

# COORDINATING AGAINST WORK-RELATED CRIME IN NORWAY

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## ABSTRACT

*This article studies inter-agency coordination in a “wicked” policy area by examining the Norwegian model against work-related crime. The main research questions are: How does the Norwegian government work to ensure coordination in the field of work-related crime? What enables and constrains horizontal and vertical coordination in this field? We find that the case represents a push towards joint intelligence efforts at the national level to create more analytical capacity and more effective use of punitive sanctions. By analysing data in the period from 2014 to 2019 we show that coordination has intensified over time, but that sector-based priorities, regulations and performance targets remain important obstacles for coordination. The article shows how a secondary organizational structure, ensuring a more coordinated, cross-sectoral strategy for combating work-related crime has been established at the national (strategic) and regional (tactical/operational) level. This supplements the primary organizational structure which is based on the more “traditional” division between ministerial areas and policy sectors and allows for both change and organizational stability. The result is a field that is more coordinated, but still complex and constrained by the existing sector-divisions, organizational and management structures.*

**Keywords** – Coordination, wicked issues, work-related crime, policing, intelligence

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, Norwegian politicians have shown increased concern about “work-related crime” or crimes taking place in the labour market, defined by the Norwegian government as “activities that breach laws concerning pay and working conditions, social security and taxation”, and “organized activities that exploit employees, distort competition and undermine the social structure” (PMO 2017a; PMO 2017b). A national strategy to combat work-related crime was first introduced in 2015 and updated in 2017 and 2019, involving several different ministries, agencies and government units at different levels, with an aim to ensure a coordinated strategy and to handle work-related crime across sectorial and organizational boundaries. The policies against work-related crime favours better coordination between authorities in order to enforce harsher penalties for this type of

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crime, as work-related crime is seen as a threat to economic stability and is as such also recognized as a threat to the very foundation of the Norwegian welfare state (NM 2019).

This article seeks to examine the development of this emerging policy field by studying how the Norwegian government organizes its coordinated efforts to deal with work-related crime. The research questions are: How does the Norwegian government work to ensure coordination in the field of work-related crime? What enables and constrains horizontal and vertical coordination in this field?

Below we outline our theoretical and analytical approach, taking the literature on wicked problems and coordination within public administration as a starting point. We then introduce our research method and empirical data before we present the main findings based on our analysis of the collected data. The article ends with a discussion and reflections on the research questions.

### **WICKED PROBLEMS, COORDINATION AND CAPACITY**

Work-related crime fits the description of a typical “wicked problem”, characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Rittel and Webber 1973; Head and Alford 2015). Typically, “wicked problems” constitutes multifaceted policy problems that defy simple solutions and straddle the borders of organizations and ministerial areas of responsibility as well as administrative levels (Lægreid et al. 2015). Responsibility for dealing with work-related crime spans across policy sectors and administrative levels, as well as national borders. There is uncertainty and ambiguity in terms of how the problem can be handled, and the complexity of the problem is manifested in in the governance structure: Multiple government units and agencies at different administrative levels are responsible for preventing and combating these crimes.

Coordination is repeatedly seen as a potent remedy handling the challenges that come with the saliency, complexity, interdependencies, and fragmentation associated with wicked problems, including work-related crime (Nesheim et al. 2019; Lægreid and Rykkja 2015). Coordination is also crucial to ensure administrative capacity within the state, along with delivery, regulatory, analytical and management capacity (Lodge and Wegrich 2014).

A multiplicity of policy sectors and levels of government are typically involved in wicked problems, and the demands on the government to ensure policy coherence is high (Lægreid and Rykkja 2015; Daviter 2017). According to Peters (2015: 5), specialization and the division of governments along both horizontal and vertical dimensions are at the base of coordination problems. The scope and intensity of coordination may vary, creating hybrid organizations that combine both voluntary and more coercive elements (Boston and Gill 2011; Lægreid et al. 2014). Both horizontal and vertical coordination may be needed, and more hierarchical coordination mechanisms or more collaborative and networked type of governance may be introduced. The latter has been more in focus both in recent literature and practice (Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest 2010, Kickert et al. 1997; Kooiman 2000). The increasing realization that cross-border tasks that transcend traditional organizations are not very well handled within the traditional hierarchical state,

has also increased the complexity and hybridity in government arrangements, making public administration more complex, accompanied with corresponding accountability problems (Lægreid 2017).

Network structures, largely built on interaction among peers and fortified by increasing trust over time, are typically seen as flexible and inclusive, and therefore particularly useful for facilitating and enhancing coordination. Being less hierarchical, less standardized and more voluntary, they are often considered a suitable response to demands for a more efficient state apparatus and for providing better services, especially in the face of the disaggregation and sub-optimal fragmentation of government in the 1980s and 1990s associated with New Public Management (NPM) (Bouckaert et al. 2010; Ministry of Finance 2013; Lægreid et al. 2015; Painter and Pierre 2005). Horizontal governance can presumably bring about more flexibility by freeing capacity to concentrate on core tasks by exploiting the expertise of others, lead to experimentation and innovation, more potential for both up-sizing and downsizing, better knowledge, more trust, better alignment of goals and tasks through more collaboration, and more governance capacity (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). However, challenges are also present. Network arrangements face important hurdles when trying to align goals, create common understandings and problem analyses, managing tensions between competition and collaboration, and overcoming capacity shortages or communication problems.

A basic assumption from organizational theory is that structure matters. Organization, and hence coordination and collaboration, does not involve only formal structures, but also informal practices, behavioural norms and culture (Christensen et al. 2016). However, the extent to which such organizational structures affects individual actors can vary (Egeberg 2004). Actors are limited in that they cannot attend to everything and consider all possible alternatives and consequences all the time – hence the notion of «bounded rationality» (Simon 1957). Organizational settings that impose only relatively modest demands on an actors' attention cannot be expected to have the same impact as those where the individual actor devotes more time and energy. In this sense, a primary organizational structure can be assumed to be more demanding and hence more influential than a secondary one (Egeberg 2004: 203). A network, involving people from several different (primary) organizations, would be a secondary structure. A new secondary structure will arguably be less institutionalized and therefore less dominant. Actors within a network will be mostly influenced by procedures and routines developed within their primary organization and be bound by normative practices and regulatory frameworks that applies to that organization. If the primary and secondary structures build on compatible organizational, regulatory and managerial principles, then conceptions and mindsets are likely to be sustained and possibly accentuated in both settings. Should they be different or incompatible, however, one would expect that preferences, identities, and coordination will be challenged. Further coordination can also depend on the discretionary capacity of the existing decision-making processes (Mazerolle and Ransley 2006), as well as informal activities and personal relationships within the network (Dupont 2004; Bjelland and Vestby 2017; Jahnsen 2014; Whelan 2016).

Although much of the literature emphasises the advantages of increased collaboration and coordination, some studies find that this “is not a panacea for addressing wicked policy

problems” (Duit and Löf 2015: 22). Network participation and decentralization can have unintended consequences that undermine the problem-solving capacity of governments. Networks are also sometimes seen as uncontrollable (Milward, Kenis and Raab 2006: 205) and prone to producing goal displacement, conflict, shirking and resistance. This generally reflects the idea that collaboration will not be effective unless there are also hierarchical mechanisms for enforcing the crosscutting ideas. Thus, it is frequently argued that coordination happens in the “shadow of hierarchy” (Lance et al. 2009; Lægreid et al. 2016) and should be viewed in a more nuanced way, recognising that a mix of hierarchical and network forms often occurs in practice.

A starting point from a broad institutional-organizational approach is that organizational affiliation will influence actions and perceptions, and that institutionalised traditions matter (Christensen and Lægreid 2018; Christensen et al. 2007). The government structure in Norway is characterised by the principle of ministerial responsibility, with strong sectoral ministries, strong vertical coordination through the hierarchy, and less coordination across sectoral boundaries (Christensen and Lægreid 2008). Another important feature of the Norwegian administrative structure is the strong tradition of local self-government, with elected bodies at local and regional level making their own policy while also being responsible for implementing central governmental policies. This creates tensions between the local and the central level.

When the individual minister is responsible for all activities in his or her portfolio (including the activities of any underlying agencies or bodies), attention is mainly directed towards fulfilling policy goals and strategies within these specialised and hierarchical «silos». Cross-cutting issues and coordination between ministerial areas suffer. NPM reforms have strengthened these «silos» and created increased fragmentation, especially through Management-by-objectives-and-results, which tends to emphasise top-down control. Newer developments framed as “post-NPM” has tried to counter this by encouraging more cross-cutting coordination and “whole-of-government” thinking (Christensen and Lægreid 2007).

On this background, we expect that actors within the area of work-related crime primarily work to fulfil the goals and expectations within their own organization or «silos». Actors will prioritize aims and goals found within their primary structure. The secondary structures are actively aligned towards collaboration and cross-cutting coordination, but the civil servants might be faced with conflicting pressures and demands having to manage both internal goals and signals within their primary organization, and at the same time work towards joint cross-cutting goals in the secondary structure.

## DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD

Our data covers the period 2014-2019 and includes relevant public documents and 30 in-depth interviews with public officials and experts. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form and included questions about the experts understanding of work-related crime, the development of the policy field, and related organizational and management issues. When analysing the interviews, we were particularly interested in

descriptions of organizational structures and practices, coordination and the introduction and formalisation of inter-agency structures.

The interviews were collected for two separate research projects.<sup>1</sup> A 2014 study included 21 interviews with a wide group of experts from different organizations.<sup>2</sup> In 2014 there were no formal national structures for work-related crime in place, and only one local inter-agency pilot project existed. The personnel had just recently been recruited, and their practises were heavily influenced by experiences from a pre-existing, but less formalised coordination initiative in a neighbouring county. There was no official definition of work-related crime at the time, and it would take another year before the first national strategy document was published. The data collection in 2018 and 2019 took place at a time of increased awareness. Several new central units had been established, both at the national and regional level. Nine interviews were done in 2018 and 2019.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORK-RELATED CRIME AS A NATIONAL POLICY FIELD**

In Norway, in a political-administrative context characterized by relatively strong sector ministries and semi-independent government agencies, inter-organizational coordination mechanisms have been essential to the development of work-related crime policies. Thus, a secondary structure, supplementing the primary sector-based government structure has been introduced and is under continuously development. This secondary structure includes seven inter-agency teams with designated personnel from the Tax Administration, the Labour Inspection Authority, the Labour and Welfare Administration, and the police, among others. At the national level, several forums, coordination and steering groups have been introduced to ensure coordination between the different actors from these different policy areas.

In what follows we analyse this structure in more detail. We start with a “top-down” approach where we describe the development and formalisation of a new type of national policy field, thereby answering the research question of how the Norwegian government work to ensure coordination across organizational and sectoral boundaries in the field of work-related crime. We also describe the rationalities behind such joint efforts and the overarching idea that more effective governance can be achieved by pooling resources and information, as well as pursuing more punitive sanction methods. After this our analysis moves on to our second research question, namely what enables and constrains such coordination. We do so by looking closer at organizational developments and how the national policy framework has enabled a joint governance model for work-related crime that cuts across horizontal and vertical divides. Consequently, a novel multi-layered secondary organizational structure for inter-agency coordination has emerged. To enable strategic decision-making, intelligence-led policing has been introduced as a *modus operandi* to bring the national (strategic) level closer to the regional (tactical and operational) level, and thus enable both vertical and horizontal coordination of analytical capacities. Our data suggests that there is a gap between national strategies and local practices, and our analysis thus brings attention to organizational and legal obstacles, such as privacy regulations and incompatible ICT systems. In the final part of our empirical analysis we describe how the field has developed to overcome existing gaps between

policy intentions and organizational realities. We conclude our analysis by describing how a more collaborative mindset seems to have developed over time.

### **National strategies and joint parameters for performance management**

According to the latest national strategy against work-related crime “...it is important that statutes and rules are followed, and that the latitude in which criminal actors act is reduced, if we want to maintain trust and confidence in working life” (NM 2019: 5). In order to achieve this, several initiatives have been made to increase the capacity and legitimacy of coordinated efforts at local, regional and national level.

The first national strategy against work-related crime was presented in 2015 by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (ASD 2015) and was revised in 2017 and 2019 (PMO 2017b, NM 2019). The two revisions were jointly signed by the Prime Minister and the other ministers with responsibilities in the field, six ministers in 2015 and 2017 and nine in 2019. The strategy is presented as being prepared on the basis of “a broad and sustained cooperation between government agencies and employees’ and employers’ organizations” and as a sign of “improved coordination between government agencies in order to maximise the effect of their joint efforts” (ASD 2015; PMO 2017b: 2; NM 2019).

There has overall been an increase in the presented measures, from 22 in 2015 to 31 in 2019. The measures sort under seven categories, including cooperation with social partners, prevention and procurement, knowledge, information, control and follow-up, registration systems and identity management, and international cooperation. The bulk of these responsibilities fall under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Finance, which also govern the most central agencies within the field: the Labour Inspection Authority, the Labour and Welfare Administration, the police, the Tax Administration, the tax collector (municipal treasurers) and, in some cases, the Customs Administration. The strategy mentions several more agencies; the Public Roads Administration, the Directorate of Immigration, the Food Safety Authority, and the Directorate for Electrical Safety, to mention but a few.

In 2017, the government called for the development of “joint parameters for objectives and result-based management”, i.e. measures for performance management (PMO 2017b). This introduced a new routine where the ministries now prepare a joint text for the annual steering documents (“letters of allocation”). Where each ministry previously wrote their own, individual texts, the steering documents now include identically worded management signals and jointly formulated, cross-sectoral objectives, with and aim to move from the single agency perspectives towards shared goals. The agencies have in the wake of this developed joint action plans to reinforce their efforts against work-related crime and prepare joint annual reports that summarise activities and results at the local level.

The agencies operating in the field have various instruments and sanctions available to combat work-related crime. They may seize assets, shut down enterprises, withdraw rights, investigate, and prosecute. By combining these in the operational inter-agency teams, the goal is to strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of the coordinated efforts. This also exerts pressure on the primary structures (i.e. the line organizations) to prioritise

the work against work-related crime. By pooling resources, the aim is to pursue more effective control mechanisms and thereby achieve better results. This approach agrees with police literature that highlights the importance of joint responsibility and coordination in crime prevention (Crawford 1994; Webster 2015). Through joint operations and investigations, and especially with the police involved, the expectation is that significantly more crimes can be prevented, detected and prosecuted.

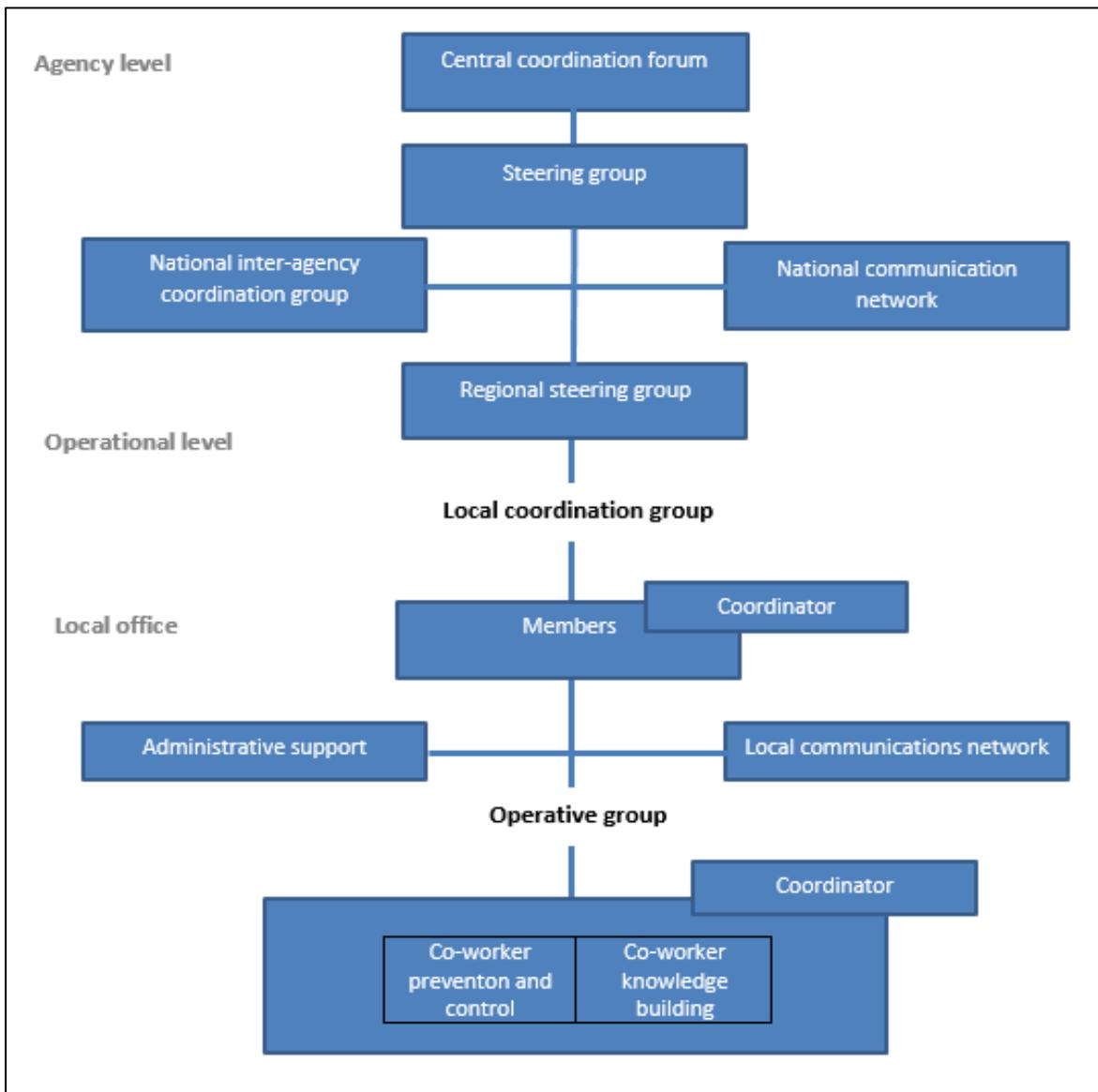
By working together, the different authorities may also get access to information that otherwise would not be available to them. According to the strategy, a prerequisite for the development of shared understandings and perspectives is that the controlling bodies have enough opportunity and necessary means for mutual exchange of information (PMO 2017b). Such shared information might result in a more systematized search for crime patterns and thereby potentially uncover more criminal cases. A more targeted search for legal breaches can also help the different authorities to identify loopholes within their existing jurisdictions. Legal amendments have followed, e.g. new regulations for public and private procurement and penal provisions that allows for tougher sanctions and seizing assets also from third parties. These legal changes indicate a shift toward increasing punitiveness. They also make consumers and public procurers responsible by clarifying their obligation to actively seek information and refrain from entering into contracts with contractors and middlemen they suspect are involved in illegalities. The concept of crime prevention is furthermore expanded to include deterrence, as the perceived risk of being caught and punished will increase:

The objective is that the criminal actors shall perceive it as being difficult, preferably impossible, to earn money on this type of activity in working life. (NM 2019: 10)

### **Inter-organizational development**

A joint governance model for work-related crime was introduced in 2018. It presented the main coordinating arrangements and bodies that were established in addition to the primary organizational structures, i.e. the existing “line organizations”, ministries, agencies, and government authorities (Figure 1). The objectives behind the joint governance model were stated in the document “Management by Objectives and Results for the Joint Work-Crime Cooperation” and was written by the four main actors in the field – the Labour Inspection, the Tax Administration, the Labour and Welfare Administration, and the police (Joint Report 2018). The main intention was to clarify the relationship between existing and newly established governance structures, and to operationalize the roles and tasks of the different teams and units. Furthermore, it was a response to local dissatisfaction and identified “improvement potentials”, aiming to improve the established structures but also create new processes and arenas of governance where “(...) new knowledge can be used for learning so that the authorities continuously may influence, adjust and target the crosscutting efforts against work-related crime” (Ibid.: 12).

**Figure 1. Joint governance model for work-related crime**



Source: Joint Report (2018: 12).

Figure 1 identifies the secondary structures within the field, including the inter-agency networks at the national level and the inter-agency teams at the operational and regional level. The Central Coordination Forum, the steering group, the national communication network, and the inter-agency coordination group represent new horizontal coordination instruments at national level aiming to overcome the perceived lack of flexibility and efficiency in the field due to sector-specific hierarchies. The Central Coordination Forum at the top signals a strong national focus on both crime prevention and public prosecution. It includes the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the leader of the police directorate, the chief of the National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime, in addition to the respective directors of the involved agencies. Similar structures were established regionally, allowing for a

decentralised model and more frequent regional meetings where both strategic and tactical decisions are made in order to respond to any need reported by the regional teams.

The establishment of regional co-located inter-agency teams was a crucial organizational development. Prior to the introduction of the national strategy against work-related crime, there existed several initiatives at the local level in the form of agreements between two or more agencies. They served as arenas for cross-sectoral meetings, joint operations and campaigns against suspected criminals, and established co-located inter-agency teams pooling resources at the local level. Some of these initiatives date back to 2012 or even earlier (Neby et al. 2016). The formal establishment of a pilot project in the city of Bergen in 2014 marks the beginning of a more formalised structure for inter-agency coordination.

An evaluation of the regional inter-agency teams in 2016 concluded that the efforts were “promising”, and that important achievements had been made (Neby et al. 2016). At the same time, the efforts were seen as undeveloped due to the internal and external complexity that cross-agency cooperation embodies). During the period of our investigation, the number of work-related crime centres increased. Currently there are seven such inter-agency teams at the regional level. Furthermore, work-related crime investigation teams have been set up within the police, and discussions about establishing separate units for work-related crime in all 12 police districts are ongoing.

A National Inter-Agency Analysis and Intelligence centre (NTAES) was established in 2016 (Government Instruction 2016). It represents a new type of coordination instrument mandated to provide intelligence products to national agencies as well as the teams at the regional level. It is described as a national cross-agency cooperation unit, specifically targeting work-related crimes, introduced as an instrument to further coordination between the relevant national authorities within the field, and as part of a more overarching national crime prevention strategy (NTAES 2019). The overall responsibility for the centre is held jointly by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Finance (ASD 2015), and it includes personnel from the same agencies as the regional inter-agency teams.<sup>4</sup> Being placed under the auspices of the police and the Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime, NTAES has no independent budgets or administrative resources. The team members can be regarded as liaison officers, coming from other agencies, but placed with NTAES with a fulltime, yet temporary (two year) commitment. The idea is that the personnel over time will rotate, and that this will secure exchange of knowledge and expertise between the primary and secondary structure.

### **Intelligence as a coordination instrument**

The overall ambition behind the introduction of the secondary organizational structures was to bring strategic decision-making at the national level closer to the tactical and operational (regional) level, by increasing the operational and analytical capacity in both the primary and secondary organizational structures. To further encourage this, “intelligence-led policing” and “the intelligence doctrine” was introduced to enhance coordinated strategic and tactical decision making. The expectation was that this would help members of the secondary organizational structures to develop joint performance indicators. The intelligence doctrine states that “Intelligence is a governed process,

constituted by systematic gathering, analysis and assessment of information about persons, groups and phenomenon for the purpose of decision-making” (POD 2014:18). It shares terminology used by the Police Security Service and the Armed Forces and is partly based on NATO's intelligence doctrine, thereby rooted in a national security tradition that cuts across several levels of government.

Figure 1 shows that the co-located inter-agency teams at the operational level include both operational and analytically skilled personnel, in the model referred to as co-worker prevention and control and co-worker knowledge building. Knowledge building here usually refers to police officers trained in and with access to intelligence information. Thus, there is a link between inter-agency controls at the operational level and the production of regional and national analysis and intelligence products.

The intelligence doctrine was originally developed by the Police Directorate and implemented as part of an ongoing police reform (Prop. 61 LS 2014-2015) and was not specifically developed to create coordination within the area of work-related crime. The effort to improve the analytical capacity can, however, be an instrument to improve horizontal and vertical coordination by creating joint understandings of risks and vulnerabilities. According to Ratcliffe (2016), “intelligence-led policing holds out the promise of a more objective basis for deciding priorities and resource allocation” and a hope that policing can be “smarter” and more efficient. In the field of work-related crime intelligence-led policing has been introduced as a way to streamline risk assessments and knowledge-based decision across the agencies, where the overarching goal is a more systematized information-gathering, -sharing and analysis, assumed to lead to more efficiency.

Our interviews indicate that while many are supportive and optimistic about using the intelligence doctrine as a platform for knowledge and information exchange, a common understanding of what intelligence-led policing means at a more practical level was lacking. Few had received proper training at the time of our interviews, and the method was seen as premature, even within the police. Furthermore, the collaborating agencies had different understandings of related concepts, such as data, information, evaluation, analysis and knowledge. The capacity to implement intelligence-led policing as a national model in the field of work-related crime was further limited by privacy regulations. Legislative amendments and new ICT tools designed specifically to provide cross-sectional information is underway (NM 2019). The aim is to create a registering practice that includes information about the organization, persons, findings and sanctions used. However, the development of such a system hinges on the ability to make exceptions from the general rules protecting personal data, both national regulation and the recent European Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### **Inter-organizational experiences**

Our interviews include descriptions of organizational obstacles for increased coordination. These were frequently linked to the existing administrative structures of the interviewees' primary organization. Differing management practices, sector loyalties and “silo” structures were frequently mentioned barriers. Simultaneously, new instruments such as regulations for common practices, joint measures, performance targets and

shared, cross-cutting goals, were described as important drivers for improved coordination. One interviewee elaborated:

The four agencies have had a rather bad performance management practice. Management by objective and results provide unfortunate incentives for the front line and can create divisions. (...) We have moved from a system with an almost extreme rewarding of small and simple cases, to being less focused on numbers and more into professional standards and quality measures. We are trying, within a system that really does not facilitate collaboration, to create collaboration with the help of management by objectives and results.

In general, our informants found the inter-agency objectives and structures as useful and working towards better coordination. They highlighted the ability to share experience and information more freely as a positive development. They also emphasised that inter-agency coordination provides an opportunity to better utilize all available instruments and sanctions.

Many described the inter-agency approach as a necessary response to combat “red tape” and “silo thinking” and saw themselves as being part of a uniquely and innovative national project, unmatched in history and international comparison. The strong confidence in the potential of coordination and the expected ensuing efficiency-gains dominated and indicates an increasing overlap between the priorities of the primary and the secondary structures. A joint annual report by the four collaborating agencies further illustrates this by emphasizing that “...it is not important who ‘gets’ the material and information, and/or the outcome” (Annual Report 2015: 2). The report portrays coordination as an opportunity to utilize available sanctions more efficiently, allowing the agencies to use the “entire battery of sanctions”. It also emphasizes that many criminal cases would not have been uncovered or effectively pursued without the support of one or more of the collaborating agencies.

The advantages of coordination were most strongly articulated in reference to joint operations and crime investigations at the regional level, and especially in reference to the co-located regional inter-agency teams. Co-location was seen as important, and as providing flexibility and opportunity for discretionary decision-making, creating mutual understanding and trust. Also, the informal encounters that came with the formalisation of the inter-agency teams was beneficial. Time to chat between meetings, during coffee breaks and lunch was important for developing mutual understandings and trust.

In 2014, few central directives and joint targets existed, and a common terminology concerning what work-related crime was, was lacking. The professional and organizational discretion that followed, led to differing interpretations, negotiations and sometimes personnel conflicts. Concurrently, there was pressure from the primary structure to prioritize work according to their separate performance targets. Personnel from the Labour Inspectorate and the tax authorities would typically argue for more controls to ensure performance targets within their own area. The police tended to prioritize cases with a clear criminal actor and substantial evidence, or inspections in workplaces with more foreign citizens, coinciding with the performance targets for immigration control and deportation. The Labour and Welfare Administration was

described as rather service-oriented, and less willing to acknowledge welfare fraud as a societal problem, at the same time as it appeared to have limited resources to offer to the newly established local teams.

In our interviews, the police were criticized for not showing enough interest and for not allocating enough resources to the inter-agency teams, especially in the early days. One local team leader emphasized that strategic work was necessary to get the police involved. Another explained that representatives from the economic and organized crime units within the police were more reluctant collaborators, and that it was easier to collaborate with units specialising in migration control, who prioritised performance targets on id-controls and deportations of “illegal workers” or “illegal migrants”.

The period leading up to the establishment of the joint management model and the shared performance indicators was described as characterized by fragmented steering and lack of control. Some actors would work only to meet their own agency’s performance targets. This caused the overall activity of the inter-agency teams to decrease and thus put a strain on the coordinated effort. One representative explained:

The numbers are low. So, we are sort of pushed to do our own reporting later. Since we contributed to another agency's statistics, we have had little to report on within our own organization [...] Then you have to do some controls «on the side». We are working 1-2 days a week to produce the numbers that satisfy our own regulations, but in some way this violates the intention behind the work-crime center and the idea of working together...

Resource input was not specified in the early phase of the inter-agency teams but was nevertheless seen as crucial for their efficiency. The revised national strategies and later budget documents set specific requirements for minimum resource input, including minimum requirements for personnel allocation and presence in the regional inter-agency teams. The rationale is to bridge the apparent gap between the regional teams and the contributing agencies, and to secure a minimum of compliance and commitment from the collaborating agencies. This is seen to enable team members to prioritize cross-sectoral performance targets over sectoral ones, and thus avoiding doing controls “on the side”.

While conflicting objectives and performance targets still loom in the background, our interviews from 2018 and 2019 indicated that joint understandings and prioritizations were developing. Our interviews indicate that new working practices and a more collaborative mind-set seems to have developed over time. Joint values, norms and working routines have been established as mutual experiences and expertise have grown. Representatives from the collaborating agencies have developed a joint understanding of how to select, handle and prioritise cases.

At the same time, some police officers told us that they would “feel bad” if a joint control operation at the regional level resulted in a crime investigation, as these cases most likely would pile up at the section for economic crime within the police, rather than being prosecuted immediately. They feared that increased activity in the inter-agency teams would result in more time-consuming and complex crime investigations that later might not result in any successful convictions. Simply put, their primary organization’s failing target numbers were perceived as an incentive to not collaborate within the local teams.

## DISCUSSION

Analysing data from two periods in time allows us to consider how coordination within the field of work-related crime has developed. Our data indicates that coordination intensified from 2014-2019. In 2014, the area of work-related crime was largely uncoordinated and based on independent decisions in different organizations, largely driven by engaged individuals. By 2019, the field was characterized by a higher degree of national political attention and prestige. During the time of our study the organizational infrastructure expanded and coordination increased. The introduction of national strategy documents, a joint governance structure anchoring the field at the Prime Ministers Office, the establishment of cross-sectoral performance targets, cross-ministerial network groups and the establishment of cross-agency operational teams are all part of this development.

While the interviews in 2014 did not indicate a clear pattern in terms of how prioritizations were made at the operational level, for example how cases were selected and how they were managed, much had changed by 2018 and 2019. By this time, more formalized structures for inter-agency coordination, routines and practices had been established. Still, our findings support the conclusions from Neby et al. (2016): Cross-agency cooperation is challenging, because of the existing “silo” structures. Thus, it seems that at least some of the challenges related to information-sharing and communication across existing organizational boundaries, and challenges related to finding the proper measures for actual effects, endure.

Our overall impression of the development in the field does not correspond with the conclusions of Frogner et al. (2016), who found that the partners in a local work-related crime team, only had a limited shared understanding, that their effort was largely dominated by one partner (the Labour Inspector Authority), and that this partners’ pre-existing and differing performance management and reporting practices complicated the ability to learn and evaluate. Our findings indicate a more nuanced understanding of the constraints of coordination. More particularly, the introduction of intelligence-led policing seems to have altered the relation between the agencies and increased the push for establishing joint understandings and performance measures.

However, this is complicated by incompatible ICT solutions, different registration practices and analytical competencies. In addition, the participating organizations have different prioritisations and different ways of enforcing legislation. This creates coordination problems, yet also constituted a positive asset, as it provides a larger battery of sanctions to prevent and punish unwanted activities and crime. If the threshold for one set of intervention is deemed to be too high, the teams may resort to other available measures.

Our study also shows that members of the operative teams experience cross-pressure, having to work towards performance targets within their own organization while at the same time working together to fulfil cross-sectoral goals. Although there has been some relief over time, the tension between the primary and the secondary structure clearly influence the civil servants, creating an important barrier for coordination. The inter-agency teams work together towards common goals, somewhat outside of the hierarchy.

However, there is no “lead agency” with strong coordinating functions in the field. Therefore, many of the earlier challenges are preserved, forcing negotiations about prioritisation to take place among individual team members at the operational level.

Our findings indicate that members of local inter-agency teams largely see national coordination instruments, such as cross-ministry action plans and establishment of joint agency reports as key instruments to reach shared goals. We also found that the support for coordinated efforts is most strongly articulated in reference to local joint operations and crime investigations. This suggests that successful coordination is largely measured by the team members increased ability to detect and punish crime, marking a contrast to traditional regulation mechanisms in the labour market. In addition, our interviewees also narrate a more complex story about coordination in which the ability to activate partner organizations become a goal in and for itself.

Avoiding “negative coordination” (Sharpf 1994) where actors seek to avoid conflicts more than working towards the same goals and resolve differences often requires a central actor to harmonize the preferences of the others. Despite not formally constituting a “lead agency” the police are seen to have a central role in the coordination of work-related crime, both at local and national level. However, the partner agencies consistently reported that they had difficulties getting the police to prioritize work-related crime, and that they had to work strategically to get them involved. Our study thus reveals a gap between the promises at the national level and realities at the local level and that immigration control plays a large part of police activities in the field than one might intuitively expect.

Also, it was commonly recognized, especially in the beginning, that national guidelines, rules and regulations for information-sharing were lacking or unclear. Much of the information that the different agencies possess is still confidential and cannot easily or legally be shared between the agencies. This represents an important obstacle for vertical coordination, especially at the national level. At the same time, it is an important arena for negotiations and adaptation, where the agencies seek to align different interpretations of existing regulations both vertically and horizontally.

Recommendations to amend for “wickedness” and organizational complexity of a certain policy area often include efforts to enhance and promote coordination and a collaborative mindset. Yet the literature on wicked problems suggest that finding effective and undisputed solutions is very hard, and that solutions often involve yet another risk: that efforts to manage them adds to the complexity of the problem. Put more simply, policies aiming to reduce, or handle complexity can themselves become wicked or increase wickedness. Our study shows that actors in the field actively sought to create distance from past «coordination underlap» (Wegrich and Stimac 2014), i.e. a situation where the policy field fell between the boundaries of different government organizations. It was a creative and innovative process, where one sought to establish a situation where partner

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agencies could share the benefits as well as the burdens associated with the field. For this purpose, introducing work-related crime as a new type of problem was instrumental.

“Work-related crime” has transcended, but also incorporated traditional understandings of economic and organized crime in the labour market. The new definition moves beyond an older term, “work-environment crime”, which more narrowly focused on environment, health and safety regulations and wage discrimination, and thus enabled a more united front seeking to protect existing structures and fair market competition. We have displayed how the policies against work-related crime favours better informationsharing and coordination between authorities and that the pursuit of more effective measurements is the driver behind the pooling of resources in joint and more targeted efforts.

Above we have highlighted that the organizational setup of the field has multiple aims. The inter-agency teams are meant to provide more analytical capacity and efficiency by pooling information and bringing together people with different types of expertise, competence and organizational backgrounds. The aim is to overcome inconsistencies between policies and performance targets, and thereby improve service delivery. More sophisticated performance management, more cross-sectoral performance targets, and intelligence-led policing as a basis for knowledge-based and proactive decision-making processes, may return important gains. However, operationalizing, achieving and reporting on cross-sectoral objectives and performance targets can be just as – or even more – difficult and challenging as more sector-specific goals. Joint objectives are often less specific than sector-based goals. Effects and outcomes are difficult to measure and evaluate, especially when goals are broadly defined, leaving, as we have showed, much interpretation to the operational level.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article constitutes a study of inter-agency coordination in a “wicked” policy area by examining the how the Norwegian government work to ensure coordination in the field of work-related crime. Above we have examined organisational features that both enable and constrain horizontal and vertical coordination. The article shows how a secondary organizational structure, ensuring a more coordinated, cross-sectoral strategy for combating work-related crime has developed in order to supplement the primary organizational structure which is based on the more “traditional” division between ministerial areas and policy sectors. Our analysis indicates that this enables change and innovation taking place in the secondary structure, at the same time as it allows for organizational stability, leaving the primary structures relative intact despite increased political pressure. By analysing data in the period from 2014 to 2019 we show that coordination has intensified over time, but that sector-based priorities, regulations and performance targets remain important obstacles for coordination. We conclude our

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analysis by pointing out that the case at the same time is representative of a larger change taking place in Norway, in which risk based assessments and the introduction of intelligence-led policing as a means to enhance coordination is becoming more influential.

The emphasis on the need for more coordination in the public sector is commonly seen as a reaction to increasing specialization and organizational fragmentation, often associated with NPM (Christensen and Lægreid 2008; Christensen et al. 2016). Our case study shows that those working in the field of work-related crime in Norway largely share this understanding. They refer to «silos» and a fragmented management system as important barriers to coordination. However, our data also shows that substantial development towards more coordination has taken place. A common understanding of what work-related crime is, is advancing, and joint objectives have been established across the collaborating agencies. New coordination instruments and means of joint intervention at the operational level have been introduced. The ambitions for and expectations of the possible returns of coordination are high. At the same time, those working within the field acknowledge important barriers. There is a movement towards more cross-cutting coordination, in parts of the literature identified as “post-NPM”. At the same time sector-orientation and NPM-type of instruments are still influential. The public officers are therefore faced with conflicting pressures and demands, having to respond to performance targets within their own organization and sector, while at the same time heeding cross-cutting goals and inter-organizational coordination. We observe more coordination over time, but also high levels of frustration over conflicting goals and aims.

A secondary organizational structure, ensuring a more coordinated, cross-sectoral strategy for combating work-related crime has been established at the national (strategic) and regional (operational) level, supplementing the primary organizational structure based on the more “traditional” division between ministerial areas and policy sectors. The result is a field that still is complex, constrained by the existing sector-divisions, organizational and management structures. However, with the coordination initiatives in place and enforced, there is potential to – at least to some extent – «tame» the wicked problem of work-related crime.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The first project was a pilot study exploring forced labour and human trafficking as a form of work-related crime (Jahnsen 2014) funded by the Norwegian Police Directorate and the Norwegian Police University College. The second project focused on Coordination, Capacity and Legitimacy in three policy sectors (climate change, immigration and the police), funded by the Norwegian Research Council (Project no. 255359).
- <sup>2</sup> This included a legal expert, five interviewees from the police, a tax administrator, four researchers, six social outreach workers, three representatives from the labour inspectorate, and one from the labour union.

- <sup>3</sup> This included local inter-agency team members, the leader of the newly established National Inter-agency Analysis and Intelligence Centre (NTAES) representing also the Tax Administration, a coordinator at the Police directorate, a consultant at the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and a public prosecutor at the District Attorney's office.
- <sup>4</sup> The centre is governed by the Central cooperation forum (figure 1). NTAES has 11 employees seconded from the cooperating agencies; four from the police, four from the Tax Administration, and one each from the Customs office, the Labour and Welfare Administration, and the Labour Inspectorate. Source: <https://www.okokrim.no/ntaes.447592.no.html>

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