ONE-STOP SHOPS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE: THE ADAPTATION OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL FORM IN THREE COUNTRIES

JOSTEIN ASKIM, ANNE LISE FIMREITE, ALICE MOSELEY AND LENE HOLM PEDERSEN

In recent years welfare services in Western Europe have been criticized for poor coordination. In response, ‘seamlessness’ has emerged as a vision for public administration with ‘one-stop shops’ viewed as means to reach this. This article conceptualizes the one-stop shop and presents a three country case study to examine its drivers and its adaptation. In all countries the reforms meant mergers driven by hopes for a single entrance to services as well as proximity to citizens. However, the analysis of task portfolios, participant structure, instruments and autonomy reveal important variations in the adaptations. The specific configurations of one-stop shops that emerged were partially a product of compromises and negotiations influenced by the political and performance priorities of central government. The classical trade-off between specialization and coordination persists, but by offering users ICT-based services one can to some extent maintain specialization behind the frontline and still provide services that are coordinated from a user perspective.

INTRODUCTION

European countries have in recent years come under heavy criticism for poor coordination between sectors such as employment, national insurance and social services.Coordination problems in welfare services have a long history but have been accentuated in the past 20 years by processes of specialization, marketization and decentralization in government (Christensen and Lægreid 2006; Verhoest et al. 2007). From the point of view of politicians with overall welfare policy responsibility, poor coordination between interdependent agencies threatens the capacity and efficiency of governance and also the legitimacy of the welfare state. From the point of view of citizens and users of government services, poor coordination threatens their chances of receiving joined-up and easily accessible welfare services.

Coordination problems have been recognized in several policy sectors and a range of efforts have been introduced to improve coordination between parts and levels of government (Bogdanor 2005), and also between networks of public and private service providers (Klijn 2008). In the welfare sector ‘joined-up government’ and ‘seamlessness’ have emerged as key policy visions, reflecting an increased willingness to think about the welfare state from a user’s point of view. One means widely applied to achieve these visions is an organizational form known as the ‘one-stop shop’ (Finn 2000; Wiggan 2007), also known as ‘one stop service centres’ (Tat-Kei Ho 2002), ‘one stop government’ (Kubicek and Hagen 2000) and ‘single window services’ (Bent et al. 1999).

One-stop shops in public administration are often nominated as one feature of New Public Management (hereafter NPM) reforms (see, for example, Schedler and Proeller 2002; Halligan 2004). The argument is that one-stop shops become a way to improve client services (Wettenhall and Kimber 1996). Additionally, in some countries they have been...
adopted alongside the development of Executive Agencies, operating as semi-autonomous agencies at arm’s-length from government, within a broader regulatory system including accountability for results (James 2003; Halligan 2004). However, as a phenomenon in public administration, one-stop shops (and the partnership between actors on which they are based) pre-date NPM reforms. In Scandinavian countries, partnerships between local government and other actors have been common in service provision since the 1930s (Aars et al. 2006) and, as a concept, the one-stop shop in social welfare can be traced back to the mid 1970s (Wettenhall and Kimber 1996). The idea of one-stop shops, we argue, has developed not so much as part of, but rather alongside, NPM. One-stop shops resonate with the consumerist part of NPM (that is, customer orientation and quality orientation, elements of competition for contracts), but not with its more managerialist aims (that is, single purpose organizing, clear vertical lines of authority, accountability for results). This makes it difficult to say whether one-stop shops indicate a reversion or an accommodation of NPM. What can be argued however is that one-stop shops integrate fragmented parts of the public apparatus – parts that might (but not necessarily) have become fragmented by NPM reforms such as marketization and agencification (Kubiceck and Hagen 2000; Fimreite and Lægreid 2009). Like other ‘frontline’ forms of partnership working, the one-stop shop aims to make services feel seamless for service users by providing a single entry point into the welfare system (Pollitt 2003).

One-stop shops have been used for some time for technical services, planning in local government and various other municipal services, but the extension of the form to the welfare sector is a more recent development. In addition to the cases discussed here, active strategies for the development of social welfare one-stop shops have existed since the mid–late 1990s. The model was originally extended to the welfare sector in Australia to ease poor people’s access to welfare service providers (Wettenhall and Kimber 1996). Since then there has been a trend in many OECD countries towards the use of one-stop shops and single gateways in relation to welfare, employment and social assistance (Finn 2000; Wiggan 2007), including countries such as The Netherlands, Austria and Finland (Kubiceck and Hagen 2000).

Despite its widespread use among OECD countries, the one-stop shop is still underdeveloped as a concept in terms of the literature. In this article we seek to help close this gap by combining public policy and organizational theory approaches. Welfare state reforms tend mainly to be studied drawing on theories of public policy, implementation and policy content (see, for example, Wiggan 2007; Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008). These studies draw attention to how the influence of political actors is institutionalized in reorganizations of the welfare state (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008), and to the dynamics of decision making (Bundgaard and Vrangbæk 2007). We believe that to make sense of a welfare reform such as the introduction of one-stop shops we need to incorporate concepts and insights from organizational theory. Many observers think of one-stop shops as mere service delivery devices and focus on physical co-location, pooled ICTs and geographical location only. We suggest that to understand the one-stop shop’s potential effects it is important to see the one-stop shop as an organizational form in a broader sense. The organizational approach reminds us that one-stop shops are more than what service users see. For example, beyond the ‘seamless’ front desks, one-stop shops take various forms, from frontlines of complex singular agencies to umbrella structures for several agencies; and from electronic information portals where services are joined up virtually, to more fully integrated and physically co-located services.
The article briefly identifies coordination problems to which the introduction of one-stop shops respond. But also, and above all, the article focuses on how the much talked about one-stop shop model is actually adapted in different contexts. The cases studied are applications of the one-stop shop model in Denmark, Norway and Britain. In the Danish case, municipal Job Centres provide information, advice, social benefits and casework to the unemployed via a single entrance. In the Norwegian case, the ‘NAV’ reform has merged employment and national insurance administrations and partnered this new structure with municipal benefits and social services. In the British case, the Jobcentre Plus system provides access to training, employment and benefits via a single gateway. As we argue below, these cases seem well suited to analyse how similar political visions formulated in response to similar problems in welfare states are adapted very differently.

The article asks: What criticisms were raised against these welfare states at the turn of the millennium? We argue that, in all three countries, public administration was criticized for being bureaucratic and poorly coordinated. In response to these critiques (and to gain legitimacy), aspects of formal organization were changed. Figurative language was used to enhance the legitimacy of organizational change such as ‘seamlessness’ in Britain, putting ‘the citizen at the centre’ in Denmark and creating a ‘holistic’ administration in Norway. Such figurative concepts are difficult to argue against, but it is equally difficult to know what they actually mean.

Therefore the second question is: what are key conceptual dimensions of one-stop shops? We stop short of delineating subtypes but as a possible step towards this we identify the one-stop shop model’s key variables, and the values and interrelatedness of those variables. The variables are task portfolio, participant structure, autonomy, proximity to citizen, and instruments. And thirdly we analyse how efforts to transform the one-stop shop ideal into practical models evolve and how the one-stop shop is adapted in each country.

ONE-STOP SHOPS AND THE COORDINATION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Coordination in the context of intergovernmental relations can be defined as the arrangement of mutually dependent parts in a way that supports the pursuit of quality, efficiency or other goals. In organization studies coordination usually refers to one of two things. Some use coordination to describe a revealed attribution of organizational behaviour, namely a situation where different parties collaborate. Collaboration itself refers to actively working together for mutual benefit. The acting ‘parties’ may be departments within an organization (intra-organizational behaviour) or separate organizations (inter-organizational behaviour). Others use coordination to describe a management task, namely the act of designing or intentionally managing interdependencies between activities that parties perform; that is, to make parties collaborate (Gulick 1937; Rainey 2003; Aurifeille 2008; Kreiner 2008).

One-stop shops often, but not always, structure collaboration between different public agencies or entities. While services are most often provided by the public sector, one-stop shops do in some cases incorporate elements of private or non-profit provision. As the conceptualization and case descriptions will show, the participant structure of stop-shops may be thought of as a variable. Sometimes (as in Britain and Denmark post August 2009), the participant structure is very simple: a single agency with a wide task portfolio establishes one-stop shops for the convenience of its clients. At other times (as in Denmark pre August 2009 and Norway) the participant structure is more complex: the one-stop shop operates...
on top of partner organizations and intends to maximize the convenience to clients of all partners through service integration. In such cases the one-stop shop is an umbrella structure; it operates as an intergovernmental partnership. Partner organizations remain distinct but integrate portions of their services in such a way as to enable clients to utilize them through a single access point, providing one entrance to the public sector. Moreover, participants may be involved from different levels of government (Bent et al. 1999).

Regardless of participant structure, coordination in a one-stop shop occurs at ‘street level’, the point at which policy meets citizens (Lipsky 1980). The purported aim of the one-stop shop model is to make services feel seamless for citizens and service users, by providing a single entry point into the policy domain. One-stop shops therefore present a possible mechanism for achieving ‘joined-up’ policy implementation (Pollitt 2003). They also aim for a customer focused and responsive style of service delivery, as well as greater accessibility (Kubicek and Hagen 2000), features which have the potential to enhance ‘bottom-up’ accountability.

This prospect of improved accountability from one-stop shops is potentially important in view of the increasing desire for more ‘rounded’ and ‘outwards’ forms of accountability appropriate to the network governance structures now prevalent in most contemporary democratic states (Gains and Stoker 2009). However, in partnership structures such as one-stop shops, accountability is always a complex phenomenon. Partnerships include different lines of accountability, namely vertical accountability upwards to central government; vertical accountability downwards to citizens; and horizontal accountability sideways to partners (Sullivan 2003). Moreover, upwards accountability includes both political accountability to ministers and other parts of the government system, and accountability to regulators, auditors and inspectors (Hood et al. 1999). These characteristics of partnership structures, while creating opportunities for new forms of accountability, also pose significant challenges in terms of knowing who to hold accountable for what.

A final characteristic of one-stop shops is their scope for achieving greater efficiency in public administration, an aim in keeping with NPM reforms. By making public services accessible within one setting, they may reduce transaction costs and duplication from citizen, provider and government perspectives. In theory, one-stop shops reduce the time and effort that citizens must expend to access the services they need; from a government or provider perspective they reduce the costs of establishing separate services and reduce duplication of activity across agencies (Halligan 2004).

It is helpful at this point to elaborate a distinction made by Kubicek and Hagen (2000) who suggest three categories of one-stop shops, namely, first-stop shops, convenience stores and true one-stop shops. The first-stop shop is a mere information provider and metaphorical signpost, one that guides the citizen to relevant services. Seen from a client’s point of view, this is a first stop among several. At least a second stop is necessary, involving substantial pro-activity on the part of the client. In the ‘convenience store’ type many different transactional services are located in a single office or on one web site. More of the joining up is done on behalf of the citizen, although citizens are still usually required to take further steps. The ‘true one-stop shop’ is a metaphorical ‘department store’. This one-stop shop type integrates concerns of specific client groups, or focuses services around specific life events or administrative matters affecting citizens. The department store type may sometimes include the dedication of a single contact person or caseworker (a ‘personal shopper’) to handle all of a customer’s concern. The delineation between the second and the third type is whether services are co-located or integrated. Kubicek and Hagen provide a useful starting point for delineating subtypes of one-stop shops;
however, the main limitation of their categorization is that it encompasses only the user dimension. They argue for greater attention to the structure of the one-stop shop. Further conceptualization is therefore needed.

An additional reference which assists in the conceptualization of one-stop shops is Rainey (1990) who has identified a specific type of one-stop shop which he denotes functionally integrated small units (FISUs). The FISU model envisions small, but complete, service units which produce rules, procedures, policies or a completed service for a client. The FISUs must achieve productive closure and be relatively small. The model thus represents the confluence of social compactness, unified supervision at the intended production level, merged production functions, and output closure. The synergy of these factors, according to Rainey, makes this form of organization distinct from other attempts to structure collaboration. Rainey’s model draws attention to work processes as being an important dimension of one-stop shops.

As a possible step towards delineating subtypes in future research, this article identifies key dimensions of variation in one-stop shops and suggests some values for these (see table 1). The choice of variables reflects our analysis of existing examples of one-stop shops found in the literature as well as empirical observations of our three cases.

**Task portfolio**
The first dimension of variation is the issue of what the one-stop shops do. It may be helpful to think about this in terms of task portfolios that may vary in breadth and depth. Breadth in this context refers to policy areas. In some places one-stop shops serve clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Values and Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Task portfolio</td>
<td><strong>Narrow</strong>&lt;br&gt;Few policy areas: Employment only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Shallow</strong>&lt;br&gt;Information/ signposting only (only partial product closure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Broad</strong>&lt;br&gt;More policy areas: Pensions, welfare benefits, social services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Deep</strong>&lt;br&gt;Information + advice + assistance with applications; case closure on the spot (complete product closure)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant structure</td>
<td><strong>Simple</strong>&lt;br&gt;Few agencies&lt;br&gt;One municipality&lt;br&gt;One level of government&lt;br&gt;Public sector only</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Complex</strong>&lt;br&gt;Multiple agencies&lt;br&gt;Several municipalities&lt;br&gt;Several levels of government&lt;br&gt;Mix of public/ private/ NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td><strong>Low</strong>&lt;br&gt;Compulsory participation in one stop shop;&lt;br&gt;LIttle discretion re budget, management, organization</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>High</strong>&lt;br&gt;Voluntary participation in one stop shop;&lt;br&gt;High discretion re budget, management, organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proximity to citizen</td>
<td><strong>Distant</strong>&lt;br&gt;Regionally based service</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Close</strong>&lt;br&gt;Locally based neighbourhood service;&lt;br&gt;virtual service accessible in own home</td>
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<td>Instruments</td>
<td><strong>Low integration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Co-located services but separately managed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>High integration</strong>&lt;br&gt;Joint management; joint budgets; joint recruitment; joint management; 'personal shopper'</td>
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of employment services only. Elsewhere they additionally serve clients of the national insurance service, various welfare benefits and a wide range of social services.

Depth in this context refers to work processes. Do the one-stop shops provide information only, thus functioning as mere information portals, or do they handle cases? In Rainey’s (1990) terms, are partner organizations’ production functions merged or separate? If the one-stop shops handle cases, do they handle only the easy ones or also the more complex cases? Some one-stop shops reach ‘product closure’ (Rainey 1990) while others do not. Product closure means that the case is resolved on the spot without any need for further steps. Where there is not product closure, there is usually some pre-handling, like assembling information from clients, before sending the casework to someone outside the one-stop shop to close the case.

**Participant structure**
The participant structure may be simple or complex, including few or many partners. The number of partners may correspond with the number of tasks involved and also with the size of the geographical area covered by the one-stop shop. The larger the geographical area, the more municipalities are typically involved in settings that involve the local government sector.

That leads to a second way to think about partners. One-stop shops may include partners from one or more levels of government: national, regional and local, and even international. Multi-level one-stop shops are rare but they do exist, as our case studies show. Third, the type of organizations involved may vary. Corporate and voluntary organizations may also be partners in one-stop shops. Such collaborative structures, like public-private partnerships (PPPs), are increasingly common in some countries including the United Kingdom.

**Autonomy**
Structured horizontal collaborations have a vertical dimension: they are often, though not always, subject to control from above. However, the degree of control varies, with some collaborations more autonomous than others. The degree of autonomy and, inversely, external control for the one-stop shop, is therefore an important variable when distinguishing subtypes. One autonomy versus control issue is whether or not partners are free to participate in the one-stop shop arrangement. To capture this issue, students of partnerships have distinguished mandated from voluntary collaborations. Barton and Quinn (2001) argue that since the 1970s central government policy-makers have been reluctant to rely upon bottom-up ad hoc collaboration between sub national state agencies; instead, they have sought not only to formalize partnerships but to make joint working mandatory. Hence the term mandated partnerships, a hybrid between the hierarchical and the partnership approach to coordination.

However, central governments use a variety of ‘vertical’ policy instruments to stimulate collaboration in localities. Moseley and James (2008), drawing on Hood (1983), identify authority-based, information-based and incentive-based instruments used by governments to encourage partnership working. Authority-based instruments include legal mandates to collaborate and joint accountability structures and network constitution; information-based instruments include exhortations and advice to local bodies; incentives encompass government grants rewarding collaboration and capacity building measures. The presence of such vertical policy instruments within the context of one-stop shops signifies a degree of external control, and use of authoritative instruments indicates greater...
control. Further control versus autonomy issues include the extent to which one-stop shops decide on issues such as their own revenues, internal organization, which clients to target, what types of services and products to offer and at what price, quantity and quality.

Proximity to citizen
A general principle of one-stop shops is that they bring the coordination of policy down to the level of the citizen. In this sense one-stop shops can be said to be organized around ‘person’, as distinct from place, process or purpose (Gulick 1937). Nevertheless, some one-stop shops are closer to citizens than others. ‘Virtual’ one-stop shops are possibly the closest to the citizen of any type of one-stop shop, since they can be present in the citizen’s own home via their computer’s Internet connection. One-stop shops which operate as physical premises with co-located services are one degree further away from citizens, and are located in citizens’ own neighbourhoods and localities, often only a few streets away from their home. Regionally based one-stop shops are one degree further still, serving several municipalities.

Instruments
What does the one-stop shop model do to make agencies work together, or at least appear to work together? How is the purported joining-up achieved? A variety of mechanisms can be employed to facilitate joint working in one-stop shops. We classify these as ‘horizontal instruments’. Horizontal instruments are management devices to improve coordination between separate organizations or within complex organizations. Consequently, they are commonly used to bridge both agencies and tasks. Linking back to the issue of autonomy, horizontal instruments may be initiated at the local level or under direction from higher levels of government.

As the term one-stop shop suggests, there is always an architectural component: clients can access a range of services at a single location. This is the minimum condition for a one-stop shop. Such architecture need not be physical, however: as inferred above, it can also be virtual (Hood 2005). For example, the Internet has allowed municipalities to offer one virtual portal to services that may be physically spread throughout a large geographical area.

The particular instruments used within one-stop shops may depend on the tasks performed. In cases where pooled information is the task to be performed, co-location, either physical or virtual, may be sufficient. In cases where the one-stop shop involves shared casework between partner agencies, possibly even product closure, further instruments are needed to complete the tasks. Instruments with deeper integration in one-stop shops include joint leadership, budgets, planning and reporting procedures, recruitment processes, employment and case coordinators. These are examples of instruments of network management generally (see, for example, Kickert et al. 1997), but may be used within the context of one-stop shops.

CASE STUDY COUNTRY EXPERIENCES WITH ONE-STOP SHOPS
As mentioned above, the cases studied are applications of the one-stop shop model in Denmark, Norway and Britain. These countries are chosen because they share important similarities. In all cases, there has been a critique of a lack of coordination: changes in formal organization in the area of employment and social services have been made in response to those. However, there are also important variations in the institutional setting such as the level of decentralization, the strength of local government, and the political
context. For instance, the political hue of governments has been centre-left in Britain, right-wing in Denmark and changing from right-wing to centre-left in Norway. These variations are important in order to analyse how institutions and interests influence the adaptation of political ideas (Heclo 1973; Pedersen 2006, 2007). However, the research design is not a most-similar-systems design (Lijphardt 1971, 1975). The cases cannot be seen as independent since reforms ideas such as the ones in focus here diffuse globally (Braun and Gilardi 2006; Franzese and Hays 2008). Nevertheless, these cases seem well suited to analyse how similar political visions formulated in response to similar problems in welfare states and services are adapted very differently.

DENMARK: JOB CENTRES

In 2002, the right-wing Danish government declared that it would work towards a single-tier system with ‘one entrance’ to the employment area (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008, p. 163). Indeed, putting the citizens at the centre by providing one entrance to public administration was also one of the central policy goals leading up to the structural reform in 2007 (Structural Commission 2004).

When the structural reform was implemented, two types of one-stop shops were established in the employment domain. The primary model, in 77 municipalities, was a multi-level one-stop shop called ‘shared job centres’. This was a model for co-habitation rather than functional integration. Municipalities held responsibility for the uninsured and the state held responsibility for administration and finance of the insured. The state and the municipality would jointly agree on the internal organization of the job centre, and leadership was divided between the municipality and the state. Employees – some employed by the municipality and some by the state – would work jointly to help all clients. The secondary model, established in 14 municipalities, was a single-level one-stop shop called ‘pilot job centres’. This was a ‘pure’ municipal model in the sense that municipalities held responsibility for both the insured and the uninsured.

The two-type solution was a result of a political compromise between the government, which preferred a single-tier system at the municipal level, and the employer organizations and unions, which strongly opposed the placement in the municipalities (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2008). However, the two-type solution did not last long. During the 2009 budget negotiations the right-wing government decided that municipalities should take over responsibility for the insured unemployed and payment of unemployment benefits. All employment services would be offered in one-stop shops – job centres – that would be backed by municipal operational responsibility but subject to central regulation. Thus the participant structure as it currently stands is quite simple, with the job centres now run solely by the municipalities. This indicates a high level of autonomy since these are comparatively strong decentralized units. This placement of employment services at this local level witnesses a historical trajectory with municipalities – which are unusually strong – seen in a comparative perspective. However, the administration of the employment area is subject to heavy central regulation, with a complex economic incentives system (Nørgaard 2009) which undermines this autonomy.

Merging tasks creates concern that municipalities in the future will concentrate on the ‘low-hanging fruit’ – getting the stronger citizens into the labour market, while devoting less resources to the clients with additional social problems (Information 04.03.09). The job centres integrate the employment services for two traditionally different target groups – the insured and the uninsured. The insured are, by definition, ready to work, whereas
only 33 per cent of the uninsured are seen as being ready and able to join the working force (KL 2009). This means that this group often needs different social services. Second, there are concerns that the municipalities are too small to handle the structural fluctuations on the labour market, especially with unemployment rising after the financial crisis of 2007–8. Another persistent critique relates to the bureaucracy and the lack of transparency in the economic incentives used to regulate local government (Nørgaard 2009).

**NORWAY: EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE OFFICES**

In the Norwegian case, in 2001, the Storting (Parliament) requested the government (a centre-right minority coalition government) to consider a merger of the three main welfare administrations – national insurance, employment and municipal social services. The aims for such a merger were to increase workforce participation and to make the welfare administrations more user-friendly, holistic and efficient. In 2005, the Storting voted in a new welfare and employment administration that was named New Employment and Welfare Administration (Norwegian abbreviation: NAV) (St.prp. 46 2004–2005). The NAV reform merged the administrations for national insurance and employment, but the social services administration remained a local government responsibility. To coordinate national insurance and employment services and social services, the NAV reform established a one-stop shop – a joint frontline service – in each municipality. The one-stop shop was to be called a NAV office. The one-stop shop would be organized as a partnership between the merged employment and insurance administrations (a central government responsibility) and the social services administration (a local government responsibility).

It was agreed that for municipalities participating in the partnerships would be mandatory; that a unitary management model should be recommended but not required; and that financial social assistance from the municipalities (social benefits) had to be offered through the one-stop shops. In addition, there were a range of other municipal social services that ‘could be’ included in a specific local partnership.

The partnership solution was a compromise. There is a tension in the partnership between central government’s need for standardization and local government’s need for local adaptation and flexibility. The NAV central agency preferred a mandatory unitary management model and a standardized task portfolio, but this was not acceptable to the defenders of local self government, notably the Ministry of Local and Regional Government and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS).

The NAV one-stop shops were implemented over the period 2006–2010. In nine out of ten cases municipalities have opted to include non-mandatory municipal tasks in their task portfolios. For instance, most municipalities have decided to include treatment for drug abuse and social housing in the one-stop shops (Fimreite and Hagen 2009). In nine out of ten cases the partnerships have chosen unitary management, meaning that one person is in charge of both the municipal and the state side of the partnership.

The multi-level partnership model behind the NAV one-stop shops is an organizational innovation in the Norwegian political-administrative system. It combines ministerial responsibility and sector specialization with local self-government and territorial specialization. The main reason why the one-stop shop partnership was chosen as a model was that it focuses on services provided rather than on which levels or sectors produce them. The configuration of the NAV one-stop shop bears little resemblance to the pre-merger frontlines of the affected agencies. It is therefore difficult to see the NAV reform as
following any path; rather, the NAV reform represented a critical juncture for how to organize the delivery of welfare services in Norway.

BRITAIN: JOBCENTRE PLUS

In Britain, social security services are provided through Jobcentre Plus, an Executive Agency launched in 2001 following a merger of the working age elements of the former Employment Service and Benefits Agency. This development does not cover the whole of the UK since Jobcentre Plus does not operate in Northern Ireland where a social security/employment policy remains split between two departments of the devolved government. Previously in Britain, the Employment Service through its job centres provided assistance with job searching and short-term financial support to people actively seeking work. The Benefits Agency through its social security offices provided help to those outside of the labour market, including disabled people and single parents (Wiggan 2007). The establishment of Jobcentre Plus brought together the administration of these two client groups. The agency operates at arm’s length from central government, and is headed by a Chief Executive. There is a clear separation of policy and delivery functions between the agency and its parent government department, in keeping with the Executive Agency reform programme (James 2003). Local Jobcentre Plus offices are the delivery arm of the Executive Agency, providing employment and social security services for people of working age, and operating outside of local authority control. A separate agency, HMRC (Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs) is responsible for national insurance and associated social assistance, including tax credits, child benefit and maternity grants. The local authority administers housing benefits. Jobcentre Plus operates under a performance system which rewards outcomes for those furthest from the labour market (Wiggan 2007).

The model of Jobcentre Plus has been described as a ‘single work focused gateway for people of working age’ (HMSO 1998; see also Finn 2000) and then later as a ‘natural one-stop shop . . . at the heart of a connected set of welfare services’ (Freud 2007, p. 111). The frontline service operates according to a ‘hub and spoke’ model in which Jobcentre Plus offices provide the central entrance for initial assessment and advice, making referrals to a broader set of employment-related support services from the private and voluntary sectors. For most new claimants the initial financial assessment is made via a telephone ‘contact centre’, followed by a compulsory work focused interview with a personal advisor (DWP 2008). The contact centres use an electronic single claims process under which all relevant information on the citizen’s employment, housing and tax benefits status is collected and passed to relevant local agencies on the citizen’s behalf.

This ‘call centre’ approach has worked better for some citizens than others. While citizens with straightforward requests have been generally satisfied, those with more complex needs and demands have been less so (Lissenburg and Marsh 2003; DWP 2008). Lower satisfaction has been reported amongst those who are sick or disabled, their carers, and people with a native language other than English. A further problem relates to time pressures and unsustainable caseloads, which have made it difficult for personal advisors to provide a genuinely individualized and tailored service as originally envisioned (Work and Pensions Committee 2006; Wiggan 2007).

Jobcentre Plus forms one part of a ten-year reform programme aiming for a more integrated, work-focused and personalized approach to social security. There were two major motivations underpinning this reform. The first was ideological, and reflected the then Labour government’s commitment to an interventionist labour market policy. The
approach aimed to increase access to employment for the economically inactive, in order to increase the total labour supply and keep inflation under control (Wiggan 2007). It also reflected a wider social inclusion agenda aiming to increase civic and economic participation for marginalized groups.

The second motive was a desire to improve coordination in line with the broader joined-up government agenda. This provided an opportunity for the new government to differentiate itself from its predecessor (Pollitt 2003; Wiggan 2007). However, it was also a response to perceived fragmentation in this sector. There was specific evidence of poor coordination and systemic failures within the social security system. The major problems were information sharing failures and separate performance systems which encouraged agencies to focus on their own narrow targets at the expense of wider systemic performance (James 2003). The introduction of joint targets alongside cross-cutting Public Service Agreements represented one response to such problems within the Executive Agency system as a whole (James 2004). The merger of the Employment Service and Benefits Agency and the one-stop shops model provided an alternative organizational response.

COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

We now employ the five variables delineated in our analytical model (table 1) to compare the Danish, Norwegian and British one-stop shop models. Table 2 locates the three countries on key variables.

Task portfolios compared
Danish job centres carry out a relatively deep task portfolio, offering not only information and advice, but also actual casework on both the uninsured (social benefits) and the insured unemployed (unemployment benefits).

The Norwegian one-stop shop model has a broader but shallower task portfolio than the models of the two other case countries. In terms of breadth, NAV involves national insurance, employment and social security. As for depth, the intention was that as many cases as possible should be closed in the one-stop shop office, and that this included cases

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Task portfolio</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Denmark I, UK</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Denmark II</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(narrow/broad)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(shallow/deep)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Participant structure</th>
<th>UK, Denmark II</th>
<th>Norway, Denmark I</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(simple/complex)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Level of autonomy</th>
<th>Norway, UK</th>
<th>Denmark I</th>
<th>Denmark II</th>
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<tr>
<td>(low/high)</td>
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<th>Proximity to citizens</th>
<th>Denmark I</th>
<th>Norway, UK, Denmark II</th>
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<tr>
<td>(distant/close)</td>
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<th>Instruments used</th>
<th>Denmark I</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Denmark II, Norway</th>
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<td>(low/high degree of integration)</td>
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Note: Denmark I refers to the one-stop shop model that dominated in Denmark until 1 August 2009 (the so-called shared job centres); Denmark II refers to the one-stop model that became mandatory after 1 August 2009.
that required discretion and not just rule following. The parliamentarians’ intention was to reach output closure (Rainey 1990) on as many cases as possible in the frontline office. This intention was later disturbed by the introduction of regional central government units tasked to solve cases based on rules and individual rights. The reason given for establishing these so-called administrative units was to lighten the frontline offices’ workload. But the administrative units also reduce the scope for action for local frontline offices since parts of what should be included in the seamless service-production are no longer available to the one-stop shop staff.

The task portfolio of the British Jobcentre Plus is moderate, focusing on employment and welfare benefits. However, while the remit of Jobcentre Plus itself is relatively moderate, it acts as a portal to a much wider network of agencies providing support on childcare, in-work benefits, training and skills. There have been trials to assess the feasibility of a more comprehensive and integrated service whereby Jobcentre Plus personnel provide assistance with applications for tax credits, housing benefits and council tax benefit, processes normally undertaken by HMRC and the local authority (Freud 2007). The picture is one of a moderate but potentially expanding task portfolio. In terms of depth of tasks, the introduction of the electronic single claims process indicates an increasingly deep task portfolio. More of the joining-up is undertaken on behalf of the citizen, although complete case closure is unusual since in most cases there remains a second step in the form of a personal interview.

Participant structures compared
The participant structure of the Danish job centres has now been simplified. The shared job centres which previously rested on partnerships between state and municipalities are now municipal; the state has resorted to a regulator role. In addition, each municipality now has its own job centre. Thus there is no longer a partnership behind the Danish one-stop shops – neither between municipalities nor between state and municipalities (multi-level).

The participant structure of the Norwegian NAV offices is more complex, the number of participants being two (the local branch of the central government welfare and employment administration, and the municipality). These participants represent different governmental levels with their specific competence still present inside the partnership.

British one-stop shops have a participant structure similar to the present situation in Denmark. The Jobcentre Plus offices themselves contain only a limited number of participants, although the overall participant structure is more complex when considering the wider network of connected agencies.

Autonomy compared
In Denmark, the municipalities have high organizational autonomy as they have high discretion on the budget, management and organization of the job centres. In Norway, it is compulsory for municipalities to take part in the partnered one-stop shops. Norwegian municipalities do, however, have autonomy to decide upon the management structure and internal organization of the one-stop shops. The one-stop shop’s budget is decided by the regional branch of the central agency and by local councillors. Where citizens have complaints, local government procedures are valid for the social service side of the partnership while central government procedures are used for other matters.

In Britain, the model is nationally rather than locally led, with centrally set performance targets, a standardized and centrally led operational management model, and mandatory
interventions (Bunt and Maidment 2007). This reflects a long history of centralized hierarchical provision in labour market and social security delivery in Britain (Wiggan 2009). This in turn suggests a degree of path dependency in the specific one-stop shop model that has been adopted. While the Jobcentres initially had autonomy to establish their management structure, a more unified model has subsequently been introduced at the behest of central government due to a perceived need for greater standardization to help attain national productivity and performance targets. As noted by Wiggan (2009), autonomy to experiment in the British public policy context often decreases after the pilot phase. In the case of welfare reform, Wiggan argues, hierarchy has been reasserted and standardization attempted, albeit within a hybrid governance structure which also includes both networks and markets. As with other OECD countries, recent reforms do purport to provide greater decentralization and local autonomy (Finn 2000). However, greater decentralization is not yet evident beyond the rhetorical level (see, for example, DWP 2008).

Proximity to citizen compared
In Denmark, since there is a job centre in every municipality, there is a close proximity to citizens. The services are to some extent accessible on the Internet (see http://www.jobnet.dk) and a high proportion of citizens have Internet access at home. Proximity to citizens is also an important feature in the Norwegian adaptation. In most municipalities, there is at least one NAV office; in large municipalities there are more, and some small municipalities have joint offices. The rule, however, is that the NAV one-stop shops are locally based neighbourhood offices. Similarly, in Britain, Jobcentre Plus aims to provide a service that is close to the citizen. Offices are located in high streets, and telephone services make it possible for clients to make their initial claim from within their own home.

Instruments for integration compared
The instruments for integration used in the Norwegian one-stop shops vary. Most offices have joint management and joint recruitment but, for the partners, budgets, laws and competences are separate. In Britain, intra-agency instruments have more relevance. The most important instrument in the British one-stop shops is the personal advisor who acts as a case manager, a relatively high integration instrument. Co-location of services is relatively rare although it has been used in some trial areas (Freud 2007). Until relatively recently, Jobcentres were managed by a single individual who was responsible for all staff. However, the management structure has now been altered to a dual management model to reflect the growing task portfolio of the Jobcentres, with one manager responsible for ensuring claimant compliance and another for mandatory welfare to work interventions (Bunt and Maidment 2007). In some senses this new split constitutes a re-emergence of the old divisional split between employment and social security.

In the Danish case, by placing the employment services with the municipalities, the coordination problem may at first hand seem to be solved. The jobcentres have joint management and joint budgets. However, there is still a need for coordination in the municipalities across the different sectors where processes in the administration of social welfare need to be coordinated with the jobcentres. This is especially the case for citizens with social as well as employment problems. There is also a need for intra-organizational coordination. Between central and local government, the instruments are rules and economic incentives. For instance, there are national rules concerning how fast and how often the unemployed should be referred to a municipal caseworker. If the speed and frequency of referrals are inadequate, the municipalities lose financial reimbursement.
DISCUSSION

Six points of discussion are made here, five comments on interrelations between our variables, and a final evaluative comment on the theme of accountability which runs through many of our variables. First, in our sample, participant structures vary extensively, from one-stop shops run by single agencies to one-stop-shops run by intergovernmental partnerships – even partnerships between partners from different levels of government. This influences the specific configuration of the one-stop shop, as the following discussion will show.

Secondly, where the participant structure is very simple, questions about instruments are less important. It is not meaningful to talk about ‘joint’ budgets or laws when one-stop shops that are run by one governmental entity, as is the case in Denmark post August 2009 and in Britain. Intra-agency coordination instruments are obviously relevant, but these are less radical than inter-agency coordination instruments.

Third, all the cases illustrate dynamism in one-stop shops. Underpinning models may change: for example, the Danish case which has transformed from an intergovernmental partnership to a single-owner structure. This probably makes little difference to people-as-clients, but it does matter from the points of views of people-as-employees and people-as-citizens. Even when partnered one-stop shops have unitary management, two lines of competence and authority run from the one-stop shop. In the Norwegian case, one line runs to the state Employment and Welfare Agency and one to the municipality in question. Services may appear ‘seamless’, but citizens as voters should still care whether services are the competency of the state or the municipality, even if citizens as service users may be indifferent to such matters.

Fourth, one may ask whether partnerships are stable or if one-stop shops that are run as partnerships are transitory structures. Will one-stop shops that are run as partnerships over time tend to become the responsibility of one partner? Many business scholars state that sustained collaboration is unlikely, because there is always an incentive for collaborating companies to free ride and shirk (Barney and Hesterly 1996). The public sector equivalent would be that collaborative partners try to push costs, blame and difficult clients and tasks onto each other and try instead to grab funds, glory and popular/simple clients and tasks. Power imbalances between participants are another source of failure for interorganizational collaborations (Mintzberg et al. 1996, p. 65). Avoiding a situation where one participant dominates the other is vital for lasting collaborative success (Mintzberg et al. 1996, p. 61). The Danish case illustrates a transition from collaboration to municipal ‘colonization’. Recent developments in Norway, such as central government monitoring of municipal social benefits, suggest that the state may also ‘colonize’ one-stop shops. This purported model for collaboration may be a transitory stage towards either decentralization or centralization.

Fifth, there is always a relationship between central government and local one-stop shops – regardless of participant structure. The degree of autonomy is therefore an enduring and often contentious issue. However, the central-local relationship differs depending on whether the local one-stop shop is formally part of a local government and also the extent to which private bodies are involved.

Sixth, the configuration of one-stop shops has implications for the issue of accountability. To start with, any move away from a pure hierarchical governance model to a partnership-oriented one can be said to reduce vertical ‘upwards’ political accountability, at least in the sense that responsibility for good or poor results is shared between partners and
harder to reward or punish. From a hierarchical perspective, accountability also decreases because of increased autonomy for the one-stop shop. However, if we focus on other types of accountability, the interpretation is less clear. Accountability also includes vertical ‘downwards’ accountability to clients. From this perspective, accountability may increase with the one-stop shop’s autonomy and also with its proximity to citizens. Professional accountability for a welfare worker also includes horizontal ‘outwards’ accountability to professionals in other frontline agencies. The greater interaction between professionals from different service units in the one-stop shop setting and the development of a dual responsibility for individual clients may improve accountability on this dimension. Outward and downward accountability therefore increase at the expense of upward accountability. There might also be tensions between these forms of accountability where the interests of clients and professional workers differ to those of government and other political actors.

CONCLUSIONS

The challenges to which the one-stop shop reforms have had to respond were similar across the three study countries. Prior to their introduction, problems of coordinating across levels of government had been apparent in all cases, particularly concerning costs (Denmark and Norway) and information-sharing problems (Britain). There were also perceived inefficiencies in all cases and a desire to rationalize. In Britain, a narrow concern with individual targets was another reason for the reform. An important motivation underpinning the reforms in all cases was a desire for a more holistic and user-friendly or customer-oriented service, one which would be simpler and easier to navigate. Thus the reforms were guided by political metaphors such as seamlessness, holistic administration, and putting the citizen at the centre. In all countries there was a strong similarity in terms of a desire to increase workforce participation, particularly for those furthest from the labour market. However, political and ideological motivations also played their part, particularly in Britain where the new Labour government had begun the reform programme. In both Britain and Denmark there was an ideological commitment to an interventionist labour market policy. In Norway and Denmark, as the actual details of the reform programme were worked out, political compromises had to be struck between administrative units, unions and levels of government. Thus in the Danish case the unions were strongly against the reform as it weakened their institutional platform (Christiansen and Klitgaard 2009).

The response to these problems was similar in two important respects. First, reforms in all three countries, involved mergers. In Britain employment and social security services were merged; in Norway it was national insurance and employment; in Denmark it was employment services provided by the state and the municipalities respectively. Second, the concepts of a single entrance and close proximity to citizens were central to all the countries’ reforms. However, there were differences in the models that were implemented, and variation in terms of task portfolios, participant structure, instruments, and autonomy of the local one-stop shop in relation to central government. The specific configurations of the one-stop shop that emerged were partially a product of compromises and negotiations between levels of government and the different interests involved, but were also influenced by the political and performance priorities of central government. While the one-stop shop model was an organizational innovation in all of our cases, the specific configuration of one-stop shops was partially path dependent in some of them, reflecting the historical traditions of public management and welfare delivery, such as the
hierarchical history of social security and employment in Britain and the history of strong decentralization in the Danish case.

Although intergovernmental partnerships often occur at either strategic, sectoral or neighbourhood level (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002), the one-stop shop model appears to cut across sectors, and combines elements of strategic and neighbourhood partnership. Further conceptualization is therefore needed to fully understand this model. Our identification of dimensions of variation helps to characterize core features of one-stop shops and may help future research to delineate subtypes of one-stop shops. For example, one may put a spotlight on the ‘one’ in one-stop shop by using ‘task portfolio’, one of the dimensions we identify. From a client perspective, variation in the breadth and depth of task portfolios translates into an experience of receiving either a complete or partial service. In complete service settings, one-stop shop staff join-up services for clients; in partial service settings, staff do some joining up while the client does the rest. This relates to Kubicek and Hagen’s (2000) three tier distinction between the first stop shop, the convenience store and the true one-stop shop.

The case studies indicate that problems of coordination and specialization persist. When citizens are ‘put at the centre’ in the jobcentres, the critique in the Danish case is that this mainly holds for citizens that are ready for the job market. Citizens with social problems in addition to unemployment, however, are in need of further inter-organizational coordination. In Britain, the change to a dual management structure also indicates that the classical trade-off between coordination and specialization is also present in the one-stop shops. When portfolios become extremely big the need for specialization re-emerges. However, the new ICT developments which are found in all countries may provide an interesting solution to part of the trade-off. Here citizen-directed services become accessible with close proximity and potentially in addition with a very large task portfolio at the same site. However, the services provided here may be less accessible for citizens with low ICT competencies as well as complicated cases which need individual attention. The level of tailoring required for individuals does not always appear to be met in our cases. This is despite the attempt to organize the one-stop shop around the principle of ‘person’. There is clearly a difficulty in balancing efficiency considerations with the need for greater discretion and on-the-spot decision making.

We have made some preliminary observations on the effectiveness of the one-stop shop model, although the scope of the article does not permit a thorough evaluation of this form. From our discussion above, it is possible to highlight three core dimensions of effectiveness for evaluating one-stop shops, namely accountability, producer dimensions and user dimensions. We have discussed accountability briefly, but we largely leave it to future research to pursue the evaluative line, which we believe is theoretically promising and substantially important.

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