

**The whole-of-government approach – regulation, performance,  
and public-sector reform**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper we first discuss “whole-of-government” initiatives as a reaction to the negative effects of NPM reforms such as structural devolution, performance management, and “single-purpose organizations.” Second, we examine what is meant by a “whole-of-government” approach. Third, we discuss how we might interpret the concept of whole-of-government in analytical terms and the various empirical manifestations of this in different countries and within the same country. We contrast a structural approach with a cultural perspective, but also draw on a myth-based perspective. Fourth, we address the dynamics of whole-of-government measures. Fifth, we focus on what is typical for this approach as a way of regulating performance, and what the effects on performance might be, i.e. how might the approach work in practice? Finally we discuss some lessons from the whole-of-government movement. Although the paper is primarily a conceptual and explorative one, it uses examples from Australia, New Zealand, and some other countries to illustrate the points it makes.

## **Introduction.**

In the second generation of modern public-sector reforms – those following two decades of New Public Management reforms – there has been a change of emphasis away from structural devolution, disaggregation, and single-purpose organizations and towards a whole-of-government (WOG) approach (Christensen and Lægreid 2006b). This trend is most evident in the Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, once seen as the trail-blazers of NPM, but it is also occurring in other countries more reluctant to implement NPM.

One pertinent issue is whether this development is really new, since it raises the old question of coordination, and indeed, elements of it have been observable in the UK and Canada for some time. Nevertheless, it would probably be correct to say that the approach has been revitalized and become more comprehensive (Halligan 2005a:29). Another issue is whether the WOG approach should be seen as breaking with the past, i.e. transforming the main features of NPM, or whether it should instead be construed as re-balancing the NPM system without changing it in any fundamental way (Christensen and Yesilkagit 2006, Gregory 2006, Halligan 2006).

In this paper we will first outline some of the main arguments for WOG initiatives, which constitute a reaction to negative experiences with NPM reforms such as structural devolution, performance management, and “single-purpose organizations.” Second, we will discuss what the WOG approach is. Like many reform-related concepts, it can be defined in different analytical ways, and also empirically can mean different things in different countries or even within the same country. The spectrum ranges from increased horizontal coordination between different policy areas in the central administrative apparatus to increased inter-governmental vertical coordination between ministries and agencies and coordination of service delivery from below as ways to regulate and enhance performance, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Third, we will discuss possible analytical interpretations of the concept of WOG and how this is manifested in empirical variations within and between countries. A structural approach, emphasizing the importance of reorganizing or restructuring, will be contrasted with a cultural perspective, where few structural changes are expected and the focus is instead on value-based coordination or smart practice, characterized by more integrated public entities that work better together. In addition we also look at WOG from

a myth-based perspective, which interprets new reform concepts as myths, symbols, or fashions. Fourth, using these analytical perspectives, we will discuss the dynamics of WOG measures. Fifth, we will focus on what is typical for this approach as a means of performance regulation and discuss what might be the practical effects of this approach on performance. We will conclude the paper by drawing some lessons from the WOG movement.

The paper is primarily a conceptual explorative one, but it also draws on a set of new empirical data gathered in Australia and New Zealand by way of example. The data base consists of public documents, interviews with key political and managerial executives, and existing scholarly literature on the field. We also use studies and examples from other relevant countries, such as the UK and Canada which have been frontrunners in addressing WOG initiatives. In the UK they were introduced under the label “joined-up government,” while in Canada there was a strong emphasis on “horizontalism.” Examples will also be used from Norway, a latecomer to the WOG movement.

### **Why whole-of-government initiatives?**

There are many different reasons or motives for the emergence of WOG -- a movement driven by both external and internal forces. First, it can be seen as a reaction to the “silozation” or “pillarization” of the public sector that seems to be typical for the NPM reforms (Gregory 2006, Pollitt 2003a). The principle of “single-purpose organizations,” with many specialized and non-overlapping roles and functions, may have produced too much fragmentation, self-centered authorities, and lack of cooperation and coordination, hence hampering effectiveness and efficiency (Boston and Eicbaum 2005: 21, New Zealand Government 2002).

Second, structural devolution, which was carried out over a long period of time in many countries and which entailed transferring authority from the central political-administrative level to regulatory agencies, service-producing agencies, or state-owned companies, may have produced disadvantages of other kinds (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). The effect has been to deprive the political and administrative leadership of levers of control and of influence and information, raising questions of accountability and capacity. WOG measures, particularly ones involving a reassertion of the center, reflect the paradox that political executives are more frequently being blamed when things go wrong,

even though they actually sought to avoid blame through devolution (Hood 2002, Hood and Rothstein 2001). Not surprisingly, they consider that being criticized and embarrassed politically while at the same time being deprived of influence and information is a bad combination (see Brunsson 1989).

Third, for a number of reasons the world is perceived as increasingly insecure and dangerous. The concerns raised by terrorist attacks have had important repercussions for public-sector reforms in the US, the UK, and Australia (Halligan and Adams 2004: 85-86, Kettl 2003), while New Zealand is concerned about bio-security (Gregory 2006). More and more countries are concerned about crises, disasters, and threats, such as natural disasters, like tsunamis, or pandemics, like SARS or bird flu . This has led to a tightening-up of government, or what some Australians refer to as a “thinking up and out” strategy, which includes whole-of-government measures. The new threat of terrorism has underlined the importance of governments’ avoiding contradictory outcomes and ensuring that information is shared between agencies (Hammond 2004).

Fourth, WOG is seen by some as an efficiency measure and an answer to budgetary pressure, contradictory though that may sound following the introduction of organized fragmentation in the name of efficiency under NPM. A vertical tightening of the system combined with increased horizontal collaboration may now be seen as more efficient than a more fragmented system, with a focus mainly on efficiency in service delivery. The initiative in New Zealand to establish a kind of super-monitoring unit is an example of this view.

Adding to this, there has been progress in ICT technology, which reduces the cost of horizontal communication and coordination; the influence of community expectation and consumerism means that citizens want services that better meet their needs; and there has been a shift of intellectual attention away from atomistic models towards a greater emphasis on holistic approaches (Mulgan 2005).

It is also important to underline that WOG has a strong political dimension. When “joined-up government” was introduced by the New Labour administration in the UK it was used as a symbol to contrast the new government’s approach with the fragmentizing policies of its predecessors and to demonstrate a response to the fear of “hollowing out” British central government (Pollitt 2003b). Some of the same political arguments can be seen in New Zealand and Australia.

## **What is “whole-of-government”?**

In contrast to the NPM reforms, which were dominated by the logic of economics, a second generation of reforms initially labeled “joined-up government” (JUG) and later known as “whole-of- government” was launched. This approach sought to apply a more holistic strategy, using insights from the other social sciences, rather than just economics (Bogdanor 2005). These new reform efforts can in some ways be seen as a combination of path-dependency and negative feedback in the most radical NPM countries such as the UK, New Zealand, and Australia (Perry 6 2004). As a response to the increased fragmentation caused by previous reform programs, these countries adopted coordination and integration strategies. The slogans “joined-up-government” and “whole-of-government” provided new labels for the old doctrine of coordination in the study of public administration (Hood 2005). Adding to the issue of coordination, the problem of integration was a main concern behind these reform initiatives (Mulgan 2005). While the terms are new, they represent old problems. Attempts to coordinate government policy-making and service delivery across organizational boundaries are not a new phenomenon (Ling 2002, Richards and Kavanagh 2000).

The concept of JUG was first introduced by the Blair government in 1997 and a main aim was to get a better grip on the “wicked” issues straddling the boundaries of public-sector organizations, administrative levels, and policy areas. It became one of the principal themes in the modernization program of Tony Blair’s New Labour administration. JUG was presented as the opposite of “departmentalism,” tunnel vision, and “vertical silos.” In the UK JUG has found its strongest expression at the local level, where it encourages various kinds of partnerships (Stoker 2005). Another special focus of JUG activities has been the assertion of authority in the form of special coordinators and clearance systems.

It is, however, not entirely clear what JUG means (Pollitt 2003). Some authors make a distinction between JUG and holistic government (Perry 6 2005), but we will use the term rather loosely, not drawing a clear distinction between JUG and WOG concepts.

The terms have emerged as fashionable slogans rather than precise scientific concepts and in practice they are often used more or less as synonyms.<sup>1</sup>

Some common features can be identified. The phrase JUG denotes the aspiration to achieve horizontal and vertical coordination in order to eliminate situations in which different policies undermine each other, to make better use of scarce resources, to create synergies by bringing together different stakeholders in a particular policy area, and to offer citizens seamless rather than fragmented access to services (Pollitt 2003a). The overlap with the WOG concept is obvious. The *Connecting Government Report* defines WOG in the Australian Public Service thus: “Whole-of-government denotes public services agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal or informal. They can focus on policy development, program management, and service delivery.”

The scope of WOG is pretty broad. One can distinguish between WOG *policymaking* and WOG *implementation*, between *horizontal linkages* and *vertical linkages*, and the targets for WOG initiatives can be a group, a locality, or a policy sector (see Pollitt 2003a). WOG activities may span any or all levels of government and also involve groups outside government. It is about joining up at the top, but also about joining up at the base, enhancing local level integration, and it is involving public-private partnerships.

The concept also has a big basket of prescriptions for best practice. Pollitt distinguishes between 17 different ways of promoting JUG policymaking and implementation, concentrating on inputs and processes such as culture and philosophy, on new ways of working and of developing policies and delivering services, and on new accountability and incentive mechanisms. The WOG concept does not represent a coherent set of ideas and tools but can best be seen as an umbrella term describing a group of responses to the problem of increased fragmentation of the public sector and public services and a wish to increase coordination (see Ling 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> There are also numerous other terms describing the challenge of improving coordination across policy sectors and service delivery, such as networked government, connected government, cross-cutting policy, horizontal management and partnerships.

## **The whole-of-government approach – analytical interpretations and empirical manifestations.**

There are various frameworks in the literature that can be used to classify the WOG approach and that contribute to the development of a theory about what a WOG approach is (Ling 2002, Lindquist 2002, Steward 2002). However, there is no overriding theory that captures all the key aspects (Management Advisory Committee 2004). We do not believe in single-factor explanations and we will therefore examine the WOG approach from a structural, a cultural, and a myth-based perspective (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001).

From a *structural or instrumental perspective* the WOG approach may generally be seen as conscious organizational design or reorganization (see Egeberg 2003). The perspective is based on the assumption that political and administrative leaders use the structural design of public entities as instruments to fulfil public goals, which in the case of WOG means getting government organizations to work better together. Major preconditions for this are that the leaders have a relatively large degree of control over change or reform processes and that they score high on rational calculation, meaning that their organizational or means-end thinking is generally not ambiguous (Dahl and Lindblom 1953), i. e. they know how to organize for WOG.

There are two major versions of the instrumental perspective: a hierarchical one and a negotiational one (Allison 1971, March and Olsen 1983). According to the hierarchical version, the political and administrative leadership is homogeneous and in agreement about the design and redesign of public organizations. In other words, there is only one unambiguous and homogeneous source of control and rational calculation. The important thing is not so much for the political-administrative leadership to have perfect or complete control or insight into every problem, solution, and effect, but rather, in accordance with a bounded rationality approach (March and Simon 1958, Simon 1957), for it to influence decision-making behavior in a substantial way by controlling design processes and consciously designing the structure of public organizations.

So what WOG measures would the hierarchical version of the instrumental perspective expect to be implemented? The challenge is to develop supportive structures for shared frameworks. One option is to adopt a rather aggressive top-down style in implementing WOG initiatives, which was what the Blair government did in the UK (Stoker 2005). Another option is a strengthening or reassertion of the center. This could

have both a vertical and a horizontal dimension, whereby the vertical one would entail controlling more subordinate bodies, while the horizontal one would be concerned with getting the different central ministries and specialized agencies to work better together, both potential instruments in a WOG approach. The UK has been a leader in strengthening the role of central government, establishing structures such as strategic units, reviews, and public service agreements. Labour's first move towards JUG was the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 and the Strategic Communication Unit one year later (Kavanagh and Richards 2001). Both the UK and New Zealand have a clear hierarchical component in their style of "joining-up" (Perry 6 2005). One interesting paradox in the UK is that the Labour government has tried to improve service delivery by enhancing its central controlling mechanisms while at the same time continuing to argue for more autonomy for the officials charged with delivering services (Richards and Smith 2006).

The hierarchical strengthening of the center might imply a stronger PM's office, in both a political and an administrative respect, as seen in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. It might also imply tightening up financial management and strengthening governance and accountability regimes, as is the case in Canada (Aucoin 2006).

Likewise, the integration achieved through Centerlink<sup>2</sup> in Australia can be seen as a reaction to previous reforms and as implying a stronger hierarchy. This runs counter to those features of NPM that attend to devolution and autonomy but might be more in line with strengthening the strategic approach. Measures like this are, however, primarily concerned with strengthening central political capacity or capability, potentially making subordinate agencies and companies less autonomous. Even though the PM's Office in Australia has been strengthened (Halligan and Adams 2004: 86) and the specialized agencies brought back under greater central control as prescribed by the Uhrig report (Bartos 2005, Halligan 2006), there has not been much major restructuring going on.

Another example of a hierarchical measure is the establishment by the PM/Cabinet of new organizational units, such as new cabinet/ministerial committees, inter-ministerial/inter-departmental or inter-agency collaborative units, inter-governmental councils, lead agency approach (indigenous people in Australia), circuit-breaker teams, super networks, task forces, cross-sectoral programs (increased ICT compatibility, for

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<sup>2</sup> Centerlink is a statutory authority established in 1997. Based on the idea of the integrated local service point Centrelink was founded to incorporate most of the federal government's benefits distribution in one organization offering a wide range of services from several departments.

example, see Halligan 2004: 12) or projects, tsars, etc. with the main purpose of getting government units to work better together (Gregory 2003 and 2006, Halligan and Adams 2004). In 2003, a new Cabinet Implementation Unit was established in the PM&C in Australia to support WOG activities. Although the central political-administrative leadership need not necessarily be directly involved, the task is to hierarchically design a system that increases the probability of collaborative or coordinated government.

Of particular importance is the emphasis placed by WOG on areas that cut across traditional boundaries. Under the label of horizontal management, the Canadian government launched such initiatives from the mid-1990s on in areas such as innovation, poverty, and climate change (Bakvis and Juillet 2004). Other examples of this were seen in Australia in 2002, where attempts were made to bring more coordination to such areas as national security, counter-terrorism, demographics, science, education, sustainable environment, energy, rural and regional development, transportation, and work and family life (Halligan and Adams 2004: 87-88). Creating coordinative structures inside existing central structures, increasing the strategic leadership role of the Cabinet, and focusing more on following up central decisions are typical hierarchical efforts in Australia (Halligan 2006). Another version of this could be when coordinative efforts are left with single ministries or departments, particularly the broader ones. Both these measures take it for granted that the hierarchical leadership must put pressure on the sectoral authorities to get them to collaborate and coordinate better.

Procedural efforts have also been made to enhance WOG initiatives. In New Zealand there is a stronger emphasis on effectiveness, broader long-term “ownership” interests and greater outcome focus in contrast to the more short-term and narrower “purchaser” efficiency and output focus that characterized the first generation of reforms (New Zealand Government 2002, Boston and Eichbaum 2005, Petrie and Wegger 2006).

The *negotiation version* of the instrumental perspective is based on heterogeneity, rather than on homogeneity, and on the notion that different actors are on the same hierarchical level and are equal players. The public apparatus is internally heterogeneous, with different units having different structures, roles, functions, and interests (March and Olsen 1983). There is also heterogeneity in relation to major stake-holders in the environment, including private actors. This means that we cannot take for granted that political and administrative leaders will hold the same attitudes or behave in the same way

towards public reform. There will be negotiation processes going on, where there will be winners or losers, consensus or log-rolling, where promises are accepted and given concerning future action and decisions (Cyert and March 1963). Compared with the hierarchical version, decisions will be modified with regard both to control, since negotiations must take place, and to rational calculation, since attitudes and organizational thinking will vary. Decisions on reforms, according to this version, may be somewhat more ambiguous than those taken under a hierarchical version, but may often have the advantage of enjoying greater legitimacy, since they involve more participants and the negotiation process is seen as more appropriate than a hierarchical command.

The WOG approach will necessarily have negotiative features, whether inside the cabinet, between ministries and departments involved in inter-sectoral task forces, programs or projects, or specialized agencies involved in collaborative service delivery, like in WOG reforms in New Zealand. Such negotiations could involve restructuring of portfolios or policy areas, for example through mergers aimed at bringing together several bodies and functions inside one new unit in order to strengthen collaboration and coordination. Alternatively, since cooperative structures are more the result of collegial coordination than hierarchical pressure, this goal could also be attained via looser but systematic collaborative efforts. WOG seems generally to be more about working pragmatically together than about formalized collaboration. This has especially been the case in Canada where working horizontally has been an issue of ongoing importance since the mid-1990s (Bakvis and Juliett 2004). Management of horizontal issues and initiatives has been promoted by choosing different horizontal projects followed by “lessons learned” and “how-to” guides on managing collaborative arrangements. One lesson is that departments working horizontally in the same policy area may well engage in competition and rivalry rather than cooperation (Bakvis and Juillet 2004).

Some collaborative efforts, as seen in Australia, are focused more on coordination from below, for example through one-stop shops aimed at delivering seamless service. This can be seen both as control from above (in this case by Centrelink), but also as a real local collaborative effort requiring autonomy from central control. A comparative study of service delivery organizations in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and the Netherlands concludes that procedural bureaucratic models are being superseded by network governance to cater for the WOG approach (Considine and Lewis 2003).

*A cultural-institutional perspective* sees the development of public organizations more as evolution than “revolution” and design (Selznick 1957). This process is characterized by a mutual adaptation to internal and external pressure, whereby every public organization eventually develops unique institutional or informal norms and values. The importance of path-dependency and historical trajectories and traditions is evident in public institutions (Krasner 1988). Institutional features will include norms connected to specialized targeting of certain groups, to professional competence or to types of function of tasks, what Thompson (1967) labels domain. Institutional leadership is supposed to help the transformation from organization to institution, or as March and Olsen (1989) put it, from aggregative to integrative features. Improving the adaptivity and flexibility of the civil service on the one hand and the sense of collectivity, shared values, and mutual trust among civil servants (OECD 2005) on the other hand involves a difficult trade-off between individualization and delegation. Balancing fragmentation and integration, individualization and common identity, and market pressure and cultural cohesion is a big challenge in public-sector reforms (Lægreid and Wise 2006).

When public organizations are exposed to reform processes, the reforms proposed must, according to a cultural perspective, go through a cultural compatibility test (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). The institutional leadership may have a double role in reforms. On the one hand, it will have to “administer the necessities of history” (March 1994), meaning being sensitive to cultural traditions and guarding historical paths. On the other hand, it will also be assigned the task of gradually changing cultural traditions in order to adapt to a new and changed environment and context. This endeavor may involve socialization, training, and manipulation of symbols aimed at changing the attitudes of the organization’s members.

Several features of the WOG approach can be understood using a cultural perspective. While structure receives significant attention, even more emphasis is given to the importance of cultural change for successful WOG systems. A central message is that structure is not enough to fulfil the goals of whole-of-government initiatives. Cultural change is also necessary, and processes and attitudes need to be addressed (Centre for Management and Policy Studies 2000). An overall feature is that the second wave of reforms is relatively less preoccupied with structural changes and more characterized by

evolutionary change resulting from conscious policy choices (Boston and Eichbaum 2005: 19-20).

Compared with the first one, the second generation of reforms focuses more on building a strong and unified sense of values, teambuilding, the involvement of participating organizations, trust, value-based management, collaboration, and improving the training and self-development of public servants (New Zealand Government 2002, Ling 2002, Lindquist 2002). There is a need to re-establish a “common ethic” and a “cohesive culture” in the public sector because of reported corrosion of loyalty and increasing mistrust (Norman 1995, Petrie and Webber 2006). What governments are seeking is a cultural shift in the state sector, and the argument is that there is much to be achieved by trying to build a common culture, collegiality, and shared understanding of norms and values, all of which are considered preconditions for working better across structural divisions. Or in the words of Peter Shergold (2004: 4), the Secretary at PM & C in Australia: “It affirms a commitment to join bureaucracy together, eschew departmentalism and embrace seamlessness.” He also stresses that “all agencies should be bound together by a single, distinctive ethos of public service” (pp. 5). The report of the Australian Management Advisory Committee, *Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia’s Priority Challenges* (2004), underlined the need to build a supportive Australian public-sector culture that encourages whole-of-government solutions by formulating value guidelines and codes of conduct, where the slogan is “working together.”

Leadership is considered critical for successful WOG initiatives. There has been increased activity in the form of leadership development programs and mentoring to develop shared leadership skills (OECD 2001). Australia has launched an integrated leadership strategy (Podger 2004) and the concept of “craftmanship” in leadership, focusing on collaboration, has been developed (Bardach 1998). In Australia there is a focus on connecting government through common cultural attitudes. Consulting other agencies may be seen as a cultural strategy in a joined-up government mode. One measure where the leadership plays an important role is good practice guidance and standard-setting. There is also more talk about developing a value-based system, of which collectivity is an increasingly important element. In addition, working cooperatively across structures is also about performance culture and innovative solutions (Shergold 2004).

Another cultural aspect is the increasing setting of standards that are supposed to influence professional practice in the public apparatus (see Ahrne and Brunsson 2004). The most typical cultural one is ethical standards, but there is also a growing use of standards in many other fields. In the *Review of the Centre* report (2002) in New Zealand this was formulated in the following way: “strengthening core public service capability, notably through a whole-of-government human resource framework based on good practice and policies, and broadening the State Service Commissioner’s mandate to lead on values and standards.” In the State Sector Amendment Act from 2004 the Commissioner was given a wider mandate to build capacity and to provide stronger leadership in setting and implementing standards across sectors and services (Gregory 2006). This could, of course, also be interpreted in terms of an instrumental perspective, not only a cultural one.

*A myth perspective* sees reforms and their main concepts mainly in terms of myths, symbols, and fashions (Christensen and Lægreid 2003). Accordingly, reforms are not only about instrumental, structural design and cultural compatibility, but also about the promotion of reform symbols and fashions, so that central actors, citizens, and the media come to take it for granted that certain reforms and reform concepts are unavoidable and will enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. These reform concepts often imitate practices in the private sector and are “sold” by private consulting firms and international reform entrepreneurs, like the OECD, primarily in order to increase the legitimacy of the political-administrative system and its leaders rather than to solve particular instrumental problems (Sahlin-Andersson 2001). Although it is often difficult to show their effects, they are widely assumed to have been successful.

According to this view, public leaders who manipulate reforms in this way will have to balance symbols and action to be successful (Brunsson 1989). “Window-dressing” is important, and pretending to act in a successful way while also gaining support by actually acting instrumentally is often beneficial for leaders. In such a perspective WOG is primarily a buzzword. It is not always easy to tell whether a reform concept is a myth or not. In some cases public leaders directly admit this, for various reasons. In others, their systematic use of certain value-infused concepts, slogans, and metaphors may provide clues. A further indicator is when they pretend to use solutions to solve problems that are more “invented” than real.

In a general way, it is not difficult to imagine that a WOG approach would have myth aspects. It is a slogan that readily brings to mind the idea of repairing and putting back together something that is broken, has fallen apart or become fragmented. In this sense its benefits are taken for granted and very few actors would dispute the advantages of an integrated governmental apparatus or of taking anything other than a wide and collaborative view.

What are some of the more specific examples of this concept as a myth? A rather cynical view of the whole-of-government approach in Australia would be that it is a fashion and that it suits political and most especially administrative leaders to be seen to be thinking big ideas. These actors think highly of themselves, have high salaries, and would like to make their mark on government and society. This reform concept fits well into that mission. One may ask, however, whether Australia really has such major coordination problems, compared to New Zealand, for example. If one doubts whether this is the case, then this concept would attain the status of a myth. Another aspect of the reforms in Australia that could be understood from a myth perspective is the concept of “value-based government,” which seems to have been imported and spread as a fad, but has now become more formalized - in the sense of being written and codified - than earlier. A third Australian reform initiative that is fundamentally rhetorical in its claims is the accrual output-based budgeting system (Carlin and Guthrie 2003).

Gregory (2006) sees the second-generation reforms in New Zealand and the WOG approach to some extent as rhetoric. There is a gap between talk and action that may be attributed to a certain weariness with structural reforms, to the fact that the civil service has taken NPM on board and adapted to it, and to a general move to the right politically. As a result, he sees the second generation of reforms as “treating the effects rather than the cause.” He also sees these symbolic features as a precondition for a more pragmatic approach to the second generation of reforms. Furthermore, public-private partnership is a new fashionable concept that has become a dominant slogan in the discourse about whole-of-government initiatives and has a strong rhetorical flavor (Wettenhall 2003).

## **The dynamics and potential effects of whole-of-government measures.**

One central question to ask is how well the different WOG measures fit together. Are they compatible or are there typical tensions and conflicts? May we see them as parts of a conscious overall strategy or as more independent and loosely coupled?

If we first look at some of the *structural or instrumental features* and the relationship between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the WOG measures, these dimensions may at first sight appear to be coordinated. Potentially, however, tension may arise between horizontal collaboration and the task of ensuring vertical accountability. Political leaders may wish to combine a strengthening of the center with increased horizontal coordination, and would use structural instruments, like collegial structures on different levels, to achieve that. Seen from this angle horizontal coordination is not based primarily on lower levels and on a voluntary component, but rather is part of a hierarchically defined coordination strategy that uses a combination of vertical and horizontal instruments. Administrative leaders may help political executives to achieve a more hands-on collaborative take on service delivery.

Overall, combining vertical and horizontal instruments may amount to trying to modify two typical NPM features at the same time, namely devolution and fragmentation. Halligan (2005b) stresses that the second generation of reforms in Australia combines horizontal coordination and recentralization: “The whole-of-government agenda also had a centralising element in that central agencies were driving policy directions or principles, either systematically or across agencies. The result was the tempering of devolution in some respects and the rebalancing of centre and line agencies” (pp.30).

But this double strategy may be difficult to implement in practice, for a number of reasons. For example, neither Australia nor New Zealand has made a clean break with the NPM system, but instead they are trying to combine it with WOG features. Such a multi-layered and complex system may create many tensions and conflicts. Australia has tried to keep some of the basic features of devolving responsibility to specialized agencies, while at the same time modifying these features with WOG initiatives. This may lead agencies to resist both the reassertion of the center and horizontal coordination. They may think that the incentives for adapting to the new measures are few and that they have too little in common with the other units they are expected to coordinate with. Specialized, rather independent agencies may generally be difficult to control and coordinate. Wettenhall

(2005: 89-91) sees a clear conflict between the WOG agenda as a broad reform instrument and the establishment of autonomy for a whole range of non-departmental public bodies.

As we have indicated, reassertion of the center may be seen as part of a WOG strategy. One reason for this is that a stronger center may be seen as a precondition for making the public apparatus work better together, both in a vertical and in a horizontal way. Vertically because the central capacity for control, planning, and acting increases, as do the instruments for vertical coordination. Horizontally, because there is more capacity to establish and control cross-sectoral units and collaborative efforts and more capacity to scrutinize specialized agencies. Increased capacity at the center also means that it is easier to handle and balance different considerations brought to the attention of the central political-administrative leadership.

But strengthening the center may also create tensions and conflicts. One such tension might arise from the challenge of balancing reassertion and devolution. How easy is it to strengthen the center and at the same time underscore that agencies and other subordinate bodies continue to enjoy a lot of autonomy? Will this create tension and confusion in role enactment and make subordinate bodies feel more insecure? And how will reassertion of the center influence intergovernmental relations? Will regional and local levels see this as increased hierarchical coordination and as strengthening their ability to implement policies and programs, or will they react negatively because they see it as undermining their authority and influence? Efforts at better coordination vertically towards indigenous people in Australia could be an example. A third aspect is how reassertion of the center should be brought about. Reorganizations like strengthening political resources rather than administrative ones, or strengthening the PM's office instead of other central ministries, departments or agencies, could generate conflicts. The strengthening of the Prime Minister's Office in Australia involving the appointment of more party political than administrative personnel may be construed as relieving the burden on administrative staff, but it may also potentially create tensions.

Increased horizontal coordination, as part of a WOG strategy, can, as mentioned, take many different forms. Seen from an instrumental perspective, there might be differences in how strongly the formalized collaborative efforts are. Establishing superior coordination bodies, either permanent or ad hoc, may have stronger effects on real coordination than softer efforts, but may also be seen as undesirable and threatening by

units that stand to lose status and position through such efforts. Horizontal coordinative efforts might make decision-making and service delivery too complex, particularly when sectoral organizations also have to attend to cross-sectoral bodies, raising accountability problems.

Efforts at horizontal collaboration might also be too broadly based. In other words, coordination may entail mixing together specialized sectoral considerations with those that overlap with others, when the former should really be kept separate. An example of this is the merger of three sectoral public organizations in Norway – the unemployment service, the national pension and insurance system, and the social services. The collaborative aim here is to avoid having clients pushed around between different sectoral authorities by creating one new organization and one local office to which clients can turn. However, since only about 15% of all clients need to have dealings with two or more of the sectoral organizations, the large and complex new organization is probably far too broad, because it includes components that have no relationship with each other and no common clients.

If we combine the instrumental and cultural perspectives, the crucial question raised by the WOG approach would be how to balance restructuring and cultural collaborative efforts, or how to combine them. Restructuring efforts may in some ways be necessary to strengthen the political and administrative leadership and its efforts at coordination and collaboration, but knowledge about the effects of these measures may be lacking, and cultural traditions inside sectoral or other specialized public organizations may result in cultural resistance to change, thus undermining the structural changes. Furthermore, professional groups may react negatively to restructuring, because they may fear that their culture, norms, and values will be weakened, and, what is more, that their influence may decrease in the new structure.

Looked at from a cultural angle, collaborative efforts aimed at developing common and collaborative cultures may seek to play down the importance of structural instruments, like, for example, the Australian practice of increasingly using value-based management and collaboration instead of contracts specifying in detail what different agencies should do. But cultural measures may also come up against implementation problems because of structural barriers. Formal structural constraints may be relatively stronger than cultural factors, so that collaborative efforts and so-called smart practice fall short of a more holistic perspective in practice.

An example of a rather ambitious WOG strategy is the broad one used by the Ministry of Social Development in New Zealand, which combines structural and cultural features. Structural measures have been introduced to reassert the center and bring policy development and service delivery back together again, with less fragmentation between organizational units, and to “stay structured around core businesses.” There has been a shift from a policy-specialized organization to a more multi-functional organization, and an outcome focus has been combined with an organic paradigm, whereby collaboration between internal organizational units and sectors is to be achieved through leadership efforts and teams. The collaborative efforts are being applied on the central level, among specialized agencies, and with private employers, with the aim of delivering coordinated and balanced services to different client groups.

The increased vertical specialization of the NPM reforms has in the second generation of reforms been countered by various measures representing a reassertion of the center or re-regulation (Christensen and Læg Reid 2006a). A reassertion of the center is most characteristic in the trail-blazing NPM countries New Zealand, Australia, and the UK. Coordination and coherence are being sought in public policy, and a more strategic government is being presented as a response to decentralization (Peters 2005). This development is partly due to concerns over the fragmentation, undermining of political control, and coordination and capacity problems that emerged from the first generation of NPM reforms (see Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). It includes the strengthening of central political and administrative capacity, the establishment of more scrutiny instruments and regulatory agencies, subjecting agencies to more control, etc. The former increase in horizontal specialization, which attended to non-overlapping roles and tasks, is now increasingly being countered by inter-sectoral programs and projects, and by networks and collaboration across institutions and functions that may increase the overall coordination of the system. A WOG approach is now deemed more appropriate than praising specialization and unambiguous roles, reflecting a reaction to the “siloization” or “pillarization” of the public sector that was typical of NPM. What we are seeing is a rebalancing or adjustment of the basic NPM model in a more centralized direction without any fundamental change.

## **Regulation, performance, and whole-of-government**

There is a growing focus on regulation inside government performed by a variety of public agencies that set standards and use different forms of performance management and compliance measures to control, scrutinize, and audit government organizations' work (Hood et al. 1999, James 2000, Power 1997). Regulation inside government addresses the ways in which government officials control the work of other bureaucrats using approaches such as oversight and mutuality. While the agencies may have more autonomy from the ministries, they also face an expansion in oversight from ex ante authorization to ex post audit and performance management systems (Hood et al. 1999, Christensen and Lægreid 2006a). The idea is for the ministries to exercise arms-length control using performance management—an emergent regulatory form within the public sector often linked to quasi-contractual arrangements in relations between agencies and ministries (Lægreid, Roness and Rubecksen 2006).

Administrative reforms at the central level have generally neglected cooperation across sectors. Major reform measures such as performance management, performance auditing, monitoring, and control have first and foremost been directed towards the vertical sector-based dimension in public administration. Other reform measures, such as structural devolution through the formation of state-owned companies and semi-autonomous regulatory agencies, have, however, enhanced fragmentation and challenged vertical coordination. As a result of these movements, horizontal coordination between sectors has become more difficult at the central level. One consequence is that it is difficult to establish cross-ministerial cooperation in policy areas (Fimreite and Lægreid 2005).

One answer to this development is to put greater emphasis on the collective goals of the government, to rebuild the capacity of central government, and to give stronger central political signals. By strengthening central bodies like the Australia Public Service Commission and the State Service Commission in New Zealand the government has tried to provide leadership across government organizations and set standards (such as ethical standards) for administrative policy and behavior.

Another NPM driver of WOG initiatives, and one that is relevant for the changing methods of regulation, is the development of “single-purpose organizations,” which has resulted in a more specialized and differentiated central administration (Christensen and Lægreid 2006b). This is expressed in the splitting up of the integrated organizational model

and the establishment of separate autonomous bodies for various purposes: ownership, control, regulation, policy advice, service production, and purchasing. This autonomization is a challenge for coordination both vertically within each sector and horizontally across sectors. The reason for this is that in such a fragmented system each organization is first and foremost responsible for its own activity. In a performance-management system it is assumed that the autonomous bodies have clear boundaries, precise goals, and results that may be clearly read and understood. Such a closed organizational system encounters problems within an administrative system that is facing increasingly widespread inter-organizational and cross-sectoral problems and challenges.

It has increasingly been realized that many societal problems, such as poverty and the environment, are typically cross-sectoral and cannot be solved solely in one specialized public organization. Thus there was clear evidence of the limits of the previous reform agenda (Mulgan 2005). NPM has been good at putting the emphasis on efficiency, but has fragmented the capacity of government to address “wicked problems” (Aucoin 2002). The first generation of reforms has worked against an integrated approach by limiting the capacity for coordination and collaboration, especially at the central level (Richards and Kavangh 2000, Weller et al. 1997). Evaluation is also focused more across sectors, like in Australia. Increased coordination is seen as resulting from devolution problems, agency specific goals, and a vertical focus in agencies and other sectoral authorities.

The development towards more autonomy and independence of government organizations may easily result in increased “negative coordination” (Mayntz and Scharpf 1975). The desire to coordinate is greater than the wish to be coordinated. In other words we are confronted with a coordination paradox, which assumes that all agree on the need for coordination, so long as it does not apply to their own organization (Lægreid and Serigstad 2006). One reason for this might be that the administrative policy instruments employed in recent years, such as performance management, finance management regulations, management dialogue, contracting, and a more precise specification of roles, have been particularly directed towards vertical coordination. Increased autonomy has coincided with increased internal control through performance management, which assumes extensive measurement and reporting of results to a superior authority. While performance management enhances coordination between the various levels of administration, increased structural autonomy pulls in the other direction (Fimreite and

Lægheid 2005). It is an open question whether vertical coordination has been strengthened overall, but what is clear is that the coordination measures are largely focused on the vertical dimension, ignoring the problems of joined-up government and WOG government issues. The consequence is that horizontal coordination is being challenged at the central level. The fact that each individual state body has been regarded as an autonomous organization has contributed to this (Brunsson and Sahlin-Anderson 2000). The process of increased autonomy has created new challenges for coordination as this takes place between administrative executives at different levels, and in particular between political and administrative executives.

In summary we may say that the central government apparatus is characterized by problems of inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial coordination. Executives tend to focus on their own sectors, thus contributing to horizontal fragmentation between policy areas. Many western countries are dominated by strongly specialized ministries, partly as a result of the ministerial responsibility principle. Performance management systems, ministerial responsibility, and a potentially clearer division between the different roles of the government strengthen this characteristic of central administration, leading to increased vertical administrative coordination within each ministerial sphere. But at the same time, this coordination is weakened through the transfer of functions to state-owned companies, government enterprises, and semi-autonomous agencies. Whether political coordination both within and between sectors is actually strengthened is an open question. The political focus on specific areas of responsibility is strong, and consequently the challenges of coordination across ministerial areas are considerable, also at the political level. The administrative reforms are propelled within individual sectors by strong sectoral ministers. In a period when problems increasingly traverse ministerial boundaries, this contributes to problems of horizontal coordination and triggers the need for WOG initiatives.

## **Conclusion.**

The whole-of-government approach has raised critical issues about public-sector performance. There is a tension between WOG initiatives and performance management systems (Pollitt 2003b). Performance management has encouraged individuals as well as organizations to meet their own performance targets and there has been a tendency towards some fragmentation of organizational forms. In contrast WOG aims to promote

cooperation, networks, and collaboration between organizations. Unless cross-cutting targets get equal status as organization-specific targets, WOG initiatives will have difficulty becoming a major tool.

JUG and WOG approaches have a strong positive flavor and are generally seen as a good thing. But it is also important to stress that the “silo mentalities” that these reform initiatives are supposed to attack exist for good reasons (Page 2005). Well-defined vertical and horizontal organizational boundaries should not only be seen as a symptom of obsolescent thinking (Pollitt 2003b). The division of labor and specialization is an inevitable feature of modern organizations, implying that JUG and WOG initiatives will be difficult to implement. Working horizontally is a very time- and resource-consuming activity (Bakvis and Juillet 2004).

The WOG approach also raises other difficulties, such as unintended risks, ambitious agendas, and uncontrolled consequences (Perry 6 et al 2002). Accountability and risk management is a central concern and a key question is how one can have WOG joint action, common standards and shared systems, on the one hand, and vertical accountability for individual agency performance on the other (Management Advisory Committee 2004). WOG tends not to clarify lines of accountability. The challenge is to balance better vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and responsiveness downwards (Ryan and Walsh 2004). One view is that the new set of reforms represented by WOG initiatives is partly a reaction to problems of control and accountability generated by the first generation of NPM reforms and that the new balance of control and autonomy opens up new accountability issues (Christensen and Lærgeld 2001). Another view is that accountability was actually already a problem in the old, more trust-based public administration systems and that NPM brought more unambiguous and transparent accountability instruments. According to this perspective, the second generation of reforms is simply fine-tuning or rebalancing this system (Halligan 2006, Gregory 2006).

One lesson is that if one wants to encourage more collaborative working practices, one size does not fit all (Page 2005). It is not a panacea that will solve all problems everywhere and at all times. WOG is a selective project that is not appropriate in all circumstances or suitable for all public-sector activities (Pollitt 2003a). A critical Canadian study of horizontal management recommended that horizontal arrangements should be

entered into only after careful thought and an estimate of the costs involved (Bakvis and Juillet 2004).

We have also revealed that countries have different approaches to a greater WOG orientation. There are contradictory forces pulling in different directions when it comes to adopting a WOG approach (Peters 1998, Management Advisory Committee 2004). On the one hand NPM reforms have pushed central government to decentralize decision-making. On the other hand, the center has been encouraged to strengthen its capacity to coordinate policy development and implementation. Several competing strategies have been advocated and implemented to enhance WOG systems, implying that the reform content has been more fluid and contested than might be inferred from the use of this rather homogeneous term (Ling 2002).

Another lesson is that high-level politics and changes in central government organizations are not necessarily the most important reform tool for promoting “whole-of-government” initiatives. WOG is to a great extent about lower-level politics and getting people on the ground in municipalities, regions, local government organizations, civil society organizations, and market-based organizations to work together. WOG needs cooperative effort and cannot easily be imposed from the top down (Pollitt 2003b).

A third lesson is that building a WOG system is a long-term project that takes time to implement. New skills, changes in organizational culture, and building mutual trust relations need patience. The role of a successful reform agent is to operate more as a gardener than as an engineer or an architect (see March and Olsen 1983).

It is also important to underline that WOG initiatives are far from being only a question of neutral administrative techniques. Accountability, legitimacy, power relations, and trust in government organizations are fundamentally political issues (Perry 6 2005). Even if governments set budgets, programs, and objectives that cross organizational boundaries, WOG activities might still be limited unless there are fundamental changes in accountability systems, dominant cultures, and structural arrangements.

The question is whether WOG will continue to be a strong reform movement or whether it will gradually fade away and be supplemented or replaced by new reform initiatives (Page 2005, Stoker 2005).. Seen from a symbolic or myth perspective this might easily be the case. In the 10-year period 1997-2006 we have seen a shift from “joined-up-government” to the “whole of-government” concept. In the UK “joined-up” government is

no longer so much in vogue and since the 2001 election it has been overshadowed by other reform concepts such as modernization, quality services, delivery, and multi-level-government.

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