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Coordination in Europe

Chapter for: *Public administration and public management in Europe*

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1. Introduction

Coordination is a perennial theme – and problem - in both the practice and study of public administration and management. As the remit and responsibilities of governments have expanded from singular tasks to the large multi-tasking bureaucracies, the challenge of successful coordination has grown in parallel. And as a concept in academic public administration, coordination is subjected to an ever-growing range of typologies, principles and categorisations by scholars seeking to apply it in multi-level, multi-actor and increasingly interconnected policy contexts (see the chapter by Bach and Ruffing, this volume).

Coordination may be distinguished as both an ambition of government, as well as a means of achieving its goals. For political executives, the ability to successfully marshal the state resources at their disposal and ensure coherence with a view to achieving public policy goals plays a central role in their popular legitimacy. Determining which form of coordination is most appropriate to deploy at any given time – even as basic as formal or informal methods – is thus a constant question for politicians and bureaucrats, as is awareness of the contingencies that may arise from such decisions.

In recent years, many public sector reforms and reorganisation agendas are inspired by the belief that they will achieve better policy coordination, and that inadequate coordination is the root cause of policy failures or public sector underachievement. Hence, since the mid-1990s there has been considerable weight placed on ‘whole of government’ or ‘joined-up government’ reform initiatives. In effect, these are attempts to find more coordinated (and therefore, it is believed, ‘efficient and effective’) approaches to difficult policy problems.

As a result of these developments in scholarship and practice, a broad variety of definitions and interpretations of coordination can be found in literature. And for students of government, coordination failures and the search for new methods and models for

policy and organisational coordination provides a rich seam of inquiry. Some of the more common distinctions are those made between the process of coordination and the outcome, vertical and horizontal coordination, intra- and inter-organizational contexts, and the extent of formality and informality in coordination practices. Coordination is sometimes a very costly and complex endeavour. In a European Union (EU) context for instance, coordination complexities arise because of the growing network of European governing institutions, as well as the ebbs and flows of policy competencies shared between the EU and its member states.

In this chapter, we begin by questioning why coordination is such a dominant theme in public administration and management, before unpacking its multiple and increasingly diverse meanings. We then consider the dominant basis mechanisms for coordination measures as used by governments. Following this, the obstacles and challenges to successful coordination are considered, while the final section locates the issue of coordination in a wider European context.

2. Why study coordination?

Both for scholars and in practice, the need for policy and organisational coordination has been ‘rediscovered’ as a reaction to the policy specialisation and organisational fragmentation associated with New Public Management (see: Bouckaert et al. 2010, pp.4–5 and Bezes, this volume). The absence of coordination is frequently identified as the reason for both policy failure (and diminishing policy performance), and justification for a reform which will address this deficiency. Typically, it follows as a consequence of demands for organisational specialisation (Thompson 1967). Therefore, specialisation and coordination are concepts which tend to be considered in tandem in organizational theory (Mintzberg 1979). Greater specialisation, increased complexity and growing chains of interdependency inevitably contribute to these increased coordination requirements.

Some of the more prominent recent themes in the study of coordination include:

- The coordinating instruments and mechanisms used by bureaucrats to achieve their policy objectives (Agranoff 2006)
- The dynamics between ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ coordination (Pollitt 2003)
- The relationship and tensions between policy and administrative coordination (Regens 1988)
- The role and capacity of the state or more precisely central government to achieve coordination across its range of policy objectives with a view to coherence (Painter 1987; Verhoest & Bouckaert 2005)
- Administrative culture and methods of coordination (Painter & Peters 2010)
- The politics of coordination (Peters 1998)

Other scholars who have undertaken research on coordination (Alexander 1995; Askim et al. 2009; Bogdanor 2005; Christensen & Laegreid 2007; Koppenjan & Klijn 2004; 6 2004; Pollitt 2003) write that approaches which try to enhance or improve coordination (e.g. ‘joined-up government’ and ‘whole of government’) have multiple aims. Firstly,

such initiatives are set up to bundle all the information necessary to approach the policy problem that has to be addressed. Secondly, they stimulate innovative practices because they bring together people with different expertise, professions and 'know-how' in a way that reduces substantive uncertainty. Thirdly, they aim to diminish inconsistencies between organizational policies and regulation, which reduces strategic uncertainty. Fourthly, they are put in place to improve service delivery, create seamless service, or to offer clients and citizens single points of contact or integrated approaches. Fifthly, their aim is to efficiently and effectively use resources by removing overlaps, lacunas and redundancies (Peters 1998; Koppenjan & Klijn 2004; Pollitt 2003).

For students of public administration, enduring and changing modes of coordination, and their pursuit by political and administrative actors, provides something of a 'philosopher's stone' (Jennings Jr & Krane 1994). The methods chosen by policy elites or street-level bureaucrats to address coordination failures, and the outcome of these attempts, reveals much about inter- and intra-organizational dynamics in the public sector, the nature of politico-administrative relations, and the capacity of the state to implement its policy goals. And given that many efforts at enhancing coordination are not the result of mutual 'bottom-up' voluntary agreements between parties, but rather arise from the use of incentives or the threat of 'top-down' coercion, they also tell us much about where political priorities lie.

In practice, coordination and specialisation co-exist and can be mutually reinforcing. For example, the European 'agencification' revolution beginning in the 1980s, which saw operational tasks disaggregated from Ministries to autonomous arm's length bodies, required those same Ministries to subsequently develop new coordinating capacities to manage them. Furthermore, problems arising from the separation of policy formulation from implementation (with a view to efficiency by means of specialization) commonly associated with NPM are routinely pointed to as evidence for governments introducing 'joined-up government' and 'whole of government' reform programmes (Bogdanor 2005; Christensen & Lægreid 2007).

In such programmes the user's point of view is often a way to re-organize the government apparatus (Peters 1998). Clusters of specific citizens groups are increasingly seen as necessitating integrated front-line, *seamless* services and coordinated programs. Moreover, NPM and New Public Governance also stress that policy problems have to be seen from a user's point of view (Askim et al. 2011; Osborne 2010). In order to achieve this, governments set up and fund specific programmes, or appoint programme minister structures (e.g. Program Ministries in Belgium and the Netherlands) to address certain policy problems (Steen et al. 2011). One-stop-shops, a structural measure to coordinate different services within one frontline service, have flourished internationally as a way to offer seamless public services (Pollitt 2003; Askim et al. 2011; Ongaro 2004). In such systems, citizens and client groups are confronted with one single entry point (either physical or virtual) to address their questions and problems, although the back-office services might be split up (Pollitt 2003). Other governments divert financial resources towards new programmes for certain clients or citizen groups.

Next to programmes emphasising the end-user's point of view, we find that governments organize their coordination efforts according to other criteria, for example by:

- Organisational level: Intra-departmental working group, cross-departmental committee, national-local
- Client group: Children, pensioners, immigrants
- Policy issue/sector: Public transport, health, education
- Geography: Regional/state government, municipality, neighbourhood,
- Mode of service delivery: E -government portal, telephone-based information/advice service

Coordination also has many dimensions and embodiments - for instance a vertical and horizontal dimension. One could envisage vertical coordination between levels of government for which one ministry is responsible, e.g. from central governments to agencies and regional offices. Another example of vertical coordination is between the EU to national and local authorities. In contrast, horizontal coordination entails harmonization within one level of government, such as organizational actions within multiple departments or between municipalities (Bouckaert et al. 2010).

With so much variety in the practice, study and conceptualisation of coordination, how then might we best capture the meaning of the concept?

3. Defining coordination

Negative and Positive Coordination

A succinct definition offered by Thompson et al. (1991, p.3) is that 'coordination implies bringing into a relationship otherwise disparate activities or events'. Another minimal view of coordination is that it 'is the extent to which organizations attempt to ensure that their activities take into account those of other organizations' (Hall et al. 1977, p.459). The idea of coordination as awareness is reflected in what Scharpf (1994; 1997) calls *negative* policy coordination. Negative coordination involves actors being aware of each other, and seeking to avoid direct conflicts in their activities. This may require a central actor to harmonize the preferences of all other actors and, as a policy is amended to remove negative costs, a lowest common denominator outcome may result. In essence, negative coordination involves strategies to mutually avoid each other in order to reduce the possibility of disagreement. As it involves minimal investment by the affected parties, negative coordination does not facilitate innovation in policy-making or service delivery.

However, as well as identifying minimal forms of coordination, post-War scholarship has also paid attention to what coordination might prevent or can bring about. By way of example, this is reflected in Lindblom's well cited definition that coordinated decisions are mutual adjustments or a more deliberate interaction between actors to produce positive outcomes, and avoid negative consequences (1965, p. 23). Examples of these negative consequences include, for instance: contradictions, lacunae and overlaps in policies (Peters 1998). Positive outcomes might include a more coordinated response to a problem, which is an attempt to optimize the coherence and consistency of political/administrative decisions as well as the implementation of agreed objectives

(Wollmann 2003, p.594). This is what Scharpf (1994; 1997) calls *positive coordination*. The goal of positive forms of coordination is to maximize the efficacy of a policy by ensuring that all involved parties are actively engaged with each other simultaneously to find new and optional solutions to problems.

Scale of Coordination

In a similar vein, more recent work by Metcalfe proposes that coordination suggests discrete parts of a system work together more effectively, more smoothly or more harmoniously than if no coordination took place: 'At a minimum, coordination implies that in working together the component parts of a system do not impede, frustrate or negate each other's activities' (1994, p.278). In his view coordination can be considered as a continuum, scaled from independent decisions by organizations to the development of government-wide strategies, which require a high degree of coordination (and political engagement) to ensure all parts of the bureaucracy are working towards common objectives (Metcalfe 1994, p.278). Such a variety is manifested in Metcalfe's nine-level 'Scale of Coordination' (1994) which ranges from loose forms of coordination for simple tasks to more tightly integrated systems aimed at the management of more controversial and encompassing tasks. The 'Scale of Coordination' is a Guttman scale, which are typically unidimensional, ordinal and cumulative. The scale addresses 'coordination capacity' in an ordinal way. Different components can be distinguished which are placed in ascending order, but the differences between the levels cannot be quantified. As an example, 'avoiding divergences' is not twice as much coordination compared to 'communication to other ministries'. However, the scale is cumulative, which means that there is a sequence in increasing levels of complexity and structure. Like every coordination strategy, the highest level of coordination is a *potential*, but might not be needed in situation which does not urge a complex method (Metcalfe 1994, pp.281–282).

- Level 9: Government strategy
- Level 8: Establishing central priorities
- Level 7: Setting limits on ministerial action
- Level 6: Arbitration of policy differences
- Level 5: Search for agreement among ministries/agencies
- Level 4: Avoiding divergences among ministries/agencies
- Level 3: Consultation with other ministries/agencies (feedback)
- Level 2: Communication to other ministries/agencies (information exchange)
- Level 1: Independent decision-making by ministries/agencies

Coordination as process

As well as levels or intensities of coordination, coordination may be considered as a *process* and examined from the perspective of those activities or structures that make coordination happen. These instruments may be predominantly vertical or horizontal in nature and, as will be considered below, may rely on different basic mechanisms - hierarchical authority, market incentives or joint trust and goal based networks (Thompson et al. 1991; Peters 1998; Bouckaert et al. 2010).

For Alexander (1993, p.331), coordination is an inherently *inter-organisational activity*, defined as ‘a deliberate activity undertaken by an organization or an interorganizational system to concert the decisions and actions of their subunits or constituent organizations. Such coordination is manifested both in process and structure’. Thus he distinguishes between coordination as a process through which decisions are brought together, and an outcome of that process (Alexander 1995). In organization theory, the concept of coordination is very closely related to the process of integration, and as noted above may be contrasted with organizational specialization and policy differentiation (March & Simon 1958). For organization theorists, integrating different organisations or part of an organisation is best achieved by means of coordination mechanisms (Mintzberg 1979; Galbraith 1977). In this interpretation, a core objective of coordination is to seek efficient outcomes, both in policy and financial terms, that can also allow organizations to retain their individual autonomy.

Coordination as a management practice

The aforementioned definitions describe the concept of coordination in first place as a result of interaction between organizations and actors. From an *administrative sciences* perspective coordination has the aim to combat fragmentation in decision-making, and adjust the policies of one agency to the concerns of other agencies (Lindblom 1959). Others, however, define coordination as a management practice, something an organization does intentionally in order to manage interdependencies and insecurities in tasks (Askim et al. 2011). According to Lindblom (2001) solely voluntary initiatives will not suffice to reach a coordinated response; people need to be subjected to controls. This is also stressed by Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest (2010) who describe coordination as an instrumental way to divide tasks between organizations. Coordination is, according to them, the ‘instruments and mechanisms that aim to enhance the voluntary or forced alignment of tasks and efforts of organizations within the public sector’ (p. 330). Behind these instruments and mechanisms, there are very different logics however (Lowndes & Skelcher 1998; Jordan & Schout 2006; Bouckaert et al. 2010).

Within management studies, the early work of Mintzberg (1979; 1989) has been very influential in the study of organisational coordination. Noting that the structure of any organization ‘can be defined simply as the sum total of the ways in which it divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them’ (Mintzberg 1979, p.3) he specifies five (and in later work a sixth, concerning norms) basic coordinating mechanisms which he posits are ‘the glue that holds organizations together’ (1979, p.3). They are:

- 1) Mutual adjustment: Coordination by means of informal communication between people
- 2) Direct supervision: coordination is achieved when one person assumes responsibility for the work of several
- 3) Standardisation of work processes: Rules and routines specifying precise work contents ensure coordination
- 4) Standardisation of output: Expected results are clarified and communicated in order that work is coordinated towards common ends.
- 5) Standardisation of skills and knowledge: Coordination is achieved through

standardized and mutually understood training and education, such that coordination is automatic.

- 6) Standardisation of norms: Coordination is achieved through standard norms, involving socialization into common value sets and beliefs, and expectations.

The idea of coordination as a management practice (including reform efforts) has certainly come to prominence in recent public administration scholarship. As Bouckaert et al. (2010, p.18) identify, ‘governments...invest enormous amounts of energy in coordination of management practices within the public sector, in order to increase uniformity/convergence of “management”.’ Building on and broadening the scope of the concept, they offer the following definition:

Coordination in a public sector interorganizational context is considered to be the instruments and mechanisms that aim to enhance the voluntary or forced alignment of tasks and efforts of organizations within the public sector. These mechanisms are used in order to create a greater coherence, and to reduce redundancy, lacunae and contradictions within and between policies, implementation or management. (2010, p.16)

Common examples of such coordination structures created to achieve such alignment include:

- New or restructured ministries or agencies
- Common objectives, procedures or strategies
- Systems for information exchange
- Horizontal management arrangements, partnerships, network(s)
- Joint planning/working groups (temporary, long-term, permanent)
- Strategic units, reviews, inter-agency collaboration units, intergovernmental councils, circuit-breaker teams, task forces
- Cross-sectorial policy programmes
- Specific budgeting tools that encourage the achievement of common goals

A common challenge in the achievement of management coordination anywhere is that while most bureaucrats will consider policy or organizational coordination to be an integral part of their job and *seek* to achieve it, few bureaucrats like *being* coordinated. And so the role played by dominant actors such as strong political parties (as in China) or powerful central administrative agencies (such as the Cabinet Office in Japan or the UK) becomes an important means of steering such coordination efforts.

Coordination of policy

An important distinction must also be made between *policy* coordination and *administrative* coordination. Policy coordination is normally concerned with the design of a public policy goal that will lead to improvements in service delivery and hence outcomes for the citizen. According to Regens (1988) governments with full competences within a sector or policy field have the ‘luxury’ to coordinate during the administrative implementation phase. If tasks are scattered across different levels of government (such

as for the implementation of EU Directives) coordination is often only possible in the policy design phase, and necessitates harsh political choices and decisions (Peters 1998).

Policy coordination is thus normally more closely connected to the political arena. And as the public policy arena has become more densely populated with a growing number of 'stakeholders', and awareness of the 'multi-level' nature of policy fields has developed in tandem, the challenges associated with coordination have also grown. Administrative coordination concerns the relationship between actors to achieve policy goals, with a view to overcoming barriers to implementation. This interpretation follows the perspective of Malone and Crowston (1994, p.90) that coordination is related to the interdependence of actors 'if there is no interdependence, there is nothing to coordinate'. In practice, governments require both forms of coordination – at policy design and policy implementation phases - if policy is to be fully coherent.

Contrast with other concepts: cooperation, collaboration, integration

Reflecting the growing variety of interpretations for its use, coordination has an increasing number of synonyms. The concepts cooperation, collaboration and integration are often used interchangeably with coordination. This is also pointed to by Lawson (2002), who, when writing on the theme of horizontal integration, refers to the “companion C-words” associated with the concept, namely cooperation, coordination and collaboration. In the growing scholarly literature, however, these concepts (and others) are increasingly distinguished from each other. For example, Skelcher and Sullivan (2008) differentiate between:

- Cooperation: Sharing of information and mutual support
- Collaboration: The integration of strategies and collective purpose
- Coadunation: Achieving a unified structure and culture

Keast, Brown and Mandell (2007) seek to unravel the concepts integration, cooperation, coordination and collaboration. They call these latter three concepts: the ‘3-c’s’, and conceptualize them on a scale from no integration (cooperation) to increasing forms of integration (collaboration). For them, cooperation is a short-term informal relation between partners in which they exchange information. When participants synchronize independent actions, the authors call this coordination. The organizations stay autonomous and separate from each other, but contribute together to specific programs or actions. The most compact mode of integration for them is collaboration, in which organizations create something new (e.g. a new managerial system, or a new agency). They propose it to be a more stable and long-term type of integration, as organizations strive towards a collective goal or systems change (Keast et al. 2007, p.25).

4. Basis mechanisms for coordination

As well as his influential ideas on principles of specialisation, Gulick (1937) may also be credited with early work on distinguishing between principles of coordination. He suggested that coordination could be achieved through formal organization, with greater

coordinating authority granted as one moved upwards in a hierarchy. However he also noted the limitations of this coercive method of coordination, and pointed to the role played by coordination according to *ideas*, involving persuasion rather than coercion. Coordination by persuasion has not proved to be as prominent a mechanism as coordination by hierarchy, although still recognized in organizational studies as an important factor in strategic management. Instead, recent scholarship has focused on the roles played by networks and markets as coordination mechanisms.

It is common in the scholarly literature to make typologies or clusters of coordination instruments and mechanisms. A prominent example of such clusters is the *hierarchy*, *market* and *network* typology (Thompson et al. 1991; Alexander 1993; Verhoest et al. 2007; Bouckaert et al. 2010). A number of other typologies may be found which resemble hierarchy, market and network, including:

- Command, exchange and dialogue (Jessop 2009);
- Hierarchical, market or solidarity-association (Alexander 1995),
- Hierarchies, markets and clans (Durant 1992),
- 'Sticks, carrots and sermons' (Bemelmans-Videc et al. 2011).
- Authority, Architecture, Social Bonds/group Interaction, and Markets/incentives (Hood 2005).

The *hierarchical family* of coordination instruments consists of authoritarian or supervisory instruments, such as orders and prohibitions (e.g. mandated ministers, rules and regulations). The mechanism is based on authority and control (Bouckaert et al. 2010). This ideal-type of coordination is organized in a top-down manner, in other words with direct control and oversight, and formalized rules. Examples of hierarchical instruments are for instance top-down use of norms and standards, routines, inspection and political intervention (Lance et al. 2009).

Another family embraces financial means, the *market mechanism*. This idea goes back to the "invisible hand" of Adam Smith (Jordan & Schout 2006). Coordination in a market-like manner is based on general economic principles, such as competition and trade. One factor that plays a significant role in the market mechanism is information (Peters 1998, p.298). To really speak of competition in a given market, the market must be transparent and accessible. In other words, everyone should have all existing information. Proponents of this mechanism suggest that it will automatically result in a better allocation of resources and subsequent efficiency gains – the core objectives of coordination. Examples of instruments within government which fit the market mechanism model might include, for instance, performance agreements between departments and agencies.

Finally, the *network mechanism* gets more and more attention within a government context, partly because of the appeal of 'government as governance' (Rhodes 1997), 'holistic governance' (6 et al. 2002), and also the New Public Governance idea (Osborne 2010), which have gained prominence in the public sector. This family comprises communicative tools, which may be focused on consensus building, information sharing, and determining common goals and visions. An example of an instrument fitting this mechanism is the use of networks as a 'physical structure', but also creating a network of

juxtaposed actors or organizations. Creating such networks would lead to shared values, common problem analyses, consensus, loyalty, reciprocity, trust, informal evaluation and reputation (Bouckaert et al. 2010, p.35). Again, these factors are deemed to positively contribute to coordination of policy and activities.

These basis mechanisms differ in, amongst other things, the level of central and mutual adjustments. For instance, according to Lindblom, the last two mechanisms (market and network) demonstrate that coordination is not only the accomplishment of a hierarchical or unilateral coordinator, but also a question of mutual or multilateral adjustment (Lindblom 2001). Furthermore, the three basis mechanisms differ in other respects, including the purpose for which they are designed, the level of guidance, control and evaluation, the resources needed and theoretical basis (Bouckaert et al. 2010, p.35)

5. Obstacles to effective coordination.

It is important to recognize barriers and obstacles to effective coordination. The multi-actor constellations typically involved in coordination efforts, and the subsequent interdependencies between organizations involved in cross-cutting policy issues invariably lead to uncertainty (Head & Alford 2013). As a consequence, coordination processes tend to be messy and uncoordinated (Klijn 2007). Arising from this, some of the most common coordination difficulties identified in the literature (Page 2005) include:

- Budget-maximizing (Niskanen 1971). Actors seek to maintain or extend their range of responsibilities and associated budgets.
- Bureau-shaping (Dunleavy 1991; 1985) Top civil servants shape their organisation to maximize their individual preferences, e.g. manageable, interesting projects.
- Different visions. Actors may view the same problem from different perspectives, and either refuse to be flexible or cede responsibility, or frustrate attempts to coordinate.
- Ignorance. Lack of awareness by actors of the shared interest held by other parties in the policy areas under their responsibility.
- Technical. Different policies may have different delivery requirements, such as ICT platforms or licences.

Inter-organizational coordination can also bring about different types of uncertainty. In the first instance there is *substantive* uncertainty, which refers to the conflicting understandings, lack of knowledge, or non-definite information about the nature of the problem. Secondly, *strategic* uncertainty develops when actors' strategies are unexpected or when the actors have no idea about what the proper course of action would be in the policy coordination arena. Separate or even conflicting strategies may lead to deadlocks and burdens in the policy coordination process (Koppenjan & Klijn 2004). Thirdly, complexity in coordination arenas is also generated by institutional factors (March & Olsen 2010; Scott 1992). *Institutional* uncertainty suggests that coordination arenas do not only involve many policy actors, but these actors also come from diverse institutional backgrounds, are socialized in different settings and have a different set of rules with

which they are ‘geared’ within the coordination arena (March & Olsen 2010; Dietz 2003).

Peters (1998) emphasises that coordination in the public sector is always a political process as well. This process is expressed on multiple levels: on the level of political values, intra-organizationally (between units in one organization), inter-organizationally (between organizations), and because of the interaction with interest groups. This political dimension is mostly present in the policy decision-making phase, within which interests can clearly manifest themselves. When a new party or coalition is taking office the idea is that they provide an integrated policy program which they want to realize. This means that the policy initiatives under such a system are defined in a certain political fashion. At the same time, the ideological preferences of elected executives can facilitate but also inhibit coordination. Ministers are usually not incentivised to take responsibility for policy areas outside of their control, and hence coordination across ministries can present particular political challenges, especially in the case of multi-party coalition governments.

In most models of inter- and intra-organizational coordination there is an inherent notion of interests between partners at play, which derive from defending bureaucratic ‘turf’, divergent policy preferences, or distrust of discretion (Peters 1998; Elmore 1979). In the agency perspective on organizations there is belief in the self-interested behaviour of agents (Van Slyke 2007; Schillemans 2012). This behaviour leads theoretically to agents which sell minimal efforts at a maximum price, as well as shirking behaviour (Schillemans, 2012). Such organizations are motivated by extrinsic rewards and want to secure and enhance their own organizational legitimacy and survival. Any challenge that gets in the way to obtain these ultimate extrinsic rewards is likely to create strong resistance (Scott 1995). Other intra- and inter-organisational interests may evolve from, for instance, the perspective that street-level bureaucrats have. Elmore (1979, p. 608) and Lipsky (1993) argue that horizontal relationships on the operational level, which entail powerful professional norms, distort top-down control. Top-down control could lead to different checks and decision points, which in the eyes of the street-level bureaucrats, creates possibilities for diversion and delay. From their perspective, discretion works as an ‘adaptive device’, and is therefore favoured (Elmore 1979, p.608).

Apart from a major agencification wave, NPM-inspired reforms placed attention on the participation of lower echelons, citizens and interest groups in the decision-making and the evaluation of services. This development can also adversely affect coordination, when defined as achieving policy coherence. If new policy initiatives continuously have to pass a broad group of interest organizations, and therefore divergent (political) values, change and implementation of any new initiative becomes more difficult (Peters 1998, pp.42–43).

6. Coordination in a European context

Finally, in a European context, the existence of the EU institutions, and the expanding reach of their policy competences has presented a number of challenges for

organizational and policy coordination at both European and member-state levels (see also the chapters by Bach and Ruffing, Ladi and Leontitis, and Mastenbroek and Heidbreder in this volume). Within the EU, the Commission, Parliament and Council, as well as the permanent representatives of member-states, advisory committees and various specialized working groups, have evolved to address short-term needs and compromises which has resulted in a 'fluid system of governance' (McCormick 2014, p.72). Indeed the Commission and Council were themselves designed to be primary structures for policy coordination across the Union. For member-states, managing the multitude of expansive policy relationships arising from EU membership can present a particular 'quagmire' (Peters & Wright 2001) that requires strong coordination capacity. And as membership of the Union has grown, so too has the variety in the quality of these national internal coordinating capacities.

The Union has advanced from simple cooperation efforts common to inter-governmental arrangements to a system of 'pooled' responsibilities amongst member-states in which the EU institutions play active and important coordinating roles. These roles vary from the policy arenas in which the EU has exclusive competence (such as competition and trade), to those of shared competence between the EU and its members (such as agriculture and social policy), to those policy fields where the EU has a minor coordinating role (such as policing or broadcasting). The precise nature of the relationships and relative weights of responsibility are set out in the growing body of EU law.

An important shift has taken place since the early 1990s with an emphasis on using 'softer' forms of cooperation between member-states, rather than reacting to legal requirements, minimum standards and economic pressures (Heidenreich & Bischoff 2008). Prominent amongst these has been the 'open method of coordination' (OMC) which encourages member-states to voluntarily and jointly review and compare the attainment of commonly-agreed objectives, with a view to learning from and adopting best practice from other member-states (Zeitlin 2005). This has also led to new coordination bodies and epistemic communities at both national and EU levels (Radaelli 2003). The OMC does not involve coercive sanctions, but Heidenreich and Bischoff argue that much of EU policy coordination now takes place in 'bureaucratic, highly professionalized, not democratically legitimized and politically barely controllable decision-making committees' (2008, p.502). For member-states, membership of the sui-generis political-legal entity that is the European Union involves addressing many coordination needs. These range from whole-of-government initiatives (such as achieving national spending deficit targets) to the street-level where the activities of public authorities (such as management of environmental waste disposal) are subject to sanction by the Commission.

Conclusions

Coordination problems, and the search for new methods with which to coordinate, will continue to challenge governments and fascinate scholars in equal measure. This chapter has identified the growing range of typologies and classifications now used to capture different modes of coordination, a growth which has paralleled greater appreciation of the

concept in respect of what it achieves, and indeed prevents. This ‘rediscovery’ may also in large part be attributed to the search for strategies to counteract policy and organisational fragmentation resulting from New Public Management reforms. The hierarchy, network and market basis mechanisms also help us advance the variety of diverse means for pursuing coordination, as well as the range of obstacles to it. And for scholars of European public administration and management, the EU provides an additional focus for and source of coordination challenges, as well as innovation in coordination practice as ideas around the management and implementation of Union-wide policies are shared between member-states.

Of course the pursuit of greater coordination may not always be the appropriate thing to do and better coordination may not also be axiomatically to the benefit of the affected parties. For example, few academics will wish to see their scientific research subjected a common orthodoxy or public policy objective. Authoritarian political regimes may seek centralised policy development as a means to ensure policy coordination and control but this may be coercive to the freedom of citizens and stakeholders. And for bureaucrats, engaging in or being subjected to new coordination activities may come at the expense of other, more efficient means of achieving a policy objective. Indeed much of recent research around using lessons from behavioural economics in government has emphasised experimental approaches to find new ways of achieving policy goals, as opposed to simply achieving new methods of policy coordination between stakeholders. Coordination is also not without costs, in terms of time and resources, and would-be coordinators must judge how complex and far-reaching a coordination strategy need be before inputs outweigh potential benefits. With much still to be determined in respect of how best to pursue, achieve and understand coordination in contemporary government, it is set to remain a prominent idea in the study of public organisations and their management.

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