as well as coordination between local and central government (Christensen, Fimreite and Læg Reid 2007).

Theoretical perspectives on coordination

According to an *instrumental-structural perspective*, decision-making processes in public organizations are either the result of strong hierarchical steering or negotiations among top political and administrative leaders (March and Olsen 1983). And the formal structure of public organizations will channel and influence the models of thought and the actual decision-making behaviour of the civil servants (Egeberg 2003, Simon 1957). A major precondition for such effects is that the leaders score high on rational calculation (Dahl and Lindblom 1953), meaning that they must have relatively clear intentions and goals, choose structures that correspond with these goals and have insight into the potential effects of the structures chosen.

Luther Gulick (1937) stressed the dynamic relationship between specialization and coordination: the more specialization in a public organization, the more pressure for increased coordination, or vice versa. The challenges of coordination by organization, his main type, were also qualitatively different depending on whether the structural specialization was based on purpose, process, clientele or geography. If a public administration is, for example, based on the principle of purpose, the main coordinative challenge would be to get different sectoral administrations to work together on cross-sectoral problems, or if process is the basic principle, getting different professions and experts to join forces would be a challenge.

Our approach will be to distinguish between an external-internal dimension of coordination and a vertical-horizontal dimension (Table 1). The first distinguishes between coordination within the central government and coordination between central government bodies and organizations outside the central government. The second

dimension distinguishes between vertical coordination, which can be either vertical within the central government or upwards to international organizations or downwards to local government, and horizontal coordination between organizations on the same level. Thus, we address the problem of coordination in a multi-level system. The vertical dimension of coordination is more hierarchy-based while the horizontal coordination is more network-based (Verhoest et al. 2005).

Table 1 Different coordination forms.

	Horizontal coordination	Vertical coordination
Internal coordination	Intra-level coordination between ministries, agencies or policy sectors	Inter-level coordination between parent ministry and subordinate agencies and bodies
External coordination	Coordination with civil society organizations/private-sector interest organizations	Coordination a)upwards to international organizations or b)downwards to local government

If we take the central public administration as the unit of analysis, vertical intra-organizational coordination means central efforts by political and administrative leaders to strengthen the coordination and control of sub-ordinate levels/units in the central civil service, like agencies. We presuppose that their authority would be strong. Empirically in our case, this is labelled “vertical coordination within own policy area”. Horizontal intra-organizational coordination is coordination inside central government among ministries and agencies. In this type the cabinet and the PM and his/her office are central actors and their authority is high. In our data, this is the variable “horizontal coordination between different government policy areas and sectors”.

Vertical inter-organizational coordination means coordination between the central administrative level and other geographical levels. In this type both sectoral political and especially administrative leaders are important actors, but their authority is somewhat weaker, since central control must be balanced against regional and local autonomy. In our data this variable is labelled “coordination with local and regional government”. Horizontal inter-organizational coordination is coordination with societal groups, and the central actors are sectoral political and administrative leaders and their counterparts in the private sector, but this implies a weaker position for the governmental actors concerning as far as authority is concerned. In our data this is called “coordination with civil society organizations and private-sector interest organizations”.

The fifth dependent variable used – “coordination with super-national and multi-national organizations” – will for most purposes be of the horizontal, inter-organizational type, but in the case of super-national organizations, like the EU, will have features of the vertical inter-organizational type, where Norway and its central civil service are in a subordinate position. The authority of national government actors will be somewhat weaker than in national coordination with multi-national organizations, while the national government’s authority will be weakest of all in collaboration and coordination with super-national organizations.

An instrumental-structural perspective may also help us understand variation among civil servants in their experiencing experience and evaluating evaluation of coordinative efforts. Leaders will have a greater obligation to organize and further coordination, and they will also see coordination differently to executive officers lower down in the hierarchy. This leads to a general expectation that leaders will score highest in their positive evaluation of a broad range of coordination forms but also have a relatively high score on particularly demanding types of coordination. This perspective also offers insights into variations in how coordination is experienced subjectively in different policy areas and among officials performing different tasks, because these formal features determine how internally or externally directed their work is, how technical or non-technical the tasks are, the number and type of stakeholders, etc.

The second perspective used in the analysis is the *cultural-institutional* one (Selznick 1957). Such a perspective views the development of a public organization as based on historical traditions, path-dependency and informal norms and values (Krasner 1988, March 1994). Actors will think and act according to a logic of appropriateness, not one of consequence. The leadership of a public organization will have a central role in socializing and training employees, so it will act in an appropriate way.

The logic of appropriateness is a central feature of the cultural perspective. What is appropriate for a civil servant to do is defined by the institution to which he belongs and transmitted through socialization (March and Olsen 1989). Common identities and high level of mutual trust are central characteristics and make it possible to coordinate many activities in ways that make them mutually consistent. High level of mutual trust tends to enhance appropriate behaviour and vice versa. In civil service systems with strong vertical sector relations, such as Norway, civil servants know what they are supposed to do and how to act and this creates and maintains trust relations within the different sectors, but can also constrain trust and coordination among sectors (Fimreite et al. 2007).

So what could be the cultural appropriateness concerning coordination? If civil servants and their leadership are sharing common norms and values, such a common culture may facilitate actual coordination. This way of thinking is very much reflected in the concept of “value-based management”, which is a central feature of the post-NPM reforms in Australia (Halligan 2007). NPM meant increased structural fragmentation but also cultural fragmentation, so a challenge for leaders under the post-NPM reforms is to bring public organizations culturally back together again. But pragmatic collaboration between public organizations, as reflected in Bardach’s concept of “smart practice” (Bardach 1998), may also be seen as a way to overcome cultural differences. Instead of primarily thinking about the interest and culture of each single public organization, the purpose is to create a common cultural platform that could yield a stronger collective capacity.

We will use three different sets of cultural variables to explain variety in civil servants’ experience of coordination. One of the chief variables and one that is a central precondition for working together in the civil service is mutual trust, i.e. whether civil servants think the mutual trust level between the ministry and subordinate agencies is high or not. Another set of variables is the role orientation of civil servants. Do the civil servants see their roles as collective, collaborative or coordinational or the opposite?

And third, what characterizes the identity of civil servants? Do they mainly identify with the central civil service in general or more with their own unit or profession? We also add the importance of boundary-spanning skills as a cultural variable, indicating that such competence will affect the civil servants' perception of actual coordination.

Demography can be seen as part of an instrumental perspective, if we attend to the competence that the civil servants bring with them, the systematic recruitment and promotion of civil servants and their location in the organizational structure. It can also be connected to the cultural perspective if we attend more to professional norms and values. Here, however, we will, use it more as a separate perspective, primarily to explain variety in the perception of coordination measures. The focus will be more on where they come from and what they bring with them into the ministries and central agencies regarding norms, values and competence, than where they are located in the organization structure or the administrative culture. The general reasoning here is that civil servants through their socio-economic background or their individual careers have acquired certain norms and values that are relevant in their jobs. The more specific questions will be whether such differences in background systematically lead to variation in their experience of coordination. Will civil servants who are older and have a longer tenure experience the various coordinative efforts differently to their younger less experienced colleagues? Will there be gender differences? And will educational background help to explain the variation?

Data sources

Our method of studying reforms is based on three main elements (Christensen and Læg Reid 1999). First, we focus on the response of individual civil servants in ministries and agencies by focusing on their perceptions of different forms of coordination. How the individual civil servants experience coordination along different dimensions in their daily work is the core of our approach. Second, we choose an extensive method to cover a lot of ground. In 2006 we conducted a large survey of all civil servants with at least one year of tenure from executive officers to top civil servants in Norwegian ministries and of every third civil servant in the central agencies. 1,516 persons in 49 central agencies answered and the response rate was 59 percent. On average there were 31 respondents from each agency, ranging from 112 in the biggest agency to 1 in the smallest. The response rate in the ministries was 67 percent. 1,846 responded in the 17 ministries, ranging from 57 in the Ministry of Oil and Energy to 284 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Third, we took a broad empirical approach to the question of coordination, asking the executives the following question: "How would you characterize coordination in your own field of work along the following dimensions?" We then listed five different forms of coordination:

- Coordination between different governmental authorities within own sector/own field of work;
- Coordination with governmental authorities in other policy sectors
- Coordination with local and regional government

- Coordination with super-national/international organizations
- Coordination with private-sector companies, civil society organizations, private - sector interest organizations

For each of these coordination forms, we asked the civil servants to state whether coordination was bad or good from on a scale from 1 (*very bad*) to 5 (*very good*).

We will now first describe the general satisfaction of civil servants in ministries and central agencies with coordination along these dimensions. Second, we will analyze how we might explain the variation in the different forms of coordination according to structural, demographic and cultural features.

The dependent variables: assessing different dimensions of coordination

Table 2 presents the experience of civil servants in Norwegian ministries and agencies concerning coordination of different types. The table gives both the results on the experiences of the civil servants working with coordination and the share of the total respondents who think that coordination is not relevant for their own work.

Table 2 The experience of civil servants in Norwegian ministries and central agencies of different types of coordination. Percentage. N=2876 (average)

	Good	Mixed	Bad	Not relevant
Vertical coordination within own policy area	52	28	8	12
Horizontal coordination between different policy areas/sectors	30	37	12	22
Vertical coordination with local and regional government	17	25	10	48
Coordination with super-national and multi-national organizations	32	24	7	37
Coordination with civil society organizations and private-sector interest organizations	24	31	8	37

The table shows the share of the total number of respondents who think coordination is not relevant for their jobs. These are civil servants who have internally directed roles and tasks, and who have very little experience with different types of coordination. Very few of the respondents say that internal vertical coordination inside the central civil service is not relevant; the same is also mostly the case for horizontal cross-sectoral coordination, while the scores on the three other coordination measures are much higher, especially for vertical coordination with local and regional levels. This means that many more civil servants are involved in internal vertical and horizontal coordination in the central civil service than in various external types of coordination, whether with

public or private actors, where coordination is a more specialized activity. For the rest of the analysis we will exclude the civil servants who said coordination was not relevant in their own field of work.

In the group of civil servants reporting that one or more of the five coordination forms were relevant in their daily work, respondents were most satisfied with vertical coordination within their own policy area (Table 3). Overall, vertical coordination within own policy area is seen as working best. This is very much a reflection of the importance of formal organizational structure, i.e. one main reason for organizing units and tasks together inside a ministry and agencies is that they have similar tasks, competence and client groups. Gulick (1937) labels this the principle of “departmentalism”, or it might also be described as what Thompson (1967) calls an organization’s domain. The relatively high level of satisfaction with vertical coordination is not surprising given the strong sectorization in the Norwegian political administrative system, the importance of the principle of ministerial responsibility and the focus of the NPM reforms on balancing vertical coordination and specialization. Six out of ten civil servants are satisfied with this form of coordination. Given the strong focus on vertical coordination it is, however, rather surprising that 41 % percent express more or less dissatisfaction with internal vertical coordination in their own policy area

Table 3 The experience of civil servants in Norwegian ministries and central agencies of different types of coordination. Not relevant responses excluded. Percentage.

	Good	Mixed	Bad	N=100%
Vertical coordination within own policy area	59	32	9	2539
Horizontal coordination between different policy areas/sectors	38	47	15	2251
Vertical coordination with local and regional government	33	49	18	1488
Coordination with super-national and multi-national organizations	51	38	11	1799
Coordination with civil society organizations and private-sector interest organizations	38	49	13	1820

Civil servants are also pretty satisfied with international coordination. Every second respondent reported that this form of coordination was good or very good. Given the complexities of the relationship between Norwegian central government and supra-national and multi-national organizations this is a surprisingly high score. It might indicate that the coordination system for handling EU-related issues works pretty well. Thus, vertical coordination between different governmental levels both internally in the state and externally with international organizations apparently works well.

The other types of coordination on average score somewhat lower. Only 38 percent of respondents think horizontal coordination is good between sectors and with civil society. This shows clearly that this is a future challenge in a post-NPM reform perspective, a challenge connected to one of the most typical NPM features, the horizontal specialization of institutions and tasks, based on the principle of “single purpose organizations” (Boston et al. 1996). One implication of this finding is that there

is a need for stronger “whole-of-government” initiatives in the Norwegian political-administrative system.

The biggest coordination problem in the Norwegian political-administrative system seems, however, to be the one between central government and local government. Only one-third of civil servants in central government report that coordination with local and regional government is good. This illustrates a major tension within the Norwegian political system between central government specialization by sector and territorial local government autonomy. Owing to recent administrative reforms at both the central and local levels the problem of coordination between central government bodies and local government has probably increased over the past decade (Fimreite and Lægreid 2005).

On average civil servants report that coordination is good along two of these five dimensions. 28 percent do not report good or very good coordination along any dimension, 44 percent are satisfied with coordination along one or two dimensions and 29 percent with three or more dimensions.

There are also some differences in scores between civil servants in ministries and those in agencies (Table 4). Respondents in ministries see vertical coordination within their own sector as much better than civil servants in agencies. This may reflect that there is a special obligation for the ministries to focus on vertical coordination, while that is less the case in the agencies. When the scores are still relatively high in the agencies, this may show that the institutional autonomy of the agencies is still influenced by a historical pattern of relatively restricted autonomy, even though Norway, too, has been subjected to a modified version of NPM, particularly concerning regulatory agencies (Christensen and Lægreid 2006a).

The second variable with differences in scores between the ministries and agencies is horizontal coordination between different governmental policy areas/sectors. One main reason for this may be that the ministries have a clearer obligation to promote cross-sectoral coordination and are better organized to cope with it. Agencies have to work more through the ministries to participate in such coordination, which may give rise to more complexity and problems.

Table 4. The experience of civil servants in Norwegian ministries and agencies of different types of coordination. Not relevant excluded. Percentage.

	Ministries (N=1125, average)		Agencies (N=856, average)	
	Coordination is good	Coordination is mixed/bad	Coordination is good	Coordination is mixed/bad
Vertical coordination within own policy area	67	33	49	51
Horizontal coordination between different policy areas/sectors	44	56	30	70
Vertical coordination with local and regional government	33	67	33	67
Coordination with super-national and multi-national organizations	53	47	47	53
Coordination with civil society organizations and private-sector interest organizations	38	62	38	62

When it comes to external coordination, there are no major differences between ministries and central agencies. Civil servants in ministries and agencies have on average the same opinion about coordination problems with local government, with the private sector and civil society and with international organizations.

Generally, these five forms of coordination are more cumulative and supplementary than alternative dimensions. There is a strong significant correlation between all five types of coordination. Pearson r varies between .36 and .68. If civil servants are satisfied with coordination along one dimension, they also tend to be satisfied along the other dimensions, and vice versa. Thus internal coordination problems tend to go hand in hand with external coordination problems, and horizontal coordination challenges are connected to vertical coordination issues. This means that there is a lot of overlap between the different forms of coordination and this will tend to produce similarities between them when it comes to what factors affect them.

Variations in coordination: structure, culture and demography

We now turn to the question of how to explain the differences in coordination experiences along the five forms of coordination. This section focuses on how the scores on the different independent variables, i.e. our indicators of structural, cultural and demographic features, correlate with the different dimensions of correlation. First, we present the bi-variate relations between each set of independent variables and dependent variables, and then do a multivariate analysis of the relative importance of the various independent variables for the different dimensions of coordination.

Bivariate analyses

Structural features. Administrative level tends to affect perceptions of vertical and horizontal coordination within the government, but also to some degree of international coordination as well (Table 5). Generally civil servants in the ministries are more satisfied with coordination along these dimensions than those working in central agencies, as shown above.

Table 5 Bivariate correlations between independent and dependent variables. Pearson's R. N=1981 (average)

	Vertical coordination	Horizontal coordination	Coordination local/regional government	International coordination	Societal coordination
Structural features:					
Administrative level	.21**	.19**	.04	.08**	.02
Position	.10**	.07*	-.01	.10**	.00
Sector	.08**	.05*	.01	.07*	-.09**
Coordination ministries	.08**	.10**	.06*	.05*	.02
Coordination tasks	.06*	.05*	.03	.10**	-.03
Cultural features:					
Mutual trust	.21**	.19**	.14**	.14**	.12**
Boundary-spanning skills	.08**	.07*	.07*	.09**	.07*
Identity own unit	.16**	.13**	.12**	.10**	-.08*
Identity own sector	.19**	.18**	.12**	.11**	.08*
Identity central government	.17**	.19*	.12**	.08**	.05
Identity own profession	.00	.02	.02	.00	.00
Demographic features:					
Age	.00	.03	.05	.00	-.05*
Sex	.01	.06*	.06*	-.10	.05*
Tenure in central government	.07*	.06*	.06*	-.03	.02
Jurists	.07*	.04*	-.02	-.01	.00
Economists	.04	.03	.01	-.02	.04
Social scientists	.01	.01	.03	-.01	-.02

** : significant at .001 level; * : significant at .05-level

Administrative level (0) Agency (1) Ministry; Position (0) executive officer, chief of section (1) Assistant Director General and above; Sector: (0) Other policy areas (1) Fisheries, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Oil and Energy; Coordination tasks (0) Coordination not main task (1) Coordination main task; Coordination ministries: (0) Other ministries and all agencies (1) Ministry of Finance, Government Administration, Justice, Local and Regional Government, Environment, Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister's Office; Mutual trust: (0) Not good (1) good/very good; Boundary-spanning skills: (0) not important (1) important/very important; Identity own unit: (0) Not strong (1) Strong/very strong; Identity own sector: (0) Not strong (1) Strong/very strong; Identity central government: (0) Not strong (1) Strong/very strong; Identity own profession: (0) Not strong (1) Strong/very strong; Age (0) Under 35 (1) 35-49 (2) 50 and older; Sex: (0) Man (1) Woman; Tenure (0) 5 years and less (1) Over 5 years; Jurist (0) No (1) Yes; Economist (0) No (1) Yes; Social scientist (0) No (1) Yes.

The dependent variables range from 1 to 5.

There is also a positive effect of position. People in leadership positions are more satisfied with vertical and horizontal coordination within government as well as with

international coordination. People working in ministries with some kind of horizontal coordination responsibilities and people with coordination as a main task are also generally more satisfied with coordination along different dimensions, except for societal coordination.² There is also an effect of sector. Civil servants working in ministries or central agencies in the area of trade and industry, agriculture, fisheries, oil and energy are more satisfied with coordination than other civil servants.³

Cultural features: There is a strong effect of mutual trust, meaning that civil servants reporting a high level of mutual trust between parent ministry and subordinate agency generally also think that coordination is good along all five dimensions examined. In addition, people who report that the ability to work across professional boundaries, administrative levels, organizations and sectors is an important skill in their own position tend to have a more positive view of coordination efforts along the different dimensions. Identity also matters. If civil servants report strong identification with their own unit, own sector or the central government in general they also report that coordination is good. In contrast, identification with own profession does not make a difference, which is somewhat surprising, indicating that the formal structure is of greater significance.

Demographic features. There is a weak effect of gender, meaning that women tend to think that internal horizontal coordination, coordination with society and coordination with local government is better than men do. There is also a weak effect of profession and tenure. Jurists and people with long tenure have a more positive view of internal vertical and horizontal coordination in central government. People with long tenure also have a more positive view of coordination with local government.

Multivariate analyses

We now turn to the question of the relative explanatory power of the different independent variables. The multivariate analyses, summed up in Table 6, generally confirm the main pattern revealed in the bivariate analyses.

First, the independent variables can only explain a minor part of the variation in the different forms of coordination. This is especially the case when it comes to coordination with local government, international organizations and societal coordination. Second, the most important explanatory variables are administrative level and mutual trust. This is especially the case for vertical and horizontal coordination within central government, but also for trust concerning coordination with local government, with international organizations and with organizations in society. If central governments' trust in the municipalities' ability to implement national policies within the main welfare sectors is reduced, they can tighten the control over local government by introducing new measures for control and coordination (Fimreite et al. 2007).

² 17% of civil servants in the ministries and central agencies report that coordination is their main task (19% in ministries and 13% in central agencies). 40% say that coordination is a big part of their task portfolio (45% in ministries and 31% in central agencies).

³ We have also controlled for the effect of different ICT tools, but the effect of ICT on the different forms of coordination is rather weak.

Table 6. Summary of regression analyses by structural, cultural and demographic features affecting different forms of coordination⁴. Linear Regression. Beta coefficients.

	Vertical coordination	Horizontal coordination	Coordination local/ regional government	Inter-national coordination	Societal co-ordination
Structural features:					
Adm. level	.20**	.18**	-	.06*	-
Position	.01	-.01	-	.05*	-
Sector	.05*	.03	-	.06*	.08*
Coordination ministries	-.02	.00	.02	.01	-
Coordination tasks	.04	.04	-	.08*	-
Cultural features:					
Mutual trust	.17**	.16**	.13**	.12**	.12*
Boundary-spanning skills	.05*	.05*	.07*	.07*	.07*
Identity own unit	.07*	.04	.08*	.03	.04
Identity own sector	.08*	.08*	.03	.07*	.02
Identity central government	.07*	.11**	.05	.01	-
Demographic features:					
Age	-	-	-	-	.05
Sex	-	.06*	.07	-	.06*
Tenure in central government	.04*	.05*	.04	-	-
Jurists	.05*	.03	-	-	-
R2	.13	.11	.05	.06	.04
Adjusted R2	.13	.11	.04	.05	.03
F Statistic	26.670	18.976	8.347	9.680	8.905
Significance if F	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

** : significant at .001 level; * : significant at .05-level; - : not included in the analyses

Third, there are also some other structural and cultural features that make a difference. International coordination is also affected by position, sector and whether civil servants have coordination as a main task. Sector affiliation also affects vertical coordination and societal coordination. Boundary-spanning skills have a significant effect on all forms of coordination. Identity with central government in general enhances horizontal coordination, but also to some degree vertical coordination in government. Identification with own sector tends to strengthen vertical coordination within government and with international organizations, but also horizontal government

⁴ Only correlations that have significant bivariate correlations are included in the regression analyses.

coordination. A high degree of identification with one's own unit tends to increase satisfaction with vertical coordination internally and with local government.

Fourth, the effects of demographic features are generally weakened when other factors are controlled for. But there are some effects of gender on horizontal and societal coordination and of tenure on internal vertical and horizontal coordination. Also being a jurist tends to enhance vertical internal coordination. For international coordination we can see no effects of demographic features.

Discussion

We have first shown that there are quite a few civil servants in the Norwegian central civil service who do not see coordination as relevant in their own field of work. This could indicate that coordination is over-focused and that we tend to forget that quite a lot of civil servants have tasks that are internal and administrative and do not require coordination. But it could also indicate that there is potential for more coordination and that even internally oriented tasks have common features across the civil service. Another interesting finding is that for most civil servants coordination is much more about internal than external coordination.

Second, civil servants perceived quite a few coordination problems in the Norwegian civil service, but more so along some dimensions and forms than others; more so for horizontal than vertical coordination. They are not very optimistic about the capacity of government to coordinate its policies (Peters 2004). One could ask whether civil servants are under-involved in coordination and whether public-sector organizations tend to resist coordination (Hanf 1976, Bardach 1998). It is interesting that two of the three vertical coordination forms score highest on satisfaction with coordination, indicating that the leadership's hierarchical control is easier to organize than horizontal coordination, which has fewer instrumental levers of control and where sectoral resistance towards central coordinative authority is easier and more evident.

The main coordination problems in the Norwegian civil service seem to be vertical coordination with local and regional government, horizontal coordination between different policy areas and sectors and coordination with organizations in civil society and the private sector. The first form of coordination problem illustrates the tension in the Norwegian system, like in many other, similar systems, between local government autonomy and central government steering. On the basis of national laws and standards the central government can demand that the regional and local government coordinate with central government to achieve national political goals. But regional and local public organizations, in particular, will try to use their electoral mandate and elected bodies to have their own independent power base and thus avoid some coordination and control.

The problems of coordination connected to civil society organizations and private-sector interest groups are generally connected to the lack of formal authority that public organizations have over the private sector. Norway, like many Western countries, has developed a strong corporative system since World War II, implying the integrated participation of interest groups in public policy (Kvavik 1976, Olsen 1983). This system has offered public authorities the opportunity to obtain more expertise and help

implement public policy and given interest groups legitimate participation rights and increased influence. The corporative system has come under increasing scrutiny in the last two decades, partly because NPM tends to see interest groups as special interests creating costs and inefficiencies, and it has been rolled back in many countries (Roness 2001). This development is weaker in Norway than, for example, in other Scandinavian countries, but we still see more tension both between government and the interest groups and among the interest groups.

There seems to be pressure for enhanced horizontal coordination to deal with cross-cutting policy issues in a highly sectorized government system, but also to handle pressing policy issues at the interface between local and central government. The area of coordination perceived as least of a problem is the vertical one within own policy area, reflecting the principle of ministerial responsibility, strong functional specialization and NPM reforms focusing on the vertical internal dimension in government. Somewhat surprisingly, coordination with super-national and multi-national organizations is also perceived as pretty good. This might indicate that the coordination system for EU-related issues works rather well.

Third, we have revealed that the different coordination forms represent more complementary than alternative dimensions, i.e. there is a cumulative pattern. There is substantial overlap between the different forms of coordination, and civil servants do not perceive them as independent categories. If civil servants are dissatisfied with coordination along one dimension, they also tend to be dissatisfied along other dimensions. And positive assessments of one form of coordination go together with a positive evaluation of other dimensions of coordination. Hierarchy-type mechanisms of coordination, such as vertical internal coordination, have not been replaced by network types of coordination, such as horizontal coordination. It is more a question of supplementing or complementing. In contrast to what some authors claim (Peters 1998), strong vertical coordination does not tend to make horizontal coordination more difficult.

Fourth, there is also significant variation in civil servants' experience of coordination, but less so for coordination with local government, international coordination and societal coordination. Perceptions of the other coordination tools depend to a large extent on structural and cultural features. The most important factors are administrative level and mutual trust. There is not only a formal difference but also a real difference in the working of ministries and agencies. While 67 percent of civil servants in ministries report that vertical coordination within own policy area is good, only 49 percent of their colleagues in central agencies agree. Civil servants in ministries and those who report a high level of mutual trust between parent ministry and agencies are much more satisfied with internal coordination in central government, both vertically and horizontally. Thus, mutual trust is not only crucial for the more network-based horizontal coordination (Verhoest et al. 2005), but also for the more hierarchy-based vertical coordination. Strong identification with own sector and central government in general also tend to increase satisfaction with different forms of coordination. If there is a common logic of appropriateness and identities across organizations, then coordination is more likely to occur (March and Olsen 1989, Peters 1998). Even if there is a positive significant effect of position, this is weaker than the effect of administrative level, mutual trust and

identification. Thus, we do not find that strategic actors represented by people in leadership positions are such a crucial element for the various coordination strategies as some authors claim (Pollitt 2003, Jennings 1994).

Fifth, the effects of demographic features are generally rather weak, but there are some significant effects of sex, tenure and education. On the one hand, this is very much in line with the general results of broad surveys of the Norwegian central civil service conducted in the last 30 years (Christensen and Læg Reid 1998, Læg Reid and Olsen 1978). On the other hand, education as a variable seems generally to be more significant than shown in this analysis. This may indicate that coordination is more an organizational issue than one closely connected to educational background.

Conclusion

The focus of the paper is on the experience civil servants in the central bureaucracy in Norway have with coordination and how we can understand these variations based on instrumental, cultural and demographic perspectives. Two main distinctions concerning coordination were used – internal or external coordination, and vertical or horizontal coordination. We started out by showing the often forgotten fact that coordination does not concern everyone, but like other functions is a specialized activity. The more demanding and the more external the task, the fewer civil servants there are involved in coordination.

We then continued by focusing on civil servants to whose work coordination is relevant. Overall, there seems to be a lot of variation in civil servants' experience of different types of coordination. One main result is that coordination seems problematic, probably both reflecting that coordination as such is difficult, since it is a complex and demanding exercise, involving many actors, but also that NPM, even in Norway, has created increasing fragmentation problems and therefore also potential challenges of capacity and coordination.

A second main result is that civil servants are more satisfied with different types of vertical coordination than with horizontal coordination. The logic behind this is that the political and administrative leadership has more formal levers of control and influence in vertical organization, than horizontally, where authority is more ambiguous and there are turf wars and negotiations. There is one interesting exception to this vertical picture and that is coordination with local and regional government. Here more different principles collide – the central hierarchical authority and the locally based popular authority.

A third main finding is that for internal forms of coordination, whether vertical or horizontal, there is evidently some variation in coordination experiences. Of the three groups of independent, explanatory variables, structural and cultural variables explain much more than demographic variables. In these two groups administrative level and mutual trust, respectively, explain the most. The first, structural variable shows the difference between ministries and agencies. Historically, Norway has followed a kind of modified Swedish agency model, with agencies as semi-autonomous bodies (Christensen 2003). In the mid- 1950s a new doctrine urging the establishment of more agencies

stated that the ministries should have broader and strategic policy development and planning tasks, while the agencies should have more professional and technical tasks. This model has not been implemented in a straightforward manner, since agencies often have policy-oriented and planning tasks as well. But our findings on coordination seem to indicate that there is a substantial difference in the indicated direction between ministries and agencies, where the ministries have more coordinative tasks and also the resources and authority to cope with them, while the agencies are further down the “sectoral silo” where coordination is seen as more difficult.

The significance of the cultural variable of mutual trust for coordination shows clearly that coordination is not only about structural levers and design but also about whether civil servants feel they are working according to the same cultural values and norms and thus whether they feel that coordination is culturally appropriate. Krasner (1988) states that cultural institutionalization has to do with vertical depth, how committed people are to fulfilling certain cultural norms, but also with horizontal width, meaning that people in different parts of an institution, in our case the central civil service, must relate to each other culturally and think they are in the same “cultural boat”. Mutual trust seems to encompass both these elements.

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