

Cross-Border Coordination Activities in Central Government Administration—Combining Organizational Conditions and Individual Features

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Abstract In this article we address working across border in central government, focusing on the case of Norway. The first research question is descriptive: How much do civil servants participate in project and working groups inside ministries, across ministries, and between ministries and central agencies, and have there been changes over time? The second is explanatory: How can we use structural and demographic perspectives to explain the variation in cross-border activities according to individual and organizational features? We apply an analysis examining the effects of both individual features and organizational conditions of the ministries as a whole. The main results are that the collegial-cross boarder projects- and working groups tend to supplement the hierarchical ministerial organization and that cross border-collegial activities are due to both organizational conditions and individual features.

Keywords Multi level analysis · Coordination · Cross boarder activity · Central government · Collegial bodies · Norway

Introduction

The focus of this article is cross-boundary activity in the civil service in the form of participation in collegial bodies. Cross-boundary activities are organized through

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collegial bodies primarily in order to increase coordination during the drafting and implementation of policy. However, it may also increase efficiency and standardization and further a common understanding of the premises used to make decisions. In an increasing complex world it could also make the civil service more able to cope with ‘wicked issues’ that reaches across sectors and policy areas (Pollitt 2003). If we look at this activity using Gulick’s (1937) basic categories of coordination—through formal organization and through ideas—we see that cross-border activities have both structural and cultural aspects. Our aim is to use structural and demographic theories of civil service organizations to test some general hypotheses about variations in cross-border activity on a set of survey data from the Norwegian central civil service, and through this deepen our knowledge on the working of these organizational forms.

Bureaucratic and networked organizations are usually portrayed as alternatives based on hierarchical authority and cooperation (Olsen 2004). We challenge this view and argue for the need to go beyond single principles when understanding how public organizations operate (Olsen 2006). Cross-border collegial activities in civil service organizations are actually an old phenomenon supplementing hierarchy, but the concept of working across boundaries has become increasingly important in public administration and in management theory and practice over the last two to three decades (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; O’Flynn et al. 2010). We may see this as a reflection of the complexity and fragmentation that New Public Management (NPM) reforms have brought, which have strained political and administrative leaders’ capacity to solve societal problems, particularly those cutting across levels and sectors (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a).

Different sets of rules tend to evolve independently in different domains, and so do interests, norms and values (March and Olsen 1989:26). As a result, there is currently a stronger focus on the notion of increased coordination. Such efforts are typically referred to as post-NPM or joined-up government, whole-of-government, holistic government, integrated governance, new public governance collaborative governance, networked government, connected government, cross-cutting policy, horizontal management, partnerships, and collaborative public management (Gregory 2003; Pollitt 2003; Bogdanor 2005; Christensen and Læg Reid 2011). We expect an increase in such cross-border collegial working groups in recent years owing to post-NPM reforms. One idea is that working across organizational boundaries, both vertically and horizontally, will make policy-making, policy implementation and service provision more efficient and/or effective. Such modes of operation are supposed to counter ‘departmentalization’ and fragmented ways of working. However, in practice they present a number of challenges. Some see the emergence of post-NPM as a Neo-Weberian development in which the old issue of coordination has re-emerged, but often in new forms (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

The main research questions are descriptive and explanatory:

- a) How common is the use of working or project groups within ministries, across ministries and between ministries and central agencies? How has this changed over time? To what extent does participation in such collegial bodies vary according to individual and organizational features?
- b) How may we explain differences in cross-boundary collegial activities? A structural perspective and a demographic perspective will be used to look at

the importance of structural features and personnel characteristics, respectively (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007a). We will examine the effect both of individual features and of organizational conditions of the ministries, which represent civil servants' working environment.

We go beyond single-level models and argue that a meaningful understanding of organizational behaviour requires an approach that cuts across levels and seeks to understand organizational phenomena from a combination of perspectives (Klein and Kozlowski 2000). The main explanatory variables on the individual level are structural such as position and main tasks, and demographic features such as gender, education and tenure. At the organizational level the structural variables include organizational size, while demographic characteristics are captured by tenure as a proxy for institutional experience.

Theoretical approaches

The context of cross-boundary activities

The basic assumption in organizational theory is that people are influenced by the organizational context to which they belong as well as by their individual socio-economic or career features. The challenge is to examine the interplay between individual characteristics and organizational features to understand how civil servants behave and act (Klein and Kozlowski 2000). Single-level perspectives cannot account adequately for organizational behaviour. The organizational features perspective neglects the impact of individual behaviour and perceptions on collective organizational behavior. Conversely, the individual features perspective neglects contextual determinants of individual decision-making. The linkage between individual and organizational levels is determined by the extent to which the characteristics of one level influence the characteristics of another level (Simon 1973). 'Individuals in organizations' have structural positions and tasks that are consciously designed to fulfil collective goals, i.e. they act 'on behalf of' the collectivity (Læg Reid and Olsen 1978). However, they also bring previous experiences to their jobs which become relevant when they interact inside certain structural frames and may either enhance or modify collective norms and values. The term 'organizations of individuals' alludes to the challenges of making actors work in the same direction to achieve the same goals.

The organizational factors we focus on in the analysis are of two types: individual-structural, related to formal position and tasks; and relational or aggregate, related to size and tenure profile. Individuals go through learning processes both outside and inside the civil service and are socialized by the norms, attitudes and behaviour they encounter in the contexts in which they operate (Eriksson 2007:57). These norms and attitudes, in turn, are modified and shaped by individual structural and collective organizational variables.

Previous Norwegian research has been concerned with civil servants' perceptions of coordination (Christensen and Læg Reid 2008). This article also explores variation in actual participation in both vertical bodies across levels and horizontal collegial

bodies across all 18 ministries. So far research has focused on how individual resources affect the attitudes and behaviour of civil servants. The role played by aggregate organizational features has received less attention in the literature, even though civil servants' behaviour is likely to be influenced not only by who they are and what they think, but also by the organizational context in which they work (Pfeffer 1983). Hence, hypotheses about how civil servants perform should be tested not only against individual-level data, but also against aggregate cross-ministerial data.

A structural perspective

According to an *structural perspective*, political-administrative leaders design the formal structure of public organizations in such a way as to control the activities of participants in decision-making processes, thus scoring high on rational calculation or clear means-end thinking (Dahl and Lindblom 1953; Egeberg 2003). Leaders influence such processes both by utilizing, in a bounded rational way, the frames and leeway a formal public structure provides, and by controlling change, reorganizations or reform processes thus influencing the structural context (Christensen et al. 2007). The basic message is that 'formal structure matters' and that leaders' design and rational use of the structural context shapes individual decision-making behaviour. Luther Gulick (1937) stressed the dynamic relationship between specialization and coordination. The more specialized a public organization is, the greater the pressure for increased coordination,—or vice versa—as exemplified currently by the dynamic between NPM and post-NPM (Christensen and Lægread 2007b).

The main coordinative instrument is hierarchical control. However, the challenges of coordination do not always lend themselves well to hierarchical direction (Wise 2002:141). Therefore, leaders have to design coordinative, collegial structures, which arrive at decisions via argument, bargaining or voting rather than through command (Egeberg 2003). Our empirical focus is on project and working groups in the central civil service and we seek to explain the variation in civil servants' participation in such coordinative structures.

We divide the independent structural variables into two groups: individual and organizational. The individual variables concern how authority, roles and tasks are allocated vertically and horizontally (Simon 1957). Organizational variables mean structural characteristics of a whole public organization, i.e. aggregate variables that may have implications for coordinative collegial participation.

First, at the *individual level*, we expect leaders to have a greater obligation to organize and further coordination, and also to see coordination differently to executive officers lower down in the hierarchy (Egeberg 2003). So leaders' tasks and perspectives on public organizations are per definition different from those of executive officers. Leaders are expected to score highest on their participation in a broad range of coordination forms, especially along the external dimension. The fact that leaders often have problems of capacity and attention in a complex public apparatus with complex policies and tasks may modify this hypothesis, however.

We also expect some civil servants to have limited cross-border of contacts, while others will have broader contacts. Civil servants working with more general tasks, such as coordination, policy development, planning, regulation and preparatory

legislative activities, will probably participate more in collegial cross-border groups than employees engaged in narrower, more inward-looking functions, like single case-work. Broad tasks involve more complex interdependence, thus potentially leading to more insecurity. This can be handled through collaboration and coordination (Thompson 1967).

Concerning structural *organizational variables*, we would expect the size of the ministries to make a difference. Size may indicate capacity to initiate policies, develop alternatives or implement final decisions (Egeberg 2003). Here our hypothesis must be two-fold. On the one hand, civil servants in smaller ministries may be more involved in external cross-border activities than those in bigger ministries, because they have to 'defend' themselves vis-à-vis larger ministries that have stronger decision-making premises or collaborate with external actors who are independent of the ministries (Thompson 1967). On the other hand, one might expect bigger ministries to have a greater need for internal cross-border activities than smaller ones, because their policies and tasks are more complex and therefore require more interaction. Complexity requires both more specialization and more coordination.

A demographic perspective

Demography may also explain variety in cross-border collegial participation. The general reasoning here is that civil servants, through their socio-economic background or their individual careers, have acquired certain norms and values that are relevant in their jobs (Lægneid and Olsen 1978; Meier 1973; Pfeffer 1983). The focus is more on where civil servants come from and what they bring with them into ministries and central agencies in the way of norms, values and competence—as well as what they experience during their careers there—than on where they are located in the organizational structure. But a demographic perspective may also include elements of structure—organizations may deliberately recruit civil servants with certain characteristics—and demographic features develop to some extent from a dynamic relationship with the organizational structure, like tenure.

Individual demographic variables are of different kinds. Gender and type of higher education represent various stages of early socialization, while the 'baggage' of norms and values public employees bring with them into the civil service becomes relevant when they start their careers and in their subsequent career paths. If one assumes these features are important for the identities and mentalities of civil servants, one would expect rather clear effects on decision-making behaviour.

In a series of large surveys in the Norwegian central civil service, conducted every 10 years since the 1970s, type of higher education is the demographic variable overall shown to have most significance for the opinions and contacts of civil servants (Christensen and Lægneid 2009a, b; Lægneid and Olsen 1978). These results show that type of higher education means that people might be prepared for and pre-socialized into their jobs in the civil service in different ways, because the content of different kinds of higher education differs. Moreover, some professions, such as jurists, probably have a more distinctive professional identity, heightening the effects of this mechanism.

The effect of gender seems in this respect to be less certain than education. There are certainly gender differences, but their relevance to behaviour in the civil service is more debatable. What we do know is that women are underrepresented overall in the

civil service and particularly so in leadership positions, something that might lead to gender differences in contact patterns (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009b). Tenure differs quite a lot from other individual demographic variables because it deals with the cumulative careers of civil servants (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009a) and thus encompasses a number of different stages—from the initial career, involving socialization into basic political-administrative norms, to mid-career, when civil servants become more ‘mature’ and acquire middle-level management positions, and finally, the latter part of their career as top or mid-level leaders or specialized advisors, who have gained a lot of experience and contacts. Just like the institutions themselves, one would expect civil servants to develop more and more complex models of thought and action as a result of their diverse layers of experience and contacts.

Demographic variables on an *organizational level*—i.e. cumulative or relational factors, may be important for the thoughts and actions of civil servants (Pfeffer 1983; Tsui et al. 1995). One very general line of reasoning would be that more general aggregate features may both have an influence per se, and have a dynamic relationship with individual demographic features and structural factors, meaning that different individual backgrounds will play out differently in different aggregate contexts. Having a ministry dominated by a cohort of very experienced civil servants may produce different norms and decisions than one dominated by a less experienced cohort or with a more even tenure distribution. Or having a ministry dominated by jurists will provide a different context and dynamic for civil servants who are jurists than for those who are social scientists.

Concerning *individual demographic variables*, type of higher educational background may be significant. Given the content of their education and the tasks they perform in the civil service, one would expect political scientists and economists to be more involved in working and project groups, while jurists would tend to score lower on collegial cross-border activities, because of their rule-oriented education and the fact that they tend to handle ‘narrow’ individual cases (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009b). Another general expectation would be that women would be less involved in cross-border activities, based on the observation that women in organizational settings lack access to emergent interaction networks (O’Leary and Ickovics 1992). This may reflect both gender ‘exclusiveness’ and the fact that women are underrepresented in leadership positions, and have generally shorter tenure. Further, civil servants with long tenure would be expected to participate more in cross-border activities, as their experience and contacts would give them the wherewithal to do so (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009b).

Concerning the *aggregate demographic variables* used, one would expect ministries with a large share of civil servants with long tenure to use cross-border activities more extensively than ministries with less experienced civil servants, because the greater number of contacts associated with longer individual tenure would be reflected in a broader collective contact pattern.

Data sources and method

The analysis draws on two types of data sets. The first is a comprehensive survey conducted among civil servants with at least 1 year of tenure in all 18 ministries. The

survey was conducted in 2006, and included 1846 respondents, ranging from 9 in the Prime Minister's Office to 284 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Christensen and Læg Reid 2008, 2009b). The response rate was 67 %. The survey contains information about individual demographic and structural variables and participation patterns, including participation in work and project groups and attitudes on a wide range of issues. To obtain descriptive statistics over time, we used comparable surveys from 1976, 1986 and 1996. Our explanatory analysis is based on the 2006 survey and examines how ministry-level variables affect participation in coordination initiatives. The data from the civil servant survey are thus linked to data on ministerial characteristics, including ministry size and 'collective experience'.

The analysis distinguishes between three types of cross-border collegial activities. These three dependent variables are measured using a single survey question, which asked civil servants whether they had participated in various types of work-group/projects during the last 12 months. The first variable deals with participation in project groups *within* ministries. These groups have participants from different divisions and teams inside the ministries, and their purpose is to increase collaboration and coordination in establishing or implementing regulations and policies. The second variable deals with vertical coordination. Here the respondents were asked to identify participation in projects or groups with participants from the sub-ministry level, i.e. agencies. This variable deals with collaboration and coordination across borders, between organizations and levels. The last variable maps participation in work and project groups *between* ministries. This variable was intended as a rough indicator of horizontal coordination initiatives.

The scope and trajectories of cross-border activities

Table 1 shows, first, that cross-border activity, involving participating in inter-organizational working groups, is high in the Norwegian central government. The scope of such activity is non-trivial. The hierarchy is to a great extent supplemented by such collegial bodies.

Second, this is not a new phenomenon. Collegial working groups have existed for the entire period for which we have data. These activities were stepped up between 1976 and 1986, before NPM was introduced in Norway, and have since remained stable at a high level. Our expectation that these kinds of cross-border activity would have increased in recent years owing to post-NPM reform initiatives is not supported by these data. Rather than radical pendulum shifts we see gradual change. It seems to

Table 1 Ministerial civil servants participating in different working groups and project groups during the last year. 1976, 1986, 1996, 2006. Percentage

	1976	1986	1996	2006
Within own ministry	58	71	75	75
Across ministries	40	53	58	54
With subordinate bodies and agencies	–	–	42	40
N	759	1,171	1,393	1,768

be an organizational form and a participation pattern that is rather resilient to reform initiatives, whether NPM or post-NPM. This is also quite remarkable since one would have thought that increasing the complexity of policy would lead to more collegial contact. On the other hand, there might also be increasing attention and capacity problems, having aggregate effects.

Third, internal groups working across the divisions and units within their own ministry are the most common and the least demanding. Two-thirds of the civil servants surveyed had participated in such collegial bodies over the last year, but there was also a high level of cross-border activity across ministries. More than half of the civil servants had participated in such activities, indicating that the strong siloization and departmentalization in the central government brought about by specialization by task or sector has been partly compensated for by high levels of activity in horizontal working groups and project groups crossing ministerial boundaries. There is also a rather high level of collegial bodies at the vertical level, bringing together ministerial civil servants and their colleagues in subordinate agencies and bodies. This shows ministerial capacity and structural preconditions for interaction (Egeberg 2003).

Explaining cross-border participation

We now turn from describing trends over time, to explaining variation within and between two levels—the civil servants and the ministries—at one particular time. The 2006 survey data on the civil servants are embedded within the ministries, in the sense that the characteristics of the latter may influence the characteristics of the former. Among the many methods of analyzing such data structures, *multilevel analysis* has a lot to be said for it (Steenbergen and Jones 2002; Hox 2002; Snijders and Bosker 2004).

We started out by estimating ‘empty’ (also called ‘unconditional’ or ‘null’) models to determine the extent of variance between the ministries. To do so, we studied the size of the variance components, their significance (using Likelihood Ratio tests) and intra-class correlations (ICCs). We then added explanatory variables at both the civil servant and the ministerial level. All the independent variables were included in the analysis, but to save space, the tables only show the significant effects in the final models. In the modelling process we postponed the (collective) testing of educational background to very last. Rather than focusing on the particular effects of each educational background we used a collective test (the LR-test, once again) to clarify whether educational background *as a general phenomenon* affects participation. Four groups were identified.

The first step in the analysis was to determine whether the level of participation varied significantly across ministries. Table 2 depicts the result in the form of separate multi-level logistic regression models for each of the three dependent variables. The empty model includes no predictors at either level, but it provides an overall estimate of the likelihood of participation in different project groups between ministries.

As we can see from the first column in Table 2, the predicted logit for having participated in internal work groups for a typical ministry is 1.228. The estimated odds of such participation is $\exp(1.228)=3.41$. Thus the estimated probability of

Table 2 Multi-level empty logistical regressions: participation in three types of ministry project groups

	Internal project group participation	Project groups with subordinate bodies	Inter-ministry project group participation
Fixed effects			
Coefficient	1.228 ^a	-0.404 ^a	0.315 ^a
Odds ratio	3.42	0.67	1.37
Level-2 variance	0.168	0.213	0.243
Chi-square (p)	19.41 ^a	53.03 ^a	72.58 ^a
Intra-class correlation	0.049	0.061	0.069
Plausible value range (95 %)			
Lower	0.60	0.21	0.34
Mean	0.77	0.40	0.58
Upper	0.88	0.62	0.78
N-level 1	1,561	1,539	1,542
N-level 2	18	18	18

Random-effects with odds ratios, intra-class correlations, LR-test and plausible value ranges. Table entries are full maximum likelihood estimates with non-robust standard errors ^a Significant at the 0.00 level

participation for the respondents is 77 % (i.e. $3.41/(1+3.41) * 100=77$). This corresponds well with the overall proportion of civil servants in the survey who answered that they actually had participated in internal project groups (75 %). We further estimate that 95 % of the ministries have a so-called *plausible value range* for internal project group participation of between 60 and 88 %.

Looking at the other two dependent variables we see that the estimated variation between ministries is even larger. Participation in project groups across ministries is estimated to vary between 34 and 78 %. Hence, some ministries have a considerable percentage of respondents who did participate in internal project groups, while other ministries do not. Furthermore, the results show significant variability around the intercept for the ministries on all three dependent variables (ministry-level variance for internal project group participation is 0.168, for sub-unit project group participation 0.213 and for cross-ministry project group participation 0.243.)

The intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) estimates the proportion of variance at the ministry level relative to overall variance (see Snijders and Bosker 2004 for ICCs for dichotomous outcomes). Since the dependent variables are measured at individual level (civil servant level) this level should also have the highest ICC score (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 231). And indeed it does. Nonetheless, the ministries account for between 5 and 6.9 % of the total variation in the three indicators. For participation in internal project groups the ICC is about 5 %, for inter-ministerial project group participation it is 6.9 %, and for participation in project groups that include participants from sub-units it is 6.1 %. Even if the ICCs are not very high, ignoring them would lead to erroneous conclusions, statistically as well as empirically.

The importance of organizational level variables is largest for participation in inter-organizational working groups and project groups that transcend ministerial boundaries both horizontally and vertically.

The subsequent step in the analysis is to include the explanatory variables in the model. Since there are only two such variables at the ministry level, and in order to save space, we present the effects for all the explanatory variables simultaneously (Table 3). As already mentioned, we present only the effects that, after an elaborate testing process, turned out to be significant. In the last model we tested for possible educational background effects. The entries in the tables are the full maximum likelihood estimates.

The table shows that at the civil servant level two explanatory variables stand out as especially important for participation in all three types of project

Table 3 Multi-level regressions: participation in three types of project group

	Internal project group		Project groups with subordinate bodies		Inter-ministerial project groups	
	Final model	Educational background effects	Final model	Educational background effects	Final model	Educational background effects
Fixed effects						
Constant	0.89 ^a	0.79 ^b	-0.74 ^a	-0.83 ^a	-1.90	-2.03 ^b
Civil-servant effects						
Structural features:						
Leadership position						
Coordination					0.52 ^b	0.52 ^c
Planning and development	0.60 ^b	0.56 ^b	0.66 ^a	0.67 ^a	0.71 ^b	0.71 ^b
Demographic features:						
Tenure						
Gender	0.36 ^b	0.32 ^c	0.24 ^b	0.24 ^c	0.26 ^b	0.25
Jurists		-0.01		0.18		0.25
Economists		0.21		0.12		0.16
Social scientists		0.40		0.12		0.50
Ministry effects						
Ministry size					-0.002 ^a	-0.002 ^b
Ministry tenure					0.03 ^b	0.03 ^b
Variance components						
Ministry level	0.138	0.161	0.187	0.197	0.014	0.016
Deviance compared to previous model	27.22 ^a	7.43 ^a	37.36 ^a	1.55	66.50 ^a	12.47 ^b
N civil servant level	1,561	1,561	1,539	1,539	1,542	1,542
N ministry level	18	18	18	18	18	18

Table entries are full maximum likelihood estimates

^a Significant at the .00 level. ^b Significant at the .05 level. ^c Significant at the .10 level

group: being male and participating in policy development and planning. Both have a much higher probability than other civil servants of taking part in project groups. The odds of participating in internal project groups was 43 % (that is $\exp(0.36)=1.43$) higher for male civil servants than their female counterparts (among those not having reporting as their main task and in the educational group 'others').

The odds that civil servants with policy development and planning as their main task participate in project groups is 80 % higher than for those with other tasks. This group stands out as important participants in all three types of project groups. Apart from these two variables all others fail to reach significance for the first two types of project group participation. It should come as no surprise that civil servants engaged in coordination activities participate more in inter-ministry project groups than other civil servants. Coordinators have an odds ratio of 1.68 for participation in inter-ministry project groups. There is a 68 % increase in the odds of participating in these groups for coordinators compared to civil servants with other job descriptions (where reporting is not their main task).

Also education does make a difference. From the second column of the Table we see that educational background has a significant effect for internal project group participation and for cross-ministry project groups, although not for participation in sub-unit project-groups. In the two former groups social scientists appear to be the most active participants.

Turning to the organizational level the analysis depicts that the two ministry-related explanatory variables in our model—*ministry size* and *institutional/ministry tenure*—are important for inter-ministry project-group participation, but not for the other two types of participation. A high number of employees reduces the probability of individual civil servants participating in inter-ministry project groups, while institutional experience increases the odds of such participation.

Compared to the empty model, the ministry-level variance components show small reductions for internal and sub-unit project-group participation. This is as expected given the small degree of freedom at Level 2. Hence, much of the variance at the ministerial level is still unaccounted for when it comes to these two types of project group participation. However, if we look at the ministry-level variance components for inter-ministry project-group participation we see that the difference between the empty model and the model with the two ministry-level explanatory variables is $0.243-0.014=0.229$. Relative to the size of the variance in the empty model this is a reduction of $0.229/0.243=0.942$. This means that civil-servant and ministry-level variables combined explain no less than 94 % of the ministry-level variance in inter-ministry project group participation.

Ministries do make a difference for participation in different types of work and project groups. Male civil servants working in the fields of planning and policy development are overrepresented in all three forms of project group. At the ministerial level, size and institutional experience seem to be important for inter-ministry project group participation. However, when it comes to ministry-based coordination, the two ministry-level variables remain unimportant. The analysis also suggests that educational background plays a role for internal- and cross-ministry project group participation, although not for participation in project groups with sub-units.

Discussion

Our analysis shows that structural and demographic features are important both at the individual and at the organizational level. Starting with the effects of individual structural variables, it is rather surprising that our expectation that leaders would participate more is not fulfilled. One explanation for this may be that there are many groups and they are of varying importance, so only some of them may attract leaders. The counter-argument is that inter-ministerial groups would, relatively speaking, attract more leaders than other types, which is not the case. Another explanation is that administrative leaders increasingly have capacity problems, reflected in the finding of the surveys that the contact pattern of leaders has become more exclusive, meaning that executive officers are increasingly involved in such collegial participation (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009b). A third explanation may be that leaders may have other fora to interact in than project and working groups, which may be primarily for actors lower down in the hierarchy.

Further we find, mostly as expected, that formal tasks matter, because having coordinative or planning/development tasks is connected with more participation. But why should having planning/development tasks have more impact overall than having coordinative tasks? One reason may be that planning/development is in reality a broader task.

What about participation and structural organizational variables? Here our expectations were rather divided, but the finding was that civil servants from larger ministries participate less in inter-ministerial working and project groups. As indicated, this may have something to do with smaller ministries having to engage a relatively higher share of civil servants in collegial coordinative efforts, but large ministries may also be more specialized concerning cross-border activities, so fewer participants may participate more frequently. A factor may also be, as indicated, that smaller ministries are at a disadvantage concerning the pattern of influence in the civil service and must use more resources and efforts to counter the influence of larger ministries (Jacobsen 1965).

Concerning the individual variables, we did not find as expected that long tenure results in more participation, reflecting that a career factor where civil servants build up a close network of contacts is of less importance than the type of tasks in which they are engaged. A long career may also further specialization, which would decrease the need for cross-border participation.

According to our expectations, men score higher than women on collegial participation. Since leadership position is not connected to participation, this probably does not have to do with men being overrepresented in leadership positions. Tasks and profession are, however, linked to participation and there are some differences between men and women in their tasks and professional profiles that might affect this result. Over time there has been a marked feminization of central government administration. From 1976 to 2006 the relative number of women at executive officer level and above in the ministries increased from 15 to 48 % (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009b), so the explanation is probably not that women are underrepresented in central government. Whether this reflects a male-biased network and identity, indicating that men recruit men into these bodies, is not easy to discern from these data.

Education had an overall effect on participation, with social scientists scoring highest. This may reflect differences in tasks between educational groups, with social

scientists being seen as more competent at performing cross-border related tasks, but it may also reflect differences in the content of their education, with social scientists trained to take into account a broader set of decision-making premises in their consequence-oriented thinking (Christensen and Lægreid 1998).

Ministerial tenure, an organizational variable, showed, as expected, that ministries with an 'older' tenure profile engage more in cross-border activities. Since tenure as an individual variable does not lead to more participation, the share of civil servants is obviously more crucial. Interestingly, this would seem to indicate that a career approach is of less value for explaining participation than a generational one (Christensen and Lægreid 2009b). We showed in Table 3 that cross-border collegial activities were less frequent in the civil service 20–30 years ago.

This article builds on the assumption that coordination is a core activity in these inter-organizational collegial bodies in central government. Other studies show that participation in project and working groups across ministerial level tend to have a positive effect both vertically and horizontally on perceived coordination among civil servants (Christensen and Lægreid 2008). Such participation definitely seem to enhance coordination within central government both vertically and horizontally.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article is to deepen our understanding of how collegial bodies in civil service is working, i.e. what is characterizing these forms primarily concerning variation in participation. This insight has an applied potential, because it could be used by the executive leadership in designing and redesigning these units to further collective goals.

We have shown first, that the hierarchical organization of Norwegian ministries to a large extent has been supplemented by, collegial cross-border project and working groups. This phenomenon is not recent but goes back at least 30 years and, despite some growth from the 1970s to 2006, does not seem to have been significantly affected by the NPM or post-NPM reform movements, which appears to be a paradox. NPM as such seems to have fragmented the civil service in many countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004), which would probably decrease the use of collegial bodies, and the efforts of post-NPM to increase coordination have been seen as a partial remedy to this situation (Christensen and Lægreid 2009b). But it is also worth mentioning that a modern civil service also has roles and tasks that are so specialized that they have a low potential for interaction (Page 2005).

We paint a picture of cross-border collegial activities as a fundamental feature of formal organizations which goes beyond contemporary administrative reforms. These findings are more in line with what we would expect if we look at administrative reforms as compounded and organizational changes and as a layering process, where new generations of reforms add complexity in structure (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

Second, both individual and organizational features influence the degree of participation in such collegial bodies. One of the main contributions of this paper is our analysis which reveals the combined effects of individual and organizational features on cross-border activities. The civil servants' behaviour is influenced by the organization to which they belong as well as by their individual features. The effects of

organizational-level features are, however, more important for participation in inter-ministerial project groups than in internal or vertical sector-specific project groups. That said, individual features are more important than organizational. Especially individual demographic features seem to be important.

The conclusion is that participation in cross-border collegial activities cannot only be traced back either to a structural-instrumental or to a demographic perspective. There is obviously no one-factor explanation and we need to use a mixed-perspective approach to understand these activities and their effects. What we are facing is not ‘individuals in organizations’ or ‘organizations of individuals’ but the mutual relationship between individuals and organizations (cf. Læg Reid and Olsen 1978).

One lesson is that if one wants to encourage more collaborative working practices, one size does not fit all (Page 2005). Collegial working groups are not a panacea that will solve all problems everywhere and at all times. This organizational form is not appropriate in all circumstances or suitable for all public-sector activities but can, under specific conditions, usefully supplement traditional hierarchical organizations and thus represents a neo-Weberian feature of modern central government organizations (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

There are contradictory structural and demographic forces pulling in different directions when it comes to engaging in cross-border collegial activities. Rather than looking at hierarchy and collegial bodies as alternative and competing organizational forms, we should understand them as supplementing and complementing other organizational modes (Olsen 2009). Network as a coordination mechanism supplements the traditional hierarchy rather than replacing it (Verhoest et al. 2007; Bouckaert et al. 2010). It is more a question of how they co-exist in a complex and hybrid combination—and how they may be traded-off and balanced against each other—than of replacing one form with another. Networks and hierarchy co-exist and represent compound systems of mixed political orders (Olsen 2007). Blending different forms of government and organizations in this way makes administrative systems robust and legitimate.

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