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# MANAGING HORIZONTAL GOVERNMENT

THE POLITICS OF COORDINATION

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## A WORD FROM CCMD

It is frequently suggested that one of the major problems facing contemporary governments is a lack of coordination and coherence across government departments or programs. This often results in increased costs and reduced efficiency in the delivery of services to citizens. At a time of shrinking budgets, many dedicated public servants are searching for better ways to work horizontally with their colleagues in order to eliminate redundant and contradictory programs. They are also seeking ways of developing comprehensive, integrated policies and services structured around specific client groups such as the elderly, women, and children.

This study, prepared for CCMD by Guy Peters, Maurice Falk Professor of American Government at the University of Pittsburgh, a Senior Fellow of CCMD, and an internationally recognized scholar of public management, is based on a series of interviews with senior public service executives in Canada and Great Britain. Through these interviews and a thorough review of the scholarly literature, he explores the many challenges presented by the pursuit of more “horizontal” government, and reminds us that it is one of the most constant and recurring themes in public administration. His study spans the range covered by both the Task Force on Service Delivery Models and the Task Force on the Management of Horizontal Policy Issues and sets both in a wider international and governance perspective. Dr. Peters believes that lack of coordination can be attributed in large measure to fundamental differences in the policy premises and legal requirements governing departments or ministries — that the failure to work horizontally is as much at the policy level as at the level of management or implementation.

Dr. Peters points out that current efforts to achieve greater coordination arise not only from the pressing need to reduce government expenditures but from other factors, including the increasingly international dimension of policy — the need for governments to ensure internal coherence in order to establish their place in the international community — and the current wave of government reorganization and reform, including privatization measures, which can lead to competition rather than cooperation among public organizations.

Dr. Peters analyses the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to coordination — through hierarchy, the market or networks, for example — and warns of some of the dangers to accountability that can arise through efforts to achieve greater horizontality in the management of government programs. He then assesses a variety of possible mechanisms and techniques for addressing the issue of coordination and concludes with a series of “lessons for the would-be coordinator.” He also argues that many new approaches in public administration today — such as executive or service agencies, greater “participation” of citizens and partners in decision making, or the pursuit of alignment through strong organizational cultures — all increase the challenge and difficulty of coordination or horizontality. He believes that while structural changes may help achieve coordination across government programs, these alone cannot produce the changes in behaviour that are essential if the effort to coordinate programs is to be successful. What may be needed, in his view, is the active intervention of political leaders, including those at the very top of government.

CCMD takes pleasure in publishing Dr. Peters’ thoughtful analysis of one of the key challenges facing governments today and welcomes this substantial addition to its ongoing series of publications on governance and public management.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>A Word from CCMD</i> .....	i
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. DEFINING TERMS .....	5
III. WHY COORDINATION NOW? .....	9
IV. THINKING ABOUT COORDINATION .....	15
V. HOW DO WE ACHIEVE COORDINATION? .....	27
VI. LESSONS FOR THE WOULD-BE COORDINATOR .....	47
VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....	51
<i>Notes</i> .....	53
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	55
<i>About the Author</i> .....	61

# I

## INTRODUCTION

No phrase expresses as frequent a complaint about the federal bureaucracy as does “lack of coordination.” No suggestion for reform is more common than “what we need is more coordination.”

*Pressman and Wildavsky (1984:133)*

The administrative Holy Grail of coordination and “horizontality” is one of the perennial quests for the practitioners of government (Jennings and Crane 1994). From the time of the separation of governing structures into departments, ministries, and analogous organizations there have been complaints that one organization does not know what another is doing, and that their programs are contradictory, redundant or both. The fundamental problems of coordination have been exacerbated by the growth and structural elaboration of modern governments, but the coordination problem appears endemic to all large organizations, or collections of organizations, whether public or private.

This report is based on personal interviews with a number of public servants in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. The public servants contacted were not a representative sample but rather occupied positions that had clearly defined coordination responsibilities, or were individuals identified by other respondents as particularly concerned with policy coordination.

Canadian and British public servants echoed the sentiment of Pressman and Wildavsky cited above. They said that during their careers (long ones, given that I spoke primarily with senior officials) there had been a continual search for means of enhancing the coordination and integration of public services. For example, as one Canadian respondent noted:

Most efforts at coordination have attacked only the superficial problems of coordination without addressing the underlying issues. The “solutions” have relied on simply manipulating structures rather than changing behaviour.

Saying that coordination problems are long-standing and perhaps inevitable does not make them any more desirable. Both citizens and public servants tend to be distressed when programs are not adequately coordinated. Citizens feel the effects of inadequate coordination in a number of ways, such as when, as clients of programs that do not work horizontally as well as they might, they find themselves confronted with difficulties in obtaining the full range of services they need from government. Social service clients, for example, may have to go to a number of different offices in order to obtain help with employment, housing, child care, income support and all the other services they need (Bardach 1996). It is not just recipients of social benefits who face these difficulties; businesses also want “one-stop shopping” for permits and regulatory clearances (Pildes and Sunstein 1995), and middle-class citizens complain about multiple tax forms.

In other instances the client may be confronted with inadequately coordinated programs that interact to produce negative, unintended consequences. For example, the “poverty trap” resulting from inadequate coordination of taxes and social benefits creates a situation in which at some income levels, and in several countries, earning the additional pound or dollar in the market results in a net loss of disposable income. Even when no “trap” exists, programs for moving from dependence on welfare to independence through work are poorly coordinated (Commission on Social Justice 1994), so that remaining on the social program may be easier than coping with the mechanisms for moving into the private economy. Similarly, programs in the United States that force recipients off welfare are not coordinated with programs for training and child care.

Businesses also find that they face contradictory or incompatible requirements for regulatory compliance. Even the information demanded on simple forms from different departments is inconsistent, and sometimes firms are required to submit exactly the same information to multiple agencies.<sup>1</sup> While businesses may be able to comply with all these regulations, to do so adds to their costs and also serves to perpetuate the conventional image that government agencies do not know what they are doing — singly, or especially, collectively. Several Canadian respondents pointed out that government organizations may be aware of these contradictory requirements yet are often wedded to their own visions of the policy world and expect the other organizations to be the ones to change.

Citizens also feel the impact of these failures to coordinate in their role as taxpayers. Running programs that are incompatible and contradictory requires extra money. In the United States, the (in)famous example is that of several government organizations pleading with citizens not to smoke or to use “smokeless” tobacco, while at the same time another organization disperses millions of dollars to support tobacco farming and others spend public money to promote the export of tobacco to other countries.<sup>2</sup> The political reasons for this inconsistency in policies may be obvious, but they do not make the resulting policy regimen any more efficient or desirable.<sup>3</sup> Inadequate coordination also extends well below the level of major policy decisions into the day-to-day management of programs, with the same street being torn up and then repaired by different agencies within a few days of each other (Hood 1971). All these coordination failures cost public money and also reduce public respect for the managerial capacity of the public sector.

Finally, the absence of effective organizational coordination can impose costs on public organizations themselves (Considine 1992). In addition to reducing efficiency in delivering services, the absence of adequate coordination will tend to generate internal conflict and reduce policy creativity. The resulting conflicts may be hierarchical, for example, when lower-echelon workers need to coordinate their activities with those of other service providers but independent action of this sort is not supported by their superiors. Similarly, an excessively hierarchical pattern of management and the absence of cross-fertilization with ideas from other



organizations will reduce the adaptive and innovative capacity of any one organization.

Several Canadian respondents noted that those organizations that were closest together ideologically and provided similar types of service were the most difficult to coordinate. While this argument may appear illogical, such organizations tend to fight over the same policy (and budgetary) turf, while more diverse organizations have found cooperation somewhat easier and less threatening. Further, turf-fighting among similar organizations tends to solidify positions on the relative importance of their services and the associated desirability of delivering them in the familiar ways, rather than fostering new ideas and creative approaches. The respondents argued that interactions among the more diverse organizations produced more real creativity.

The above discussion should make it clear that much of the failure to work horizontally in government is at the policy level as opposed to the management or implementation level. While there are certainly instances in which one ministry or agency did not choose to coordinate its service delivery activities with those of other organizations, many of the problems arise because the fundamental policy premises (and legal requirements) with which these organizations must function are different. The task for managers, then, often becomes one of finding ways of making the activities of their own department or agency compatible with those of other organizations that have similar responsibilities. These managers must do this while complying with the legal rules and policy guidelines governing their own agency. This is no simple task.

# II

## DEFINING TERMS

To this point we have been writing as if we were clear about what “coordination” and “horizontal government” mean. Although these terms, especially “coordination,” are used frequently, their exact meaning is sometimes vague. These terms refer to the need to ensure that the various organizations — public and private — charged with delivering public policy work together and do not produce either redundancy<sup>4</sup> or gaps in services. We should think about minimalist and maximalist levels of coordination. The minimal level might be that at which organizations simply are cognizant of each other’s activities and make an honest effort not to duplicate or interfere. This certainly would be a desirable pattern of behaviour, but seems unlikely to address most of the serious problems in the public sector. Still, the majority of the respondents pointed out that this would be an improvement over much existing behaviour in the public sector.

A maximalist definition might be too severe for most scholars and practitioners since it could require much tighter controls over the activities of organizations and some means of enforcing jurisdictional controls over disputed turf, or of demanding that the gaps in services be remedied. A maximalist definition might also require developing substantial uniformity in the standards of treatment across a country, even one as large and diverse as Canada. This amount of coordination might also require a level of omniscience and omnipotence that few public sectors possess. Who, for

example, could enforce such a system, even if it were acceptable to the actors involved? This would become especially difficult given the general mood of empowerment, decentralization and entrepreneurship that is current in the public sector.

Table 1 provides one listing of the coordination options available to governments involved in intergovernmental negotiations on policy. These options range from minimalist schemes involving, at best, information exchange among ministries, to the creation of an integrated policy strategy for government as a whole. As noted already, such a scheme might be too demanding for most governments yet could remain the goal toward which committed coordinators would strive. Further, the internationalized context presumed in Table 1 might place even greater demands on coordination than would ordinary domestic politics, so that lower levels of coordination could be quite effective at the domestic level. Pressures from the international environment will make internal coordination more difficult, but more necessary.

**TABLE 1*****The Internal Management of External Relations: Policy Coordination Scale***

- 
- Step 1: *Independent decision making by ministries.* Each ministry retains autonomy within its own policy domain.
- Step 2: *Communication to other ministries (information exchange).* Ministries keep each other up to date about what issues are arising and how they propose to act in their own areas. Reliable and accepted channels of regular communication must exist.
- Step 3: *Consultation with other ministries.* A two-way process. As well as informing other ministries of what they are doing, individual ministries consult other ministries in the process of formulating their own policies, or position.
- Step 4: *Avoiding divergences among ministries.* Ensuring that ministries do not take divergent negotiating positions and that government speaks with one voice.
- Step 5: *Interministerial search for agreement (seeking consensus).* Beyond negative co-ordination to hide differences, ministries work together, through, for example, joint committees and project teams, because they recognise their interdependence and their mutual interest in resolving policy differences.
- Step 6: *Arbitration of inter-organisational differences.* Where inter-organisational difference of view cannot be resolved by the horizontal coordination processes defined in levels 2 to 5, central machinery for arbitration is needed.
- Step 7: *Setting parameters for organisations.* A central organisation of inter-organisational decision-making body may play a more active role by setting parameters on the discretion of individual organisations. These parameters define what organisations must not do, rather than prescribing what they should do.
- Step 8: *Establishing government priorities.* The centre of government may play a more positive role by laying down main lines of policy and establishing priorities.
- Step 9: *Overall governmental strategy.* This case is added for the sake of completeness, but is unlikely to be attainable in practice.
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*Source:* Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, PUMA Group, *Globalisation: What Challenges and What Opportunities for Government?* (Paris: OECD, 1996). Paper OCDE/GD(96)64.



# III

## WHY COORDINATION NOW?

If coordination is an enduring problem of government, it now appears more central to the concerns of many people in government than it has been in the recent past. There are few banner headlines in the newspapers of any national capital about the absence of good horizontal government, and they would be unlikely to arouse much public interest if they did appear. If, however, one asks the people working in the public sector about their problems, coordination is mentioned frequently, and appears to be mentioned even more frequently than in the past. For example, as one Canadian respondent reported:

The important issues now all cut across traditional departments and lines of authority. Ministers don't yet understand that, so public servants have to take up the slack to try to cope with the changes.

This respondent and other dedicated public servants all appear to be searching for better ways to “work horizontally” with their colleagues. One indication of this search was the Task Force of deputy ministers in Canada on the “Management of Horizontal Policy Issues” (Canada 1996a) that produced an extensive analysis of coordination issues in Canadian government. For them, achieving better horizontal government is central to achieving their organizational goals as well as the comprehensive goals of government. Why is this of such great concern — and, particularly, why now? There appear to be several reasons for this resurgence of interest.

The first is simply that public money is now less plentiful than it was in the past. Governments have been facing pressures to reduce expenditures, and appear likely to face the same or even greater pressures for the foreseeable future. This is especially true given the contemporary public mood demanding lower taxes and greater accountability for expenditures. A number of the respondents in both Canada and Britain argued that perhaps the most fundamental issue motivating contemporary efforts towards coordination is the need to reduce expenditures and therefore to find more efficient ways to provide services. It would be an added benefit if services were improved along the way, but this would not be nearly as significant a goal of reform as that of reducing costs.

One way to save money and appear more efficient to the public is to eliminate redundant and contradictory programs, and to establish priorities more clearly within the public sector. In the past, any number of people in and out of government have advocated goal clarification and planning; now, fiscal pressures appear to have made greater coherence possible, and even necessary. This may not make the politics any easier, however, given that the beneficiaries of a program, no matter how redundant objectively the program may be, will not want it eliminated.

Although fiscal stress may make eliminating redundancy and promoting better coordination desirable for government as a whole, it is less likely that this will be the case for each individual organization. As money becomes tighter, there is a tendency for organizations to focus on their core functions and activities and attempt to defend themselves against all perceived outside threats. For example, they may not be anxious to cooperate with other organizations providing similar or even complementary services since these may fall into the category of “threat.”<sup>5</sup> Even without the real or imagined adversarial relationship among organizations, coordination activities almost certainly will receive a lower priority than activities that contribute directly to the mission of the organization, with the probability of even less investment in cooperation than in “normal” times.

In addition to the financial constraints on the public sector, it also appears that greater attention to coordination is required because of the very nature of the issues now arising in government. There are an increasing

number of “cross-cutting issues,” especially those that are conceived of as being structured around client groups rather than around functional policy areas. Groups such as the elderly, women, children, Aboriginal peoples and a host of others increasingly are seen as meriting comprehensive, integrated services and programs. The perceived need to serve these client groups is in part a recognition of their increasing political mobilization, and also in part a result of changes in the political values of most democratic societies — the growing “customer orientation” (Pierre 1995). Again, the Canadian government organized a Task Force of deputy ministers to examine the issue of service delivery and possible alternative models for serving the public (Canada 1996b). Governments generally do not want to create separate departments for specific client groups that would duplicate and rival functional programs — social services or education, for example — but they also recognize the need for creating better patterns of service delivery.

Even for policies formulated on the basis of function as opposed to client groups there appears to be a greater need for coordination. The increasing international dimension of policy places more pressure on each government to coordinate its policies and present a coherent policy picture to the external world (Savoie 1995a). For example, it is now difficult to conceptualize education and training programs as being purely domestic. Rather, they must be seen as crucial components of international competitiveness policy in information-based economies. Again, one respondent in Canada pointed out that:

...programs that once were purely domestic and that could ignore international issues and influences now are crucial to Canada’s place in the international community and crucial to trade and competitiveness.

It is increasingly difficult for any policy area to function in isolation from others if it wants to be effective, and it is also less likely that ministers will find it tolerable for any policy area to function independently. As one Canadian public servant noted, the public is now better informed, and more rights oriented, and tends to see how one policy affects another more than in the past.<sup>6</sup>



Leaving aside the competitive pressures on government for better coordination, the increased importance of membership in supranational organizations is requiring greater internal coherence in government. For the governments of most European countries, having to present a united front in Brussels is a major coordination task, but one that is necessary. One British civil servant whom I interviewed, for example, pointed to the problems that several countries had when a social services minister in one meeting agreed to spend millions of pesetas, or lire or whatever, while in the next room their finance minister was saying that this level of expenditure was impossible. The respondent was quite proud that the British government had developed elaborate and effective mechanisms for ensuring a more unified stance, but even then minor embarrassments could occur.

Government reorganizations and reforms in a number of countries are also contributing to the increased need for coordination. Reforms such as “Next Steps” in the United Kingdom (Greer 1994), “corporatization” in New Zealand (Boston 1991), and similar reforms in other countries (Kickert 1995) have divided large cabinet departments into a number of smaller, specialized entities. These specialized organizations are now required to develop their own “business plans” and to begin to act as if they were functioning in a competitive marketplace, rather than within a unified public sector. In the extreme case, public organizations may find themselves in direct competition with one another, rather than as potential cooperative partners.<sup>7</sup> As the “ship of state” becomes a flotilla, producing effective coordination and cooperation becomes even more difficult than in the past.

Finally, government is less popular than in the past, so that anything that can be done to make the public sector look more efficient and effective is valuable. The ever-increasing demands to be efficient and effective are producing pressures for improved coordination. These external pressures, however, only reinforce the long-standing commitment of most public managers to the tasks of producing greater coherence in government programs. Thus, for many public managers the growing demands for coordination and coherence are welcomed rather than being seen as intrusions into their insulated world. This response is, of course, very different than many popular (and academic) perceptions of public servants and their

presumed desires to maximize their own budgets and perquisites (Niskanen 1994).

Thus, a number of forces appear to be driving governments to search for better ways to coordinate their activities in order to create better, more efficient, and more “user friendly” public services. Governments have wanted to achieve these same goals for some time but have encountered a number of obstacles to achieving what might appear to outsiders to be common-sense improvements in governance. There is perhaps little reason to be sanguine about the contemporary efforts to achieve these coordinative goals when other attempts have failed. Still, if some improvements can be made, even if they fall short of a perfectly coordinated and coherent government, then the effort may yet be worth it. It is hoped that this paper can contribute to solving some of these problems of coordination; to this end, some lessons for would-be coordinators in government are developed at the conclusion of the paper.

# IV

## THINKING ABOUT COORDINATION

We have so far been talking about coordination as if we were confident about just what it is, as if we believe that it is a simple undifferentiated characteristic of organizational populations. In reality, there are a number of different issues that arise when we think about coordination. Some of these issues are intellectual and theoretical; how do we situate the problems associated with coordination within the broader context of new approaches to and ways of thinking about the public sector and its management? Other issues arise when we attempt to isolate different dimensions of coordination and to differentiate coordination issues from other closely related questions of policy and administration. How do we translate this theorizing about coordination into effective management in the public sector? What instruments are available to promote coordination and what are their relative strengths and weaknesses?

### POLICY OR ADMINISTRATION?

The first question is whether we should focus more attention on policy coordination or on the coordination of administration (Regens 1988:138). These two issues are certainly related, but they also have important differences; addressing one issue without the other can solve only a portion of the coordination problems usually identified in public service delivery.

Administrative coordination is in essence coordination from the bottom up, and is focused on service delivery issues. This “bottom-up” orientation toward making government more effective assumes that the important questions about governing are implementation questions. A policy orientation to coordination assumes, on the other hand, that if policies are well formulated initially, then there will be few (or at least fewer) problems in putting them into effect. This is a more “top-down,” politically centred conception about how to make government perform better than is administrative coordination. Another of the Canadian government task forces, that on “Public Service Values and Ethics,” (Canada 1996c) looked at these alternative conceptions of coordination and governing from the perspective of their normative implications and the impacts they might have on ordinary citizens.

The choice between administrative and policy coordination is to some degree a false dilemma; to be truly effective, governments require both forms of coordination. The question then becomes one of balance between coordinating the two elements of formulation and implementation. Some scholars (Elmore 1979; Barrett and Fudge 1981) have argued, for example, that policies should be designed “from the bottom up,” using coordination — and implementation more generally — to design programs. Others have argued (Linder and Peters 1987; Hogwood and Gunn 1984) that although implementation is important, it should not be so dominant in initial policy formulation. Governments should first decide what they want to do and then decide how those goals can be achieved efficiently and effectively (Bogason 1991). To achieve better coordination, governments will need to decide on the priorities of the governing system as a whole as opposed to the multiple priorities that bubble up from each individual program and organization.

## BARGAINED OR IMPOSED?

Related to the choice between policy and administration as the locus of activity for coordinative activity is the question of whether the best means of producing coordination is through imposition, or through bargaining. If

coordination is important for government, why do the leaders of government not invest more time and effort in imposing greater coherence in policy and administration on their governments? While it appears somewhat old-fashioned to say so, governments do have hierarchies that can be employed to produce more effective government (Jacques 1990). On the other hand, if coordination is to be truly successful, then perhaps it must be “owned” by the participants. If that premise is true, then bargaining may be the only way to produce enduring and effective coordination.

Interestingly, several respondents wanted the centre of government to make the fundamental decisions about priorities, rather than having to bargain among themselves. One Canadian respondent pointed out that it is the role of the political level of government, not the public service, to make decisions about the relative priorities of government. The respondents expressed general frustration over the tendency to let issues go down to the public service for coordination, and then to be blamed when public servants “could not read the minds” of the political leaders.

The choice between bargaining and imposition reflects some fundamental issues in the theoretical literature on coordination among organizations, whether public or private. We can identify three dominant strands of literature that address coordination: hierarchy, markets, and networks (Thompson, Frances, Levacic and Mitchell 1991).

### *Hierarchy*

Hierarchy represents the imposition alternative, as well as the traditional public administration conception of how to manage within the public sector (Walsh and Stewart 1992). The assumption of this approach is that if there is a need for coordination then the impetus will come from the top down, with central administrative and political figures taking the lead in generating the necessary cooperation among organizations. Indeed, good will and commitment on the part of the organizations involved is not so important as the authority relationships that exist within the formal hierarchy.

The hierarchical approach to coordination often is a highly centralizing way of solving the problem. This strategy implies that each individual

hierarchy in the public sector will have little difficulty in visualizing its own duties and how it can achieve those separate goals. On the other hand, each single organization often encounters substantial difficulty in recognizing the need for coordination with other organizations and their programs. Moreover, an individual organization may have little incentive to cooperate, since to do so may detract from the attainment of its own goals. Therefore, in practice the hierarchy must be extended upward to include central agencies and even the Cabinet (Campbell 1988) if there is to be effective coordination.

The hierarchical approach to coordination, as well as being centralizing, is also at times difficult to implement. Since much of the contemporary ethos of governing stresses participation and decentralization rather than imposition from the centre of the system, many employees would not be pleased with attempts to reinforce central control. Furthermore, this approach to coordination must assume that the central decision makers have sufficient information to make decisions that cut across multiple organizations and groups within society. Such an assumption, however, is often invalid. Even those organizations, such as the military, which presumably should be able to coordinate effectively through hierarchy, appear to have difficulty (Allard 1990; Smith, Marsh and Richards 1993).

All that having been said, coordination through hierarchy does have some advantages. For example, from an institutional perspective, one of the principal reasons for creating hierarchies is to lower the transaction costs of coordination (Alexander 1993). Even if smaller, specialized organizations may be more efficient in some ways, having to coordinate them imposes transaction costs that may outweigh the efficiency gains from specialization. This logic undergirds the creation of large firms in the private sector as well as the creation of large executive departments in the public sector (Miller 1992). The use of a hierarchical approach utilizes authority and command within the organization to reduce those costs, and should minimize the degree of conflict and competition within the public sector.

## *Markets*

The first alternative to coordination through hierarchy is the market. While the hierarchical approach assumes that coordination results from authority and that it is demanded in law and regulation, the market approach assumes that coordination results from exchange and bargaining. The market is, however, only one version of coordination resulting from voluntary exchange and bargaining, the other being networks (see below). Markets assume that there are “buyers” and “sellers” who each have something to gain by engaging in an exchange, but who enter the exchange with somewhat opposing interests. Their relationships are largely impersonal and episodic, and depend only upon the possibilities of making an exchange that is perceived by both to be advantageous.

In the case of coordination by markets within the public sector, the necessary bargaining may come about with money as the medium of exchange. One clear example is the creation of internal markets (Jerome-Forget, White and Wiener 1995; OECD 1993) as a means of coordinating actions and imposing market discipline on organizations that otherwise would be governed strictly through hierarchy. Similarly, contracts are increasingly being employed among public organizations as a means of coordinating their activities, replacing previous coordination through hierarchy with mutually acceptable “deals.” Indeed, to some extent the budgetary process has always been a type of coordination process based on money, but the increasing reliance on internal markets has made that role more explicit.

It is more common that some medium other than money is used for exchange within the public sector. Thus, the markets implied in this model are very much quasi-markets, or other forms of generalized exchange relationships (Marin 1990). There are, for example, “virtual markets,” with clients as the commodity of exchange. In a population of social service organizations, clients constitute a major resource that can be used to influence the behaviour of other organizations (Hall et al. 1978). The apparent difficulty, however, is that most organizations still tend to have their own professional blinders on when they attempt to coordinate. Organizations can also be involved in other types of exchange, such as an

exchange of information, in order to negotiate accommodations among themselves (Stinchcombe 1990).

Not all relationships among multiple organizations can be coordinated effectively through markets and exchange. In some instances, organizations possess mutually complementary goals rather than the somewhat contradictory goals implied in market exchanges. Also, the goals that might be achieved through mutual adjustment among the interested parties could be different from those sought by the legislators who wrote the law, or even perhaps those at the top of hierarchies responsible for implementing the law. The very decentralization that makes markets so valuable may also, in some ways, limit their effectiveness. Market exchanges between organizations may be especially damaging for policies that contain a strong legal or entitlement basis for citizens.

### *Networks*

Networks are another bargained means of producing coordination. Rather than the exchange relationships implied by the market approach, networks are defined much as individual organizations would be, through their patterns of interaction. Networks offer many advantages as a means of producing coordination, and to some extent depend upon natural patterns of interaction among organizations and individuals concerned with the same policy issues. Networks depend upon the interests and commitment of individuals and groups, most of whom (inside and outside the public sector) want to do their jobs as well as possible (Chisholm 1989).

Professionalism creates a ready-made network for coordinating some types of public policies. One virtue of the professions in their classical definition (see Wolgast 1992) is their role as a reference group for their members; in most instances, professionals will have their own network of fellow professionals that can supplement the networks created through the organization itself. Although in many ways beneficial, professional networks also can limit coordination. In the first place, these networks are relatively closed to outsiders, so that there is less capacity for objective



scrutiny of policies than is true for other forms of decision making. In addition, each profession tends to define problems and solutions in its own terms so that there may be very effective coordination within each profession and therefore (usually) within each single program, but coordination across programs may actually be more difficult.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their virtues, networks also have some weaknesses as a means for producing coordination. One of these is an analytic problem; once you have said a network exists, what do you say next? It is difficult to argue that networks do not exist, but it also appears difficult at times to say much more about them. This is especially true given that networks can have rather different internal dynamics. For example, Sabatier (1988) conceives of multiple networks existing around many policy areas, with the principal dynamic being conflict over the definition of the policy problem and the solution to the issue. This clash of ideas is, however, a form of coordination since it tends to eliminate conflicting ideas about policy and, in doing so, it also eliminates conflicting and probably wasteful duplication.

Networks are more than an analytic problem: they can present real barriers to effective implementation. Rather than being able to expect to produce action through command and control methods, managers must now attempt to produce that action through bargaining within a network. There are no guarantees of success with command and control, but bargaining is even more uncertain. On the other hand, networks may be better for policy formulation. Structures such as task forces that bring together a range of affected interests may formulate solutions that would be impossible with a more linear conception of policy making.

Other networks could be structured more vertically, with most interactions being upward to the relevant government organization, rather than occurring between organizations in the network with a view to solving problems among themselves. This is one emerging role for central agencies that may displace their traditional role of imposing coordination in favour of bargaining about coordination. Certain other organizations also have an emerging role in fostering coordination, particularly by using ideas and issues such as environmentalism as a means of promoting common values

(Doern 1993). Ideas like environmentalism, even in the absence of an institutional basis, can be used to produce greater coherence in government policy (Taylor 1984).

## HORIZONTAL OR VERTICAL?

The coordination question is often phrased in terms of making government more “horizontal,” and indeed many of the issues associated with coordination relate to working across programs within a single level of government. These problems of horizontality are compounded when the issue of coordination across levels of government is added, especially in federal regimes such as Canada or the United States. Even in unitary regimes, however, many of the same inter-governmental coordination problems among structural levels arise, albeit usually without the political intensity that can characterize federal-provincial disputes in a federal regime (Toonen 1985).

The fundamental root of the coordination problem is that most federal regimes have evolved in ways that permit all levels of government to be involved in almost all policy areas. Thus, if problems of redundancy and incompatibility are to be addressed, then all governments must agree on some basic approaches to the policy and must work to make their means of service provision more compatible. This agreement is not always easily reached. For example, several respondents in Canada noted that the federal government and the provinces have come to agreements to coordinate and integrate their efforts at food inspection as a precursor to further attempts to coordinate policies among the levels of government. These agreements may appear to be simple matters, but should rather be seen as an accomplishment in light of the difficulties involved in achieving them. One respondent pointed out that these agreements were gained only after days of discussion and had to be validated at the level of the provincial premiers. Australian federalism has institutionalized this coordination process through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) that meets regularly to develop policies acceptable to all levels of government.

Furthermore, in most federal systems the central government makes use of subnational governments to implement many of their policies. This implementation strategy means that, even if policies are effectively coordinated in the national capital, integration may collapse once they begin to be implemented. If the central government is not particularly concerned about how its policies are implemented, as appears true under the block grant provisions becoming so common in the United States (Katz 1995; Ehrenhalt 1995), then there is no particular cause for concern. If the central government does care, as most do, then vertical coordination becomes a *sine qua non* for horizontal coordination (Derlien 1991). The reverse is probably also true, and it would be difficult for subnational implementors to compensate for fundamental design errors occurring at the central government level (Linder and Peters 1987), as may be the case for contemporary attempts to reform social welfare programs.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND COORDINATION

The classical question of the accountability of government officials — and the impact of coordination on the capacity to enforce accountability — also becomes a part of the coordination problem in government. While greater coordination generally will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs, there are instances in which it does not. With an emerging complex multi-organizational environment it may be difficult, if things go wrong, to identify where the system broke down. Accountability, at least in its *ex post facto* sense, depends upon the capacity of politicians and the public to identify who is responsible for any failures in a program, and complex coordination programs can reduce that capacity.

The dangers to accountability may arise through several of the methods used for improving coordination. For example, financial accountability becomes difficult to enforce when funds from several departments are merged to create resources for comprehensive attacks on policy problems such as drug enforcement or urban regeneration. How does government ensure that money is being spent in the ways intended when it was appropriated? One British respondent argued that:

Once we began to mingle funds from different programs the Treasury said it lost all ability to hold the departments involved accountable for the use of public money. They fought against any scheme to assemble large blocs of money from several departments, no matter how worthy the cause.

If funds are not spent properly, who should be held responsible for the misallocation? Perhaps even more fundamental, are conventional ideas about parliamentary accountability the best ones in the emerging world of the public service — and if not, what principles are better suited for this task?

## IS COORDINATION ALWAYS THE ANSWER?

Finally, we have been pursuing the notion of coordination as if it were always the answer to problems in the public sector. We should, however, at least entertain the possibility that coordination and coherence do not always offer a positive approach to policy problems. There may be some circumstances in which competing and incoherent approaches are functional rather than dysfunctional. For example, even though government funds a great deal of scientific research, it almost certainly should not attempt to impose a single line of research or establish an orthodoxy (Salbu 1994). Drawing the line between funding “good science” and establishing such an orthodoxy may be difficult, but it also may be necessary.

In addition to research funding, there may be other policy areas in which coordination is not especially desirable for government. For example, in many policy areas there is far less than certain knowledge (Dror 1992) about how to produce desired changes in the behaviour of individuals in society. The recent debate over welfare policy in the United States is an extreme but not isolated example. Therefore, government may be well advised at times to adopt an explicitly experimental approach to policy and to minimize coordination and coherence. Some scholars have advocated such an experimental approach (Campbell 1982; 1988), and at times even some politicians have argued that there is insufficient evidence to make a

long-term commitment to any particular policy option. In addition, some program areas can benefit from redundancy and duplication and excessive coordination can make the policy area more prone to error (Landau 1969). Less coordinated policy areas tend to have multiple checks on error, while more streamlined systems lack those checks.

# V

## HOW DO WE ACHIEVE COORDINATION?

There are a number of existing organizations and techniques for creating and expanding the horizontal coordination of public policies within OECD countries. Many of these coordinative devices have existed for a number of years and represent ongoing efforts to produce greater policy coherence in government. Other methods are much newer and reflect the need to coordinate the expanded range of public services, to control the costs of those services, and to cope with the increasing disaggregation of government organizations and programs. These emerging techniques are increasingly oriented toward the management of cross-cutting issues, and together they force some redefinition of existing programs, a set of tasks for which the existing technologies tend to be inadequate.

### THE CORE EXECUTIVE

The locus for horizontal policy coordination and issues management is usually assumed to be at the very centre of government — the chief executive and the central agencies that serve that executive. The ultimate responsibility for policies, and the coordination of those policies, lies with prime ministers in parliamentary regimes. The situation of the American President is somewhat more complex, but even there the President bears ultimate responsibility for the execution of policy. These chief executives

have attempted to provide themselves with the means for promoting coordination, whether it is done primarily by the executive or through the use of Cabinet and powerful administrative agencies.

### *Chief Executive Staff*

By themselves prime ministers and presidents do not have much capacity to produce effective coordination. They tend to be extremely overworked and have little time to spend on coordinating the activities of the numerous ministries under their overall control. They can, however, develop staffs and organizations that can assist them in coordination. The most developed organizations of this type are in the Executive Office of the President in the United States. This office includes not only the personal staff of the President but a number of monitoring and coordinating organizations such as the Office of Management and Budget, the Council of Economic Advisors and the National Security Council. All recent presidents have also had some organization in the White House for coordinating domestic policy, although the name and responsibilities of those organizations have varied. Although similar offices exist in other governments, for example, the Bundeskanzlersamt in Germany and Austria (Smith 1991), the Kansli in Sweden (Larsson 1986), and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia, they tend not to be as fully articulated as in the United States.

One virtue of these executive organizations for managing cross-cutting policy issues is that they tend to be flexible and do not have to be concerned with delivering services to existing clients (other than advice to the chief executive). They can thus create internal task forces or temporary structures to cope with changing issues and interpretations of issues. Also, they do not have as much policy “turf” to defend as do line agencies. On the other hand, relying on this level of government for coordination is likely to be highly centralizing; it can overload the office of the chief executive at a time when the prevailing ethos of governance is decentralization. These problems can be compounded if definitions of issues and policies arise at the lower echelons of government since there can be a significant loss of information by the time they reach this level.

### *Central Agencies*

A more general strategy for achieving coordination from the centre of government is to rely upon central agencies. By this term we refer to budgetary, policy, and personnel management organizations that report directly to the chief executive or are assigned principal responsibility for policy coordination and central management of issues (Campbell and Szablowski 1979; Savoie 1995b). Examples of central agencies are the Treasury in Britain, the Treasury Board Secretariat in Canada, and Departments of the Public Service and Ministries of Finance in a number of countries. These organizations can be used to enforce the priorities of the chief executive, but they also tend to develop priorities and managerial styles of their own.

Central agencies can play a significant role in creating coordination but they also can generate substantial conflict with the line organizations actually providing public services. These conflicts reflect the conventional conflicts encountered between “line” and “staff” organizations. The former resent the power exercised by control organizations that do not directly serve the public and which, it is argued, know little about the programs being delivered. Staff organizations (including central agencies) tend to believe that line agencies have extremely narrow views on policy and do not understand the need to impose overall priorities on government. Several respondents in staff agencies commented on the “parochialism” of their counterparts in line departments and the need to impose coordination from above.

### *Cabinet Itself, Especially with a Strong Prime Minister or Minister of Finance*

Cabinet itself is another locus for the management of cross-cutting policy issues. In some ways it is the most logical institution to perform this task; all the principal actors in policy making and service provision are represented. On the other hand, Cabinet may be a place in which the ministers must protect the interests of their departments. Those interests may well not be best served (in the short term at least) by excessive



cooperation with other agencies, or by examining the broader implications of groups of policies. The Cabinet can serve as the locus for the examination of cross-cutting issues if there is adequate leadership, both from the Prime Minister and from the civil service that serves the Cabinet. With that leadership there can be a capacity to redirect the discussion of issues and enhance policy coordination.

### *Cabinet Committees*

A Cabinet may be too large an organization to coordinate programs effectively. This is especially true given that each minister usually will feel compelled to defend the interests of his or her own department, and this need may make the necessary cooperation difficult to obtain. In the case of problems that are not well defined and which cut across a range of ministries, ministers may feel compelled to defend the claims of their department over control of the issue, with some loss of necessary cooperation across departments.

Most cabinet systems therefore have developed working “inner cabinet” systems, or some committees within Cabinet that can establish collective priorities and coordinate policies across portfolios (Mackie and Hogwood 1985). One approach to achieving this goal is to create an overarching “priorities and planning committee” within Cabinet. This approach can coordinate policies across the entire range of public programs, but often will push too many decisions upwards to a few senior officials of government. The alternative approach is to use a series of cabinet committees each responsible for a particular segment of policy. This approach has the advantage of bringing the relevant departmental ministers to the table to coordinate their own activities but it also has disadvantages. In particular, the boundaries between policy areas, and therefore between cabinet committees, are not always clear, and may be becoming even less so; for example, social policies, labour market policies and even education policies have become intertwined to a degree not previously experienced. Therefore, there may be a proliferation of coordinating committees, and the consequent need to coordinate the coordinators.

### *Ministers without Portfolio, or with an Additional Coordinative Portfolio*

Another means of generating improved coordination within a cabinet system is to have ministers without portfolio coordinate programs within a broad policy area. A related method would be to assign departmental ministers additional coordinating portfolios. For example, in the Netherlands one minister has been assigned the additional responsibility for coordinating all programs being delivered to immigrants, as well as programs designed to regulate their entry and their participation in the labour market.

While this system has the advantage of designating someone to be responsible for the coordination of a policy area, it also has several important drawbacks. The most obvious is that it can overload an already busy minister. Also, although the minister is responsible for coordinating a range of other programs, this coordinating function is unlikely to receive the same priority as running the programs within his or her own department. While a minister without portfolio assigned primary responsibility for coordinating programs may have more time to spend on this activity, he or she may not have the other necessary resources. In particular, a cabinet minister without a departmental power base may not have sufficient clout within the Cabinet to bring his or her colleagues onside if there is a need to coordinate their policies. This, however, may be counteracted by assigning these roles to politicians with strong political links to the Prime Minister.

### *Junior Ministers*

Rather than have a minister accept additional responsibilities and add to an already extensive range of duties, governments can instead develop a system of junior ministers that can help coordinate their ministries, and perhaps accept responsibility for services to designated groups or for other special functions. To a certain degree junior ministers will encounter some of the same problems as ministers without portfolio. Being designated “junior,” these officials almost certainly have less power in government

than ministers, or probably even senior civil servants. If these aspiring political leaders are asked to coordinate a range of services and manage cross-cutting issues controlled by powerful ministers, they may have only limited success. Further, they could find themselves in confrontational situations with senior ministers and thus perceive the job as a political detriment rather than a step up the political career ladder.

## MINISTERIAL ORGANIZATIONS THEMSELVES

We have been discussing the need to coordinate across cabinet portfolios or their equivalents, but cabinet departments can themselves develop mechanisms for policy coordination. One approach that has been tried in a number of countries is the creation of “superministries” which incorporate within their own structures a wide range of programs that otherwise would have to be made compatible across departmental structures. At one extreme, the Swiss government is limited to seven government departments; assuming that these portfolios are relatively homogeneous, the government should be able to produce substantial internal congruence of policy. At a lesser extreme, the Hawke government in Australia reorganized government in 1983 to create a smaller number of large ministries and an inner Cabinet that had some capacity to coordinate policies across the entire range of government services. The British government had tried a similar strategy much earlier, and the Nixon administration in the United States had proposed creating four “super-departments” in the federal government (Nathan 1975). The Canadian restructuring in 1993 did not create the huge ministries found (or proposed) in other systems. It did, however, produce fewer ministries with more coordination problems within each.

While it may appear logical to locate as many similar programs as possible within a single ministry, the coordination gains from this structural decision may be more apparent than real (see Craswell and Davis 1993). First, there will have to be a significant subministerial structure which may engender its own difficulties in coordination. Similarly, if a minister has a ministry that is too large, with too many internal divisions, he or she may

encounter the same problems in producing coordination as might a prime minister with an equal number of ministries to coordinate. Finally, the location of all the apparently related programs within the single department could lead to complacency and the assumption that the problems have been solved — while, in fact, the problems actually persist.

The combining of programs under a single ministry could impinge on policy and management in other ways as well. When the principal coordinative responsibility for programs lies within a department, decisions tend to be taken more often by career officials than by politicians. Where programs remain separate, however, it is left to the politicians to debate issues of program coordination in Cabinet. Since these issues often lead to internal conflicts within Cabinet, the coordination of programs within larger departments would allow Cabinet to concentrate instead on fundamental decisions related to policy priorities.

### *Advisory Committees*

One way of approaching the problem of program coordination is to have a means of mutually representing the interests of relevant programs. This can be done through the creation of broad advisory committees for departments or bureaus which include representatives of other organizations. For example, in the Scandinavian countries (Norway in particular), each ministry has an advisory committee composed of representatives of interest groups as well as of other departments. Any significant policy initiative by the ministry must be referred to this committee. This system works well in these countries, with their traditions of consensual decision making. Even without that tradition this method can at least inform interested departments of actions and perhaps allow them to be settled (in Cabinet or by other means) earlier than might otherwise be done. However, like most other existing mechanisms for coordination, the agenda for these committees is set by existing organizations using conventional notions of policy.

### *Boards*

With the increasing use of independent/quasi-autonomous government organizations in a number of countries, there may be a need to impose the same governance system as was developed for organizations of this type in their home environments. In the Scandinavian countries, from which this model was derived, the use of boards composed of government and lay personnel is a means for providing a broad perspective on the functions and role of the organization. To the extent that other government organizations are represented on these boards they can help produce enhanced coordination. For example, the boards used for policy direction and oversight in Sweden contain a variety of government officials who can advance the ideas and interests of their own organization and hence produce a certain amount of coordination without formalized interventions.

### AGENCIES WITH PORTFOLIOS RELEVANT TO COORDINATION

Ministries or agencies can be developed that have direct responsibility for coordinating services for a specific target population or geographical area. At a minimum, these organizations can act as advocates within government for the interests of those segments of the population. Examples of organizations of this type serving particular demographic groups are the Administration on Aging in the United States, the Ministry for Family and Seniors and the Ministry for Women and Youth in Germany, and the former Ministry for the Middle Class in France. Examples of these organizations serving geographical areas are the “regional ministries” in Canada such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the Ministry for Macedonia and Thrace in Greece, and the Ministry for the Mezzogiorno in Italy.

While the development of organizations of this type does bring attention to the needs of demographic or regional groups, it is far from guaranteed that those interests will be served in the way in which they need to be. These ministries and agencies often are not perceived as central players in government so that even though they might sit at the cabinet table, they are unlikely to have much influence over major players such as

the principal large social and economic ministries. In addition, although these ministries may provide some services for the target groups, they still must ensure that services provided from other ministries are compatible. In other words, this may be just another version of the division of services among departments. Further, as cross-cutting issues become more significant, the more traditional definitions and limitations characteristic of existing programs may not push consideration of the issues ahead quickly enough.

## INTERMINISTERIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Another obvious means for coordinating the activities of existing programs and exploring the need for new structures to cope with cross-cutting issues is to develop organizations within the interstices of existing organizations. All governments have some form of interministerial governance, although they differ in the extent to which those structures are articulated and the power they can exercise over policies. For example, the British respondents noted that developing organizations of this type was difficult because of the legal vesting of all powers in individual ministers rather than in the government as a whole.

## TASK FORCES, WORKING GROUPS AND OTHERS

When government enters a policy area for the first time, or when there is a great deal of confusion about the best way to conceptualize a cross-cutting policy issue, a standard response is to create a temporary “task force” or “working group.” These are sometimes given executive authority, as is the case with some *projets de mission* in France or *Projektgruppen* in Germany, but generally these organizations are oriented toward problem identification and clarification — a central need for cross-cutting policy issues (Timsit 1988). A recent example is the establishment of major agency, program, policy and expenditure reviews in Canada, including one on pensions. These appear to be very much based on a recognition of the

need to think more broadly about the issues facing special segments of the population — the aging, young people, first Canadians, and so on — and the governments that provide them services.

If the problems of cross-cutting issues can be “solved” in a limited period of time, or if a clear definition of the issues can be developed in the limited time span allowed for most of these special organizations, then a task force or working group is perhaps the most desirable way of addressing the problem. These organizations can provide a clear focus and perhaps clear answers to a limited problem. However, if these conditions are not met and success is not possible — which is usually the case — then these organizations either go out of business with little having been accomplished, or they become simply another set of permanent players in the complex network of organizations dealing with most of these issues.

Interministerial organizations can also be thought of as “virtual organizations” — organizations that may have no permanent structure and/or membership. This style of organization has been advocated by some Canadian civil servants as a mechanism for generating coordination without creating yet another permanent structure. The argument is, in part, that creating another continuing organization to coordinate will itself soon require additional coordination as issues change and new patterns of interaction become the dominant concerns. Reaching agreements as to when, and under what circumstances, an organization will cease to exist is not the most pleasant thing for most public officials — for them, it is akin to thinking about death. Thus, temporary, “virtual” organizations may be a better alternative than more permanent coordination activities.

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEES

Another flexible means for attempting to deal with cross-cutting issues is to create ad-hoc committees of the organizations affected. Almost all governments use some form or another of such committees. This practice is perhaps best developed in France, with committees existing at the level of officials, ministers (or their cabinets), and finally, as coordinating links

between the Prime Minister and the President (Fournier 1987). Coordinative committees of this sort have also been well developed in the Australian and New Zealand systems.

Like all committees formed to link existing organizations, inter-ministerial committees of this type will have a difficult time in advancing the definitions of policy far beyond those that already exist. If, as argued, there is a need in many policy areas for some potentially sweeping redefinition of the issues to be considered, then these committees are unlikely to change policies significantly (Schon and Rein 1994). Granted broader powers than is usually the case, such committees might be able to advance more innovative ideas about policy, but would tend to be only as effective as their most committed member. Any one reluctant actor can eliminate the trust and commitment needed for these organizations to be effective.

## COORDINATING ORGANIZATIONS

Another approach to policy coordination is to develop special organizations with the task of ensuring coordination for clients. One example of this was the Model Cities program in the United States which, during the War on Poverty, sought to identify the range of services available to residents of poor inner city neighbourhoods and to coordinate them in order to provide the full range of services to clients. The time at which the Model Cities program was established was very much like the present in terms of the perceived need to rethink an area of policy and to attack social questions differently. For a variety of reasons (financial and bureaucratic, among others) Model Cities enjoyed only limited success, but it was one means of rethinking service delivery problems.

## COORDINATION AT THE BOTTOM

To this point we have been looking at coordination from the top down, with senior politicians and central agencies being the principal players.



Coordination could, however, be implemented from the bottom up. For most social, health and educational programs the decisions that really matter are those made at the bottom of organizations. Therefore, it may make sense to focus coordination efforts at that level. This bottom-up perspective on coordination and implementation would utilize the experience and knowledge of lower-echelon employees who are in direct contact with program clients. Further, if there is an emphasis on coordination at this lower level of organizations, the clients themselves would be able to send more effective signals to government than they could if coordination decisions were concentrated at the top of the departmental hierarchies.<sup>9</sup>

If there is a decision to emphasize coordination at the lower level of government, then there are several other decisions that must also be made. Coordination at this level can be achieved through a number of different methods. On the one hand, case managers could be used to bargain with all the programs involved to obtain the whole range of services for clients. On the other hand, one agency and its personnel could be designated as the “lead agency” and coordination could come through its efforts. If the former strategy is chosen, then the case manager must be given adequate resources to bargain with numerous organizations on behalf of the clients. If the second or “lead agency” strategy is adopted, the agreements must be developed cooperatively; otherwise, the strategy will only perpetuate the competitive and uncoordinated pattern of administration that their selection was designed to solve.

Further, as we will elaborate below, one current change strategy in the public sector is to create a strong organizational culture and to attempt to imbue the entire organization with that culture. If this managerialist strategy is effective, then coordination between organizations with different organizational cultures will be all the more difficult. Indeed, the emphasis on management by generating an organizational culture to some extent glorifies barriers to coordination. This style of management may be effective in the market (Peters and Waterman 1982) but it will be less so in the public sector in which organizations should, in principle, be cooperative rather than competitive.

## PROCESSES

The above discussion has centred on the impacts of structural changes on the effectiveness of coordination activities. Coordination also could be enhanced by a variety of processes or procedures. If nothing else, procedures can force organizations to consider the implications of their policy choices for other organizations and for clients. Just as structures cannot guarantee success in coordination, processes depend upon the commitment of the principal participants to the goals of coordination. Otherwise, the processes may only perpetuate or reinforce the independence of programs and justify that perpetuation as being the result of careful policy analysis.

### *Budgeting*

Budgeting reflects the priorities of government in dollar terms. Therefore, it can be a central process for improving coordination of government priorities and programs. Given the tight fiscal constraints under which governments now function, budgeting may be the most important mechanism for setting priorities and coordinating activities. The goals of priority setting and policy coordination can be achieved in at least two ways. One is through the use of relatively technocratic approaches such as those associated historically with program budgeting. This involves an assessment of the relative costs and benefits of any expenditures and their relationship with other spending programs. The alternative approach is “Star Chamber” proceedings in which senior political and/or administrative officials examine expenditure requests, requiring the advocates of programs to justify their expenditures, and then impose some collective priorities on public spending.

Budgeting in the contemporary political and fiscal environment implies reducing spending as well as allocating resources among competing purposes. This factor, in turn, tends to reduce the willingness of organizations to invest in coordination through the budgetary process. When there is a fiscal reality of reduced funding, organizations tend to retreat to their

“heartlands” (Downs 1967) and do not want to use resources to extend their domains or to help achieve broader, government-wide, goals. The constant threat of reductions and cutbacks makes agencies hunker down and wait for better days.

### *Regulatory Review*

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the United States exercises regulatory review over the activities of the executive branch (McGarrity 1991; Stevens 1995). Whenever an agency wants to issue new regulations (secondary legislation), OMB reviews these regulations in terms of their compatibility with the program of the President, their cost (to government and to the public), and their relationship to other, existing sets of regulations. This is but one of several mechanisms that governments use to monitor and control secondary legislation, both to ensure the protection of individual rights and to coordinate regulations being issued by government organizations.

Central agencies in several other countries also exercise similar forms of regulatory review and attempt to coordinate the activities of their bureaucracies (see Pullen 1994). This is often not a great problem in parliamentary systems, given that in such systems a good deal of clearance of secondary legislation is done at the cabinet level. In general, the greater the autonomy granted to administrative agencies, as in the Scandinavian countries, the greater will be the need for some means of coordinating their issuance of secondary legislation. The question then becomes whether economic, policy or political criteria will dominate the coordinating decisions.

### *Evaluation*

The evaluation of public policies can be another process for producing coordination, although it is usually directed toward other ends. Evaluation tends to be directed at single programs rather than at complexes of

programs. Even then, it can point to programs whose effectiveness is limited by failure to coordinate with other programs, or by the absence of needed programs. If evaluation can be oriented to target populations (Rossi and Freeman 1989) rather than to specific programs, it can be used as a means of pointing to the need for coordination. However, for the greatest benefits to be obtained from this approach, the definition of the relevant target population should, perhaps, be made external to the program itself, and be derived from broader policy objectives (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

Evaluation will tend to be less useful in the case of cross-cutting policy issues because the goals and interdependencies of the constellation of policies may be less clearly established. Conventional program evaluation may find that a program is working effectively, while from a broader, systemic perspective the program may be seen to be seriously deficient. Existing social insurance programs, for example, may provide pensions to the elderly efficiently and effectively yet not address the range of services this population requires, nor effectively relate the skills of the elderly to a changing labour market.

## COORDINATION COMMENTS

In Australia the procedure of “coordination comments” is designed to prevent members of Cabinet from proceeding with departmental policies without adequate coordination with their peers. Cabinet members are required to circulate for comment any proposals they will bring to Cabinet at least several days prior to the meeting. Other cabinet systems have rules to avoid surprises in Cabinet, but this method in Australia goes the furthest in generating coordination. Although occurring at a lower level, one Canadian respondent pointed out that, in the large departments created after the 1993 reorganization, one of the emerging forms of coordination among sections within some larger departments is a formalized comments procedure. This respondent believed that the use of these comments was helping to integrate these new and potentially unwieldy organizations.

## INFORMAL ORGANIZATION I: THE POLITICAL PARTY

One of the purposes of political parties is to provide a relatively integrated vision of policy and to attempt to implement that vision once they take office. The party government concept of democracy (Rose 1974) can be compromised by a number of factors, for example, the need to form coalition governments, but in principle parties should be able to provide a common direction to policy and to cope with cross-cutting issues. This capacity to deliver coherent or consistent governance may be especially evident when a single party forms the government and has been in a hegemonic position for some time: examples include the Liberal Democrats in Japan (Park 1986) and the Social Democrats in Sweden for most of the post-war period.

There are several reasons to question the capacity of political parties to represent cross-cutting policy issues adequately. Most party systems are aligned on the traditional left-right economic cleavage and may not be suited to resolving issues that cut across that dimension. Further, there may as yet be little political mileage for the parties in addressing these emerging issues. On the other hand, there are newer political parties, such as the Greens in many countries, regional parties also forming in a number of countries, and the Women's Party in Iceland, that represent cleavages that cross-cut the major existing socioeconomic cleavages. The strategy of developing an alternative political party may not be available, however, for lower status groups such as immigrants who also need integrated services more than other social groups.

## INFORMAL ORGANIZATION II: INTEREST GROUPS

Political groups advocating the interests of those segments of society presenting government with cross-cutting policy issues can function as a means of identifying needs and pressing for their solution. In many countries the target populations for major cross-cutting policy issues — the elderly, women — are well organized and are positive political symbols. Other populations, however, are less well organized and in the case of

immigrants are often conceptualized as pariah groups with few political rights and resources. Depending upon the political power of the groups, requiring service may not be the most effective means of generating coordination and policy coherence. For example, one of my British respondents pointed to the recent attempts to coordinate and integrate government responses to racial attacks in British cities. In this case the leadership had to come from within the bureaucracy itself — the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service — rather than from the political power of the groups in question.

Interest groups may have many of the same problems as political parties in coping with cross-cutting issues. Many political parties work with particular conceptions of the issue area that have been functional for them in the past but which have outlived their utility, or which are now not so widely shared by other actors involved in the issue areas. To be successful they may have to broker deals with other groups having complementary or even contradictory definitions of issues (Sabatier 1988). This need to compromise and negotiate often contrasts with the organization's need to serve its members directly. That service may be oriented toward the differentiation of programs for constituents rather than an acceptance of the interdependencies among policies and issues.

### INFORMAL ORGANIZATION III: THE CIVIL SERVICE NETWORK

One means of producing coordination in government is to structure the careers of civil servants so that they have a broad conception of government and policy. Countries such as the United States or Norway in which civil servants spend most or all of their careers within a single agency or department will, everything else being equal, encounter greater difficulties in coordinating policies than will other countries. Civil service systems such as those of the United Kingdom and other Westminster democracies, in which there is relatively frequent movement among departments as a civil servant works his or her way up through the hierarchy, should have a somewhat better possibility of generating policy coordination. Civil servants who have worked in a variety of different programs should have a

better idea of the perspectives of other departments. They should also have a better idea of the total range of services delivered by government and how they could be made available to clients.

My Canadian respondents expressed growing concern about the loss of this important informal mechanism for coordination. They noted that the downsizing of the public service is reducing the opportunities for movement within government so that individuals remain in one post for a much longer period than in the past. The vision of what government is has narrowed accordingly, at least in the eyes of my respondents. Further, the increasing technical content of most programs means that greater expertise is required, and with that individual civil servants may have fewer fungible skills that can be applied in other settings. While the public service may be becoming more expert, it also may be contributing to the loss of effective coordination from within the public service itself.

## NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

How does the administrative theory underlying the “New Public Management” (NPM) (Pollitt 1995) correspond with the need to coordinate policies and manage cross-cutting policy issues? Many strategies recommended by the NPM disaggregate larger structures within government, develop strong corporate cultures within the newly formed specialized entities (and any remaining ministerial departments), and develop a strong entrepreneurial spirit within each individual government organization and program. This decentralized and internally integrated perspective on making public policy appears to conflict with the need to coordinate and integrate policies across institutions. Indeed, if public managers in the future are to be evaluated by how well they and their organizations do individually, then the incentive to cooperate with other programs may be less than if there were the traditional strong corporate culture within the civil service and government as a whole.

In addition to the above, other reforms advocated by the New Public Management as mechanisms for improving the efficiency of public services, such as contracting out and use of non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) for service provision, also appear to make policy coordination all the more difficult. Government itself is inherently multi-organizational (Hanf and Scharpf 1978) but these new managerialist strategies are creating even more organizations, and are separating many of those being created from direct ministerial control. At least some of these organizations will not share the values of the public service. Thus, these management strategies may require some trade-offs between possible efficiency gains from decentralized provision of services and possible efficiency losses from reductions in coordination. Further, if the importance of broad, cross-cutting issues is increasing, then disaggregation and the use of NGOs may diminish the capacity to manage those issues.

Finally, although often overshadowed by the marketization element, another strand of thinking about the New Public Management stresses the role of participation in public organizations. This concept includes participation both by lower-level workers within an organization and by the clients of the program. Again, this development may negatively affect the capacity of government organizations to coordinate effectively. If policies must be developed by broad consultation within and outside organizations, then changing those programs through coordination and harmonization with other organizations will be more difficult politically.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND COORDINATION

From the perspective of many people working at the lower levels of public organizations, existing accountability procedures appear to be one barrier to effective policy coordination. This is particularly true for mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of public funds. Public money tends to be allocated to specific organizations and programs and must be accounted for in that same way. Even if a client receives services from several programs in a “holistic” manner from a single case manager, that manager will, under conventional rules, have to connect specific amounts of expenditure back to the specific programs, often coming from different cabinet portfolios.



Some governments have been making strides in reforming their budgetary processes so they will be more conducive to cooperation among organizations and programs; by doing so, they have been able to make such coordination more likely. These changes in some ways suggest a return to the concepts associated with program budgeting (Wildavsky 1978); they tend to provide managers with tranches of money to cover a range of services, allowing them to make more independent decisions about how actually to deliver those services. For example, the recently formulated Urban Regeneration Budget in the United Kingdom receives funds from a number of ministries. These funds are then reallocated in an attempt to produce integrated services to depressed urban areas. How far can such budgeting mechanisms go to promote cooperation among programs without undermining important considerations of public accountability? Do the cross-cutting policy issues present special budgeting problems, especially in a period of financial stringency and competition for resources?

# VI

## LESSONS FOR THE WOULD-BE COORDINATOR

Much of this paper has discussed the academic literature on coordination as well as the various techniques that have been developed by governments to cope with the need for enhanced coordination. While this is an important exercise in its own right it is only one of several goals for this paper. Another important component is an attempt to extract a series of lessons that can assist practitioners in solving their own coordination problems. To a limited extent the mere enumeration of the options that have been tried in other countries should be beneficial to practitioners, given that it can provide some guidance about which mechanisms may work in what settings. We should, however, also go somewhat further and develop a more specific set of usable lessons.

The first lesson is that mere structural manipulations cannot produce changes in behaviour, especially if the existing behaviour is reinforced by other factors in government. Those other factors, including the budgetary process and links between programs and powerful external interest groups, may be difficult to overcome simply by altering formal structures. Those political factors tend to reinforce the tendency inherent in most organizations to deal only with their own vision of policy problems rather than cooperating with other organizations, especially when their budgets may potentially be affected. Structure is important, and can facilitate coordination, but to produce behavioural changes may require the active

intervention of political leaders, often political leaders at the very top of government. It is perhaps no accident that many seemingly simple issues of coordination between the federal and provincial governments in Canada were resolved by the direct involvement of the prime ministers, and perhaps resolvable only by that intervention.<sup>10</sup> Further, the differential weight attached to coordination by different politicians appears to count for more than does structure (Davis 1995).

The second lesson is that there is often greater willingness to coordinate programs at the bottom of organizations than there is at the top. At head offices, budgetary issues, questions of political power, and worries about influence over policy within the overall system of government tend to be dominant. At the lower echelons of organizations, services to clients tend to be the more dominant concern, with the consequence that there may be greater willingness to engage in discussions with “competitors” about ways to provide those services better. Coordination at this level may, however, be extremely inefficient. It requires breaking down a series of structural and procedural barriers that have been created by the organizations, rather than solving these problems of coordination at a policy level in the first place.

A third lesson for the practitioner is that timing is important in this and all other aspects of administrative change. On the one hand, it appears that if coordination questions can be addressed early in the formulation of a program, future misunderstandings and organizational opposition can be minimized, if not necessarily eliminated. On the other hand, if the interorganizational questions are raised prior to the existence of a clear idea of what the policy is about, then the bureaucratic “turf-fighting” may become more important than the actual formulation of a policy intervention.<sup>11</sup> Thus, timing of coordination efforts becomes a very delicate balancing act for practitioners, who must attempt to find just the right time to raise the questions of how organizations will work together to deliver the program, or at least work together so as not to prevent the effective implementation of the new program. There appears to be no real substitute for experience and good judgment when playing this game of timing, but practitioners should be aware of the existence of the issue.

A fourth lesson is that formal methods of coordination may not be as beneficial as the more informal techniques involving bargaining and creating the analogues of markets, if not real markets. The usual reaction of governments when faced with the issue of coordination or similar challenges is to rely on hierarchy and formal organizational mechanisms to “solve” the problem. Central agencies are particularly prone to assume that their intervention is absolutely crucial to successful coordination. However, as with coordination at the bottom of the pyramids discussed above, a better approach may be to permit those involved to address the problems themselves. The central actors of government may have to ensure that the value of proper coordination is understood by everyone involved, but too much direct imposition may be counterproductive.

These are several possible lessons to be extracted, but they point to a more basic lesson about producing action in the public sector. This basic lesson is that there are no simple answers and that most methods that purport to solve the problems of coordination and horizontality are doomed to fail, or at least doomed to address only parts of the underlying problems. Almost any structural device appears potentially workable if there is sufficient political and managerial desire to make it work. It appears that the ultimate effect of structural manipulations is to establish conditions that make effective coordination more or less easy to obtain.

# VII

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Coordination remains a crucial question for governance. Despite any number of reforms of the public service designed to make it more effective and efficient, the problems of coordination may not be solved and, if anything, may be exacerbated. With the exception of the fiscal crisis faced by most governments, all the pressures in the contemporary political system tend toward reducing the degree of coordination and coherence in government. At the same time, there are increasing needs, and increasing demands, for more coherent and coordinated government.

This analysis has pointed to a number of unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, problems in coordinating public organizations and programs. There is a tendency to impose one model of policy making and policy coordination on all policies. While uniformity may make the policy process appear easier, it is unlikely to be as successful as more differentiated strategies which would be linked to different characteristics of both policies and political systems — one size does not fit all. This leads to the next question: What are the important criteria for differentiating among policy areas? One set of criteria might follow the simple functional titles of policies — defence, education, agriculture, and so on. Another differentiation might arise from characteristics of service delivery systems, such as those depending on significant administrative interactions with prospective clients (means-tested benefits) versus those that tend to be more simply administered (social insurance pensions for the elderly). For cross-cutting

policy issues we may need to know the degree and type of interactions occurring among existing policies (as well as among existing policy deficiencies).

Ultimately, however, the question of coordination comes back to the epigram at the beginning of the paper. Coordination continues to be cited frequently as a major need for good governance. Indeed, if anything, the recognition of its importance has been increasing among public servants and politicians. Further, although this need is mentioned sufficiently frequently to be a cliché, it is probably also true. There are any number of ideas and mechanisms for producing enhanced horizontality in the administrative system, but none of these has been a real solution for the problem. As is so often the case, coordination (or any other virtue) may be achievable without special mechanisms if there is the will to coordinate, but no mechanism is sufficient if there is an absence of will.

## NOTES

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1. This is a clear case in which the multiple values of the public sector create apparent inefficiencies. Privacy requirements often prohibit data sharing (Bennett 1992), although for sheer economic efficiency it might be desirable.
2. More recently the apparent inconsistency between governments promoting low fat diets and their subsidies for the meat and dairy industries has become apparent (Milio 1990).
3. Despite all its rhetoric about cutting the costs of government, the new Republican majority in the United States has not addressed this and similar anomalies because of the political power of the lobbies representing the industries involved. Presidential governments are, however, more forgiving of incoherence than are parliamentary regimes such as Canada (Davis 1995:17).
4. As we will point out in some greater detail below, redundancy can produce some advantages in service delivery (Bendor 1985).
5. Central agencies, which could be a major impetus for coordination, will almost certainly be perceived as a threat in a time of fiscal constraint.
6. The example he gave was that in Canada and the United States the issue of gay rights has had a significant impact on how the defence establishment conducts its business.

7. Of course, organizations have always been competitors for public funding at budget time, but the emphasis on market-like mechanisms exacerbates that competition. Further, government organizations now are increasingly faced with competition from private sector providers.
8. For example, in my earlier research on the Model Cities program in the United States, professionals tended to refer clients to others in the same profession rather than serving the “whole client” as intended by the program.
9. At the most extreme level, the argument can be made that clients are the ultimate coordinators and all that really matters is their mutual cooperation. In this view, policy is more likely to be a barrier to effective coordination (in t’Veld 1991).
10. This observation came from a public servant with experience in the Privy Council Office managing issues of this sort.
11. This observation also came from a senior Canadian public servant with a good deal of experience in attempting to produce program coordination.



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