Partnering for Success:
Inter-Organizational Coordination and the Older Workers Pilot Project Initiative

By Robyn Dalton
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec

Abstract

How is it that three labour market projects, each striving for the same objective, providing similar services and operating under comparable economic conditions could produce completely divergent outcomes? Canada's Older Worker Pilot Project Initiative (OWPPI) was a joint federal-provincial program introduced to reintegrate older displaced workers into employment. While the federal government set the parameters and provided the bulk of the funding, the provincial governments were responsible for overseeing projects' implementation. This was outsourced to organizations at the local level.

This study focuses on three projects in three different provinces: British Columbia, Newfoundland and Quebec. Despite their similarities, their results were distinct; one successful, one a failure, and one in the middle of the two. It argues that the key difference was the effectiveness of inter-organizational coordination that took place between the administrators at each level, from the federal to the provincial to the local. The relationship between the federal and provincial government in labour market policy is framed by a separate agreement with each province. This project explores the impact of that relationship on relations between project coordinators involved in the implementation of the OWPPI. It argues that the most successful project achieved its outcomes as a result of a strong working relationship between the provincial and local coordinators. The findings speak to the ability of the federal government to work in partnership with the provincial and local levels in an effort to address important policy problems such as Canada's ageing workforce.

Introduction

Inter-organizational coordination, broadly defined, is the act of ensuring that "two or more parties take one another into account for the purpose of bringing their activities into harmonious or reciprocal relation" (Kernaghan and Kuper, 1983: 13). It becomes particularly crucial when these parties are called upon to jointly administer a program. As a wide number of authors have observed, public tasks are rarely carried out by a single organization (deLeon and deLeon, 2002; O'Toole, 1983; Lundin, 2007; Herranz, 2007, to name a few). Multiple organizations, often from several different sectors, whether governmental or private, are involved in the implementation of programs intended to address societal problems. Once tasks are divided, each group must perform its responsibilities in a manner that helps or at the very least does not hinder others from doing the same. Such necessitates clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for each group, as well as an open channel of communication. Effective coordination allows for greater information and resource exchange. For Rethemeyer and Hatmaker (2008), organizations coordinate because no single group can sustain its operations or achieve its goals alone. Each needs some of the resources that can be offered by others, whether financial, political, human or knowledge-based.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on inter-organizational coordination by exploring its impact on program implementation. It is grounded in an empirical examination of Canada's Older Worker Pilot Project Initiative (OWPPI), a joint federal-provincial program introduced to reintegrate older displaced workers into employment. While the federal government set the parameters and provided the bulk of the funding, the provincial governments were responsible for overseeing projects' implementation.

This was outsourced to organizations at the local level. Looking at three different projects, implemented in three different provinces, it is argued that the variation in their levels of success is attributable to variations in their levels of inter-organizational coordination.

In Canada, the relationship between the federal and provincial governments in the field of labour market policy is framed by a separate agreement with each province for sharing powers and responsibilities in this area. The findings from this study illustrate the effect that such an asymmetrically decentralized system has on relations between public managers working at the federal, provincial and local levels. It is suggested that these arrangements merit closer attention, given their ultimate impact on the implementation outcomes of public programs.

The first section of the paper provides the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis by looking first to the literature on implementation and inter-organizational coordination. Following from this, the second section describes the research methodology. Details from the empirical cases under examination are then put forward. The final section summarizes the results of the investigation and concludes by providing lessons learned for policymakers and academics alike.

Inter-Organizational Coordination and Implementation: A Review of the Literature

Since it first surfaced as a field of study in the 1970s, implementation literature has undergone a significant evolution (deLeon and deLeon, 2002). While the first generation is described as a collection of case studies, resulting in the identification of over three hundred variables (Matland, 1995), the second generation addressed the need

for structure, and developed into two schools of thought: top-down and bottom up. For the first approach, the starting point of analysis is the authoritative decision that initiates policy action (Matland, 1995). Top-down studies of implementation are concerned with ensuring that decisions made by higher authorities are carried out as intended. According to this perspective, programs will succeed if met with sufficient economic resources and a clear mandate (Montjoy and O'Toole, 1979). Local level actors will conform to the commands from above provided sufficient authority is exerted. This approach is not appropriate to a comparison of different projects within the OWPPI. As Boismenu and Graefe (2000) point out, Canada's federal government has never been in a position of significant influence in the field of labour market policy. This is attributed to the fact that this jurisdiction is shared with the provincial governments, in addition to its declining financial commitments since the 1990s. The top-down approach, while having made a significant contribution to the field, is therefore not an appropriate model for implementation analysis of the OWPPI.

Standing in marked opposition is the bottom-up model, which emphasizes the importance of contextual factors affecting the policy process. As Matland (1995) argues, bottom-uppers see implementation as the interaction of policy and setting. This means that no single theory of implementation may be context-free. This also suggests that projects operating in similar contexts should produce similar results. For the projects under examination for this research, the conditions in which they were implemented were all relatively similar and were selected for analysis on the basis of this criterion. That different outcomes were produced for each project suggests that other variables may have affected the process of implementation in ways not accounted for in the bottom up model.

This approach also focuses on the role played by officials at the local level. Authors such as Lipsky (1980) argue that administrators at the street level are central to determining the types of services delivered to the public. In his view, programs must be flexible enough to allow local level implementers the freedom to adapt them to their particular conditions. While organizational capacity at the local level played a significant role in program implementation, this does not adequately account for the variation in outcomes across individual projects. First, local level implementers were free to design projects that would best be suited to fit the particularities of their local labour market. Second, local coordinators and their projects were carefully scrutinized by federal and provincial officials before they were approved for participation in the program. This served as a control on organizational capacity across projects.

Overall, neither the bottom-up nor top-down perspective is effective for explaining the diverse results obtained by individual projects within the OWPPI. The top-down approach fails to serve as an appropriate framework because the federal government has never exerted a strong influence over the provinces in the area of labour market policy. The bottom-up approach suggests that similar contexts should yield similar implementation results, which was not the case for the projects under analysis. How is it, then, that each project produced a different outcome?

The OWPPI: A Question of Inter-Organizational Coordination

To answer this question effectively, one has only to take into account the number of organizations involved in implementing the OWPPI. Three organizational levels were implicated in each project (federal, provincial, local). Additionally, once projects reached

the provincial level, there was great variation as to the number of groups involved in putting projects into practice.

Though intergovernmental interactions have always been necessary for states operating under a federal system (Agranoff, 2001), such relations have undergone significant increases in the last twenty years (Johns, et. al, 2007). In addition, increasing inter-departmental interactions within the same level of government are evidenced in the growing number of departments with intergovernmental units of jurisdiction. Interactions between different levels of government are also on the rise, as federal-provincial/territorial partnerships have become a common tool for harmonizing policy between different jurisdictions and addressing issues that require joint action (Johns et. al, 2007). Interestingly, this rise in intergovernmental activity has not occurred with an accompanying rise in studies examining the policy implications of such changes. Indeed, many questions still remain regarding the effect on program performance (Agranoff, 2001).

Within the context of this changing structure of government, in which a greater emphasis is placed on the importance of decentralization,[1] shared decision-making and shared programme delivery, networks have emerged as a new and effective public administration tool. Adopting O'Toole's (1997) definition, networks are "structures of interdependence involving multiple organizations where one unit is not merely the formal subordinate of the others in some larger hierarchical arrangement" (45). These organizations may be governmental, private or non-profit. They may come together voluntarily or through contractual obligation. Some units may therefore relate to one

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[1] This represents one of several attributes of what Kernaghan terms the "post-bureaucratic paradigm" (Kernaghan, 2000). Other elements include a managerial culture that stresses innovation, consultation and results-oriented accountability.

another hierarchically, though this is not the case for all organizations within the network. Instead, it is more accurate to describe them as interdependent. Creating and implementing public programs now has much to do with crafting network forms and monitoring their performance (O'Toole, 2000). Within this new era of changing government patterns, networks have become a common choice for public service provision. Such multi-organizational arrangements solve problems that cannot be solved by a single organization (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001).

An important implication of the emergence of networks is the transformation of the work of public administrators and managers. Though traditionally understood as POSDCORB (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting) (a term coined by Luther Gulick and cited in Herranz, 2007 and Kernaghan and Kuper, 1983), working for government now requires an altered skill set, placing greater emphasis on some aspects of the traditional role, while adopting new roles and responsibilities. Within this changing environment, public managers are faced with the challenge of working in networks, where they have less authority and yet are being held more accountable for performance outcomes (Herranz, 2007). The key to their success, that is the successful implementation of programs they are assigned to manage, is their ability to foster a collaborative, open and effective relationship between all actors involved. In short, inter-organizational coordination is the key to successful program implementation.

Inter-Organizational Coordination and Program Success: The Evidence

While this body of literature is still in its infancy (Rhodes, 1996; Herranz, 2007), a number of interesting studies examining the relationship between inter-organizational coordination within a network and program performance have emerged. Nowhere are these more developed than in the field of labour market policy. Standing at a cross between economic and social policy, necessitating dual macro and micro perspectives, labour market policy analysis is an undeniable fit with theoretical approaches dealing with coordination between multiple organizations. As Meier et. al. (1998) point out, the complexity and ambiguity of this policy area necessitate the creation of network forms. Changing labour market conditions, coupled with reforms to the federal welfare and workforce policies have made network forms of governance particularly important in the United States (Herranz, 2007). There, a complex network of employers, non-profit organizations and unemployed people has emerged to ensure the delivery of employment services, as it is not politically acceptable within that context to depend on the state for employment (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001). Researchers such as Rogers and O'Rourke (2003) and Klassen (2000) are equally convinced that greater collaboration is needed in the field of labour market policy in Canada.

Many employment and training programs in the United States, Sweden and Germany make use of numerous organizational units for their planning and execution. Initiatives introduced under the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) in the United States require the involvement of officials at the federal, state and local level, as well as for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Studies of these programs have found different techniques for coordination to be more effective than others (Jennings and Krane, 1994;

Jennings and Ewalt, 1998). While the JTPA includes a number of formal planning requirements, mandated activities and official coordinating bodies, these are no guarantee for successful coordination. Demonstrated in Jennings and Krane and Jennings and Ewalt's studies, techniques fostering communication and operational interaction are the most useful. This does not imply that joint planning is itself problematic, but that it must be fostered through working partnerships and regular meetings with staff from various units (Jennings, 1994).

In an examination of Boston's workforce development system, Herranz (2007) presents an analysis of different strategies used by public managers to coordinate within their network. Working in partnership with both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations, public managers must bear in mind that each will have different interests and will not respond to incentives and disincentives in the same way. As a result, the same type of public service delivery outlet may operate differently, depending on the other members of its network. Such is the case for three of Boston's One Stop Career Centers. As Herranz explains, while each experiences similar funding levels, mandates and institutional parameters, they differ with respect to their approaches to coordinating within their network. From community-based, to bureaucratic to entrepreneurial, each centre is flexible enough to respond to its particular context, resulting in effective employment service provision.

As Agranoff and McGuire (1998) find in their analysis of economic development policy in several cities across the United States, a multi-organizational network exists to address an issue that cannot be handled by a single organization. In most cases, a local development corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the county government and a local

utility are involved in creating policies and strategies for the city. They find that the best performing cities are those where the public managers spend a great deal of their time developing and fostering collaborative relationships, as opposed to formal partnerships.

O'Toole (1983) equally points to the importance of sustained and stable relationships between individuals within different organizations in his studies of programs in Sweden and Germany. In the most successful Swedish program, for example, many of the parties have worked together on related issues over a long period of time (144). Lundin (2007) also finds that the most successful Swedish program involves much coordination between caseworkers and managers from the National Public Employment Service offices and the local municipal governments. Several factors are incorporated in his measurement of coordination, such as whether or not managers from different units contact each other on a daily basis, whether they work together on particular cases and whether any formal collaborative contracts exist between them.

Together, these studies set the groundwork for future developments in the field of network management and inter-organizational studies. As Herranz (2007) points out, greater attention to the relationship between network coordination and program and service delivery performance is needed. In examining the different inter-organizational coordination mechanisms used to implement various projects within the OWPPI, this research contributes to the closing of such a gap.

A Multi-Dimensional, Multi-Level Concept

Inter-organizational coordination is a multidimensional concept, consisting of both formal and informal dimensions. Formal inter-organizational coordination is

structural, taking on the form of officially-mandated interactions or legally binding arrangements between organizations. Governments use such mechanisms in response to the need to limit duplication and work collaboratively with other departments or levels of government on a jointly-administered policy or program. Informal inter-organizational coordination speaks to the behaviour of public managers forced to work with numerous organizations at any one time. Since many public tasks, particularly in the case of direct service provision, are delivered at arm's length from government, they will adopt different approaches in order to hold the various networks together (Goerdel, 2005, Agranoff and McGuire, 2001). Inter-organizational coordination includes their leadership skills and ability to communicate with others. It is more likely to occur when organizations have worked together on other projects, as this increases their level of familiarity with one another, simultaneously decreasing their level of uncertainty. Moreover, information and resource-sharing is more likely to occur when collaborative relations have been fostered for some time.

In addition to having multiple dimensions, coordination also takes place between various organizational levels, from national, to sub-national, to local. A second line of inquiry discussed in the literature is the transferability of coordination mechanisms. Does an organization's ability to coordinate with one unit influence its ability to do so with a second separate unit? As Jennings (1994) argues, the ability of the federal and state governments to coordinate sets an example for the type of coordination that occurs with the local authority. Within the Canadian context, this suggests that the mechanisms used to coordinate between federal and provincial officials are replicated when such officials coordinate with the local organization. Thus, in the absence of such mechanisms between

federal and provincial officials, weaker relations with the local level are likely. A competing line of reasoning holds the opposite: that federal-provincial coordination is not necessary for coordination with the local level to occur. Since provincial officials do not have to coordinate with the federal level, greater resources can be dedicated to ensuring effective coordination with the local organization.

Research Methodology:

How to Study Inter-Organizational Coordination within the OWPPI?

Analytical Framework

Based on the structure of the OWPPI, coordination was necessary at two separate organizational levels: federal-provincial and provincial-local. The federal government, having ultimately formed the objectives for this program, was responsible for coordinating with the provincial government, ensuring they had adequate information and resources to fulfill their functions (federal-provincial coordination). The provincial level was then responsible for the design, planning and implementation of projects, in partnership with the local level. Within each level, federal-provincial and provincial-local, there are two dimensions of coordination: formal and informal. Formal coordination is evident in the legally-binding agreements and official interactions that took place between all players. Informal coordination, in contrast, speaks to the behaviour of public managers at each level and the tools they used to maintain the network. The analysis thus treats inter-organizational as four separate variables: formal

federal-provincial, informal federal-provincial, formal provincial-local, informal

provincial-local.

Throughout the analysis, the three projects are compared according to a complex

measure of implementation success, the dependent variable. Projects that perform well on

the greatest number of indicators are ultimately deemed most successful. Using both

quantitative and qualitative indicators of formal and information coordination (the

independent variable), the level of inter-organizational coordination for each project is

also determined comparatively by assessing which project benefitted from the greatest

use of each of the mechanisms.

Measuring Implementation Success: The Dependent Variable

Borrowing from the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), implementation is

defined as "the process of interaction between the setting of goals and the actions geared

to achieving them" (xxiii, 1973)[2]. "Implementation Success", is therefore constructed

from three concepts, Increased Employability, Achievement of Objectives by Local Level

and Quality of Evaluation.

"Increased Employability" measures the impact of the project in terms of the

percentage of participants who took part in labour market training and the percentage of

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[2] A project's implementation, it should be noted, is not the same as a project's impact. As Montjoy and
O'Toole (1979) suggest, a policy or project's impact is the "ultimate effect on the target" (465). In the case
of the OWPPI, the impact of any given project may be understood as the number of participants who
successfully returned to the labour market. While such a measure does speak to the success of a project, it
does not sufficiently address the larger goals of the federal-provincial program. The aim of the OWPPI was
to *test* various approaches to increasing the employability of older workers, either by helping them to
maintain their employment or reintegrate into the labour force (HRSDC Evaluation Report March 2005). In
order to gauge the success of a project, it is necessary to take into account the actions geared toward
achieving all of its objectives.

participants who were employed upon completion of the project. The greater these percentages are, the more successful the project.

Since the responsibility to implement projects was largely placed in the hands of the local level organization, the second indicator of implementation success measures the percentage of objectives achieved by the local administrators. The greater the percentage of objectives achieved, the more successful the project.

As indicated in the federal government's Evaluation Summary, "from the beginning of the OWPPI, evaluations were central to the design" (p.5). Successful project implementation is therefore also indicated in the quality of the evaluation. Speaking to the importance accorded to this element of the project, it is measured according to its comprehensiveness, or the percentage of participants for whom data was collected (the greater, the more successful), and its utility, that is whether or not the findings can inform future policy decisions ("yes" indicates the evaluation is useful, "no" indicates the evaluation is not useful).

Measuring Inter-Organizational Coordination: Four Explanatory Variables

Inter-organizational coordination is treated as four separate variables, corresponding to the organizational units between whom coordination was required, or the inter-organizational 'levels' (federal-provincial and provincial-local), and the two dimensions of coordination (formal and informal). The indicators used to measure each dimension, whether formal or informal, are examined at each level, federal-provincial and provincial-local.

Using Jennings' (1994) methodology, formal inter-organizational coordination is measured according to the mechanisms used to share information between organizations and ensure that the activities of each did not conflict with one another. These mechanisms are the existence of a contract between the organizations, the satisfaction of each party with that contract, the use of progress reports to provide details on the activities of each organization, the use of conference calls to share information, the use of workshops exchange ideas and experiences with one another and the use of site visits by the supervising organization (the federal level in the case of federal-provincial coordination and the provincial level in the case of provincial-local coordination). Each indicator is measured according to whether or not it was used (i.e. Yes or No). The greater the number of indicators used, the greater the level of inter-organizational coordination.

Based on the models used by Lundin (2007) and O'Toole (1983), informal inter-organizational coordination is measured using three indicators. The first is whether or not administrators within each organization have worked together on previous projects, as this indicates a higher level of familiarity and subsequently lower level of uncertainty in their interactions with one another, increasing the likelihood of effective collaborative relations. The second indicator is the frequency of communication between administrators within each organization, whether via telephone or electronic mail. Lundin (2007) measures frequency of communication as whether or not coordinators were in contact on a daily basis or seldom. Drawing from Lundin's study, frequency of communication will be defined as frequent if it occurs at least once per week, while it is considered infrequent if coordinators communicate less than once per week. This makes frequency of communication a dichotomous variable, assigning frequent communication

an indicator of "yes" and infrequent communication an indicator of "no". The third

indicator is the presence of an effective leader. Much of the literature on inter-

organizational coordination points to the importance of leadership by a public manager in

executing complex public tasks (Jennings, 1994; O'Toole, 1983, Goerdel, 2005, Agranoff

and McGuire, 2001 to name a few). Within the context of the OWPPI, an effective leader

is understood as an individual whose actions ensure efficient information-sharing

between organizations, someone who serves as a "facilitator of exchange" (O'Toole,

1983: 138). This person works beyond the basic requirements for over-seeing his or her

responsibilities in an effort to ensure that he or she has done everything possible to

achieve a successful result for the project. During interviews with public officials

involved in the implementation of the OWPPI, effective leadership was measured as to

whether or not they identified a particular individual as having gone beyond the basic

requirements in his or her work on this file.

Data Collection

Evidence compiled for this research project is based on ten semi-structured

interviews conducted with the public managers and administrators involved at every

stage of the implementation of the OWPPI, from the federal, to the provincial, to the local

(see "Interview Codification"). Given the nature of the information required for this

study, the use of interviews as a primary data collection tool was essential. Certain

insights, such as a greater understanding of how individuals interact with one another in a

professional setting, are unlikely to be documented and thus can only be revealed through

dialogue. The evaluation reports prepared by each province and the overall evaluation

report prepared by Human Resources Social Development Canada (HRSDC), the federal

department assigned responsibility for the program, further inform the findings put

forward. Official documents from the federal and provincial governments, as well as

secondary sources were also consulted in order to provide accurate contextual

information on each of the cases.

Case Selection Justification: Controlling for Extraneous Variance

The purposeful selection of cases ensures extraneous variance is kept to a

minimum so that the principle determinants of variation in the dependent variable may be

more closely scrutinized. This project adopts the "Most Similar Systems" design

(Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Peters, 1998), in that many details about the individual

projects are comparable. They were selected on the basis of their similar objectives, to

increase the employability of workers in rural communities. Such areas utilize more

network actors for the purpose of policy making, while large central cities are more likely

to be involved in contractual arrangements and partnerships (Agranoff and McGuire,

2001). This further emphasizes the importance of inter-organizational coordination. It

also ensures a comparable pool of participants for each project, most likely coming from

a background in manual labour, either from forestry or farming. The projects operated in

areas with similarly challenging labour market conditions, such as employment,

unemployment and participation rates. Selecting cases operating under difficult labour

market conditions further justifies the importance of positive project outcomes and makes

it even more crucial to develop an understanding for the factors that led to successful and

failed results. The projects were all funded by the federal government, which was

responsible for passing down guiding principles. The provincial governments all played a similar role in acting as the liaison between the federal and local level. Organizational capacity at the local level is comparable across all projects because each had to pass through a proposal process in which they were scrutinized by officials at both the federal and provincial levels.

A Significant Distinction between Cases: The Labour Market Development Agreements

The main difference between the projects selected for this analysis is that they were implemented in different provinces: British Columbia (BC), Newfoundland (NL) and Quebec (QC). This serves as a crucial distinction, because the relationship between the federal and provincial governments in the area of labour market policy may fall under one of two types of inter-governmental regimes: co-management or full transfer. As Klassen (2000) explains, federal-provincial relations with respect to labour market policy have never allowed for a clear division of jurisdictional responsibility. In an effort to disentangle each level's roles (and in response to the growing demand to reduce government overlap and increase efficiency), the federal government introduced a series of bilateral agreements, the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) in 1996. Two types of intergovernmental regimes have resulted from these agreements. Fully devolved or "full transfer" agreements leave the responsibility for design and delivery of employment programs with the provincial or territorial government. The federal government's involvement is limited to an annual contribution toward the administrative costs incurred by the province or territory (Treasury Board Secretariat). These arrangements have also resulted in the transfer of federal employees to the provincial

payrolls. Under "co-management" agreements, provincial/territorial and federal officials

work in close partnership, establishing priorities and strategic direction for labour market

policy and programs. Under these agreements, federal employees are still responsible for

the delivery of employment services through local HRSDC centres (Lazar, 2002).

The co-management agreements have allowed for the creation of a positive

working relationship between public officials at the federal and provincial levels of

government (Klassen, 2000; Lazar, 2002). Much coordination occurs between both

organizations, whether through formal protocols (Treasury Board Secretariat), or more

informal methods of information exchange (Lazar, 2002). For full transfer provinces, the

LMDAs have resulted in greater collaboration between the provincial and local levels

(Klassen, 2000), as they have had to develop their own liaisons with these service

providers.

3 Hypotheses

This analysis of the relationship between inter-organizational coordination and

implementation success for projects operating under the OWPPI is structured by an

examination of three hypotheses. The first hypothesis is centered on the effect of formal

federal-provincial coordination on formal provincial-local coordination. According to

Jennings (1994), the mechanisms used for coordination at one organizational level will

serve as an example for the coordination mechanisms used at another level. This suggests

that effective formal federal-provincial coordination is necessary for formal provincial-

local coordination to occur. Based on this line of reasoning, the mechanisms used for

coordination at the federal-provincial level will resemble the mechanisms used for provincial-local coordination.

Hypothesis 1: The higher the level of formal federal-provincial coordination, the higher the level of formal provincial-local coordination. The mechanisms used for formal federal-provincial coordination will be replicated for formal provincial-local coordination.

Null Hypothesis 1: The level of formal federal-provincial coordination has no effect on the level of formal provincial-local coordination. The mechanisms used at the federal-provincial level are not replicated at the provincial-local level. Provincial-local mechanisms develop without the influence of federal-provincial mechanisms.

The second hypothesis examines the relationship between the dimensions of inter-organizational coordination. As found in John et. al.'s 2007 investigation of intergovernmental relations within the Canadian bureaucracy, formal mechanisms of exchange, such as intergovernmental committees and agencies, have led to the creation of cooperative working relationships between administrators at all levels of government. This suggests that strong formal mechanisms of coordination must be in place for informal coordination to develop.

Hypothesis 2: Formal federal-provincial and formal provincial-local coordination mechanisms exert a positive impact on informal federal-provincial and informal provincial-local coordination. Therefore, the higher the levels of formal federal-

provincial and provincial-local coordination, the higher the levels of informal federal-provincial and provincial-local coordination will be.

Null Hypothesis 2: Formal federal-provincial and formal provincial-local coordination are not necessary for informal federal-provincial and informal provincial-local coordination to develop. Therefore, the levels of formal federal-provincial and formal provincial-local coordination have no effect on the levels of informal federal-provincial and informal provincial-local coordination.

The third hypothesis focuses on the impact of informal provincial-local coordination on implementation success. What is most important in any analysis of labour market programs is what happens at the level of service delivery (Jennings, 1994). In the case of the OWPPI, the local organization was ultimately responsible for putting program objectives into practice. Provincial-local coordination was therefore an important determinant of the implementation outcomes for each project. Informal mechanisms have been emphasized throughout much of the literature on employment projects as particularly effective in ensuring success (Herranz, 2007; Ludin, 2007; O'Toole, 1983, to name a few). As such, not only is the level of coordination important (provincial-local), but the informal dimension is also key to achieving implementation success.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between informal provincial-local coordination and project success. The more informal provincial-coordination mechanisms were used, the greater the likelihood that the project achieved implementation success.

Null Hypothesis 3: Informal provincial-local coordination is not necessary for a project to achieve successful implementation.

Three Projects, Three Different Outcomes

British Columbia's Primetime Employment Options: Mixed Results

BC is a co-management province. Under the LMDA, it opted to share the responsibility of implementing active labour market policies with the federal government. In the case of the OWPPI, however, the province was responsible for overseeing all aspects of program design and implementation without the input of the federal government.

PrimeTime Employment Options (PEO) operated from June 2002 to March 2004. The organization offered a number of services, including the development of action plans, assistance with resume-writing, career exploration, individual training, work experience placements and peer support and counselling. Program coordinators met with prospective clients on an individual basis through a continuous intake process.

The implementation outcomes of BC's PEO were overall mixed. While some indicators performed well, others performed poorly. The most striking result is the low level of employability generated, particularly the number of participants who were reintegrated into the labour market at the end of the project. Of the 131 participants, only 33 succeeded in locating employment, a mere 25% of the total (See Table 1.1: "Implementation Outcomes for Three OWPPI Projects").

Newfoundland and Labrador's Agricultural Awareness Community Service Program: a

Failed Attempt

During the LMDA negotiations, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) opted for a co-management agreement. Provincial officials recognized that the federal structures already in place in the province were operating at a level of efficiency that necessitated no change in the way labour market programs were being implemented (Bakvis and Aucoin, 2000). As such, the federal government plays an active role implementing employment programs for workers in the province. NL's dependence on the federal government to administer labour market programs was clearly evidenced in this case study. The OWPPI left the design and delivery of projects up to the provincial governments. In NL, this resulted in a complete failure for the projects.

The Agricultural Awareness/Community Service Project (AACSP) operated from July 2003 to February 2004. It offered participants theoretical knowledge and practical training in farming in order to help them reintegrate into the workforce, particularly through self-employment. This project was selected for analysis because of its comparable labour market conditions with the projects in BC and QC. Despite their similarities, however, AACSP's implementation outcomes failed according to all indicators of implementation success, with the exception of one (See Table 1.1: "Implementation Outcomes for Three OWPPI Projects").

NL's ultimate failure was due to the project's poor timing. While the intended commencement date was set for May 2003, the project did not get underway until July. Since farming in NL is mainly a spring to fall operation, participants were not able to take part in training throughout the entire growing season.At the end of the project, all

twelve participants were collecting employment insurance, suggesting that they likely

had not been reintegrated into the labour market. While AACSP's project coordinators

set out to fulfill eight objectives, only three of these were fulfilled. AACSP's evaluation

was also a failure, as information on participants, though collected prior to the

commencement of the project, could not be reviewed by the evaluator, as it was

destroyed in order to respect perceived privacy laws (EAACSP, 2004).

Québec's Action-Travail 55: A Remarkable Success

       QC's Action-Travail 55 (AT55) was the only project selected for detailed analysis

that was implemented in a full transfer province[3] . Upon the signing of its agreement in

1997, QC created Emploi-Quebec, an independent unit that operates within the Ministry

of Employment and Solidarity and oversees all programs dealing with labour market

training and assistance. Beyond Emploi-Quebec, the province also proceeded with the

creation of a widespread network of organizations each participating in the delivery of

employment programs. Activities are centralized in the provincial capital. Employment

centres are set up throughout the province. These regional offices oversee activities in a

number of local offices. The local offices, known as Centres local d'emploi (CLE), are

then responsible for maintaining ties with local non-profit organizations. In essence, QC

has developed a system that has all the conditions necessary to ensure successful project

implementation. Indeed, QC's AT55 performed better than both BC and NL on all except

one indicator of implementation success.

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[3] Recall that projects were selected on the basis of their similar activities and labour market conditions. The type of LMDA chosen by each province was not initially expected to play a significant role in differentiating the projects.

AT55 operated out of Service d'aide à l'emploi du Temiscouata (SAET), a non-profit organization dedicated to labour market development in the region. Its goal was to reintegrate older workers displaced from Quebec's failing forestry industry into employment by helping them transfer their skills and experiences to other sectors of the labour market. A number of activities were offered through the project, including workshops and job-search training sessions. Participants also took part in one-on-one consultations in order to identify their specific skills, strengths and weaknesses. Upon completion of the project, 71% of the participants had been reintegrated into employment through job placements. Beyond this remarkable employment increase, AT55 succeeded in achieving all its set objectives, as well as providing a complete and effective evaluation.

Below is a summary of each project's implementation outcomes (Table 1.1) and their measures of inter-organizational coordination (Table 1.2).

Table 1.1: Implementation outcomes in Three OWPPI Projects

IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESS	BC's PEO	NL's AACSP	QC's AT55
Increased Employability			
% of participants employed upon completion	25%	0	72%
% of participants who took part in training or placement	80%	100%	71%
Achievement of Objectives			
% of objectives achieved	100% (3/3)	37.5% (3/8)	100% (5/5)
Quality of Evaluation			
Comprehensiveness (% of participants on whom data was collected)	61.2%	0	100%
Utility	Somewhat*	No	Yes

Table 1.2: Inter-Organizational Coordination in Three OWPPI Projects

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL COORDINATION (Dimensions & Levels)	BC's PEO	NL's AACSP	QC's AT55
Formal Federal-Provincial			
Existence of contract (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Satisfaction with contract (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Progress reports (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Conference calls (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Workshops (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Site visits (Yes/No)	Yes	No	No
Informal Federal-Provincial			
Work on previous projects (Yes/No)	No	No	Somewhat
Freq. of communication (At least 1 contact per week?)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Presence of effective leader (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes
Formal Provincial-Local			
Existence of contract (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Satisfaction with contract (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes
Progress reports (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Conference calls (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	No
Workshops (Yes/No)	Yes	No	No
Site visits (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes
Informal Provincial-Local			
Work on previous projects (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes
Freq. of communication (At least 1 contact per week?)	No	Yes	Yes
Presence of effective leader (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes

The Impact of Inter-Organizational Coordination: Findings from all three Cases

Results from Hypotheses 1, 2 & 3

1. Formal mechanisms used to induce coordination at the federal-provincial level are reproduced at the provincial-local level.

BC: In the case of BC's PEO, this relationship held. The formal mechanisms used for federal-provincial coordination (site visits, workshops and conference calls) were replicated when the province was coordinating with the local level organization.

NL: Beyond the formal written agreement, mechanisms for formal federal-provincial coordination were virtually inexistent in the case of NL's AACSP. This was also the case for provincial-local coordination. As such, the relationship also held, in that the absence for formal federal-provincial mechanisms led to an absence of formal provincial-local coordination.

QC: This relationship did not hold in QC. The mechanisms used for formal federal-provincial coordination, such as workshops and conference calls were not used for formal provincial-local coordination. Instead, the provincial coordinator used site visits to monitor the activities at the local level.

Analysis: That this relationship held in the co-management provinces and did not in the full transfer province suggests that the type of LMDA operates as a conditional variable. If the province is co-management, then formal federal-provincial mechanisms affect provincial-local mechanisms. If the province is full-transfer, formal federal-provincial mechanisms do not matter to the provincial-local mechanisms that develop.

2. Formal mechanisms of coordination are used to foster informal ties. These must be sustained over time to truly be effective.

BC: While there were few indicators of informal coordination in BC's PEO, it is likely that these would have developed if given more time. For example, workshops were hosted at both the federal and provincial levels to promote more effective communication between project managers. As those responsible for the project became more familiar

with one another, this may have encouraged them to take the initiative and become even more effective coordination facilitators. However, the OWPPI file was transferred from one department to another in the middle of its implementation process. This meant that the ties that had developed between the provincial level and their federal and local counterparts had to be rebuilt, before they could effectively contribute to successful project implementation.

NL: In the absence of formal mechanisms for coordination, few attempts were made to foster informal ties in NL.

QC: In QC, the formal federal provincial mechanisms for coordination had no bearing on the type of informal coordination that developed between public managers at every level. Instead, informal coordination mechanisms have been developed over time since the signing of the full transfer LMDA. Over time, QC's highly centralized system for delivering employment programs has become very effective. In the case of AT55, the project coordinators had worked together on previous projects, and thus had developed a strong level of familiarity. Moreover, QC was the only case in which an effective coordination facilitator was evident. This person took the initiative to ensure the successful implementation of the project.

Analysis: When looking at the impact of this relationship in all three cases, the element that appears most evident is the importance of fostering informal ties over time. In QC, the fact that this formal LMDA structure has been in place for some time has allowed project managers at every level to develop a relationship with one another.

3. Implementation outcomes are most affected by provincial-local coordination. In the interest of developing local capacity, this type of coordination must be fostered over time.

BC: While PEO's implementation was challenged by a number of factors, the most difficult was the transfer of the OWPPI file from one department to another within the provincial government. This affected provincial-local coordination in that the informal ties that had developed between project managers at each level had to be rebuilt with a new provincial manager.

NL: AACSP's biggest challenge was the poor timing of the project. As a result of inadequate information-sharing between the provincial and local level, participants were unable to take part in many of the agricultural activities planned by the project's managers. Inter-organizational coordination was clearly problematic, in that had the local coordinators been aware of the funding delays, they would have been able to plan for a different set of activities. Furthermore, previous experience working with the provincial government would have allowed them to become more familiar with the fact that funding delays at the provincial level are common. Overall, had the ties between the local and provincial organization been fostered over time, the outcome of the project would likely have been more successful.

QC: AT55 succeeded on all indicators of implementation success. It also had the strongest measures of inter-organizational coordination between the provincial and local level. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of this analysis, it becomes clear that the fact that the ties between the province and the local organization have been fostered for

some time, allowing the organizations to become more familiar with one another and to become more experienced in implementing employment programs for older workers is what led to its success.

Analysis: Neither BC nor NL fostered very strong ties between the provincial and local levels, and neither project succeeded on all measures of implementation success. Conversely, QC succeeded in both these areas. This suggests that co-management provinces do not emphasize the importance of provincial-local coordination and this is to their detriment because they do not achieve successful implementation results. There are two possible reasons for these shortcomings. The first is that in having to coordinate with the federal level, they do not have enough time, staff, or other additional resources to coordinate as effectively with the local level. A second reason is that they lack the capacity at the provincial level to coordinate effectively with the local level, which is why they opted for a co-management agreement in the first place.

Three Lessons in Inter-Organizational Coordination: **Findings from the Analysis of the OWPPI**

1. Weak inter-organizational coordination between departments and/or ministries of the same government unit can have detrimental effects on implementation outcomes

For BC's PEO, the implementation results achieved were overall less than optimal. That 75% of participants could not be reintegrated into employment is largely due to weak inter-organizational coordination between all those involved in the implementation of the project. The lack of effective information-sharing between

departments within the federal government and the provincial government left PEO with a less-than optimal base of clients for participation in the program. When BC's OWPPI was first introduced in 1999, it was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training (MAE). In April 2003, the program was transferred to the Ministry of Human Resources (MHR). Despite a well-planned transition process between ministries, the change in responsibility had a negative effect on local project outcomes. MHR saw in the BC OWPPI an opportunity to reintegrate social assistance recipients under their supervision back into the labour market through the employment services offered in local projects. Participation in a local project was subsequently introduced as a condition for eligibility of such benefits from the province. These participants were not well suited for OWPPI projects. Their level of motivation to find employment was noticeably different from those who had chosen to take part out of their own interest. It was clear that they had been forced to participate. PEO administrators were unsuccessful in increasing their employability. There is always an adjustment process when projects change from one ministry to another. Verbal agreements made between one set of officials must necessarily be renegotiated. Communication patterns change and the level of familiarity and trust that had developed between officials must be recreated. In addition to these challenges, PEO administrators, along with the coordinators for all local projects in BC were forced to deal with a new clientele base that were unlikely to be reintegrated into employment, due to their lower level of motivation. The lack of information-sharing and goal cohesion between the MAE and the MHR on this issue illustrates how a failure in inter-ministerial coordination can lead to unsuccessful implementation results at the local level.

2. Effective federal-provincial communication is essential for successful implementation outcomes.

NL's ultimate failure was due to the project's poor timing. According to the provincial level, delays within the review process of the federal government caused the project's late start date (EAACSP, 2004; p. 14). Conversely, the federal level pointed to NL's Intergovernmental Committee, a body that oversees all funding decisions throughout the province, alluding to its potential for delay. Either way, it is clear that information-sharing between each level, from the federal to the provincial to the local was weak, given that the urgency of the start date for the project was neither well-communicated, nor respected. Had the federal and provincial administrators been aware of the impact that their funding delays would have on the ultimate outcome of the projects, they likely would have secured funding sooner to allow the project to get underway, or would have decided not to fund it at all. In addition, had the local coordinator been aware of the likelihood of delays, a different mix of activities may have been planned instead of those stated in the proposal, and AACSP's objectives may have been achieved with a much higher degree of success. Experience in dealing with funding that comes through the provincial government would thus have been a valuable asset to have before embarking on the implementation of the project.

3. Sustained and stable relations with local level organizations are the key to achieving successful results in program implementation. This helps develop the local organization's capacity for providing public services. In addition, it fosters effective leadership and a strong working relationship between coordinators within each organization.

Based on the findings of this study, where ties with the local organization were weak, the project's implementation outcomes failed. Where ties were strong, the project performed successfully. Fostering local capacity means developing a strong working relationship with community organizations able to help in the implementation of a project. The lesson learned in this study is that the role played by the local organization has a huge bearing on the results of any project.

While capacity at the local level is controlled as much as possible by the fact that organizations had to pass the scrutiny of the provincial and federal levels in order to deliver a project for the OWPPI, the pool of local applicants to choose from differed for each province. While in QC, the selection was based on a myriad of projects, NL only had four in total. This suggests that the playing field is not entirely level when it comes to local employment organizations across the country. At first glance, this speaks directly to the ability of local service providers to do their jobs well, thus suggesting that local capacity is an important variable. At the same time, it is important not to overlook the underlying causes associated with weak local level capacity. Policy learning is an important element in developing and implementing successful programs. No policy, program or project is ever perfectly implemented the first time. Learning from others and from one's own mistaken attempts is important and helps to create more successful program and policy responses in the future. Local level capacity is therefore tied to whether or not the organization had worked in partnership with the provincial level before. QC's Action-Travail 55 was one of many projects that had been developed between the province and the local organization. Though past projects had not necessarily been geared towards older workers, project managers used their experience to create

something that would work given their local conditions and their ties with the labour market.

One of the most notable features in QC's informal coordination indicators was the presence of a highly effective coordination facilitator. This individual was one of the 1084 civil servants who had been transferred from the federal government to work for the provincial government with the signing of the full transfer LMDA. [4]With experience at the federal level, this individual was consistently reported as being an effective leader, someone who facilitated communication between all those involved, and someone dedicated to achieving positive outcomes for the projects. As evidenced in QC's successful outcomes, projects implemented by multiple organizations profit immensely from individuals of this kind. Policy makers and program planners stand to benefit from recognizing these features in their staff and fostering such qualities over time.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explain a simple puzzle: How is it that three labour market projects, each striving for the same objective, providing similar services and operating under comparable economic conditions could produce completely divergent outcomes? Using a theoretical framework of inter-organizational coordination, the analysis has illustrated that the mechanisms used to promote communication, exchange information and avoid duplication between different organizations involved in the implementation of a single project matter to its outcome. Moreover, it has been

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[4] It should be noted that while this may have placed Quebec at an advantage with respect to the level and quality of its human resources, the cases selected for detailed analysis are still comparable to the extent that they offered similar activities in similar labour market environments. That this human resources expertise served to benefit Quebec illustrates an important lesson to other provinces, which is to promote strong, effective leaders in the public service and to dedicate more human resources to labour market development.

suggested that the kinds of mechanisms that are used and the organizations between whom they are used also have a bearing on the success of the project. While these findings do contribute to the theoretical literature on inter-organizational coordination, their implications are most significant when examined within their empirical context. Indeed, this study offers a series of important insights in to the state of labour market program implementation in Canada and offers suggestions for its improvement in the future.

While the three cases selected for detailed analysis were chosen on the basis of their many similarities, the results of this study suggest that their most marking distinction is the province in which they were implemented. This is due to the asymmetrically decentralized (Klassen and Schneider, 2002) nature of labour market policy in Canada, in which two types of intergovernmental regimes now exist: co-management or full transfer. The cases under examination differ to the extent that both BC and NL opted for the co-management agreement, while QC chose the full-transfer arrangement. The similar arrangements in BC and NL resulted in similar implementation outcomes, though BC performed noticeably better than NL, while QC stood apart, resulting in higher implementation outcomes for most indicators. Its stronger level of inter-organizational coordination best explains these successful results.

For those who have ever wondered how a government program moves from the high echelons of the federal level, through to the province and down to the local level, where its impact on an individual is finally felt, it has been the intention of this article to illustrate that process. While the OWPPI is just one of the several thousand programs implemented by the Canadian and provincial governments at any one time, the findings

put forward in this study suggest that while the path is complex, it eventually reaches its

final destination, the individual in need of it. For its impact to be a positive one, however,

the key is effective inter-organizational coordination. Without this, even the programs

with the greatest of expectations can, as Pressman and Wildavsky found in 1973, be

dashed.

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Interview Codification:
Interview 1: Interview with 2 HRSDC administrators, conducted August 25th, 2008 over the telephone

Interview 2: Interview with BC's provincial administrator responsible for the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, conducted June 3rd, 2008 in person

Interview 3: Interview with Primetime Employment Options director, conducted June 16th, 2008 over the telephone

Interview 4: Interview with NL's provincial coordinator within the Ministry of Human Resources Labour and Employment. Telephone interview, September 11, 2008

Interview 5: Interview with secondary NL provincial coordinator within the Ministry of Human Resources Labour and Employment. Telephone interview, September 11, 2008

Interview 6: Interview with NL's local project coordinator at Lower Trinity South Regional Development Association. Telephone interview, September 10, 2008

Interview 7: Interview with QC's provincial coordinator responsible for the OWPPI. Telephone interview, September 16th, 2008

Interview 8: Interview with QC's regional coordinator responsible for the OWPPI within the Direction Regionale du Bas St. Laurent. Telephone interview, September 12th, 2008

Interview 9: Interview with QC's local coordinator responsible for the OWPPI with the Centre Local d'Emploi de Cabano. Telephone interview, September 5th, 2008

Interview 10: Interview with QC's community organization director responsible for the OWPPI at the Service d'aide a l'emploi du Temiscouata. Telephone interview, July 14th, 2008