

# Policy integration: what does it mean and how can it be achieved? A multi-disciplinary review

*Evert Meijers, Dominic Stead*

Delft University of Technology  
OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies  
PO Box 5030  
2600 GA Delft  
The Netherlands  
[e.meijers@otb.tudelft.nl](mailto:e.meijers@otb.tudelft.nl); [d.stead@otb.tudelft.nl](mailto:d.stead@otb.tudelft.nl)  
Tel +31 15 2787892  
Fax +31 15 2783450

## 1. Introduction

There are increasing calls for greater policy integration from a number of areas, one of the most prominent being environmental policy-making where integration is frequently recognised as being crucial for sustainable development. A wide variety of sectoral policies turn out to have unexpected and often unwanted environmental consequences (or externalities) that were not taken into account in the process of policy-making. Calls have been made to avoid such fragmented decision-making by integrating different, but interrelated policies.

These calls are coming at a time when decision-making is facing increasing complexity as a result of various concurrent trends. Some of these trends are toward globalisation and greater centralisation of decision-making, whilst other trends are toward fragmentation and decentralisation of decision-making. A variety of factors have increased the number of actors involved in the policy process, such as the emergence of the information society, greater emphasis on public participation and the increasing role of non-governmental organisations, pressure groups and agencies in the decision-making process. All these developments make policy integration increasingly difficult but more compelling to achieve.

Policy integration concerns the management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, which often do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments. In the academic literature, several disciplines address policy integration although not always referring to this particular term. A variety of other related (and sometimes synonymous) terms are used such as policy coherence, cross-cutting policy-making, concerted decision-making, policy consistency, holistic government, joined-up government and, most especially, policy co-ordination. These concepts are developed within organisational theories such as those on inter-organisational co-operation and co-

ordination, collaboration, intergovernmental management and network management. In order to improve understanding of the concept of policy integration, this paper reviews and compares these various concepts and theories and relates them to the issue of policy integration. Bringing about more conceptual clarity to the concept of policy integration is the first objective of the paper. This literature also opens up a wealth of material concerning facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration. Identifying and synthesising these facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration is the second objective of the paper.

The paper is structured on the basis of these objectives. The second section presents an overview of the literature on the concept of policy integration and related key concepts. Based on these concepts, the third section presents the ‘state of the art’ –knowledge on facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration. The concluding section reflects on the level of ambition when integrating policies.

## 2. Theoretical concepts concerning policy integration

Policy integration concerns the management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, and which do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments. It also refers to the management of policy responsibility within a single organisation or sector. Integrated policy-making refers to both horizontal sectoral integration (between different departments and/or professions in public authorities) and vertical inter-governmental integration in policy-making (between different tiers of government), or combinations of both. However, the focus in this paper is mainly on horizontal sectoral integration. According to Underdal (1980), the basic requirements for policies to be qualified as ‘integrated’ are comprehensiveness (recognizing a broader scope of policy consequences in terms of time, space, actors and issues), aggregation (a minimal extent to which policy alternatives are evaluated from an ‘overall’ perspective) and consistency (a minimal extent to which a policy penetrates all policy levels and all government agencies).

### *Key concepts*

Whilst the term ‘*integrated policy-making*’ is rather uncommon in the theoretical literature, a number of better known and more or less synonymous concepts can be found: *coherent policy making* (OECD, 1996), *cross-cutting policy-making* (Cabinet Office, 2000), *policy co-ordination* (Challis *et al*, 1988; Alter and Hage, 1993), *concerted decision-making* (Warren *et al*, 1974) and *holistic government*, also known as *joined-up policy* (Wilkinson and Appelbee, 1999) or *joined-up government* (Ling, 2002). Other related concepts in the organisational literature that have potential relevance for research concerning the integration of sectoral policies within and between organisations include *inter-organisational co-ordination* (Rogers and Whetten, 1982), *inter-organisational collaboration* (Alter and Hage, 1993; Huxham, 1996), *inter-governmental management* (see Agranoff, 1986) and *network management* (Kickert *et al*, 1997). These related concepts primarily concern co-operation between organisations, rather than co-operation between sectoral departments within one organisation. It could be argued that inter-organisational policy-making and intra-organisational policy-making are similar to a considerable extent when it comes to integrating issues that are cross-sectoral. After all, even within one organisation, different sectoral departments often operate as different organisations with their own specific professional styles, approaches, needs, agendas and modes

of operation. The main difference is that the inter-dependence within an organisation is subject to a larger amount of control than between organisations. Here, a brief overview of definitions of these key concepts is presented. The overview is not exhaustive but instead tries to make clear some of the links between the major concepts.

#### *Co-ordination*

In the literature, policy co-ordination is often seen as an umbrella concept for a number of other terms related to integrated policy making, such as *policy consistency* and *policy coherence*. Challis *et al* broadly characterise policy co-ordination as ‘a pursuit of coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness and of harmonious compatible outcomes’ (1988:25). Coherence itself is, in a very general sense, defined as an overall state of mutual consistency among different policies (OECD, 1996). Mulford and Rogers define *inter-organisational co-ordination* as ‘the process whereby two or more organisations create and/or use existing decision rules that have been established to deal collectively with their shared task environment’ (Mulford and Rogers, 1982:12). The broad perspective taken by Challis *et al* on co-ordination is also expressed in their overview of what co-ordination may refer to (Challis *et al*, 1988:29):

- ensuring consistency and coherence between the various objectives and elements of a single policy or project
- ensuring consistency and coherence within a set of interacting policies or projects ‘owned’ by one or more departments or organisations
- ensuring that policy is translated into a consistent and coherent set of appropriate actions within one or more departments or organisations
- ensuring that service delivery practises at the field level are such that a consistent, coherent and comprehensive package of help is available to people with specified needs
- ensuring that services actually consumed by the public in contact comprise a consistent, coherent and comprehensive package appropriate to expressed wants

#### *Inter-governmental management*

The concept of *inter-governmental management* (Agranoff, 1986; 1996) comes down to more or less the same as inter-organisational co-ordination, but puts more emphasis on the achievement of goals by means of co-operation and co-ordination and other interactions between governments. Like integrated policy-making, inter-governmental management is both horizontal and vertical. There is, however, a difference in focus: inter-governmental management focuses more on the vertical relations, while integrated policy-making is more concerned with the horizontal relations.

#### *Holistic government*

Another related concept is the idea of *holistic government*, which refers to an understanding that is greater than the mere piecing together of the partial perspectives (OECD, 1996:29). It departs from the idea that a series of tractable issues cannot be solved in isolation but needs a co-ordinated response from a variety of organisations. The same view is taken in the approach called *joined-up government*, a concept from the United Kingdom. Here, it is considered a response to the perception that services had become fragmented and that this fragmentation was preventing the achievement of important goals of public policy. As such the concept of joined-up government acted and still acts as a central part of public sector reform. Joined-up government is an umbrella

term and concerns ‘co-ordinating activities across organisational boundaries without removing the boundaries themselves. These boundaries are inter-departmental, central-local, and sectoral’ (Ling, 2002:616). A similar concept is that of *cross-cutting policy making*, which addresses issues not captured by sectoral departments and their objectives. Sustainable development is an example of such a cross-cutting issue.

#### *Collaboration*

Another term used to describe a form of inter-organisational relationship is ‘*collaboration*’. It might generally be described as a very positive form of working in association with other organisations for some form of mutual benefit (Huxham, 1996). The focus in this approach is strongly on the output of the collaboration process, so-called collaborative advantage, a kind of synergy to legitimise collaboration. The idea of collaborative advantage (as opposed to the idea of competitive advantage) presents an alternative to the market-dominated thinking in public management. Alter and Hage (1993:87) refer to co-operation in terms of collaboration: co-operation is the degree to which collaboration exists in terms of programs, resources, information and so on. Gray (1989:5) uses the term collaboration to define the ‘process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible’.

#### *Policy networks and network management*

The metaphor of the network, emphasising inter-dependency and complexity, has also been applied to policy communities, most clearly in the concept of *policy networks* and *network management* (Hanf and Scharpf, 1978; Rogers and Whetten, 1982; Marin and Mayntz, 1991). Kickert *et al* define such policy networks as ‘(more or less) stable patterns of social relationships between independent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes’ (Kickert *et al*, 1997:6). This concept is mostly applied at the meso-level of specific policy fields, meaning that for integrated policy making often a number of quite self-standing policy networks need to be integrated. While the worth of the policy network lies mainly in clarifying inter-dependencies, it comes coupled with an approach to governance that seems interesting in our context: network management, or the managing of policy networks. Network management aims at ‘co-ordinating strategies of actors with different goals and preferences with regard to a certain problem or policy measure within an existing network of inter-organisational relations’ (Kickert *et al*, 1997:10). It is a form of steering aimed at promoting joint problem solving or policy development (Kickert and Koppenjan, 1997:43). Network management is often considered one of three ideal type modes of governance, the others being ‘market’ and ‘hierarchy’ (Thompson *et al*, 1991). These modes of governance are not mutually exclusive – rather, inter-organisational relations involve different modes of governance, one of which dominates in different stages of the relationship concerned (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998).

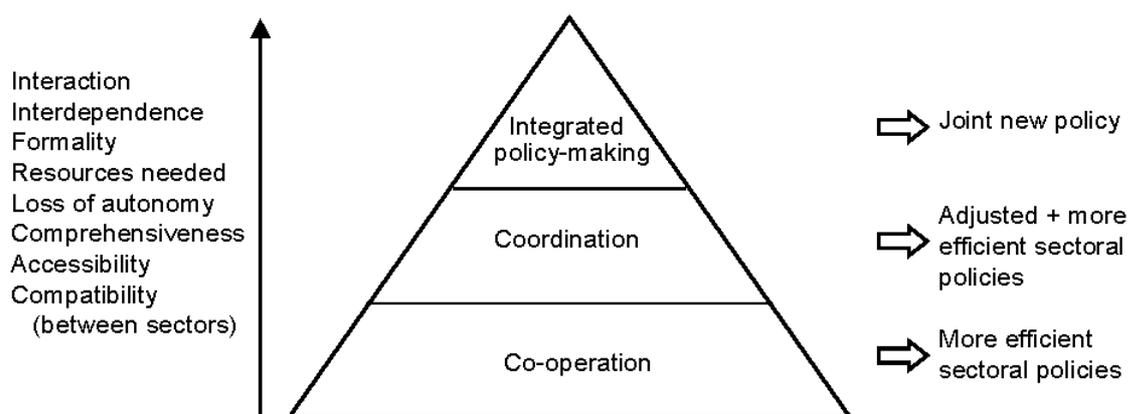
#### *..... and policy integration*

While these notions and theories refer to more or less the same phenomenon, there are notable differences. For instance, while some people see co-ordination as more or less the same as integrated policy-making (Mulford and Rogers, 1982), others see differences (OECD, 1996). The OECD observes that policy integration is quite distinct and more sophisticated than policy co-ordination (OECD, 1996). The main differences concern two aspects: (i) the level of interaction;

and (ii) the output. Policy integration requires more inter-sectoral interaction than policy co-ordination. This is partly explained by the difference in output. Whilst co-ordination aims at adjusting sectoral policies in order to make them mutually enforcing and consistent, policy integration results in one joint policy for the sectors involved. This difference in output is based on a difference in objectives as well. Co-ordination is about policies of organisations having more or less the same sectoral objectives, while integrated policy-making departs from an objective not covered by, and on a higher scale than sectoral objectives. Such an objective could well be called a cross-cutting objective (such as sustainable development).

Where integrated policy-making is more far-reaching than policy co-ordination, policy co-ordination in turn is more far-reaching than co-operation. In addition, the literature is not clear on how to interpret the relation between co-ordination and co-operation. While some authors consider co-operation and co-ordination to be distinct and separate, others see co-ordination as one type of co-operation (Alter and Hage, 1993), holding that typical features of co-ordination – deliberate adjustment and collective goals – are also found in co-operative relations. The difference between co-ordination and co-operation concerns the extent to which collective goals or individual goals are at play. *Inter-organisational co-operation*, for instance, is defined as ‘the presence of deliberate relations between otherwise autonomous organisations for the joint accomplishment of *individual* operating goals’ (Schermerhorn, 1975:847). On the other hand, Mulford and Rogers (1982) argue that co-ordination goes further than co-operation in the sense that co-ordination is more formal than co-operation, involves more resources and increases interdependence, which poses more of a threat to autonomy. Above all, it leads to different outcomes. In the case of co-operation, two organisations work together to accomplish their own goals, while in the case of co-ordination, the joint decisions and/or actions result in joint outcomes that may be quite different from their initial preferred outcomes. Here, a parallel can be drawn with the relation between co-ordination and integrated policy-making: the latter being more far-reaching on the same dimensions (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Integrated policy-making, policy co-ordination and co-operation.**



As regards output and type of objective (cross-cutting or sectoral), policy integration can be distinguished from co-ordination and co-operation or collaboration. Although co-ordination and co-operation are part of the process of policy integration, they do not account for the entire process. Integration is more demanding for the stakeholders involved in the process. In general,

policy integration requires more interaction, accessibility and compatibility, leads to more interdependence (and also follows from more interdependence regarding the issue at stake), needs more formal institutional arrangements, involves more resources, requires stakeholders to give up more autonomy and is more comprehensive in terms of time, space and actors. However, keeping the differences in terms of output and type of objective in mind, policy integration does involve co-ordination and co-operation, just like it does involve inter-governmental management and network management. Moreover, policy integration is synonymous to concepts as holistic government, joined-up government or cross-cutting policy making.

### 3. Facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration

Having increased our understanding of the relationships between policy integration and other key concepts addressing more or less the same issue, we arrive at the second objective of this paper. This objective is to identify and synthesise the facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration. Linking the key concepts mentioned above to policy integration opens up a wealth of material concerning facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration as many of those that have attempted to define these key concepts, have also focused on factors facilitating or hindering the achievement of integrated policies and effective inter-organisational relations. Here we review the material and present an overview of the important conditions for policy inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination to occur, the facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration, and the costs and benefits of policy integration. These three aspects are of course strongly related. Given the various disciplines of the literature reviewed, a number of different issues emerge as being important.

Reviewing the organisational science literature up to the early 1980s, Halpert (1982) proposes that co-ordination is preconditioned by two assumptions: (i) the quest for survival by an organisation is the prime factor motivating inter-agency co-ordination; and (ii) co-ordination cannot occur without some level of internal adjustment to the structure of the organisation. His synthesis of literature leads to a description of co-ordination between agencies as a result of two competing forces: facilitators and inhibitors of co-ordination. Halpert subdivides these facilitators and inhibitors according to interpretive and contextual factors. Interpretive factors relate to individuals (attitudes, values and perceptions for example), whilst contextual factors relate to internal organisational or environmental conditions (Table 1).

Another review of facilitators and inhibitors of co-ordination in social planning can be found in Challis *et al* (1988), who distinguish between behavioural and structural elements. Behavioural factors that hinder co-ordination include disruptive or difficult personalities; professional defensiveness and divergent planning philosophies. Challis *et al* report that none of these are sufficient to fully sabotage co-ordination. However, acting in parallel or in combination, they can have a powerful influence on policy-making. Structural elements have more impact on the 'co-ordinative environment'. These include the *political factors* (such as political backing, political style, values and ideology), *policy issues* (such as consensus on the nature of problems and their solutions), and *specific factors* relating to the policy field in question. Contrary to the behavioural elements, which have an inimical nature, structural elements can be either a major barrier or a significant opportunity.

**Table 1. Facilitators and inhibitors of organisational co-ordination.**

Facilitators of organisational co-ordination	Inhibitors of organisational co-ordination
<i>1. Interpretive factors (attitudes, values and perceptions of personnel):</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived need</li> <li>• Positive attitudes</li> <li>• Consensus between administrators and staff</li> <li>• Maintenance of organisational and paradigm identity</li> <li>• Maintenance of prestige or power</li> <li>• Group-centred approach to problems</li>   <li>• Similar resources, goals or needs</li> <li>• Common commitment</li>   <li>• Common definitions, ideologies, interests or approaches</li> <li>• Good historical relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vested interests</li> <li>• Perceived threat or competition</li> <li>• Disparities in staff training</li> <li>• Perceived loss of organisational and program identity or strategic positions</li> <li>• Perceived loss of prestige or authority</li> <li>• Inter-professional and intra-professional differences</li> <li>• Lack of a common language</li> <li>• Different priorities, ideologies, outlooks or goals</li> <li>• Differing organisational-leader-professional socialisation</li> <li>• Poor historical relations or image formation</li> </ul>
<i>2. Contextual factors (internal environmental conditions):</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actual needs or benefits</li> <li>• Standardisation</li> <li>• Decentralisation</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> <li>• Occupational diversity</li> <li>• Informal contacts or exchange of information and resources</li> <li>• Geographic proximity</li> <li>• Boundary permeability</li> <li>• Complementary organisational or personnel roles</li> <li>• Similarity of structures, supply capabilities, needs or services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs outweigh benefits</li> <li>• Bureaucratisation</li> <li>• Centralisation</li> <li>• 'Professionalisation'</li> <li>• Specialisation</li> <li>• Infrequent or inadequate communication (internal or external)</li> <li>• Fragmentation of levels of government</li> <li>• Little or no boundary permeability</li> <li>• Inadequately trained personnel</li>   <li>• Structural differences</li> </ul>

Adapted from Halpert (1982).

Next to these behavioural and structural elements which form the basic context to interaction, Challis *et al* (1988) discern a secondary level of environmental variables more related to process factors in which cost and benefit considerations play an important role. Administrative and time costs are important in co-ordination. Loss of domain is considered another major cost. Challis *et al* conclude with the observation that success in interaction and attempts at co-ordination are most likely when a number of factors (opportunities, barriers, costs, benefits) fall (or are manoeuvred) into positive alignment.

Kickert and Koppenjan (1997) provide a synthesis of preconditions for the method of network government and potential success factors. Frequently mentioned factors include:

- *The number of actors.* It is often assumed that the more actors involved in interaction processes, the more difficult it becomes to reach agreement. However, other evidence (e.g. game theory) suggests that there is no difference when it comes to co-operation. Of course, network management is a matter of finding an adequate level of participation: involve only those who are indispensable.

- *Diversity within networks.* The success of network management depends on the degree to which efforts to influence the process take account of the multiformity of the network and the actors who operate within it.
- *Closed nature of networks.* Closedness refers to the situation in which a network is to a large extent closed off to external influences, limiting the opportunities for network management. A closed network is not easily influenced, but this means also that there is some capacity for self-management within the network.
- *Conflict of interests.* Many authors suggest that in situations in which interests are divergent or even clash, reaching consensus is rendered impossible by lack of alternatives and by conflict (Agronoff, 1986; Ostrom, 1990). However, as interests should be considered social constructs rather than fixed, they can be modified through interaction. The more diverse the interests/goals are, the less the potential for success.
- *Leadership and commitment power.* Representativeness and commitment power of representatives of organisations within a network are not always guaranteed. Reaching consensus between representatives regarding a joint course of action and establishing support for these ideas within the ‘parent’ organisation demands leadership qualities.

Alter and Hage (1993) argue that four factors are necessary for the development of collaboration between firms and agencies: the *willingness to collaborate*, the *need for expertise*, the *need for funds*, and the need for *adaptive efficiency*. These in turn are affected by the culture of trust, the complexity of the task, the existence of highly specialised niches, and the emergence of small units – whether as separate organisations or within large-scale organisations. Surveying a wide range of literature, Alter and Hage summarise the costs and benefits – also referring to them as risks and motivators – of network co-operation between firms and organisations in a ‘calculus of inter-organisational co-operation’ (Table 2).

The Cabinet Office (2000) recognises several potential costs and benefits of cross-cutting interventions (Table 3). Compared to the overview by Alter and Hage, these are more oriented towards the practice of co-operation and policy-making. Interestingly, the same document gives some insight into reasons why effective cross-departmental working is often inhibited. These reasons mainly relate to the organisational structure and, to a lesser extent, cultural reasons. The Cabinet Office report notes that although the conventional vertical structure of local government (based on a functional organisation of responsibilities) has its advantages, it also often inhibits effective inter-sectoral working and policy integration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The vertical management structure of local government is effective in delivering many local government policies and priorities, and of course has its advantages: (i) it provides a single, clear line of accountability; and (ii) it is effective at keeping tight control over scarce resources and ensuring those resources are used efficiently and effectively.

**Table 2. Costs and benefits of inter-organisational collaboration.**

Costs	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of technological superiority; risk of losing competitive position</li> <li>• Loss of resources – time, money, information, raw material, legitimacy, status</li> <li>• Being linked with failure; sharing the costs of failing such as loss of reputation, status, and financial position</li> <li>• Loss of autonomy and ability to unilaterally control outcomes; goal displacement; loss of control</li> <li>• Loss of stability, certainty, and known time-tested technology; feelings of dislocation</li> <li>• Conflict over domain, goals, methods</li> <li>• Delays in solution due to problems in co-ordination</li> <li>• Government intrusion, regulation and so on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to learn and to adapt, develop competencies, or jointly develop new products</li> <li>• Gain of resources – time, money, information, raw material, legitimacy, status</li> <li>• Sharing the cost of product development and associated risks, risks associated with commercial acceptance, and risks associated with size of market share</li> <li>• Gain of influence over domain; ability to penetrate new markets; competitive positioning and access to foreign markets; need for global products</li> <li>• Ability to manage uncertainty, solve invisible and complex problems; ability to specialise or diversify; ability to fend off competitors</li> <li>• Gain of mutual support, group synergy, and harmonious working relationships</li> <li>• Rapid responses to changing market demands; less delay in use of new technologies</li> <li>• Gaining acceptance from foreign governments for participation in country</li> </ul>

Adapted from Alter and Hage, 1993.

**Table 3. Potential benefits and costs of policy co-ordination as seen by policy-makers.**

Costs	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less clear lines of accountability for policy and service delivery</li> <li>• Greater difficulty in measuring effectiveness and impact, because of the need to develop and maintain more sophisticated performance measurement systems</li> <li>• Direct and opportunity costs of management and staff time spent establishing and sustaining cross-cutting working arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping to convey the ‘big picture’ for strategic issues</li> <li>• Helping to realise synergies and maximise effectiveness of policy and/or service delivery</li> <li>• Exploiting economies of scale</li> <li>• Improving customer/client focus and thus the quality and user friendliness of services</li> <li>• Providing a framework for resolving potential conflicts and making trade-offs</li> <li>• Improving service delivery for particular groups</li> </ul>

Cabinet Office, 2000.

This conventional structure may, for example, sometimes lead to policy-makers taking a narrow perspective on policy and focusing on departmental aims rather than the overall goals of the organisation or the end-users of services. They may also lead to weak or perverse incentives for policy co-ordination. Other barriers include a lack of management mechanisms for policy integration and professional and/or departmental culture (Box 1).

### Box 1. Examples of barriers to co-ordination between professions and departments.

#### *Narrow perspectives*

- policy-makers can fail to look at things from the perspective of the overall goals of the organisation or the end-user of services
- departments may be over-prescriptive in specifying the means of delivery which may conflict with objectives set by other departments

#### *Weak or perverse incentives*

- high-profile initiatives often receive more recognition than lower-key contributions to corporate goals, even where lower-key contributions have as much impact as high-profile initiatives
- current incentive structures encourage more interest in what an individual department contributes to a corporate goal, rather than what the whole organisation contributes to the goal
- there is little or no reward, either in financial terms or in terms of enhanced status or career prospects, for helping someone else to achieve their objectives: conventional public sector pay and appraisal systems are generally not very good at recognising or rewarding a contribution to a team effort, especially to a team effort which will deliver another department's objectives
- recognition tends to be given to individuals skilled in perceptive policy analysis, not to those who make it easier for others to achieve their objectives
- there is often a reluctance to promote inter-sectoral working because it involves complex relationships and lines of accountability, which means they can be risky, or at least difficult to manage
- inter-sectoral working can mean significant costs falling on one budget while the benefits accrue to another, which discourages a corporate approach
- the skills required for successful inter-sectoral working are different from those required to promote a departmental brief but the lack of incentives for inter-sectoral working (above) inhibits individuals and organisations from developing these skills

#### *Lack of management mechanisms*

- current mechanisms for sorting out inconsistencies and conflicts between different departments' objectives and priorities are sometimes not effective enough to avoid conflicting messages being passed down from different departments to service providers
- mechanisms for reconciling conflicting priorities between sections can be weak
- appraisal systems are often incapable of identifying and rewarding a contribution to a successful inter-sectoral project, which reduce the incentive to work together effectively

#### *Professional and departmental culture*

- departments (and sections within them) tend to defend their budgets, which are generally allocated on a departmental or sectional basis, rather than to policies or functions, even where these straddle sectoral boundaries
- departmental objectives often take priority over corporate goals

Based on Cabinet Office, 2000.

A 1996 OECD report presents a number of tools to increase policy coherence (OECD, 1996). Tools of coherence are organisational concepts which, translated into structures, processes and methods of work, have helped bring greater policy consistency in governments from different political and administrative traditions. They concern the *process* of policy-making, not the *substance* of policies. While the focus is on recommendations for the centre of government, a wider set of concerns is addressed. A number of commonalities in organisational concepts that have been

developed to manage coherent policy-making are presented. They include the following rather broad recommendations (OECD, 1996:41-42):

- Commitment by the political leadership is a necessary precondition to coherence, and a tool to enhance it
- Establishing a strategic policy framework helps to ensure that individual policies are consistent with the government's goals and priorities
- The existence of a central overview and co-ordination capacity is essential to ensure horizontal consistency among policies
- Decision-makers need advice based on a clear definition and good analysis of issues, with explicit indications of possible inconsistencies
- Mechanisms to anticipate, detect and resolve policy conflicts early in the process help identify inconsistencies and reduce incoherence
- The decision-making process must be organised to achieve an effective reconciliation between policy priorities and budgetary imperatives
- Implementation procedures and monitoring mechanisms must be designed to ensure that policies can be adjusted in the light of progress, new information, and changing circumstances
- An administrative culture that promotes cross-sectoral co-operation and a systematic dialogue between policy communities contributes to the strengthening of policy coherence

In an analysis of what dimensions of activities are taking place under the banner of joined-up government in Britain, Ling (2002:626) identifies four ways of achieving more integrated policy in practice:

1. defining new types of organisation (e.g. culture and values, information and training)
2. defining new accountabilities and incentives (e.g. shared outcome targets and performance measures)
3. defining new ways of delivering services (e.g. joint consultation and involvement)
4. defining new ways of working across organisations (e.g. shared leadership, pooled budgets, merged structures and joint teams)

Co-operation between organisations is complicated and 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham, 1996) often occurs. The term refers to the situation when the apparent rate of work output from collaboration is slowed down considerably compared to what a casual observer might expect it to be able to achieve. Numerous difficulties can lead to a state of inertia. Among these are difficulties stemming from differences in aims, language, procedures, culture and perceived power; from the tension between autonomy and accountability and the lack of authority structure; and from the time needed to manage logistics (Huxham, 1996:4). The autonomy-accountability tension refers to the often limited degree of autonomy individuals have in collaborations as activities of the collaboration will affect 'parent' organisations. They need to be accountable to these organisations, but at the same time, a fair degree of autonomy is needed in order to make progress in the collaboration.

The review of *facilitators*, *inhibitors*, *benefits* and *costs* of policy integration provides a large number of factors influencing the process of achieving more integrated policies. While there is quite some

overlap, the difference in perspective taken by the various authors provides some differing interpretations. Important factors playing a role in inter-organisational integrated policy-making include:

- organisational factors
- behavioural, cultural and personal factors
- political factors
- economic or financial factors
- process or instrumental factors
- contextual factors
- specific factors relating to the issue involved

The exact weight of all these factors is unclear from the literature, although Challis *et al* report that *structural elements* play a more significant role than *behavioural elements*. However, it could be argued that the significance of all these groups of factors varies from case to case. Obviously, integrated policy-making is dependent on a large variety of factors, making it a complex endeavour. Integrated policy making will therefore always be a delicate balance between facilitators, inhibitors, costs and benefits and can therefore never be taken for granted. Moreover, there may well be a gap between the need for coherent policies and the capacity to achieve it.

#### 4. Conclusion

The twofold objective of this paper is to increase our conceptual understanding of policy integration on the one hand and to identify and synthesise the facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration on the other. To fulfil these objectives the paper first presented a review of the concept of policy integration and linked it to other key concepts. This has opened up a wealth of literature on facilitators and inhibitors of integration, which were summarised in the paper.

Studies on policy integration, and the term itself, are rather uncommon in the academic literature. Consequently, policy integration should be regarded as a relative frontier of knowledge. However, our understanding of policy integration can build on some decades of research in organisational science addressing co-operation and co-ordination between different sectors. Though in terms of the output (one integrated policy rather than adjusted sectoral policies) and the nature of the objective (cross-cutting) policy integration differs from policy co-ordination and co-operation, it necessarily involves both at the same time. Moreover, a variety of synonymous concepts can be found, such as cross-cutting policy-making, holistic or joined-up government. Policy integration concerns the management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, and which do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments. An integrated policy is comprehensive, aggregated and consistent.

Attempts to identify factors contributing to more co-ordinated or integrated policies clearly point at the existence of a gap between the existing situation and the desired situation: policies are often not sufficiently integrated to effectively address policy issues, particularly those that have a strong cross-cutting nature. Simply stating that policies should be more integrated and providing

tools to do so, gives a rather simplistic representation of the complex endeavour of policy integration. A review of the lists of facilitators, inhibitors, costs and benefits of policy integration makes clear that achieving better integrated policies is dependent on a multitude of different types of factors concerning for instance individuals, organisations, culture, process, instruments, politics and so on. Achieving more integrated policies is dependent on a multitude of different types of indicators such as organisational factors, behavioural or personalised factors, political factors, economic or financial factors, process or instrumental factors, contextual factors and specific factors relating to the issue involved.

Policy integration may well be an aspiration for many policy-makers and politicians and there are undeniably some good reasons for policy integration but there are also limits to which policy integration can be achieved in practice. In this respect, the OECD remarks that the ‘pragmatic approach adopted... has led to a measure of caution concerning the extent to which coherence can, in practice, be strengthened. It has also raised the concern that excessive efforts to enhance coherence can result in a high degree of central control, and a consequent loss of flexibility in the policy making system’ (OECD, 1996:8). With respect to the gap between the need for coherence and the capacity to achieve it, they conclude that this is due to the complexity of governing contemporary society and the multifaceted nature of the public policy domain. They discern different spheres of coherence (e.g. economic, social and political), attributing a different internal logic to each of them. Another key lesson is that governing in a democratic political system necessarily involves a degree of incoherence. Social and political factors bring into play an array of forces that rarely converge toward coherent policies. Incoherence can hardly be avoided, rather managing it is the way to proceed. The recent report of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy on sustainable development expresses similar views, stating that the propensity for integrality ‘disguises the fact that there are always multiple, complex and conflicting goals at issue in the public arena, which do not generally complement one another but require choices to be made’ (Scientific Council for Government Policy, 2002).

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