

# Coordination Quality in Central Government – The Case of Norway

## *Abstract*

This article focuses on perceived coordination quality among Norwegian civil servants. It explains how they assess the quality of coordination in their own field of work along different dimensions. To what degree have such perceptions changed over the past 10 years and what can explain the variations in perceived coordination quality from a structural and a cultural perspective? The data base is a comprehensive survey in ministries and central agencies. The civil servants perceive coordination as better within their own policy area than across administrative levels and policy areas. The perceptions are rather stable over time. The most important factors for understanding variations in coordination quality are coordination capacity, mutual trust and administrative level.

## **Introduction**

The dynamics of modern public sector reform waves, from structural fragmentation in NPM to attempts at structural reintegration in post-NPM, have resulted in a renewed interest in coordination in the government apparatus (Christensen and Lægreid 2007, Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest 2010). Coordination is very high on the contemporary reform agenda in many European countries (Wegrich and Stimac 2014, Lægreid et al. 2014). In addition an increasing number of wicked issues and policies have emerged that transcend organizational boundaries and pose challenges related to the leadership and organization of the public administration (Lægreid et al. 2015). Coordination capacity and quality is a key precondition for governments to address such complex governance and policy challenges in the modern state (Lodge and Wegrich 2014). In a broad survey conducted between 2013 and 2015, top civil servants in ministries and central agencies in Europe were asked to assess the importance of various reform trends in their own specific policy field, and they ranked enhanced collaboration and coordination as the most important measure (Lægreid et al. 2016b). Hierarchical command is the most common coordination mechanism in central government, but heterogeneity may necessitate negotiations among actors with diverse interests (March and Olsen 1983), and related network arrangements, such as cross-cutting work and project groups and policy arrangements and programs, are also rather common (Osborne 2010, Lægreid et al. 2014).

The main governance doctrine in many countries is the principle of ministerial responsibility. This principle tends to produce strong administrative silos with relatively good vertical coordination within each policy area but weak horizontal coordination across policy areas (Pollitt 2003). Another strong governance doctrine is local self-government, which tends to enhance coordination within jurisdictions at local (and regional) level, but produce coordination challenges between the central and local government. New Public Management reforms have mainly been preoccupied with vertical coordination and have tended to aggravate rather than ameliorate the mismatch between vertical and horizontal coordination within government (Gregory 2003). Recently, NPM reforms have been supplemented by a variety of post-NPM reforms (Reiter and Klenk 2018), with differing degrees of formalization, from mergers through networks and partnerships between the public and private sectors and between central and local government – to diverse nudging strategies for collaboration (Lodge and Wegrich 2016).

This article will focus on perceived coordination quality in ministries and central agencies in Norway. It will describe and explain how civil servants in central government perceive coordination quality, by addressing the following questions:

- How do civil servants assess the quality of coordination in their own field of work along different dimensions (internal-external, vertical-horizontal)?
- To what degree have such perceptions changed over the past 10 years?
- How can one explain the variations in perceived coordination quality from a structural and a cultural perspective? Is there a stable explanatory pattern between 2006 and 2016?

In the following, the concept of coordination is first explained and then the theoretical perspectives and method outlined. Then the main results and patterns are described and analyzed.

### **Conceptual clarification – coordination**

The quest for coordination is an old issue in organization theory, with the focus here on structural or organizational coordination. Gulick (1937) stressed that the structure of public organizations is built on the dynamic between specialization and coordination. Units, roles and tasks are specialized according to different horizontal and vertical principles, and coordination is often meant to realign what is specialized, as was evident, for example, in New Zealand's reform dynamics between NPM and post-NPM in the 1980s and 1990s (Gregory 2003). Coordination and specialization seem therefore to go in tandem (Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest 2010). Balancing specialization and coordination has been characterized as a search for the Holy Grail or 'the philosophers' stone' (Gulick (1937, 31). But, they have sought in vain. There is apparently no 'one most effective system' or 'one size fits all' in organizing public administrations. Coordination has been one of the most poorly understood and the least examined problems for government since its inception according to B.G Peters (2015).

Coordination is a multidimensional, contested and somewhat ambiguous concept (Peters 2006). In the intra- or inter-organizational context of government systems, coordination can be defined as the purposeful alignment of units, roles, tasks and efforts in order to achieve a predefined goal (Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest 2010). It is about adjustment of actions and decisions among interdependent actors to achieve specified goals (Koop and Lodge 2014). Coordination is, therefore, seen both as a process facilitating cooperation and as output – in the

form of effective collaboration. In this article, the dependent variable is measured as the perceived quality of coordination along different dimensions.

Coordination is often considered as a solution to transboundary wicked problems and as an instrument to tackle problems of capacity and legitimacy in the public sector (Head and Alford 2013, Lægreid et al. 2014, 2015). Choosing between different means of coordination entails prioritization and carries both advantages and risks, such as increasing complexity and hybridity (Christensen and Lægreid 2010). Coordination often plays out as a combination of hierarchy, negotiations/networks and markets. On the one hand, networks, consultation or ‘smart practices’ (Bardach 1998) can be non-hierarchical, as they make responsibilities less clear and thus disrupt the chain of command. On the other hand, networks are often constrained by hierarchy and operate in the shadow of hierarchy.

Wicked problems involve a risk of ‘coordination underlap’ (Koop and Lodge 2014); when a particular policy issue falls between the boundaries of different government organizations. This means that they become a responsibility of none, i.e. ‘blind spots’ (Christensen 2018). Or, on the contrary, wicked issues may involve competition among different public organizations and ‘coordination overlap’. This implies that a policy issue is of relevance for several different organizations and all want to be involved in policy making. Seen from a collective point of view, this may mean that resources are used unnecessarily, because of ‘turf wars’ (Voorn, Van Genugten and Van Thiel, forthcoming).

The problems of underlap and overlap are often related to the actions of higher-level leadership and may be solved through organizational redesign or reorganization. Coordination is therefore a central aspect in the understanding of how larger systems handle the challenges of collective action (Hood 2005). The increased focus on coordination is linked to an increasing emphasis on the complexity and hybridity of wicked problems (Christensen et al. 2016). Such problems enhance the need for contingent coordination, collaborative governance and network approaches (Ansell and Gosh 2008, Kettl 2003), demanding interconnected administrative responses.

New coordination measures, broadly connected to post-NPM, often focus on efficiency, increased capacity to cope with wicked problems, and better public sector services. They belong broadly to the same family of measures, but have numerous shapes and names, e.g. integrated governance, joined-up government (Bogdanor 2005), holistic governance, new public governance (Osborne 2010), networked government, partnerships, horizontal management, collaborative public management, collaborative governance, whole-of-government, etc. (Lægreid et al. 2014). The development of these measures produces complex and hybrid

administrative arrangements as they place new layers on top of pre-established forms rather than replacing them, in a complex pattern of deinstitutionalization and institutionalization of reform elements (Christensen and Lægveid 2009). Hybrid structures following different organizational principles may bridge new coordination means and traditional sector-based arrangements and be a fruitful way to handle the ‘coordination paradox’, i.e. vertical coordination measures may counteract horizontal coordination (Egeberg and Trondal 2016). However, the performance and effects of these practices are often mixed and uncertain, and there is a trade-off between potential gains through flexibility and disadvantages through ambiguity, tensions and conflicts (Lægveid et al. 2015).

Coordination is crucial for governance capacity and quality because it shapes program design and influences efficiency gains, which in turn influence governance legitimacy (Christensen, Lægveid and Rykkja 2016). But the need for improved coordination is not easily resolved, because new coordination measures imply new potential challenges for public administration and public policy-making, such as erecting new structural boundaries in addition to and potentially counter-acting the old ones (Pollitt 2003). Moreover, there is also the question of whether too much is coordinated, which may have negative consequences for the public at large. Reformers often have to choose between equally attractive but logically incommensurate alternatives (Wildavsky 1987). Coordination instruments are thus based on judgments and discretionary balancing of competing values and are therefore a question of politics, priorities and power and not merely of logistics or technical considerations (Lindblom 1965). Coordination can, therefore, be controversial and lead to debate and conflicts, where some actors potentially may lose and others gain influence (Moe 2005).

In this article, it is distinguished analytically between coordination capacity as an independent variable on the one hand and coordination quality relations as dependent variables on the other hand. Coordination capacity refers to administrative capacity within civil servants’ fields of work when it comes to getting actors to collaborate and to cooperate (Lodge and Wegrich 2014); this can vary on a scale from very good to very poor. It includes resources for coordination and pre-existing formal structural and procedural features of the administrative apparatus aimed at bringing together disparate organizations to engage in joint action. Coordination quality, on the other hand, is the perceived quality of coordinating activity as it works in practice within the civil servants’ field of work along different dimensions. Coordination quality as a concept reflects both the functioning of the coordination process and its outcomes (Lægveid et al. 2016). In terms of coordination as a process, the focus is on different dimensions of coordination, such as vertical and horizontal. In terms of coordination

as a result, the focus is more on civil servants' perceptions of policy coherence in their own policy field and on whether it has improved or deteriorated in recent years.

From an instrumental perspective, one would normally expect large coordination capacity to enhance the quality of actual coordination practice. It is distinguished between two dimensions when assessing coordination quality: *internal* and *external coordination* and *vertical* and *horizontal coordination* (Table 1) (Christensen and Lægreid 2008: 102; Egeberg 2012). Internal coordination may refer to coordination in and between governmental actors within a political-administrative system, like the central government and civil service, whereas external coordination refers to interaction between the government and public or private organizations or stake-holders outside of it, e.g. civil society, international organizations or municipalities. Vertical coordination is normally more hierarchy-based while horizontal coordination is more collegial or networked-based (March and Olsen 1983; Verhoest et al. 2005). The combination of these dimensions is shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Different coordination relations.**

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

Source: Christensen and Lægreid (2008, 102).

### **Theoretical perspectives on coordination**

Coordination is both a structural and a cultural phenomenon. A structural-instrumental perspective and a cultural-institutional perspective are used to understand the variation in perceived coordination quality and capacity among civil servants (Christensen et al. 2007). According to an *instrumental-structural perspective*, decision-making processes in public organizations are influenced by the formal structure (Egeberg 2012, Simon 1957). It is assumed that formal structure matters for coordination quality. It might be the result of strong hierarchical steering or negotiations among top political and administrative leaders, who are the most important actors, but also of network structures (March and Olsen 1983). A major

precondition for such effects is that leaders score high on both political-administrative control and rational calculation (Dahl and Lindblom 1953). This implies that they control coordination processes, have relatively clear coordinative intentions and goals, choose structures that correspond with these goals and have insight into the potential effects of the coordination structures chosen.

According to Gulick (1937), the challenges of coordination by organization are qualitatively different depending on whether the structural specialization is based on purpose, process, clientele or geography. For a public administration based on the principle of purpose, a main coordinative challenge is getting the different sector administrations to work together on cross-sector wicked problems. If process is the basic principle, then getting different professions and experts to join or coordinate forces would be the main challenge (Egeberg 2012). This perspective offers insights into variations in how coordination is experienced by civil servants in different policy areas, at different administrative levels, in different positions, performing different tasks, and in different coordination structures. The argument is that these diverse formal features affect how internally or externally directed their work is, how technical or non-technical their tasks are, the number and type of stakeholders they interact with, etc.

Based on this perspective, different explanatory variables are applied. A general expectation is that organizational boundaries matter and that the perceived coordination quality will be seen as better within own policy area than across policy areas and administrative levels due to weaker organizational boundaries in the first case. First, a distinction is made between *policy areas* according to their transboundary responsibilities. Some ministries have coordinating tasks and responsibilities across ministerial areas, while others are more sector-oriented. A typical transboundary ministry is the Ministry of Finance but also the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (societal security issues), the Ministry of Climate and Environment (climate issues), the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office have some transboundary tasks. It's expected that this especially tap into the problems with horizontal coordination and coordination across administrative levels. The main expectation is that civil servants in these ministerial areas will perceive transboundary coordination as better than civil servants working in line ministries or agencies without such transboundary responsibilities. The reason for this is a combination of more resources for coordination and more coordinative experience. On the other hand civil servants in these ministries might perceive coordination problems owing to the constraints imposed by the principle of ministerial responsibility, which might counteract the effect of being overarching ministries.

Second, the focus is on *administrative levels*, which means the hierarchical distinction between ministries and agencies. Here the expectation is that coordination quality will be perceived as more positive in ministries than in central agencies. This is due to the strength of the principle of ministerial responsibility and the resources for coordination by hierarchy, which will favour ministries. This is expected to be especially the case when it comes to internal coordination within own policy field.

Third, it is expected variations according to *position* in the hierarchy. Leaders are supposed to have a greater obligation to organize and further coordination, and they will also see coordination differently than executive officers lower down in the hierarchy. This leads to a general expectation that leaders will score highest in their positive perceptions of a broad range of coordination forms, in particular related to the most demanding types of coordination.

Fourth, the effect of *tasks* are examined. The main expectation is that civil servants who have coordination as their main task or who work with tasks and matters that need collaboration across administrative levels and ministerial areas will perceive less coordination problems than other civil servants due to their resources and experiences, but also here the principle of ministerial responsibility might counteract the effects of having coordinating responsibilities especially when it comes to transboundary coordination. This might apply especially to a sector-oriented central civil service like the one in Norway.

Fifth, overall *coordination capacity* is expected to matter. Civil servants who assess the administrative capacity of the public administration within their own field of work to get actors to collaborate and cooperate as good will generally assess the various measures of coordination quality as better than those who assess coordination capacity as poor. This is a measure that expresses the pre-existing formal capacity for coordination while coordination quality delves into how the separate and diverse interaction patterns work in practice.

Sixth, it is expected that attitudes to *coordination reforms* matter. The expectation is that civil servants who see coordination-directed reforms as important will assess coordination quality within the public sector as better than civil servants who think that such reforms are of little relevance.

Finally, participation in *network arrangements* is expected to make a difference (Christensen, Lægreid and Midtbø 2012). Previous studies have shown that there is a significant positive correlation between network-based coordination instruments and perceived coordination quality (Lægreid et al. 2016a). Coordination tends to be viewed more positively when horizontal network-based measures, like inter-organizational groups, forums and boards, are used as coordination instruments. There might, however, be more negative than positive

coordination going on if the participants' main task is to defend their own parent institution (Scharpf 1994, Radtke et al. 2016) or if networks mean mostly information sharing and not real coordination. Anyhow, the expectation is that civil servants participating in such units will perceive coordination quality as better than other civil servants, especially when it comes to coordination across policy areas and administrative levels.

From a *cultural-institutional perspective*, trust relations, common values and norms, meaning a common culture, may facilitate coordination. The development of a public organization is seen as based on historical traditions and path-dependency (Selznick 1957, Krasner 1988). Actors will think and act according to a logic of appropriateness, not a logic of consequence (March 1994). The leadership of a public organization will have a central role in socializing and training employees to install a common cultural identity. Coordination in a cultural sense might mean to develop a common culture, so that civil servants and their leaders share common informal norms and values, which may in turn facilitate coordination in practice (cf. Kaufman 1947). This way of thinking is also reflected in the concept of "value-based management" (Halligan 2007).

The introduction and use of NPM reforms meant increased structural fragmentation, but also cultural heterogeneity and competition, and a challenge for leaders under the post-NPM reforms is to bring public organizations culturally back together again (Gregory 2003). Pragmatic collaboration between public organizations, as reflected in the concept of "smart practice" (Bardach 1998), when public organizations collaborate in a rather loose way vis-à-vis common clients or users, may also be seen as a way to overcome cultural differences. Instead of primarily thinking about the interest and culture of each single public organization, the idea is to create a common cultural platform that could generate stronger collective capacity. Sometimes it may be necessary to embark on a new cultural path to achieve this (Kingdon 1984).

Previous studies have revealed that there is a positive relationship between coordination culture and coordination quality along different dimensions (Lægreid et al. 2016b, Christensen et al. 2016). Three different sets of cultural variables are used to explain variety in civil servants' perceptions of coordination quality. First, a central precondition for working together towards a common cultural goal in the civil service is *mutual trust*, measured by whether civil servants think the level of mutual trust between the ministry and subordinate agencies is high or not. The expectation is that a high level of mutual trust will enhance coordination quality, especially the vertical coordination within own policy area.

Second, whether civil servants' tasks and areas of responsibility are characterized by a high or low level of *conflict* will supposedly influence coordination quality. The expectation here is that a high level of conflict will make coordination more difficult and challenging, because it is difficult to find common cultural ground.

Third, what is typical for the *identity* of civil servants? The expectation is that civil servants scoring high on identification with the public administration as a whole will perceive overall higher coordination quality than those who mainly identify with their own ministry or agency. This relates primarily to inter-organizational coordination

## **Context**

Norway is a unitary state with a combination of central control and standardization, and political and administrative decentralization. It has a large public sector and there is a relatively high level of mutual trust and understanding between central actors and public-sector organizations on different levels (Christensen and Lægreid 2005). Two governance doctrines are central. First, the principle of *ministerial responsibility*, which tends to enhance vertical coordination within policy areas, but constrains horizontal coordination between them. It is very effective when the problem structure follows the organizational structure, but not when it comes to wicked problems of a transboundary nature. Thus, problems of pillarization, departmentalization, tunnel vision, and silo attention are main challenges for handling transboundary wicked issues (cf. Pollitt 2003).

Second, the principle of *local self-government* may enhance coordination within each county or municipality, but produce multi-level coordination challenges between regional/local and central government. Counties and municipalities are supposed both to make their own policies and to implement policies coming from central government. Added to this, there are also central government bodies represented at the regional level which are not standardized across policy areas and both their inter-organizational coordination and coordination with counties/municipalities is a challenge.

Since the early 1990s, two developments in the Norwegian central government have affected the coordination pattern. First, the NPM era involved vertical specialization and the creation of single-purpose agencies and local bodies with more autonomy than before, but it also increased intra- and inter-organizational horizontal specialization, creating structural and cultural fragmentation (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). Performance management – a related

feature – mainly addressed vertical coordination within each sector and ministerial area and defocused the horizontal transboundary coordination challenges typical for wicked problems.

In recent 10-15 years, the NPM reforms have been supplemented by post-NPM reforms which seek to enhance integration in the central government apparatus by introducing more network arrangements in the shadow of the hierarchy and also by merging agencies and to some extent ministries. Compared with other European countries, Norway scores relatively low on coordination through the internal administrative hierarchy within each ministerial area (Lægreid et al. 2016), and the use of cross-boundary collegial bodies, such as working groups and project groups crossing policy areas and administrative levels, is rather common (Lægreid et al. 2016, Christensen, Lægreid and Midtbø 2012).

Norway's closer integration in the European Union through the Economic Area Agreement has also increased the need for external coordination and for a unified Norwegian position to be formulated on various policy issues. To facilitate this, eighteen special overarching committees have been established covering both ministries and agencies and different policy sectors. The members of these committees are civil servants in affected ministries and agencies. Since Norway is not a member of the EU, the overall political coordination through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is more limited.

Thus, this contextual situation illustrates the special challenges, reflecting a hybrid combination of NPM and post-NPM features, that civil servants in Norwegian ministries and central agencies face when handling and assessing coordination issues. The Norwegian case illustrates that a number of changes in government have made coordination more difficult and that there is an increasing demand for both horizontal and multi-level coordination, which post-NPM reforms are trying to meet (Peters 1998 and 2004). The expectations based on these contextual features are:

- that internal coordination within own policy area will be seen as relatively good in comparison to horizontal coordination across policy areas owing to the principle of ministerial responsibility and NPM reforms.
- that there will be coordination challenges vis-à-vis local and regional government, owing to the principle of local self-government,
- that increased integration into Europe will have strengthened the quality of sectoral vertical integration upwards to the international level, and
- owing to the introduction of post-NPM reforms over the last 10-15 years transboundary coordination will be of higher quality in 2016 than in 2006.

## Data base

The data used are taken from two unique comprehensive surveys of civil servants in the Norwegian ministries and central agencies, conducted in 2006 and 2016. All civil servants in the ministries with at least one year tenure, from executive officers to top civil servants, and a representative sample of every third civil servant in the central agencies were included. The number of respondents in 2016 was 2322 in the ministries and 1963 in the central agencies. In 2006, the numbers were 1864 in the ministries and 1452 in the central agencies. The response rate in 2016 was 60% in the ministries and 59% in the central agencies. In 2006, it was 67% in ministries and 59% in the central agencies. Overall, this is a high response rate.

*The dependent variables* are based on the following set of questions:

*“How would you characterize coordination within your field of work along the following dimensions”?*

- a. Coordination between different governmental authorities within own ministerial area
- b. Coordination with governmental actors in other policy areas
- c. Coordination with regional and local government
- d. Coordination with supranational or international organizations
- e. Coordination with private sector/civil society

The respondents were asked to rate their perceptions on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (very poor) on each of the five dimensions; ‘not relevant’ was also an option. The question about coordination with the private sector or civil society was only posed to civil servants in the ministries in 2016, but the data from 2006 indicate that there are only minor differences between perceptions in the ministries and central agencies on this dimension (Christensen and Lægveid 2008).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Excluded from the analyses are civil servants who do not see coordination on the different dimensions as relevant for their own daily work or who did not answer the questions on coordination quality. In 2016, this varies between 39% of the respondents for coordination within own policy area to 66% for coordination with local and regional bodies. In 2006, it varied between 24% for coordination within own policy area to 55% for coordination with local and regional bodies.

## Coordination quality across time and coordination dimensions

Table 2 shows, first, a stable pattern over time regarding perceived coordination quality in central government. Despite an increased focus on political-administrative coordination in different governments' reform programs and several mergers and centralization reforms in the ministries and agencies, the civil servants' characterization of coordination on all coordination measures did not change significantly. In contrast to the thesis about increased integration and coordination across policy areas and sectors (Rommetvedt 2017), there are few changes in perceptions of increased coordination in central government over time.

*Table 2. Coordination quality in ministries and central agencies. Percentage rating the quality as good or very good. 2006 and 2016*

	2006	2016
Coordination between governmental authorities within own ministerial area	59	61
Coordination with governmental actors in other policy areas	38	39
Coordination with regional and local government	33	33
Coordination with supranational or international organizations	51	48
Coordination with private sector/civil society*	38	40
<i>N (average)</i>	1818	1843

\* Ministries only.

Second, there are interesting variations across coordination dimensions, which remain similar over time. Reported coordination quality tends to decrease significantly when crossing organizational, administrative levels or sectoral boundaries in the central government apparatus. This illustrates a general finding that organizational boundaries in central government affect both civil servants' perceptions and their actual behavior (Christensen et al. 2018). The civil servants are much more satisfied with the coordination quality within their own policy area than across policy areas or administrative levels. This finding is in line with a general trend in Europe (Lægreid et al. 2016).

Third, the civil servants report better coordination quality upwards towards the European or supranational level than downwards to the local and regional levels. The weaker coordination downwards with regional and local bodies is a major concern in ministries and central agencies and this reflects how coordination is constrained when the principle of

ministerial responsibility meets local self-governance. In contrast, coordination upwards to the European and supranational level tends to work pretty well, which might reflect that the EEA agreement is largely based on the principle of specialization by sector or purpose in line with the domestic governance style in Norway (Egeberg and Trondal 2016). Even perceived coordination quality with the private sector is stronger than with the local level.

Compared with 16 other European countries, Norwegian top civil servants score significantly higher than average on internal coordination quality both vertically within own policy area and horizontally across policy areas, and considerably lower on external coordination both with local and regional bodies and with stakeholders in the private sector (Lægreid et al. 2016).

The five coordination dimensions are more overlapping and supplementary than alternative. There are strong significant positive correlations between them. Pearson R varies between .36 and .68 in 2006 and between .42 and .70 in 2016. If civil servants are dissatisfied with coordination along one dimension, they also tend to be dissatisfied with coordination along other dimensions, and vice versa. Perceived internal coordination problems tend to go in tandem with external coordination problems, and vertical coordination problems often overlap with horizontal coordination challenges.

### **Variation in coordination quality: structural and cultural features**

How to explain the differences in civil servants' perceptions of coordination quality along the different dimensions? This section focuses on how the scores on the different structural and cultural variables correlate with the different dimensions on coordination quality. First, we do multivariate analyses of the relative importance of the various independent variables for the different dimensions of coordination in 2016. Then the pattern in 2016 is compared with the pattern 10 years earlier.

#### ***Multivariate analysis***

The multivariate analysis is summed up in Table 3.<sup>2</sup> First, the independent variables can overall explain more of the variation in perceptions of coordination quality within own policy area and across policy areas than that in other dimensions. Second, both structural and cultural features

---

<sup>2</sup> It has been controlled for demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, tenure and education but they have no significant effect.

can help to explain variations in perceived coordination quality. Third, the most important explanatory factors are coordination capacity and mutual trust. This goes for all five coordination dimensions. Strong coordination capacity has a significant positive effect on perceived coordination quality along all dimensions, which was expected. If civil servants perceive the administrative capacity within their own policy area to get actors to cooperate and collaborate as good, than the perceived coordination quality is good. If mutual trust relations between ministries and subordinate central agencies are strong, then coordination seems to be smoother along all quality dimensions horizontally and vertically, internal as well as external.

**Table 3. Summary of regression analysis by structural and cultural feature affecting different dimensions of coordination quality. 2016. Standardized Beta coefficients. Linear regression. Method Enter.**

	<i>Coordination quality</i>				
	<i>Internal</i>	<i>Hori- zontal</i>	<i>Regional local</i>	<i>Inter- national</i>	<i>Private sector1)</i>
<i>Structural features:</i>					
-Administrative level	.20***	.15**	.02	.14***	-
-Position	-.02	.00	-	-.01	-
-Policy field (overarching ministries)	.00	.06*	.03	.10***	-
-Network arrangements	.01	.01	-	.11***	-
-Coordination as a main task	.00	.01	-	-	-
-Transboundary collaboration tasks	.06**	.07**	-	.05	.08**
-Coordinating capacity	.29***	.26***	.23***	.15***	.23***
-Coordination reforms	.00	.03	.01	-	-
<i>Cultural features:</i>					
-Conflict	.07***	.04	.03	.07**	.05***
-Mutual trust	.22***	.18**	.06*	.12***	.15***
-Identification central government	-.03	.06**	.09**	.02	-.01
<i>R2</i>	.27	.22	.09	.12	.11
<i>Adjusted R2</i>	.26	.21	.09	.11	.11
<i>F</i>	15.233	34.071	17.370	18.119	23.188
<i>Significance</i>	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Only variables with significant bivariate correlations are included. 1) Only at ministerial level; \* Significant at .05 level; \*\* Significant at .01 level; \*\*\* Significant at .001 level

Fourth, other structural and cultural actors also matter. Administrative level has an effect on internal coordination within own policy area, horizontal coordination across policy areas and vertical coordination with international bodies. For all these dimensions, the civil servants in the ministries perceive coordination as better than those in the agencies do. Policy field also makes a difference to the way that civil servants working in overarching ministries perceive the quality of coordination across sectors and international coordination as better. Participating in

network arrangements also influences the perception of international coordination. Having transboundary collaboration tasks matters for coordination within own policy area, across policy areas and also with civil society and the private sector.

Among the cultural variables, level of conflict also matters. Civil servants working on policy areas with a high level of agreement normally perceive coordination quality as better than those who work on issues involving a lot of conflict. This is especially the case for coordination within own policy area, with international bodies and with actors in the private sector. Strong identification with central government in general also tends to go together with higher perceived coordination quality, especially across policy areas and with regional and local bodies.

Fifth, there is relatively little variation across the different coordination dimensions regarding the factors that might explain the variation in the observed patterns. This is not surprising given the significant positive correlation among the different coordination dimensions. There are, however, marked differences for coordination with regional and local authorities and to some degree with private sector bodies which is interesting and support the role of context in this study. Coordination downwards to the regional and local levels is mainly affected by coordinating capacity, and to some extent by mutual trust relations between ministries and central agencies, and identification with central government.

### *Stability of explanatory factors over time*

If we compare the explanatory factors across time, we find a lot of robustness and stability (Christensen and Lægreid 2008, table 6, 110). The pattern is not completely comparable since not all explanatory variables are included in both time slots. In particular, the question about coordination capacity was not asked in 2006. Nevertheless, in both years we find a combination of structural and cultural features as the main explanatory variables, and the demographic control variables do not have a strong influence.

Both in 2006 and in 2016 administrative level is a main explanatory factor when it comes to horizontal coordination as well as coordination within own policy area. Generally, coordination across policy areas as well as within own policy sector is perceived as better in ministries than in central agencies both in 2006 and in 2016. To some extent, this also goes for coordination with international bodies. The same stable pattern occurs for mutual trust relations. Along all coordination dimensions, mutual trust is an important explanatory factor both in 2006 and in 2016. Horizontal as well as vertical coordination and internal as well as external

coordination are perceived as significantly better if there is a high level of mutual trust between ministries and central agencies.

## **Discussion**

The three most important independent variables are coordination capacity, mutual trust and administrative level. First, a positive perception of overall coordination capacity correlates strongly with all the dimensions of coordination quality. Second, strong mutual trust enhances coordination quality. This indicates that structural and cultural variables might interact and that informal cultural integration is important as ‘institutional glue’ that reaches beyond formal structural boundaries. Krasner (1988) labels this ‘horizontal width’, meaning that if actors care about what is going on in other units in their organizations, this will enhance collective action. Third, administrative level means a lot for three of the coordination quality dimensions. These results may perhaps be attributed to the fact that ministries have broader coordination tasks than agencies and also more resources to handle these tasks. In some ways this result may be seen as surprising, since more coordination tasks could have indicated more coordination challenges. Lack of a differentiated result on coordination quality at the regional/local level may reflect the rather complex organizational structure governing the allocation of authority between the central and regional/local levels. Fourth, a low level of conflict is important for improving the perceived quality of coordination, because interaction and cultural integration then become easier.

Going back to the expectations based on the Norwegian political-administrative context, there are mainly expected results but also some surprises. It was expected a high score on perceived internal coordination quality in own policy area, which means mainly the hierarchical relationship between ministries and agencies, and that is exactly what we found. This is very much a reflection of the ‘silozation’ that is very typical for many European central civil services (Pollitt 2003). We also expected challenges in coordination with regional and local government, which is reflected in the relatively low scores for coordination quality on this dimension. This is due to three factors: firstly, that many ministries have agencies with regional and local branches, operating relatively independently of the elected regional bodies and their administrations; secondly, lack of overlapping regional branches; and thirdly, the importance of the County Governor, i.e., the representative of the central government on the regional who enacts many regulatory and coordinating tasks.

It was also expected that closer European integration, mainly through the EEA treaty, would lead to higher perceived quality of international coordination. This was confirmed, but

rather unexpectedly, there is a higher score on this dimension than on horizontal coordination between policy areas. This too can be interpreted as showing siloization features, because many of the international contacts are transnational and sectorized. The rather mediocre quality of cross-sectoral coordination can also be seen as a hindrance to resolving wicked issues.

Norway has undergone several major administrative reforms over the last two decades. These have been hybrid, but mainly post-NPM inspired (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). A police reform in 2015 regionalized the police further, cutting police districts from 27 to 12. The Immigration Administration Reform in 2001 established a more independent immigration agency and a very independent appeals body. The Hospital Reform in 2002 transferred the ownership of hospitals from the county councils to the central state, but also implied delegation of authority to regional/local health enterprises. The Welfare Administration Reform in 2005 merged the agencies for pensions and employment, and on the local level they co-located with the social services through partnership arrangements. A collaboration reform intended to enhance integration and collaboration between local government as the level responsible for primary care and the state as responsible for secondary care and hospitals was introduced in 2012. During the last few years, there have been major mergers of public sector organizations such as municipalities, universities/colleges and central agencies.

Despite all these reforms aimed at enhancing coordination, the perceived coordination quality on different dimensions has not increased, as expected, but instead has remained stable. This is also supported by the fact that coordination reforms in own policy area have not had any effect on perceptions of coordination by civil servants in ministries and central agencies. Thus, there seems to be a loose coupling between reforms and perceived coordination quality in central government. One reason for this may be that coordination quality perceptions are not that much influenced by reforms, but more by cultural features and basic structure of the central civil service. This apparent loose coupling may indicate at least three tendencies. One is that reforms are not that well designed to respond to coordination challenges. Another is that reforms may involve a lot of talk and symbols, which may undermine their instrumental qualities (Brunsson 1989). A third reason might be that the strong focus on integration in coordination reforms might have neglected the fact that fragmentation might enhance coordination under certain conditions (Genschel 1997, Wolbers, Boersma and Groenwegen 2017). For example, when there is a lot of complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty, sequential attention and local rationality might be a fruitful coordination strategy (Cyert and March 1963). Even though coordination is a key issue in post-NPM reforms, it is not seen as a 'silver bullet' to improve the public administration's capacity to act. Also the appropriate specialization and

division of labor is an important feature of modern organizations (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007, Reiter and Klenk 2018, Page 2005).

There are rather unique time-series related to the surveys. Similarities between the two surveys concerning results are first of all the importance of administrative level, where the significant results for three of the same dimensions are nearly identical. Method-wise this is rather reassuring. Other similarities are the lack of influence of position and having coordination as a task, while working in a coordination ministry seems slightly more important in 2016. Related to the cultural variable mutual trust is a very important variable for explaining variations on all dimensions of coordination quality both in 2006 and 2016. Another similarity is some significance of identification with the central government as such. Adding to this both in 2006 and 2016 it was also found that demographic variables were of no significance, in line with the general findings of variations in perceptions and actions among Norwegian civil servants over time (Christensen et al. 2018).

One difference is that we used more structural variables in 2016 (Christensen and Læg Reid 2008). The most important of those are overall coordination capacity, but having transboundary tasks also yielded higher scores on perceived coordination quality. Involvement in network arrangements influenced perceptions of international coordination, while having experience of coordination reforms had no influence, which is consistent with the overall finding of stability. Among the cultural variables, the existence of conflict was not used in 2006 and it showed significant results on three of the variables in the dependent dimension in 2016.

## **Conclusion**

This article has shown that coordination is important but difficult to achieve, especially transboundary coordination (Peters 2015). It has also revealed a coordination paradox. On the one hand, major efforts have been made to increase coordination both vertically and horizontally and several big reform initiatives have been launched to increase coordination between policy areas and administrative levels. On the other hand, perceptions of coordination quality among civil servants in ministries and central agencies have been rather stable and robust over the past 10 years. One interpretation of this pattern is that as long as the main governance doctrines of ministerial responsibility and local self-governance are not challenged, the leeway for increasing coordination between policy areas and administrative levels is limited. Another interpretation, linked to this, is that coordination is not only a logistical and technical issue, but also a political issue. Coordination is about power relations. Civil servants generally

prefer to coordinate than to be coordinated. As long as power relations are not changed, the room for increased coordination is limited. This brings us to the third point: Context matter for coordination quality, such as governance doctrines and integration into the EU. A fourth interpretation is that one should be careful not to expect too much from big structural reforms (Aberbach and Christensen 2014). Often reform agents tend to oversell the reforms and promise more than they can deliver (Patashnik 2008). This is especially problematic when their means-end knowledge is rather weak, which is not uncommon in reform processes. Thus, a cautious approach might be wise.

When it comes to explaining variations in coordination quality, it is distinguished between ‘hard’ structural/formal explanations and ‘soft’ cultural features. The main finding is that both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ measures matter. First of all, cultural features such as mutual trust, conflict and identification affect the coordination pattern. If one wants to improve coordination, an important lesson is to take cultural features into consideration. This means that the trust-based reforms that is seen in other Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, might be a way forward (Aspøy 2016, Bringselius 2018). One problem with this is that culture is not easy to change, especially in the short term. However, it is also shown that cultural features need to be complemented by structural features. It is especially important to strengthen coordination capacity. Good government means a high trust administration but also an administration with capacity, in this case coordination capacity, to ensure effective service delivery and the implementation of public policies. The structural arrangements can both constrain and enable coordination quality. Perceived coordination quality varies with organizational boundaries and especially with the administrative capacity to get different actors to collaborate and cooperate within and across different areas.

## References

- Aberbach, J.D. and T. Christensen (2014). Why Reforms So Often Disappoint. *American Review of Public Administration*, 44(1), 3–16.
- Ansell, C. and A. Gash (2008). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18 (4): 543–71.
- Aspøy, A. (2016). Tillitsreform i Skandinavia (Trust reform in Scandinavia). *Stat og Styring*, 26 (3): 14–16.
- Bardach, E. (1998). *Getting Agencies to Work Together. The Art and Practice of Managerial Craftsmanship*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

- Bogdanor, V. ed. (2005). *Joined-Up Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bouckaert, G., B.G. Peters and K. Verhoest (2010). *The Coordination of Public Sector Organizations*. London: Palgrave.
- Bringselius, L., ed. (2018). *Styra och leda med tillit. Forskning oh praktik*. (Govern and manage with trust. Research and practice). SOU 2018:38.
- Bouckaert, G. , B.G. Peters and K. Verhoest (2010). *The Coordination of Public Sector Organizations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christensen, D. A., P. Læg Reid and T. Midtbø (2012). Cross-border Coordination Activities in Central Government Administration - Combining Organizational Conditions and Individual Features. *Public Organization Review*, 12 (4): 367–382.
- Christensen, T. (2018). Blind Spots: Organizational and Institutional Biases in Intra- and Inter-organizational Contexts. In T. Bach and K. Wegrich (eds.), *The Blind Spots of Public Bureaucracy and the Politics of Non-Coordination*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christensen, T. and P. Læg Reid (2005). Trust in Government: The Relative Importance of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors, and Demography. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 28 (4): 487–511.
- Christensen, T. and P. Læg Reid (2007). The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector Reform. *Public Administration Review*, 67 (6): 1059–1066.
- Christensen, T. and P. Læg Reid (2008). The Challenge of Coordination in Central Government Organizations: The Norwegian Case. *Public Organization Review. A Global Journal*, 8 (2): 97–116.
- Christensen, T. and P. Læg Reid (2009). Complexity and Hybrid Public Organizations. Theoretical and Empirical Challenges. *Public Organization Review*, 11(4):407–423.
- Christensen, T., P. Læg Reid and L.H. Rykkja (2016). Organizing for Crisis Management: Building Governance Capacity and Legitimacy. *Public Administration Review*, 76 (6): 887–897.
- Christensen, T., P. Læg Reid, P.G. Roness and K.A. Røvik (2007). *Organization Theory and the Public Sector*. London: Routledge.
- Christensen, T., M. Egeberg, P. Læg Reid and J. Trondal (2018). *Norsk sentralforvaltning gjennom 40 år. Stabilitet og endring (Central Civil Service in Norway over 40 years. Stability and Change)*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Christensen, T., O.A. Danielsen, P. Læg Reid and L. H. Rykkja (2015). Comparing Coordination Structures for Crisis Management in Six Countries. *Public Administration*, 94 (2): 316–332.
- Cyert, R.M. and J.G. March (1992). *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Second edition. New York: Blackwell.

- Dahl, R. A. and C. E. Lindblom (1953). *Politics, Economics, and Welfare*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Egeberg, M. (2012). How Bureaucratic Structure Matters: An Organizational Perspective. In B.G. Peters and J. Pierre (eds.), *Handbook of Public Administration*. London: Sage.
- Egeberg, M. and J. Trondal (2016). Why Strong Coordination at One Level of Government is Incompatible with Strong Coordination across Levels. *Public Administration*, 94 (3): 579–592.
- Genschel, P. 1997). How Fragmentation Can Improve Coordination: Setting Standards in International Telecommunication. *Organizational Studies*, 18 (4): 603–622.
- Gregory, R. (2003). All the Kings's Horses and All the King's men: Putting New Zealand's Public Sector Back Together Again. *International Public Management Review*, 4 (2): 41–58.
- Gulick, L. (1937). Notes on the Theory of Organization. In L. Gulick and L.F. Urwick (eds), *Papers on the Science of Administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration. Pp.1-46.
- Halligan, J. (2007). Reform Design and Performance in Australia and New Zealand. In T. Christensen and P. Lægreid (eds.). *Transcending New Public Management*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Head, B.W. and J. Alford (2015). Wicked Problems: Implications for Public Policy and Management. *Administration & Society*. 47(6) 711–739.
- Hood, C. (2005). The Idea of Joined-Up Government: A Historical Perspective. In V. Bogdanor (ed.), *Joined-Up Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaufman, H. (1967). *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Kettl, D.F. (2003). Contingent Coordination: Practical and Theoretical Puzzles of Homeland Security. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 33 (3): 253–277.
- Koop, C. and M. Lodge (2014). Exploring the Co-ordination of Economic Regulation. *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(9): 1311–1329.
- Krasner, S. D. (1988). Sovereignty. An Institutional Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 21 (1): 66–94.
- Lindblom, C. (1965). *The Intelligence of Democracy*. New York: The Free Press.
- Lodge, M. and K. Wegrich (eds.), *The Problem-solving Capacity of the Modern State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lodge, M. and K. Wegrich (2016). The Rationality Paradox of Nudge: Rational Tools of Government in a World of Bounded Rationality. *Law and Policy*, 38(3): 250–267.

Lægreid, P., T. Ramnda-Liiv, L.H. Rykkja and K. Sarapuu (eds.) (2014). *Organizing for Coordination in the Public Sector. Practices and Lessons from 12 European Countries*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lægreid, P., K. Sarapuu, L.H. Rykkja and T. Randma-Liiv (2015). Emerging Coordination Practices of European Central Governments. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 81 (2): 346–351.

Lægreid, P., T. Ramnda-Liiv, L.H. Rykkja and K. Sarapuu (2016a). Coordination Challenges and Administrative Reform. In G. Hammerschmid, S. Van de Walle, R. Andrew and P. Bezes, (eds.), *Public Administration Reforms in Europe. The View from the Top*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Lægreid, P., K. Sarapuu, L.H. Rykkja and T. Ramnda-Liiv (2016b). New Coordination Challenges in the Welfare State. *Public Management Review*, 17 (7): 927–939.

March, J. G. and J. P. Olsen (1983). Organizing Political Life. What Administrative Reorganization Tells Us About Government. *American Political Science Review*, 77: 281–297.

Moe, T. M. (2005). Power and political institutions. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(2): 215-233

Osborne, S.P. (2016). The New Public Governance? *Public Management Review*, 8 (3): 377–387.

Page, E.C. (2005). Joined-Up Government and the Civil Service. In V. Bogdanor (ed.), *Joined-Up Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Patashnik, E.M. (2008). *Reforms at Risk. What Happens After Major Policy Changes Are Enacted*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Peters, B.G. (1998). Managing Horizontal Government. The Politics of Coordination. *Public Administration*, 76 (2): 295–311.

Peters, B.G. (2004). Back to the Centre? Rebuilding the State. *The Political Quarterly*, 75 (1): 130–140.

Peters, B.G. (2006). Concepts and Theories of Horizontal Policy Management. In P.G. Peters and J. Pierre (eds.), *Handbook of Public Policy*. London: Sage.

Peters, B.G. (2015). *Pursuing Horizontal Management. The Politics of Public Sector Coordination*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

Pollitt, C. (2003). Joined-up Government. A Survey. *Political Studies Review*, 1 (1): 34–49.

Radke, I., T. Hustedt and A. Klinnert (2016). Inter-Ministerial Working Groups as a Panacea for Coordination Problems. *Der Moderne staat*, 9 (1): 65–81.

Reiter, R. and T. Klenk (2018). The Manifold Meanings of ‘post-New Public Management’ – a Systematic Review. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*. Online First.

Rommetvedt, H. (2017). *Politikkens allmenngjøring. Stortinget, regjeringen og de organiserte interessene i et nypluralistisk demokrati (The Generalization of Politics. The Parliament, the Government and Organized Interests in a New-Pluralistic Democracy)*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Scharpf, F.W. (1999). *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration*. New York: Harper & Row.

Simon, H. A. (1957). *Administrative Behaviour*. New York: Macmillan.

Voorn, B., M. Van Genugten and S. Van Thiel (forthcoming). Multiple principals, multiple problems: A review and implications for effective governance.

Wegrich, K. and V. Stimac (2014). Coordinating Capacity. In M. Lodge and K. Wegrich (eds.). *The Problem-solving Capacity of the Modern State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Verhoest, K., B.G. Peters, E. Beuselinck and F. Myers. (2005). How Coordination and Control of Public Organizations by Government Interrelate: an Analytical and Empirical Exploration. Paper presented at the Scancor/SOG Workshop on 'Autonomization of the State', April 1–2., 2005.

Wildavsky, A. (1987). Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions. A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation”, *American Political Science Review*, 81(1): 3–22.

Wolbers, J., K. Boersma and P. Groenewegen (2017). Introducing a Fragmentation Perspective on Coordination in Crisis Management. *Organization Studies*. Online First. Doi:10.1177/ 01708406177177095