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# Performance Management of Coordinating Agencies: The Importance of Administrative Capacity in the Field of Societal Security

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses performance management of coordinating agencies in the field of societal security by examining what kind of administrative capacity their parent ministries focus on. It examines the performance contracts issued to the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. Based on a structural-instrumental and a cultural perspective, the importance of coordination, delivery, analytical and regulatory capacities is analyzed. A main finding is that the different governmental models of Sweden and Norway affect the number of performance objectives, while tasks and external shocks have some effect on the distribution of the different types of capacity. Despite being set up to act as boundary spanners in the policy field, both organizations are hybrid and compound agencies combining coordination capacity objectives with analytical, delivery and regulatory capacity objectives.

## KEYWORDS


Performance management;  
coordinating agencies;  
societal security;  
administrative capacity;  
performance contracts

## Introduction

The policy field of societal security is characterized as highly fragmented and decentralized (Bossong & Hegemann, 2015a; Christensen et al., 2015) and is often branded as a “wicked issue” (Lægreid & Rykkja, 2015). “Wicked issues” are especially complex, cross-cutting, and thorny problems for a society. They are complex in the sense that they cut across organizational and sectorial boundaries as well as across administrative levels and pressure actors who do not normally cooperate to do so (Head, 2008). Addressing these types of issues is thus a challenge for the classical hierarchical model of steering, and there is a need for an approach involving coordination between different levels of government and different sectors (Christensen et al., 2019; Lægreid & Rykkja, 2019). To deal with these issues, several countries have established designated governmental agencies aimed at forging coordination between actors in a transboundary setting. These “coordinating agencies” should act at boundary spanners bringing together actors from different levels of government and different sectors in the policy field (Bossong & Hegemann, 2015a; Christensen et al., 2015; Danielsen & Førde, 2019; Førde et al., 2019).

This article addresses this claim by examining both the tasks that these agencies are assigned by their parent ministries and if there is variation across countries in this

respect. In doing so, it challenges the claim that they are single purpose agencies addressing only coordination and asks if the parent ministries more look at them as multi-purpose and put claims on them for being service delivering, regulative and analytical bodies. It will focus on how the Norwegian and Swedish governments use performance contracts to manage their executive coordinating agencies within the policy field of societal security. The letters of appropriation are the central tool the ministries use to manage their agencies and can be seen as a form of performance contract (Askim, 2015; Askim et al., 2015). Even though performance management is firmly established in most European countries, there is considerable variation in which tools are used to track performance indicators (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2007). Both being Scandinavian welfare states, Norway and Sweden are similar countries, but they differ in the relationship between government ministries and their agencies. Norway is part of a Western Nordic public management tradition with the principle of ministerial responsibility and strong ministries. While Sweden is part of the Eastern Nordic tradition with a dualist system where the government comprises a collegium around the prime minister and the agencies exercise a large degree of autonomy (Greve et al., 2016; Johanson et al., 2019). This article will address how this difference affects the letters of appropriation used to steer the executive agencies in the two countries.

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More specifically, we will study the objectives and targets that the parent ministries formulate for the agencies regarding their administrative capacities. This is done by addressing the performance contracts by examining the letters of appropriation given to the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (*Direktoratet for samfunnssikkerhet og beredskap, DSB*) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (*Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap, MSB*) by their parent ministries. The article will examine both the number of performance objectives given to the agency and the type of administrative capacity the Ministry focuses on. A number of performance objectives act as an indicator of the level of detail and specificity given by the parent ministry, while the type of administrative capacity indicates what they want the agency to focus on. More explicitly, the article addresses the following research questions:

- Are there differences in the way the two countries use the performance contracts to steer their agencies regarding the number of performance objectives given?
- What kind of administrative capacities do the Ministries focus on in order to contribute to problem solving in the field of societal security?
- To what degree can the variation in these demands be explained by structural-instrumental and cultural perspectives?

The article contributes to the existing research by linking the research on performance management with literature on societal security, by its comparative approach on central agencies in the policy field. It does so with a special focus on administrative capacity, and by combining structural and cultural features to understand variations in scope and types of administrative capacity in the performance contracts given to the two agencies.

The article continues as follows. First, we present some relevant previous research. Second, we clarify the concept of administrative capacity, followed by an outline of a structural-instrumental and a cultural perspective and derived expectations about variations between the two agencies. Third, we give some background consisting of country context, the performance management system, and the two agencies in question. Fourth, we describe the data and methods used. Fifth, we conduct an empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss the findings with respect to the expectations before drawing some conclusions.

## Previous research

The term societal security is contested, but with deep roots in the Nordic countries (Rhinard, 2020). It entails both the concept of *safety*, concerning unintended crises and external threats, and *security*, more concerned with intended crises and external threats (Christensen et al., 2019). In this paper, societal security focuses on prevention, preparedness, and response to internal security in the civil sector. It will not focus on the military aspect of external threats and national security issues in Europe related to NATO and American security demands. After the end of the cold war there has been a shift from a military to a civilian focus in field of societal security, and a move towards an all-hazard approach in several European countries. The policy field is characterized as being both highly fragmented and decentralized (Bossong & Hegemann, 2015a; Læg Reid & Rykkja, 2019). It is increasingly acknowledged as an important policy field, but responsibility is spread out between different sectors, ministries, and levels of government. There is no one solution to deal with this fragmentation, and the national systems are rooted in national contexts and historical experiences (Kuipers et al., 2015). However, some trends towards more coordination and centralization can be observed (Boin & 't Hart, 2012; Bossong & Hegemann, 2015a, 2015b; Christensen et al., 2015; Førde et al., 2019). There is a need for increased capacity for handling more transboundary crises, and network arrangements and lead agency models are emerging (Boin et al., 2014). One such trend is the establishment of designated coordinating agencies at the central level of government, such as the DSB in Norway and MSB in Sweden (Danielsen & Førde, 2019).

Recent studies have shown that the Swedish government uses an array of different strategies to influence and steer the administration and that the relationship between the government and the administration is somewhat different from the dualist ideal that it is presented to be (Jacobsson et al., 2015). First, how politicians choose to organize their agencies gives them a lot of influence. Both in the establishment of new formal organizations, but also in how they are arranged with respect to other bodies and to itself, the government can do much to set up a responsive system. Besides the formal set-up there is also informal micro-steering. Except for this informal contact Swedish officials are very sensitive to signals from the political leadership and try to take cues from media statements and other sources and adjust their actions accordingly (ibid. 2015).

Sweden introduced elements of management by results in the early 1960s through program budgeting, and a more comprehensive performance management system was established in the 1980s (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2009, p. 111; Sundström, 2016). Owing to the large number of different demands made on the agencies, the system was changed in 2009, whereby stable goals were moved from the letter of appropriation to the overall instruction, thus de-emphasizing management by objectives and results and going towards strategic governance (Jacobsson et al., 2015).

In Norway, the management by objectives and results (MBOR) system was introduced in 1986 with a budget reform aimed at making the state budget more result oriented. The system has gradually moved from focusing on goals and objectives to focusing more on results (Læg Reid et al., 2006). After the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011,<sup>1</sup> the Ministry of Justice was criticized for its use of MBOR, especially with respect to steering the police. The official governmental inquiry report pointed out that there was too much focus on details in the letters of appropriation, and more overarching tasks were left out (NOU 2012:14, 2012: 14). Studies show that as a reaction to this critique the number of performance objectives in the letter of appropriation issued to the police dropped in 2013 and continued to drop in the following years. At the same time, the number of assignments sent from the ministry to the Police Directorate outside of the yearly letter has increased (Njaastad, 2017).

Kristiansen (2015) shows that MBOR is characterized by continuity and has become a central element in the steering and management of agencies in central government in both Norway and Sweden. Within the continuity there can also be observed some gradual changes in both countries. In the 1980s MBOR system focused on autonomy for the agencies, but the pendulum swung in favor of more control in the 1990s. In the 2000s, MBOR was criticized for being too complex, and there was a shift again towards more autonomy, especially in Sweden (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2021).

Studies on performance management and ministry-agency relations often rely on survey data, while studies based on appropriation letters do exist (Askim, 2015; Askim et al., 2019; Bjurström, 2020; Öberg & Wockelberg, 2020) these are more seldom found. While using the same coding scheme as Askim et al. as a base, this article is unique in its focus on administrative capacities. This gives us the opportunity to see which task is being focused by the ministry and how this changes over time. Move beyond the input vs. output dichotomy as Bjurström (2020) points out. The article also fills a gap in the literature with the

use of these data in a comparison both over time and between countries (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2021), within a policy field that can be branded as a wicked issue. It also shows that in practice, the objectives and goals in performance management systems are not living up to the claims of being stable and consistent.

## Conceptual clarification and theoretical framework

### *Administrative capacity*

To categorize the requests of the ministries in their letters of appropriation, this article will use the concept of administrative capacity. This concept is analytically distinct, but interdependent and partly overlapping with the concepts of policy capacity and state capacity. Painter and Pierre (2005, p. 2) define administrative capacity as: “*the ability to manage efficiently the human and physical resources required to delivering the outputs government.*” According to this definition, administrative capacity includes both the structural and procedural factors for the agency to perform its tasks and meet the expectations of its superiors and the public. This could be seen as a narrow definition, excluding concepts like capacity building that will not be covered in this article. For this purpose, the different types of administrative capacity will be used as a sorting tool for the performance objectives formulated by the parent ministries to the agencies.

Lodge and Wegrich (2014a, 2014b) distinguish between four types of administrative capacity: coordination, delivery, regulatory, and analytical capacity. These four types of capacity are not mutually exclusive; they are distinct but overlapping. A working system of governance requires a mix of all four types of administrative capacity, but how they are balanced, organized, and deployed will vary depending on context (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014b).

*Coordination capacity* is the capacity for problem solving by coordinating the activities of different actors. In a transboundary field like societal security the coordination challenges are many. Getting actors from different sectors and different levels to work towards a common goal with the same understanding of the problem is difficult. To do this requires actors working across governmental divides, what Lodge and Wegrich (2014b, p. 41) call boundary spanners. These boundary spanners in turn need to develop the skills required to facilitate and moderate often highly contested processes (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014b, pp. 40–41). In the letter of appropriation, coordinating capacity is related to

objectives where the agencies are asked to be boundary spanners within the policy field and to collaborate with other organizations.

*Delivery capacity* is about making things happen at street level. This concerns both service delivery and the implementation of public policy (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014b, pp. 36–38). Linking this to the policy field in question, delivery capacity may relate to crisis management, exercises, and training. Taking part in operative incidents and the implementation of new policy will fall under this category of capacity. In sum, delivery capacity is about having the structure and the resources to attain policy goals.

*Regulatory capacity* is more about control and oversight. It relates to the setting of certain standards and to controlling and assuring compliance with these standards. There are different strategies an organization can choose to achieve compliance with given standards. It can apply a strong control and command regime or else it can lean more to giving advice and guidance (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014b, pp. 38–39). For the two agencies in this article regulatory capacity will mostly regard task given to them to act as auditors and controllers over other actors in the policy field.

*Analytical capacity* is the ability to evaluate future challenges, demands, and opportunities. This can apply to both short-term and long-term planning. With an increased focus on evidence-based policy formulation, analytical capacity is about providing policymakers with appropriate knowledge (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014b, pp. 42–45). For the two agencies, this type of capacity is important for producing their yearly national risk assessment, for their role in providing input for policy formulation, and for the revision of rules and regulations for their ministries.

### **Explanatory theory and expectations**

Theoretically, the article is based on an organizational theory-based institutional approach and on the assumption that both structure and culture matter for understanding variation in administrative capacity (Olsen, 2018; J. P. Olsen, 2010). The cultural heritage and the historical institutional context matter as well as organizational and structural factors (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Lægreid, 2020). In line with Christensen and Lægreid (2021), we will make use of perspectives from organization theory to explain the variation in scope of administrative capacities (number of performance objectives) given by the parent ministries to the agencies and the variation in focus on different types of administrative capacities. This article will rely on two

theoretical perspectives: a structural-instrumental and a cultural perspective (Christensen et al., 2020; Olsen, 1992). They will act as different interpretative lenses that we can use to develop expectations. The two perspectives will be used in a complementing manner to explain as much as possible about the variation we are examining (Roness, 2009). Three expectations focus on the scope of administrative capacities and are derived from a structural perspective (H1) and a cultural perspective (H5, H6), while the last three expectations (H2, H3, and H4) are derived from a structural perspective and address the distribution of the different types of administrative capacity.<sup>2</sup>

A *structural-instrumental perspective* emphasizes how the formal structure shapes action and decision-making within a system. It underlines that the structural context of civil servants and government agencies, meaning where they are situated in the formal organizational structure and what tasks they are responsible for, will influence their behaviour. Public organizations are seen as instruments and the organizational form will affect the decision-making and the content of public policy (Christensen et al., 2020; Egeberg, 2012; Egeberg & Trondal, 2018; Simon, 1997). Different types of vertical and horizontal specialization will make a difference for steering of government agencies.

First, the *Eastern and Western Nordic public administration models* that the two countries are a part of will shape how they develop their performance contracts. The main argument is that interorganizational vertical specialization matters (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). The formal differences between the two countries due mainly to the dualist model and the greater autonomy of the Swedish agencies where the Ministry is not allowed to interfere in single cases in contrast to the Norwegian system of ministerial responsibility but also due to the reform of Swedish performance contract system, we might expect

- *the Swedish agency to receive a lower number of performance objectives in its letter of appropriation than its Norwegian counterpart* (H1)

Second, how we organize matters regarding which *task* are being emphasized (Pollitt et al., 2004; Wilson, 1989). Based on the profiles of the two agencies we can formulate some expectations about how the different types of administrative capacity will be distributed among the performance objectives. Since both agencies were established to act as coordinators in the policy field, we might expect that

- *The majority of objectives in the letters to both agencies will concern coordination (H2)*

Both agencies operate mainly on a strategic level in their countries. We would therefore expect that

- *a smaller share of the performance objectives will be related to delivery capacity, that is more street-level oriented, in both agencies (H3).*

Analytical capacity will be expected to have an equal share in both countries since it relates to tasks the agencies in both countries perform. Since the Norwegian agency has a supervisory role over several areas, we would also expect that

- *a larger share of the performance objectives given to DSB will be assigned to regulatory capacity than in its Swedish counterpart, which does not have this role (H4).*

According to a *cultural perspective*, change processes tend to be rather slow and evolutionary, where informal norms and values are developed by adapting to both internal and external pressure (Selznick, 1957). The importance of path-dependency (Krasner, 1988; Peters, 2019; Pierson, 2000) implies that cultural norms and values of change efforts have to be compatible with historical traditions (Yesilkagit and Christensen, 2009; Brunsson & Olsen, 1993). We can talk about “historical inefficiency,” where institutions are robust, and change does not happen in a simple and straight forward way. Especially this is the case if it threatens institutional identities. Another and similar mechanism is the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989). A public institution will develop over a long period of time, a dominant view of what kind of action is culturally appropriate. As previously stated, it is observed that the Swedish government operates some way beyond the formal ideal of the dualist model (Jacobsson, 2017; Jacobsson et al., 2015). There may be a difference between the formal setup of an organization and how it operates in practice. Focusing more on informal steering and seeing organizations as “living organizations” (March & Olsen, 1989), we can formulate a contrasting expectation to H1

- *that the difference in formal contact with the parent ministry will not affect the letters of appropriation and that the scope (the number of performance objectives) will be quite similar for the agencies in both countries (H5).*

Historical institutionalists often point to “critical junctures” and “punctuated equilibrium” (Pierson, 2000) to understand major changes after long periods of stability (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Thus, exogenous shocks and changes affect action and decision-making. We would expect the 2011 terrorist attack and the ensuing criticism of the Ministry of Justice to have affected the letters of appropriation issued to the Norwegian agency. In line with the findings of studies about the Police Directorate (Njaastad, 2017), we would expect:

- *the scope of administrative capacities issued to the DSB to have decreased from 2013 onwards, since it receives its letter from the same ministry and is involved in the same policy field. Sweden, on the other, did not experience any major crisis during this time period, so we would expect it to have a more stable number of performance objectives (H6).*

## Background

### Country context

The two countries were chosen based on a “most-similar” case selection (George & Bennett, 2005). As Scandinavian welfare states, they share several political-institutional characteristics and governmental administrative traditions but there are also clear differences (Lægreid, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Norway has strong ministries owing to the model of ministerial responsibility, which means that the responsible minister can be held accountable for the actions of agencies within the ministry’s portfolio. Sweden, on the other hand, has a strong tradition of professional-bureaucratic autonomy and management through more autonomous authorities. The Swedish ministries are organized together in the Government Office (Regeringskansliet) headed by the prime minister (Hall, 2016; Jacobsson & Sundström, 2009). This executive dualism is protected by the Swedish Constitution, which guarantees the independence of the agencies. The government can steer in general through legislation and performance contracts, but it cannot interfere in particular cases (Öberg & Wockelberg, 2016).

### Performance management system

The agencies have been put under a more rigid performance management system effected through management by objectives and results in a quasi-contractual steering model. The agencies receive an annual steering document, or performance contract, called a letter of

appropriation from the ministry, which allocates resources and sets performance targets after the state budget has passed through parliament. The letter of appropriation has the character of a yearly list of tasks and goals (Askim, 2015; Kristiansen, 2015). Because of the dualistic model, Swedish agencies can have more autonomy with a greater distance to the government and their parent ministries than their Norwegian counterparts, which have more of a dialog with and greater access to their parent ministry.

In connection with the performance contracts there are also dialog meetings between the agencies and their parent ministry, and the agency report back to ministry at the end of the year. These reports and the meeting are not addressed in this article since we are mainly interested in the demands from the ministry to the agency and not how the agencies deliver on the demands. While the letters of appropriation do not show the whole picture of the dialogue between ministries and agencies, they should at least show the essence of the yearly tasks allocated by the ministry. Since these types of documents are public, they can also be seen as a way for the ministry to legitimize the work of the agency as well as its own role as a parent ministry.

### **Agency characteristics**

Norway's attempts to deal with the "wickedness" of the policy field of societal security has mainly resulted in a gradual strengthening of the coordination responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. To aid the ministry with this growing coordination task and to act as a professional advisor in the field, the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB) was established in 2003. This new agency was a merger of the former Civil Protection Agency and the Directorate for Fire and Electrical Safety; as of March 2017, it also absorbed the Directorate for Emergency Communication.

The agency has a broad task portfolio involving several areas of the policy field and is therefore potentially in a good position to act as a coordinating agency. It has several coordinating mechanisms. One is formulating an annual national risk assessment, collaborating with different involved actors. Modeled on their Swedish counterpart the agency has also established a variety of forums for involved parties in different task areas (Danielsen & Førde, 2019).

In the areas of dangerous materials, electrical security, product security, and fire protection it has supervisory powers over both public and private actors. In the broader field of societal security, it also has supervisory powers over county governors, the municipality-based fire departments, and even over various ministries. The

last was a Norwegian innovation, whereby every three years an agency does a review of the different ministries to monitor their preparation and work on societal security (Fimreite et al., 2014).

The agency also organizes training exercises for different branches of the public sector. It is responsible for the National Emergency Planning College and the Norwegian school for the training of fire-fighters. DSB oversees the Norwegian Civil Defense, which has around 200 missions a year such as combatting forest fires, floods, oil spills and search operations.

Sweden created its coordinating agency in this policy field in 2002 with the establishment of the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (*Krisberedskapsmyndigheten*, KBM). This came in response to several government reports pointing to both the shift from a military to a civil focus on security and to the scope of a policy field involving many actors from both the public and private sectors. The new agency had a key role in defining and managing areas of collaboration within the field. This involved analyzing societal vulnerability and developing new planning systems to deal with it. Like its Norwegian counterpart, KBM also became the contact point for international collaboration with actors like the EU and other countries (Larsson, 2015; Westerberg & Nilsson, 2011, pp. 19–20).

In 2009, KBM was merged with the National Board of Psychological Defense and the Swedish State Rescue Services, forming a new organization, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency in 2009 (Larsson, 2015). Today the agency has a broad task portfolio very similar to that of the Norwegian DSB. Some of the main differences are that the Swedish agency does not have a supervisory role towards the ministries, but MSB does have responsibility for information security, which in Norway is the responsibility of another agency. MSB also controls a crisis management grant. The grant money can be used to improve public crisis management, which is an important incentive for actors to take part and to collaborate (Larsson, 2015).

MSB used to report to the Ministry of Defense but was moved to the Ministry of Justice in 2014. Today the agency has around 850 employees. The Norwegian DSB has around 700 employees. Overall, the Swedish MSB and the Norwegian DSB can be characterized as rather similar agencies, established to deal with the same issues for the same policy area but with some differences in powers, scope, and supervisory role regarding administrative capacity (Danielsen & Førde, 2019).

## Data and methods

The main source of data is the letters of appropriation issued to the Norwegian and Swedish agencies by their parent ministries between their establishment in 2003 and 2009, respectively, until 2016. In addition, we draw on semi-structured interviews with central actors in the two agencies (12 in Norway, 5 in Sweden).<sup>4</sup> The focus in the analysis will be on the letters of appropriation, while the interviews will have a more supplementary role. The interviews will mainly be used to provide context about the agency characteristics and to describe the dialogue between the agency and its parent ministry, in addition to supplement the findings from the letters. In the letter, the ministry outlines the economic framework and describes priorities, goals, and performance indicators for the upcoming year. The letters in the two countries are fairly similar in form.

The letter of appropriation is demands on government agencies from their parent ministry regarding administrative capacity rather than actual capacity of the agencies. To analyze the letters of appropriation, this article couples the concept of different types of administrative capacity presented above with the scheme outlined by Kjærvik and Askim (2015)<sup>5</sup> on how different Norwegian ministries use this performance management tool vis-à-vis their subordinate agencies. To show a complete picture of the requirements regarding performance objectives issued to the agency by its parent ministry we include goals; control parameters, which specify the different reporting indicators that will be attached to a goal; and assignments (*aktivitetskrav*) which covers concrete activities and assignments that the ministry orders the agency to carry out (Kjærvik & Askim, 2015).<sup>6</sup> A large number of performance objectives indicate a high level of detail and specificity in the contracts given to the agency from the parent ministry.

In the analysis, we have coupled the four administrative capacities from Lodge and Wegrich (2014b) with the categories presented above based on Kjærvik and Askim (2015). By merging these two in the analysis of performance contracts, the study can track the total number of performance objectives issued to the agency each year, how this has changed over time, and also what type of capacity the parent ministries focus on in their objectives. This gives us the opportunity to operationalize the administrative capacities as inputs given to the agencies by their parent ministry and how this change over time.

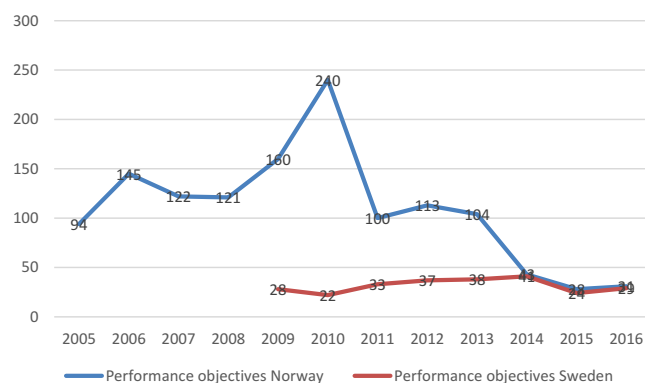
Each performance objective has been categorized in terms of the different kinds of administrative capacity. Requirements regarding training, exercises, operational

activities, policy implementation, active crisis management, and day-to-day street-level administration were coded as delivery capacity. If the requirements contained supervision and audit roles, this was coded as regulatory capacity. When the different performance objectives involved active collaboration with other actors serving as boundary spanners or as a contact point with others this was categorized as coordination capacity. Policy formulation, analysis, assessments, and national risk assessments were coded as analytical capacity. To enhance the reliability of the data, all the material was coded twice at half-year intervals: the first time on paper and the second time using NVivo.

## Empirical analysis

The following section is a descriptive presentation of the findings from the appropriation letters coupled with the interviews. We start by looking at the total number of performance objectives (PO) given to the two agencies, before we move on to see how the types of administrative capacity are distributed among these objectives.

A main finding from the POs is that there is more variation in the appropriation letters to the Norwegian agency than to the Swedish MSB. As we can see, in Figure 1, DSB starts out at a total of 94 POs in 2005 and peaks with 240 in 2010 before it drops drastically in 2014, falling further to a total of only 28 POs in 2015 and 31 in 2016. In Sweden, the number of POs is much more stable with a low of 22 POs in 2010 and a high of 41 in 2014. As we can see from the figure below, over the last three years examined the total number of POs has been quite similar in both countries. In the interviews, several of the Norwegian officials point out that the level of detail from the ministry has dropped in recent years and that more of their permanent task has been moved to the general instruction. As one DSB official put it, *“It used to be extremely many sub-goals and control*



**Figure 1.** Total number of performance objectives in Norway and Sweden.



parameters. These have now been peeled away, and it is made clearer what the yearly assignment is.” A Swedish official close to the General Director have comments along the same line saying: “The number of assignments from the government saying you should do this and that have dropped. And we rely more on our main assignment and the standing instruction.”

Interviews with officials in the two agencies about the letters of appropriation also provide a clear picture of the differences in distance to their respective parent ministries. The Norwegian agency officials find it natural to take an active part in drafting their own letter of appropriation. Some even go so far as to say that they are the ones writing it. “It (the letter) comes from the Justice Department, but there is nothing new there because we have written it ourselves.” However, as some interviewees pointed out, by doing this, they also end up “catching themselves out.” Writing large parts of the letter themselves, the agencies are sometimes too ambitious. An official says: “This is our dilemma. We have high ambitions for the subject area, but scarce resources. Then we have to match them.” In the final rounds of drafting these documents there are discussions with the ministry about what should be included in or excluded from the letter. The ministry also adds elements and has the final say, but the agency also plays an active role.

By contrast, the consensus among their Swedish counterparts is that letters of appropriation are issued by the ministry and they just must follow them. One Swedish official states: “This is the governments area. So, I feel it is a non-question if we should influence the letters.” Some Swedish officials closer to the general director say that they can try to influence the ministry if they wish to have something specific included in the letter, but that this is not the norm. In this respect, one

might argue that Norwegian agencies have a lower autonomy but greater access, since they have so much influence in shaping their own performance contract.

Shifting our focus, the different kinds of administrative capacity will be shown as a percentage of the total number of performance objectives for both countries to make the comparison easier. If we look at the share of all four types of capacity in the total number of performance objectives for each country’s agency separately, we can see how they interplay. Starting with Norway, even though it started out at 19% of the objectives, regulatory capacity is at the bottom of the four (Figure 2). POs relating to coordinating capacity are, after a rise from 2005 to 2007, clearly in third place. It is interesting also to note how delivery and coordination capacity partly mirror each other’s rise and fall and end up closer together, while the other two types of capacity generally shift more evenly.

Swedish appropriation letters provide a rather different picture of the relationship between the total number of performance objectives and the different capacity types (Figure 3). Regulatory capacity remains stable over time, applying to one or two objectives in each letter. The other three capacity types follow each other more closely than in the Norwegian case until 2014. Coordination capacity is quite stable throughout the period examined. Delivery and analytical capacity change more drastically after 2014. Delivery capacity replaces analytical capacity as the one that receives the most attention from the ministry by quite a large margin from 2014 onwards. This trend starts in 2012 but is especially clear in 2015 and 2016.

If we look at the different capacity types individually across countries, starting with *coordination capacity* it generally has the third-highest percentage of objectives for both countries’ agencies. It starts out

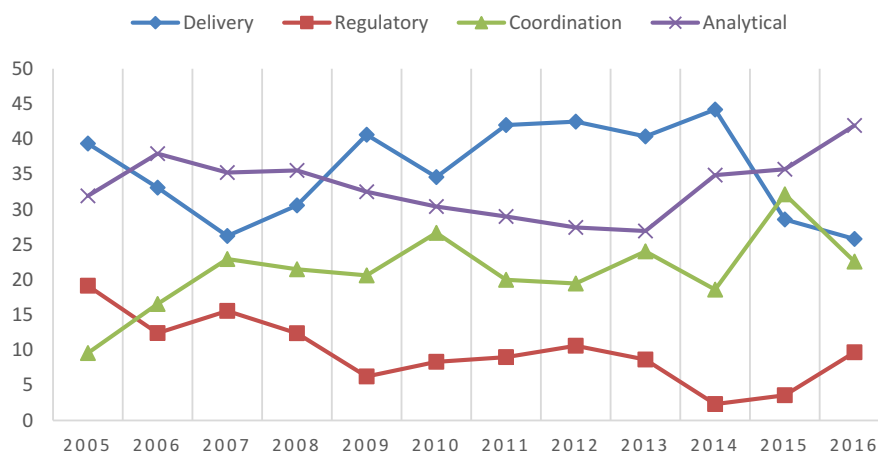
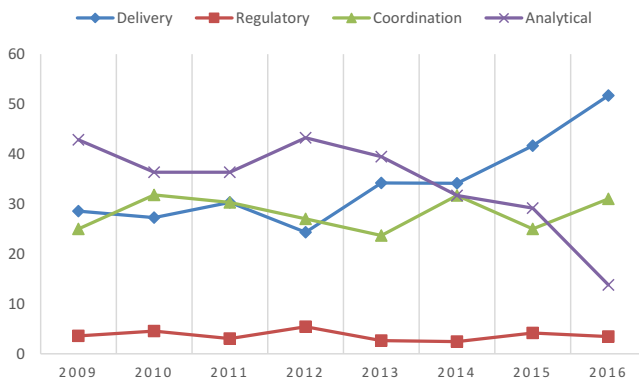


Figure 2. Overall picture Norway, types of capacity as a percentage of the total number of performance objectives.



**Figure 3.** Overall picture Sweden, capacity types as a percentage of the total number of performance objectives.

quite low in the Norwegian agency with only 10% in 2005, but then rises unevenly, peaking in 2015 at 32% before falling to 23% the following year. It is clear from this that the Norwegian agency's role as a boundary spanner in the policy field was not a major focus for the ministry in the early years after it was established but received increased attention over time. It is also interesting to note that in the appropriation letter from 2013 where one sees most of the effect on the agency of the 2011 terror attack, coordination capacity gets a small boost before going right back down again the next year. In Sweden, by contrast, coordination capacity has a stronger focus. In both countries, appropriation letter objectives coded under this capacity relate to international and national coordination, but the share relating to international coordination is somewhat larger in the Swedish letters.

Regarding *delivery capacity*, we can see that there are some differences in the amount of attention this has received in the two countries and that the attention has gone in opposite directions. In the letters of appropriation to DSB, objectives requiring delivery capacity generally account for the largest part of the document. The drop in the last two years may be due to the overall reduction in requirements, with the more concrete tasks linked to delivery capacity excluded in favor of more overarching goals. The appropriation letters sent to MSB show that delivery capacity dipped to 24% in 2012, but then rose steadily, surpassing Norway, and ending up at 52% of the total number of objectives in its letter.

Moving on to *regulatory capacity*, the comparison is less striking. In the Swedish letters of appropriation, the number of objectives pertaining to regulatory capacity is fairly constant at one—namely, the supervision of the emergency number operator. This shows that the supervisory and regulatory roles play a smaller part in the performance contracts issued to the Swedish agency

than those issued to the Norwegian one. But even in the Norwegian agency regulatory capacity has the lowest score, except for 2005. From then on there was a steady decline down to only 2.3% in 2014, before rising again to 10% in 2016. The objectives pertaining to regulatory capacity in the DSB mainly concern different forms of audit. The audits are presented as one of the agency's most important tools in several appropriation letters. In the early years this is quite specific, focusing on setting up plans and defining the boundaries of the auditing role. Over the years, it varies a bit more how upfront and concrete the ministry is about the audits. Some years the appropriation letter gives instructions on what focus the audits should have, while in others the document merely lists the number of audits to be done on different government levels without giving any more detail. From 2012 the audits are again given more attention as an important tool. Another reason why the percentage of regulatory capacity objectives drops so drastically is that it simply drowns in the increasing number of control parameters and assignments before resurfacing from 2014 onwards. Interviewees in DSB indicate that this supervisory power towards the ministries is a very important source of authority for the agency.

*Analytical capacity* alternates with delivery capacity as the one with the highest percentage of objectives in both the DSB and the MSB. Within this category we see a lot of policy advice, revision of rules and policies, and assessments of different areas within the field, illustrating how the ministries use the agencies for professional counseling. In Norway, it starts out at 32% in 2005 and peaked with 42% in 2016. In the Norwegian appropriation letters, the objectives regarding analytical capacity are overall the most concrete. The ministry describes fairly precisely the policy advice or input it needs on various topics. As with coordination capacity, Norway and Sweden are quite similar, but here the Swedish appropriation letters vary slightly more from year to year. Objectives relating to analytical capacity peak in 2012 before falling again, reaching just 14% of the total number of performance objectives in 2016.

## Discussion

Returning to our explanatory theory and expectations, analyzing the letters of appropriation reveals that the structural-instrumental setup illustrated by the national differences have clear implications. The performance objectives MSB receives in its appropriation letters are fewer, more overarching, and less detailed than those of its Norwegian counterpart. This is also apparent from the large difference in the scope of administrative

capacities between the two countries up until 2013. The formal structure of the Swedish dualist model of autonomous agencies seems to be going strong, judge by the appropriation letters. The Swedish agency is given far fewer tasks and assignments from its parent ministry than the Norwegian DSB. This falls in line with our first expectation from the structural-instrumental perspective (H1) and not to our contra expectation from the cultural perspective (H5).

However, if we look only at the letters, we miss out on much of the micro-steering that happens in the “shadow” of formal dialogue. The fact that the Norwegian agency is so closely integrated in formulating its appropriation letter may also partly explain the large scope of administrative capacities compared to Sweden. It was made clear through the interviews that this was a big difference between the two countries. The Norwegian officials from different branches and levels of the agency felt involved in the construction of the letters, while in the Swedish agency only the ones taking part in the dialog with the ministry reported the same. If an organization with such a broad task portfolio wishes every part to be equally represented in the letter, there are bound to be many objectives.

Moving on to the task related expectations related from the *structural-instrumental perspective* and how this explains the variation on types of administrative capacity, we see, as expected from H4, that regulatory capacity is much more frequent in the performance contracts given to the Norwegian agency, than it is for those given to the Swedish agency. Coordinating capacity, on the other hand, is lower than we would have expected (H2) regarding the formation of the agencies. This is a somewhat surprising finding since coordination is mentioned as one of the most important tasks for the future of the agencies by the interviewed officials in both countries. Coordination both internally in the agency, but mostly externally towards other actors in the policy both domestic and abroad. An official in DSB stated, “*DSB’s most important task is our role as coordinator. To be a coordinating actor on civil side, before, under, and after an incident. That is the biggest task, and biggest challenge.*”

On average, coordination capacity accounts for a larger share of the total number of performance objectives in letters to the Swedish agency than in those to the Norwegian one. Relations with the ministry may partly explain this. Coordination is challenging—both to achieve and to define. Seidman and Gilmour (1986) described the quest for coordination as the “twentieth-century equivalent of the medieval search for the philosopher’s stone.” Performance objectives relating to this capacity may be easier to issue if the government gives

the agency fewer and more overarching goals, as is the case for the MSB in Sweden. This contrasts with the more concrete performance objectives formulated with agency participation evident in the appropriation letters issued to the DSB in Norway.

The distribution of analytical capacity is quite even when we compare the two countries over time. Delivery capacity, however, accounts for a larger share of the total number of performance objectives than expected (H3) owing to their strategic nature. It is also interesting to see how delivery and analytical capacity interact in the two countries over time, especially in the final years of the period studied. In letters to the Norwegian agency analytical capacity grows steadily from 2013 and surpasses delivery as the capacity type with the largest number of performance objectives in 2015. The increased focus on analytical capacity is also in line with several of the interviews done in DSB, where they point to knowledge as an important focus for the future. “*We need to build societies competency on how infiltrated everything is,*” a Norwegian official stated. To become more visible, they need to become the main knowledge provider in the field and be the expertise other actors go to.

In the letters to the Swedish agency, we see the opposite: delivery capacity overtakes analytical capacity in 2014 and becomes the most prevalent type by quite a margin in the last two years studied. These changes may be interpreted in relation to expectations concerning critical junctures and external changes derived from a cultural perspective. In Sweden, these changes happened in parallel with the move of the agency from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Justice. The new parent ministry was keen to show a new direction and focus on more salient activities related to delivery capacity than to internal analytical activities. This contrasts with the interviewees in MSB who reported no change regarding their new parent ministry.

Turning to the *cultural perspective*, and our expectation based on the impact of exogenous shock (H6) illustrated by the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 we see the same changes as in the study of the police. Starting from 2013, there is a substantial drop in the scope of administrative capacities issued to the agency. The criticism of the Norwegian Ministry of Justice regarding its management of the police and the ensuing change in procedures also influenced other agencies like the DSB. The agencies in both countries thus end up with about the same number of performance objectives from their respective parent ministry following the criticism and the resulting changes in the performance management regime in Norway. One problem with this material is that it is hard to distinguish whether the large difference in

the scope of administrative capacities between the two country's agencies is mostly due to the Swedish reform in 2009 or to the dualist system more generally.

Summing up, three out of six expectations were supported by the empirical evidence presented. Starting with the *structural-instrumental perspective* The Swedish agency did receive a lower number of performance objectives than the Norwegian agency, until 2014. This is in line with H1 and indicates that the Swedish dualist government model and the Norwegian model of ministerial responsibility affect the scope of administrative capacities and how they are formulated. In relation to the task and the distribution of capacity types, we get support for H4 that the Norwegian agency received a higher number of objectives pertaining to regulatory capacity than its Swedish counterpart. On the other hand, coordination capacity pertained to a lower number of objectives than expected, while delivery capacity came out higher than expected for both countries, contradicting H2 and H3.

Regarding the *cultural perspective* and the expectation that the different formal arrangements between ministries and central agencies in Sweden and Norway does not matter gets little support (H5). Exogenous shocks and the crisis the Norwegian Ministry of Justice after the terrorist attack in 2011, seems to play an important role and brought about a drastic decline in the scope of administrative capacities in Norway. Ending up on a similar level as Sweden how remained stable in the same period and supporting out H6. Summing up, the two perspective supplements each other and both needs to be considered to understand how the administrative capacity dimensions vary across the agencies.

Our analysis of the appropriation letters in the two countries through the lens of the *structural-instrumental perspective* showed that the governmental model—the dualist model in Sweden and the model of ministerial responsibility in Norway—seems to affect the scope of administrative capacities in the letters issued to the agencies in our study. The close connection between the Norwegian ministry and its agency has resulted in more consultation in the process of formulating the performance contracts and in more detailed appropriation letters with many POs. The Swedish agency, on the other hand, operates more at arm's length from its parent ministry, receiving more overarching but fewer performance objectives. We also see using the *cultural perspective* that external events influence, at least indirectly, the number of objectives as well as how these performance contracts are used. The Nordic

administrative model is often described as a mixed order of different doctrines and values resulting in composite and compound administrative arrangements (Lægreid, 2017; J. P. Olsen, 2010). To understand the scope and type of administrative capacity we need to include both structural and cultural drivers. Thus, the article contributes both to the literature on organizational factors as well as to the relevance of historical context and culture to understand the performance management of coordinating agencies in the field of societal security. Especially the formal structural arrangements, the task structure, and external shocks matter.

## Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the literature on performance management of coordinating agencies. Using appropriation letters as the main data source and the concepts of administrative capacities as a sorting tool gives us a framework for comparisons of minister-agency relations both over time and between countries, which has more general application, both outside the policy field and the Nordic context. The agencies are not single purpose agencies but seen by their parent ministries as multi-purpose agencies in which coordination is not the only and most prominent target. There seems to be an overload of objectives making the agencies more hybrid.

Looking at the mixture of different capacity types found in the performance objectives for both agencies, we also find that, although they were established to have a coordinating role, they are complex hybrid organizations that fulfill several tasks within their policy field. In fact, delivery and analytical capacity seems to be more up front than coordinating as seen in the letters of appropriation from their line ministry. Being the result of mergers of different agencies they carry with them several tasks that need to be maintained in addition to their coordinating role. This complexity may also give them the opportunity to act as boundary spanners in the field of societal security.

Especially in the transboundary and “wicked” policy area of societal security, the performance management system faces challenges due to the lack of overlap between the problem structure and the organizational structure. Performance management fits better control and steering within each “silo” than for tasks that are crossing administrative levels and policy areas, which puts the overarching coordinating agencies in a difficult situation (Christensen & Lægreid, 2021).

A main empirical contribution of the article is to advance knowledge about performance management of coordination agencies by mapping and unpacking the importance of administrative capacities. The main theoretical contribution draws on the explanatory values of structural and cultural factors to understand the variations in administrative capacities.

Using a combination of the categorization of performance contracts formulated by Kjærvik and Askim (2015) and the classification of administrative capacity types by Lodge and Wegrich (2014a; 2014b) as an “sorting tool” is a fruitful method of inquiry as it provides an opportunity to use the concept of administrative capacity types more operationally. And we can more clearly categorize different types of inputs given from a parent ministry to their agencies.

However, this categorization also has some limitations, especially regarding overlap between the administrative categories, which are not always mutually exclusive. A second limitation to this approach is that analyzing the letters of appropriation enables us to observe only part of the steering process between ministry and agency. Nevertheless, this is still an important official dialogue and a good source for tracking variation in the steering of public agencies over time. An important topic for future research is to examine the actual administrative capacity of coordinating agencies and to what degree the agencies deliver on the assigned performance objectives and according to the different administrative capacity dimensions.

## Notes

1. On the 22th of July 2011 a single domestic terrorist placed a bomb in the governmental quarter in Oslo, before proceeding to a political youth camp at Utøya and shooting the participants. 77 people were killed in the attacks.
2. Please see the section on background including country context and agency characteristics for more details regarding the reasons for the expectations.
3. A difference that will not be elaborated on here, but should be noted, is that Sweden is part of the EU, while Norway is not. And Norway is a member of NATO, while Sweden is not.
4. The interview subjects were chosen through dialog with a contact person in each agency and they consist of leaders from different sections in the agencies that focus on coordination, and leaders at the central level of the agency close to the general director. The interviews were carried out late 2016, and first part of 2017. They were recorded, transcribed, and coded by topic using NVivo. Quotes were translated by author.

5. The author would like to thank Jostein Askim and Karl Hagen Bjurstrøm (UiO) for their help and for insights into their coding of appropriation letters.
6. The financial and budget part of the letter is excluded, as are standardized guidelines that go to all agencies. Additional goals and assignments issued later in the year and the appendices to the letters of appropriation are likewise not included in the analysis.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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