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Tom Christensen

# The Norwegian Front-End Governance Regime of Major Public Projects – a Theoretically Based Analysis

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*Tom Christensen*

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Sammendrag: Denne rapporten drøfter den norske ordningen med ekstern kvalitetssikring av store statlige investeringsprosjekter i lys av ulike perspektiver fra organisasjons- og statsvitenskapen. Ved å foreta en analyse basert på teorier fra disse fagfeltene kommer det frem et bilde som supplerer det etablerte kunnskapsmaterialet som omhandler KS-ordningen. Rapporten har tre deler: Den første delen tar for seg kvalitetssikringsordningen i lys av utvalgte perspektiver. Den andre delen ser på kvalitetssikringsordningen i lys av større reformer i offentlig sektor. Del tre er en diskusjon om hvordan KS-ordningen eventuelt kan forbedres og gjøres klarere sett i lys av de foregående analysene.

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*Tel. 73 59 46 40*

*Fax. 73 59 70 21*

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# **The Norwegian Front-End Governance Regime of Major Public Projects - a Theoretically Based Analysis**

Tom Christensen,  
Department of Political Science,  
University of Oslo  
Email: [tom.christensen@stv.uio.no](mailto:tom.christensen@stv.uio.no)



# Forord og kort sammendrag

Formålet med denne studien er å se nærmere på den norske ordningen med eksterne kvalitetssikring av store statlige investeringsprosjekter i lys av perspektiver fra organisasjonsvitenskapen og teorier om beslutningstaking. Ved å foreta en analyse basert på teorier fra disse fagfeltene kommer det frem et bilde som supplerer det etablerte kunnskapsmaterialet som omhandler KS-ordningen. Nye perspektiver gir ny innsikt. Rapporten har tre deler:

Den første delen tar for seg kvalitetssikringsordningen i lys av utvalgte perspektiver: Et strukturelt-instrumentelt perspektiv gir innsyn i systemets oppbygging og struktur, et økonomisk-rasjonelt perspektiv forklarer det tekniske planleggingsidealet som ordningen fungerer innenfor, et kulturelt-institusjonelt perspektiv peker ut nye utviklingstrekk, et miljøperspektiv ser på presset for bedre effektivitet og symbolbruken brukt i systemet, mens "garbage can" perspektivet belyser potensielle uklarheter i systemet.

Den andre delen ser på kvalitetssikringsordningen i lys av større reformer i offentlig sektor. KS-ordningen har kjennetegn som stemmer med både New public management (NPM) og senere post-NPM reformer. Planleggingsgrepet og bruken av eksterne kvalitetssikringsrådgivere minner om tenkingen innen New Public Management, mens KS1 med sitt bidrag til politisk lederskap og kontroll har typiske post-NPM kjennetegn.

Del tre er en diskusjon om hvordan KS-ordningen eventuelt kan forbedres og gjøres klarere sett i lys av de foregående analysene. Rapporten konkluderer at det kan være fordelaktig med økte ressurser og kompetanse i den sentrale administrasjonen for å følge opp ordningen, alternativt å tone noe ned den eksterne delen av KS1-ordningen for å sikre god balanse mellom det interne og eksterne perspektivet på investeringstiltakene.

Rapporten er skrevet av Professor Tom Christensen ved Institutt for statsvitenskap ved Universitetet i Oslo.

Trondheim, november 2009

Knut Samset,

Programansvarlig, Concept-programmet, NTNU



# Summary

This report presents a theoretically based analysis of the Norwegian Quality Assurance Scheme (QA1 and QA2) for Major Public Projects, drawing on a number of different perspectives from organization theory and decision-making theory. It starts by presenting the perspectives and using them to characterize, analyze and evaluate the quality assurance system. A structural-instrumental perspective gives the best insight into the complex design of the system, which encompasses both centralizing elements with the potential to increase political control, and devolutionary elements, such as the use of private experts. An economic-rational perspective helps to explain the technical planning ideal on which the system is based, while a cultural-institutional perspective points to a new cultural trajectory in the making. An environmental perspective looks at pressure from the environment for greater efficiency and at the symbols used by the quality assurance system, while the garbage can perspective highlights potential ambiguity in the system.

As a second step the report outlines the main features of New Public Management and post-NPM reforms in public sector organizations, and places Norway in the comparative reform picture. The main question here is whether the quality assurance system has New Public Management or post-NPM features. Quality assessment systems as such could be fitted into both reform waves, and the Norwegian quality assurance system has features from both types of reform. While the quality assurance system's approach to planning and the inclusion of external experts is very much inspired by New Public Management reform thinking, the QA1 part of the system, which anchors the system in the central political leadership and thus potentially increases political control, is a typical post-NPM element.

Third, the report discusses how the system might be elaborated or improved. Assuming that the basic structure of the system will remain in place, one improvement would be to increase the resources and competence of those responsible for steering and administering the system in the central civil service, particularly in the Ministry of Finance. Alternatively, the role of the external experts could be scaled back somewhat, particularly in the QA1 phase. More resources for planning major public projects in the sectoral ministries and agencies could also be developed.





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# Foreword

This report presents a theoretically based analysis and evaluation of the Norwegian Quality Assurance Scheme (QA1 and QA2) for Major Public Projects, which was introduced in 2000 (QA2) under the Bondevik I government and extended in 2005 (QA1) under the Bondevik II government. It will conduct a theoretically based discussion and analysis of the scheme or system, or as it is often labeled – ‘regime’, for which the point of departure is organization theory, or more specifically a combination of instrumental and institutional types of organization theory. This type of theory will be used to discuss how the quality assurance system in Norway may be understood as an organizational and institutional phenomenon, and how it fits into general international trends concerning administrative policy and reforms. What characterizes this quality-assurance and planning scheme as a steering, regulation and decision-making system in a general and analytical sense? What are its potential major strengths and weaknesses, and what improvements might be made?

There is a long and extensive research tradition dealing with major public projects. However, the aim of the report is not to address this tradition in any systematic way or to try to fit the quality assurance system in Norway into it. Firstly, the literature is rather technical and economic in its orientation; secondly, studies often deal with the implementation and effects of such projects rather than with the front-end part of them; thirdly, they often use completely different types of theories and perspectives to study such phenomena. The report will also leave aside quality assurances done on various projects since 2000 up to the present as well as research done on these and other major public projects in Norway, for example in the Concept program. Instead, its focus will be to take a fresh analytical look at the quality assurance system in Norway, drawing on a long research tradition in political science that combines political theories and organization/decision-making theories.

The structure of the report is as follows: First, the quality assurance system will be briefly presented and some of the main questions for analysis and evaluation posed. Second, five different analytical perspectives for analysis will be outlined and related to the quality assurance system. Third, the development of public reforms and political-administrative structures, cultures and practice in recent decades will be outlined in a comparative perspective, and the Norwegian quality assurance system will be discussed in relation to this development. Fourth, a

concluding analysis and discussion of the quality assurance system will be made, including outlining strengths and weaknesses and possible improvements.

# Introduction

## What is the quality assurance system?

The main principles and features of the quality assurance system for Major Public Projects in Norway are possible to delimit in the following way. What is called the governance regime for major public projects embraces the systems and processes that the government (or more generally a financial party) needs to secure successful investment. Such a regime should encompass ‘a regulatory framework to ensure adequate quality at entry, compliance with agreed objectives, management and resolution of issues that may arise during the project, etc., and standards for quality review of key governance documents’ (Samset, Berg and Klakegg 2006: 4). An analysis of studies of major public projects raises questions about the feasibility of project flexibility, the involvement of political and administrative leaders versus project autonomy, the type of regulations needed, accountability and transparency features, the need for risk analyses, etc.

In 2000 the Norwegian Ministry of Finance introduced a mandatory quality assurance system, or ‘mandatory quality-at-entry’ regime (QA2) as it was labeled, to reduce implementation costs in major public projects. The majority of members of an inter-ministerial committee, which included the major ministries dealing with large projects in fields like defense, transport and communications, and labour and administration, were against such a system, because they thought that each individual ministry should have the autonomy to deal with cost problems in major projects (Styringsgruppen 1999). A minority in the committee – the members from the Ministry of Finance – however, received the support of the Cabinet for the introduction of the new and standardized system (St.prp.nr. 1 (1998-1999). Gul Bok; St.prp.nr.1 (1999-2000). Gul Bok). From 2005 the system was extended to include quality assurance (QA1) concerning the early choice of the concept/project – the idea being to ensure that the projects chosen were appropriate and viable, i.e. to ‘stop and think’, primarily in broader cost-benefit and societal terms, before the project or concept options became more limited (St.prp.nr. 1 (2004-2005). Gul Bok). The interaction between QA1 and QA2 was meant to ensure ‘enduring quality and consistency of analysis and decisions’ (Samset, Berg and Klakegg 2006: 4). One major rationale behind such a quality assurance system is that the traditional ideal technocratic planning model is unrealistic and that processes involving multiple actors, problems, solutions and decision-making opportunities are complex and fluctuate (see March and Olsen 1976). This latter point will be discussed later on in the report.

The quality assurance system is overall said to have the following features (Samset, Berg and Klakegg 2006: 5): It represents a distinct set of milestones and decision-making hurdles that are applied to major public investment projects in all sectors regardless of existing practices and procedures for such projects in the ministries and agencies affected. It is intended to secure political control over fundamental decisions concerning whether major public projects go ahead or not and increase the professional quality of the premises and documents behind such decisions (QA1). It anchors the most fundamental decisions in the Cabinet, but the system as such is designed so that it is independent of any particular government, i.e. it is a set of generally applicable rules and procedures. It is intended to provide an adequate basis for major project decisions and to focus on important decisions rather than on details.

A crucial element of the quality assurance system is that pre-qualified external consultants are engaged to perform 'quality-assurance of the decision-making basis in all public investment projects with a total budget exceeding 60 million Euros' (Samset, Berg and Klakegg 2006: 5). The first frame agreement with four consulting firms was finalized in June 2000 and lasted through 2003, and the new one will run through 2008. Around 50 projects were scrutinized in the QA2 system during the first four years. In 2005 the QA1 system was introduced and to date (2007) has been used in three major public projects. QA1 and QA2 form the so-called front-end phase of the projects. The QA1, called the feasibility phase, is wider and focuses on the choice of concept/solution, while QA2, known as the basic design/engineering phase, deals with the budget, management structure, contract strategy, etc. for the solution/project alternative chosen.

QA1 is supposed to be conducted in close consultation with the political leadership and anchored in the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance, and the job of the consultants is to 'review the professional quality of the underlying documents constituting the basis for the decision'. The relevant sectoral ministries in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance decide when a QA1 should be started. The ministry responsible for the relevant project may choose which qualified consultants to employ and must have two alternatives to the preferred project, one of which should be a real alternative project and the other the option of doing nothing. It should prepare a need analysis, coupling stakeholders and their needs and priorities with relevant anticipated investments, and then outline an overall strategy specifying 'consistent, realistic and verifiable immediate and long term objectives', based on the need analysis (Samset, Berg and Klakegg 2006: 6). Furthermore, the 'overall requirements that need to be fulfilled, for instance functional, aesthetic, physical, operational and economic requirements', should be established and an alternative analysis suggested, including defining 'the zero-option and at least two alternative concepts, specifying

their operational objectives, essential uncertainties, and cost estimates' and the alternatives should be subjected to a full socio-economic analysis. The consultants rank the alternatives proposed by the ministry, and the cabinet then either decides to move on to the QA2 phase, or to reject the preferred project and look at alternatives.

Samset, Berg and Klakegg (2006: 6) define the QA2 thus:

*'At the end of the pre-project phase, the QA2 aims to provide the responsible ministry with an independent review of decision-making documents before Parliamentary appropriation of funds. This is partly a final control to make sure that the budget is realistic and reasonable, and partly a forward-looking exercise to identify the managerial challenges ahead. The analysis should help substantiate the final decision regarding the funding of the project, and be useful during implementation as a reference for control. The focus is on the strategic managerial document, and the consultant will review its consistency with previous decisions taken when the concept was decided (QA1) as well as the implications for the project of possible changes that might have occurred subsequently, and the cost frame, including necessary contingencies to make sure the budget is realistic'.*



Figure 1 Scope of external quality assurance QA1 and QA2.

QA1 is a qualifying step to get a QA2, while QA2 is a qualifying step to participate in the budget process. Getting into the QA1 doesn't guarantee that a QA2 is going to happen, and getting a QA2 on a project doesn't guarantee that the project is prioritized by the government or the Stortinget. A QA1 starts with a decision in a sector ministry which is having the project and the participation of the Ministry of Finance as a quality body, and without a decision on QA1 one is not allowed to start pre-project activities. When a QA1 is finished it's handled by the Ministry of Finance and undergoes professional evaluation, and the Cabinet decides on whether to go further with a QA2, based on QA1. But it could potentially happen that the sectoral ministry proposing the project could also stop the process after QA1. If it's decided to continue with a QA2; after the QA2 report is delivered by the external experts, it's still two options for the Cabinet, either to stop the project or to allow it to enter into the budget process, without any guarantee to prioritize it.

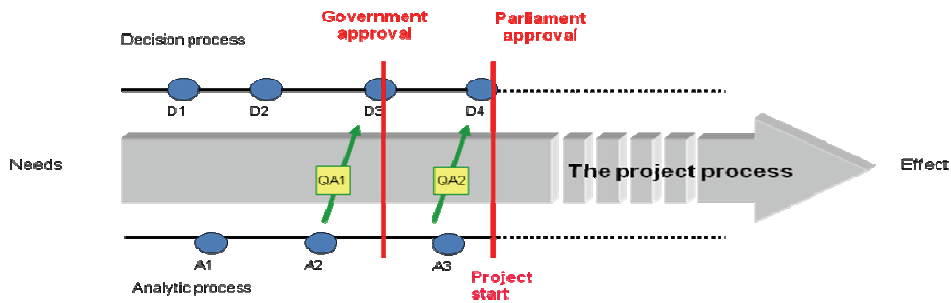


Figure 2 Two parallel processes – the decision making and the analytical process. Source: Samset, Berg and Klakegg (2006:5).

So why develop a quality assurance system of this kind? One reason, like in many other countries, was that in the past major public projects has often had unrealistic budgets and had overrun the estimated costs, indicating bad planning, but also potentially preventing other valuable projects from being implemented (St.prp.nr.1 (1999-2000): Gul bok). Another reason was the decision-making processes that such projects traditionally typically had involved. They often had bottom-up features, where the relevant sector administration was in alliance with local political initiatives and local campaigns (see Priemus 2007). Examples of this might be



road-building projects or military projects. One disadvantage of such processes was that they often heavily constrained the central political authorities in their ability to prioritize and select projects (St.prp.nr.1 (2004-2005): Gul bok). While it was often taken for granted by sectoral and local stakeholders that the alternative they supported was good and viable, the central political authorities often wanted not a fait accompli but more alternatives to choose from and more leeway for central decisions.

A third reason for such a system was to establish more professional standards for the steering of major public projects, by bringing in external consultants as independent experts as part of a strengthened control function (St.prp.nr. 1 (1999-2000): Gul bok). Sectoral expertise in this field was lacking and internal expertise could potentially be 'biased' in the sense that it was involved in alliances with societal stakeholders wishing to further certain projects. Independent experts were also associated with good governance, benchmarking and higher professional standards. The third reason could also be associated with a development from the mid 1990 when the ministries were supposed to become more secretariats for the political leadership (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). This implied not only more autonomy for subordinate agencies and state companies, but also developing more control and scrutiny functions in the ministries. But the resources and expertise of controlling large major public projects was lacking and involving external expertise was an option.

When QA2 was introduced, it seemed to be an obvious way of coping with the first and third problems – budget realism and independent expertise. QA2 is more traditional in its budget and planning focus: while it may potentially further more realistic budgets by bringing in external expertise, it probably does not do much to change influence patterns and choices. This was one of the reasons why the quality assurance system was extended to include the QA1 phase. QA1 was meant to take back central political power over the decisions of major public projects and anchor it at the central level. The aim was to put the projects in a wider societal perspective, increase the alternatives and open the process more by bringing in external experts, while at the same time restoring more control to the political executive. One paradox of bringing in external consultants in this phase is that they may potentially undermine the assumed increase in influence of the political executive through their professional expertise and decision-making premises, even though QA1 is about political design, development and judgment, the balancing of different political interests and concerns, and the balancing of political considerations with broader societal ones. So one central question would be how much external consultants influence these priorities and balances, i.e. what the relative influence of politics and professional expertise is over major public projects. Clearly, employing external consultants is intended to bring unambiguous

professional advice into 'muddier' political processes through quality assurance, but this might of course have the side-effect of intervening in the decision-making processes over which politicians wish to exert more control. On the other hand, external expertise may have a more neutral role and help politicians make more considered and informed decisions about projects, without introducing a bias into the process.

Having briefly presented the quality assurance system and its background, we now turn to the question of terminology. In the literature on government reforms and systems the concepts of 'governance' and of 'regime' are increasingly being used and are sometimes combined to form the term 'governance regime'. A certain amount of skepticism may be in order about the use of these concepts. Governance has become a rather fashionable term that is used to describe almost any aspect of the work of the political-administrative apparatus, so its content is pretty ambiguous. In most cases government would be a better and more precise term. Some authors say that government is decision-making, control and planning systems inside the political-administrative apparatus, while governance extends this system to non-public actors, like the 'joined-up' system created by Tony Blair in the UK (Pollitt 2003). QA1 and QA2 seem much more to be a government than a governance system in this respect. The word 'regime' is also rather loose. In political science, regime is connected to theories of international relations, while recently regime has had a tendency to be used both theoretically and empirically to describe almost any national political-administrative system or structure. Regime is also frequently used by the media almost interchangeably with the words government or administration, particularly in the US. Given these concerns, inconsistencies and ambiguities we are reluctant to use either the term 'governance regime' or the two concepts separately in this report. A better and broader term would usually be quality assurance system or structure, or sometimes government system or government quality-assurance system.

## The main questions

Organization theory and decision-making theory in political science embrace a variety of perspectives that could be labeled either instrumental or institutional and which may be used in an analysis and evaluation of the Norwegian quality assurance system for major public projects (see Peters 1999, Scott and Davies 2006). We use five such perspectives: an economic-rational, an instrumental-structural, a cultural, an environmental and a garbage can perspective (Boston et al. 1996, Christensen et al. 2007, March and Olsen 1976 and 1983, Olsen 1992, Selznick 1957). One may question whether the first perspective really belongs to

this group of organization theory perspectives, but that is not an important issue here. Such a rational perspective forms the basis for many control, planning and regulation systems, and as such represents an ideal that may be challenged by the other perspectives (March 1994).

First, the perspectives will be outlined in terms of how they see actors in public decision-making processes, how they imagine the control of and organizational thinking in such processes and how they view the establishment and implementation of public reforms. These perspectives will then be used in a general analysis of the Norwegian quality assurance system. We will ask how different elements in this system can be understood in terms of these perspectives, using a method similar to that employed by Allison (1971): both looking for different elements according to the different perspectives and analyzing the different elements from different angles. This analysis will not be concerned with the details of the quality assurance system; rather it is preoccupied with some general features that are followed up in the comparative section and primarily in the final analysis.

Second, the comparative development of public reforms and political-administrative structures in recent decades will be outlined in a discussion addressing the main features of the reform wave New Public Management (NPM), which emerged in the early 1980s, and also of the post-NPM reforms, which started in the late 1990s (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). The Norwegian administrative reforms, policy and practice will then briefly be compared to the overall pattern, and Norway's role as a reluctant reformer will be discussed. We end this section by asking whether the Norwegian quality assurance system has elements from New Public Management or post-NPM reforms, or both.

Third and last, the Norwegian quality assurance system will be more systematically analyzed and evaluated, in terms of the theoretical perspectives and modern public reforms, and its strengths and weaknesses, and possible improvements, will be identified. What will emerge is a picture of a rather complex system, containing many elements pointing in different directions.



# Perspectives on public decision-making processes

## Generic perspectives

The organization-theory and decision-making perspectives presented here are broad and generic, meaning that in principle they could be used to discuss any public decision-making system or process. The quality assurance system organizes a particular type of public decision-making process and embraces elements of a control or regulation process, a planning process, a quality-assurance process, a technical and an economic process; primarily though, it of course frames a political and administrative process connected to the central level.

## The economic-rational perspective

The economic-rational perspective, often labeled an 'economic man' concept, is based on ideas about what drives actors in decision-making processes and how this thinking can be applied to the structure and functioning of the public sector (March 1994). This perspective is primarily based on the notion that to understand (and improve) society in general and the functioning of the political-administrative system in particular, one must proceed from the notion of individual actors who pursue their own interests and are preoccupied with incentives. Actors think and act strategically to attain personal goals and are primarily utility-maximizing individuals (Boston et al. 1996, Egeberg 1995, Evans et al. 1996, Hood 1998). According to the cultural theory propounded by Mary Douglas (1986), individualists, like economic man, score low on both 'group' (feelings of belonging to a group) and 'grid' (feelings of being controlled by societal rules of a formal and informal nature). An economic man is in the extreme an atomist actor with few historical or social constraints who is little influenced by the society and institutions surrounding him/her (March and Olsen 1989).

For the purposes of this report it is relevant to discuss how this economic way of thinking is used in the design and functioning of public organizations, i.e. how is this individually oriented thinking translated to the collective and institutional level? Effective rational (re)design of public organizations entails using some major features of rational theories of choice: a combination of control by major participants in the process, and a theoretical framework yielding clear, apriori goals,

unambiguous means-end thinking and full information about the possible consequences of choosing different reforms and courses of action (March 1994, March and Olsen 1983, March and Olsen 1989).

The economic-rational perspective is not homogeneous or totally consistent, which makes it all the more interesting to see how it is translated into public reforms and design. For example, Boston et al. (1996), in an analysis of the economic thinking behind the reforms launched in New Zealand in the early 1980s, show that different directions in new institutional economic theory – rational choice theory, principal-agent theory and transaction-cost theory – resulted in different reform solutions (although there are, of course, many similarities too), because they focused on different economic mechanisms. This underscores the point of variety, but also the potential ambiguity in coupling economic theory with practical application and structural design.

We will outline just some of the most relevant versions of this perspective used in public reforms. One version of the economic-rational perspective is the *principal-agent theory* (Knott and Hammond 2003). This is a theory that has been used to focus on the relationship between the public and elected bodies/representatives, between political executives and civil servants, between political executives and agencies/state-owned enterprises, and between the public bureaucracy and external experts, interest groups, citizens and users/clients. The main thought is that the principal-agent relationship is a problematic relationship in many ways, mainly because the principal cannot trust that the agent is doing what he or she is supposed to do. This is among other things due to informational asymmetry, i.e. the agent will act self-interestedly and not provide the principal with enough information, so that decisions and control become problematic. This may be solved or modified through the use of incentives or structural ways to control the agents. This type of theory can be criticized in various ways. One criticism is that the theory does not focus enough on problems the agents may have: for example, that they may have more than one principal, and steering signals may be conflicting and inconsistent, reflecting complex public decision-making processes. Another crucial factor is whether the goals the principals set for the agents are clear enough to act upon; often they are not when it comes to public decision-making processes.

Principal-agent theory has especially focused on formal institutional design of structural devolution and delegation and when and why political executives create agencies and transfer formal power to them. But it may of course be relevant regarding any delegation of public authority, such as downwards in the public hierarchy or to external actors or experts. Agencies are supposed to deal with informational asymmetries, handling blame and increasing credibility and efficiency. Agencies can act contrary to the preferences of their political bosses

(‘agency losses’) by following their own preferences (‘shrinking’) or because the agency has incentives to behave contrary to the wishes of the political executives (‘slippage’) (Thatcher 2005). This theory has also formed the basis for marketization and privatization and has inspired contract systems that use incentives and performance-enhancing structures.

A second version of the perspective is public choice theory, which also presupposes that politicians and bureaucrats are motivated by self-interest. This theory, which is skeptical towards collective interests and ethical-institutional considerations, is part of a conservative or neo-liberal agenda advocating a small state and extensive personal freedom. Boston et al. (1996) mention some examples of this theory as applied in New Public Management reforms in New Zealand. It has inspired vertical structural specialization, where policy advice, regulation and implementation are divided, and it is also behind calls for larger central political staffs and alternative external policy advice to counteract the influence of bureaucrats. The theory also underlines the need for increased transparency and insight into vested interests and competition bias, clearer definition in contracts of rights and duties for public and private actors, and a reduction in the scope of influence of political executives in order to make some policy areas more autonomous. Critics of this theory assert that its premises for action are not very plausible and that it has little predictive power, and they ask about alternative logics of action. They also question whether one should take self-interest for granted and accept it or try to limit it, because that has implications for the design of public organizations.

Transaction-cost theory, primarily connected to the work of Oliver Williamson (1976), is primarily preoccupied with decreasing insecurity and costs in transactions, and focuses on the best way to organize production and the exchange of goods and services. The theory compares transaction costs and the use of hierarchies or markets, and the main idea is that a hierarchy should be used where there is a high level of insecurity, specialized activities and little competition. Critics point out that this theory takes little account of social, cultural and moral constraints. In addition the definition of the term transaction costs is held to be ambiguous and the relevance of this theory for the design of the public apparatus is questioned.

A fourth relevant version of the economic-rational perspective is the one that addresses the connection between self-interest and capture, which is often taken into account in designing regulatory structures. It combines economic analysis with analysis of political behaviour (Peltzman 1998), and it asserts that special interests and interest groups will try to pursue their own goals and influence the outcome of public decision-making processes. A main focus is on power relations and self-

interested economic and political competition for scarce resources. In regulatory processes civil servants may, for example, go 'native' and be captured by the interests they were designed to control or regulate, leading interest groups or external actors in general to lobby for public solutions from which they will benefit (Stigler 1971). Another option, sometimes called a bureau-shaping perspective (Dunleavy 1985, James 2003), expects bureaucrats and their institutions to benefit from the decisions made and the structures designed (Majone 1996). One outcome might be, for example, that autonomous public units, like regulatory agencies, begin to set their own standards rather than those formulated by the legislature and the political executive (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

So how can we understand the Norwegian quality assurance system in terms of the economic-rational perspective, using elements from the different sub-theories presented? How might self-interest become relevant in such a quality assurance system? One possibility is that the political executive acts self-interestedly. It is not easy to tell what their personal interests might be in major public projects, except for cases where a project promises benefits for them personally or for their constituency, which is not all that likely (see Egeberg 1995). What is more relevant is that various political executives will try to further their organizational or institutional interests, based on sector/policy area, like in the old bottom-up oriented system for major public projects. But there is, of course, no guarantee that their interests will be compatible, so this could add to the complexity of such processes, even though the new quality assurance system tries to further more collective interests and the system is more centralized and hierarchical. The same reasoning could be used for administrative leaders or internal experts. So political executives and administrative leaders from sectoral ministries and agencies may potentially have different interests from the actors in the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance. And what about the external consultants? They are, of course, interested in earning money but also in doing a good professional job, so it is not entirely clear what their self-interest might be when it comes to major public projects. They may potentially side with the actors running the quality assurance system, but also with sectoral interests, making alliances influencing the crucial decisions.

Second, the logic on which the thinking in the quality assurance process is based has obvious features from this perspective. It could be characterized by a demand for unambiguous, apriori goals to steer the process, coupled with systematic strategies and an analysis of needs and requirements. As such it has features of a traditional technocratic and economically oriented planning process. There is, however a difference between the QA1 and QA2 phases; the first phase is more open, since it involves three alternatives for action being presented by the responsible ministries and then analyzed and evaluated with the participation of



political executives, administrative leaders and experts; the second phase, on the other hand, is more closed, traditional, technocratic and rational in its elaboration by experts of the chosen project or alternative.

Third, in certain respects the quality assurance as a decision-making process seems to deviate from some features of the economic-rational perspective. The most important deviation is that the political leadership is meant to play a hands-on role and be tightly coupled to the first QA1 phase, while this perspective often emphasizes that it's better to avoid the involvement of politicians. On the other hand, external consultants are coupled to and central to the whole process, which might potentially undermine political control and influence. An important factor is also how the administrative leaders and experts in the relevant ministries and agencies act. Will they clearly act in accord with the political leadership, and have a common understanding of problems, solutions and norms, or will they act more according to a bureau-shaping theory and further their own interests and solutions, possibly in an understanding with external actors? Here we also see a kind of triple principle-agent relationship; the political executive-administrative leader relationship, the political executive-external consultants' relationship and the administrative leader-external consultants' relationship.

Fourth, if we combine the analytical aspect (means-end thinking or rational calculation) with the decision or participant aspects (actors and influence) (March and Olsen 1976), there may be similarities at one extreme with this rational perspective, for according to a kind of capture logic the external consultants/experts, possibly in collaboration with leaders and experts inside the ministries and agencies, may dominate the planning process both in QA1 and QA2. At the other extreme, the political executives may dominate QA1 relative to their own administrative leaders and external experts, and determine the fundamental problems, definitions and solutions and thus provide important premises for QA2. The reality would probably be somewhere in between the two alternatives. It is therefore crucial to analyze the relative importance of the external experts and administrative leaders and under what conditions the balance would be towards one of the extremes.

Fifth, a central thought in this perspective is that autonomy is good, because it increases efficiency and professional expertise, and this argument is at the same time skeptical about the role of the political executive, holding that alternative policy advice and expertise, from external actors, is also valuable (see Halligan 2001 for examples of this in the Australian system). The quality assurance system's inclusion of external consultants constitutes such an element. At the same time, though, their participation potentially may undermine the accountability and authority of public leaders. Yet transaction-cost theory says that the active use of

hierarchy modifies insecurity in public decision-making processes, and the introduction of QA1 to supplement QA2 is an example of this. So the quality assurance system shows that this type of perspective is internally inconsistent, while at the same time revealing a potential inconsistency and tension in the quality assurance system.

## The instrumental-structural perspective

A similarity between this perspective and the economical-rational one is that they both see the analytical aspect as an important part of public decision-making processes. (March and Simon 1958). They are both preoccupied with examining the 'logic of consequence', i.e. what happens if one chooses certain alternatives or solutions based on collective public goals. The main difference between them concerning rational calculation is the difference between bounded rationality and full rationality in organizational thinking (March 1994). While the rational perspective demands full rationality, the instrumental one talks about bounded rationality and satisfying solutions. The latter logic proceeds from the view that the world is rather complex and that public decision-makers have to select certain decision-making premises because they have attention and capacity problems (Simon 1957). What is important for that selection is the formal structure, i.e. the position and tasks the individual actors have will pre-select most of the decision-making premises, in other words, one's structural position governs how one thinks and acts. This means that the structural design or structure of public organizations is important for the main content of decision-making processes.

Another main difference between the two perspectives is that the instrumental one focuses more on the decision-making structure and the actor aspect than the rational one. The rational perspective takes it for granted that the analytical aspect will prevail, with apriori goals and related means, and is less preoccupied with how leaders control decision-making processes, because hierarchical control is taken for granted. The instrumental perspective focuses more on the reasons behind problems of control. One reason could be that public goals are rather ambiguous and that it is therefore difficult to receive support and legitimacy from the various stakeholders (Allison 1983, Christensen et al. 2007). Another is that political and administrative leaders may have problems of control because of heterogeneity in the leadership or resistance from certain actors inside or outside the public apparatus.

The instrumental-structural perspective exists in two versions (March and Olsen 1983). The first one, the hierarchical version, is the one most similar to the

economic-rational perspective. Its basic premise is that the political and administrative leadership, who are presupposed to be rather homogeneous, are the main actors in important public decision-making processes. They either participate themselves or control the central actors in the process. The decision-making processes are rather closed concerning the number of participants and the problems, solutions and decision-making situations are rather fixed (March and Olsen 1976). In terms of the participants, predictability and control are not seen in the same way as in the rational perspective concerning organizational thinking or rational calculation. The ideal is that goals, problems and alternatives are rather unambiguous, but as indicated, the actors are bounded in their rationality, so there is bound to be a certain degree of limited insight and some ambiguity concerning all these aspects.

The other version is the negotiation version, also called bureaucratic politics (Allison 1971, Cyert and March 1963). The premise here is that a public organization is by definition heterogeneous concerning actors and their interests, experience, education and general socio-economic make-up, cultural background, etc. This leads to a modification of the control aspect of the decision-making process. Instead of leaders being homogeneous and having hierarchical control, leaders and organizational units engage in conflicts and negotiations (March and Olsen 1983). There are different ways to reach decisions and select solutions under such conditions. One is for the majority to decide; another one, more common in Scandinavia, is to reach a compromise. A third option is to agree to disagree, whereby a quasi-resolution of conflicts is established, fulfilling the interests of certain actors at one point in time, and of others at other points in time, in a sequential attention to problems and solutions (Cyert and March 1963). Compared to both the rational and the hierarchical versions of the instrumental perspective, solutions and alternatives in this negotiation version are potentially more ambiguous, but they may also be more legitimate, since more actors are involved in the decisions that often take more time (Mosher 1967).

The instrumental-structural perspective is much more explicit and clear about the implications of the effects of structuring the public apparatus in certain ways than the rational perspective, which does not put much emphasis on this aspect (Boston et al. 1996). Luther Gulick (1937), in a seminal work on the structuring of the US federal administration, stressed that there is a connection between public goals, the way one organizes public organizations according to those goals and the content of public decisions and policy. Or as Weaver and Rockman (1993) put it – ‘structure matters’. The two basic structural dimensions Gulick is preoccupied with are specialization and coordination – dimensions that are rather closely connected and have both a vertical and horizontal dimension. Horizontal specialization is related to the division of tasks and functions on the same hierarchical level and may,

according to Gulick (1937), attend to principles of either purpose, process, clientele or geography, often with purpose as the first organizing principle. Vertical specialization is related to the allocation of authority, functions and tasks across hierarchical levels. The organizational or structural type of coordination can either be the horizontal coordination of tasks and activities on the same hierarchical level, or hierarchical or vertical coordination, control and integration between levels.

Specialization, whether horizontal or vertical, has both an intra-organizational and an inter-organizational aspect (Egeberg 2003). Intra-organizational specialization may either be horizontal specialization of functions and tasks inside a ministry or agency, or vertical specialization between hierarchical levels in the same unit. Inter-organizational specialization can either be horizontal specialization and allocation of functions and tasks between ministries or agencies on the same level, or vertical specialization between ministries on the one hand and subordinate agencies or state-owned enterprises on the other. The relevance of these distinctions will be explored further in the next section where we discuss reform developments and the quality assurance system.

So, how can this instrumental perspective give us insight into the quality assurance system? First, the overall focus on formal structure in the perspective may give more insight than the rational perspective. The quality assurance system is in some ways special. To have a separately organized quality assurance system is something new, to divide it into QA1 and QA2 is another aspect, and to bring in external experts in the way this has been done is also somewhat unusual in a setting like this. So the quality assurance system is structurally rather complex and represents a kind of structural innovation. The complexity is more evident related to other parts of the Norwegian public decision-making system in general, and control and scrutiny systems more specifically, than comparatively to other countries.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, the whole quality assurance system could have been organized in an integrated way with only public actors and public experts, and with more resources allocated, either together or separately in some of the ministries with the largest public projects.

So, based on the instrumental perspective, one can ask what effect the way the quality assurance system is structured or organized has. Is it generally better for the main aims of the system, for quality assurance and planning, to organize a separate quality assurance system and to do it in this way? Does the quality assurance system give the political leadership enough influence, whether by this we mean the

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<sup>1</sup> The comparable UK system – the OGC Gateway Process is very complex (see [www.ogc.gov.uk/what\\_is\\_ogc\\_gateway\\_review.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/what_is_ogc_gateway_review.asp)).

political executives in the QA1 phase or the Stortinget in the QA2 phase? What does QA1 actually add to the more traditional QA2 phase? Do the external experts involved in the quality assurance system provide good alternative quality assurance, or does this way of organizing primarily give them too much influence relative to the political and administrative leadership in the ministries and agencies?

These are questions that we will follow up later, both in the reform section and in the final analysis section. But if we look at relevant research on the underlying structural questions, some preliminary answers may already be suggested, at least in a broader perspective. The fact that external experts are so deeply involved in the process is an example of vertical inter-organizational specialization or structural devolution but also indicates profound access to public decision-making processes by those private experts; processes that traditionally have got their legitimacy from an internal focus and appropriate process features. Potentially this gives the external experts an influential position in the quality assurance system. This potential may, however, be limited in some ways, either by the political leadership balancing different considerations and decision-making premises, where the external experts are one of many actors, or by administrative leaders in the ministries and agencies trying to counteract the influence of the external experts if necessary. Ministry of Finance has a special role of controlling the control job done by the external experts, to avoid biases in the process.

The fact that quality assurance is organized as a separate system and not integrated in the government hierarchy in a more traditional way may also be analyzed from an instrumental perspective. Experiences with this form of organization, whether reorganization or reform projects, have shown that it has both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is the specialized attention and capacity structure, meaning that there is a specialized organizational structure in the Ministry of Finance, that there are rules for quality assurance involving political executives and administrative leaders, and that external experts are employed to focus solely on quality assurance of major public projects. Alternatively, these tasks would have had to compete with ordinary tasks inside government and would probably receive less attention. One disadvantage of this form of organization is that the quality assurance system would be less integrated in the hierarchy and might prompt resistance from other government units, although this would be modified by the fact that this is in some ways a certified, self-contained and mandatory system. The system potentially puts less weight on planning and proposals from the ministries and agencies, or modifies this influence, which may be seen as both positive and negative, depending on where the actors in question are situated.

The fact that the quality assurance system has been changed and a QA1 phase added does in a way potentially change the concept. This structural separation

means that the system overall is more closely connected to the political leadership than it was with just the QA2 system. It has potentially become more hierarchical and politically oriented, and QA1 may also strengthen the Ministry of Finance and the quality assurance actors there. But what kind of overall effect this will have on the influence of the Storting is more questionable. On the one hand, it may make it even harder for the Storting to resist project proposals, but on the other hand it may indeed improve the quality of the projects and save public money, which can then be used for other purposes.

But traditionally the planning of major public projects has also had obvious negative elements. Such projects have been proposed through local initiatives, proposals have come from ministries and agencies, and the Directorate of Public Construction and Property (DPCP), for instance, has planned and elaborated some of the projects, etc. The Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance have then balanced all the different considerations, interests and competences and made crucial decisions. The quality assurance system has in some ways rebalanced the quality assurance and added to the complexity of such a system, and also added one set of mandatory actors, namely the private consultants, whose participation may modify the hierarchical elements in the system, or at least counteract some of the influence of the traditional actors.

Concerning the rational calculation or organizational thinking behind a traditional planning system in government, it is not easy to say what the elements of hierarchy and negotiations will really bring. Hierarchical control may imply scoring high on rational calculation, and negotiation features may primarily create conflicts between different interests, confusion and ambiguity concerning problems and solutions. But negotiation features may also lead to more thorough consideration of issues and more discussion of the solutions; after all, hierarchical control does not guarantee a thorough analytical process. So how does the quality assurance system address this balance? In principle the increased participation and influence of external experts may make the decision-making basis better, but it may also potentially add complexity and weaken the decision-making premises of governmental actors. Only a deeper analysis of several of these projects may eventually reveal the influence on rational calculation of these experts, i.e. the quality of organizational thinking, particularly in the QA1 phase.

## The cultural-institutional perspective

According to this perspective, public organizations develop gradually and are not possible to design and control, as assumed in the rational and instrumental

perspectives. Through a gradual adaptation to external (task environment) and internal pressure a public organization goes through a process of institutionalization (Selznick 1957). This process leads to the development of cultural features of a unique character, encompassing informal norms and values. These norms and values are supposed to be more important for the thoughts and actions of public actors than formal norms, and they influence the development of formal structures.

The history and traditions of public institutions are important (Peters 1999; Thelen and Steinmo 1992), for the formative years of such institutions influence greatly the path or trajectory the institutions follow thereafter. This is labeled path-dependency. In other words, the past is overrepresented in the informal institutional norms followed today. When people join a public institution, whether as a political representative or as a civil servant, they will be socialized and disciplined just as much according to the informal norms and values as the formal ones (Lægreid and Olsen 1978). Krasner (1988) says that an organization with strong institutional or cultural features will have actors who score high both on *vertical depth*, meaning that the informal norms and values are important for their thoughts and actions, and on *horizontal width*, implying that they are aware that what other actors are doing is culturally similar or integrated with what they do themselves.

When people act inside public institutions, they act according to a *logic of appropriateness*, not according to a *logic of consequence*, which is typical for the rational and instrumental perspectives (March and Olsen 1989). An experienced politician or civil servant knows how to act according to informal norms and values, without having to calculate or analyze much, i.e. their behaviour is intuitive, based on experience. March (1994) labels this matching behavior – actors are able to match situation, cultural expectations and identities in order to act in an appropriate way.

This perspective tells us that reforms in public organizations or institutions are very much about compatibility. When reforms are decided on or implemented, they will easily be implemented if they fit in well culturally with existing informal norms and values (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). If they are more on the incompatible side, the reforms will either be bounced back or only partly and pragmatically implemented to fit in with existing norms.

There are some standard types of critique of this perspective. One is that the perspective underestimates the importance of formal norms for action. Another is that it is not all that clear what the mechanisms are when organizations adapt to internal and external pressure. A third is that informal norms and values are often heterogeneous and inconsistent, making it difficult to socialize and discipline

organizational members and develop a dominant logic of appropriateness (Christensen and Røvik 1999).

Has the cultural perspective any relevance for understanding the quality assurance system that has emerged? While the quality assurance system attends to a development path, it has also potentially established a new tradition and a new logic of appropriateness. Traditionally, major public projects have had a rather varied planning process and culture, depending on the type of project, the ministries and agencies involved and the number of stakeholders, and a more conventional way of thinking about planning and quality assessment. The old system seems to be more sectorally, administratively and locally anchored than the new one. The new quality assurance system in many ways represents a break with the past and the beginning of a new development path, prompted by problems and crises of costs and quality (see Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Quality assessment is overall more culturally embedded than more technical planning and there is a more explicit involvement of the political and administrative leadership. There is also a new set of quality assurance rules, the Ministry of Finance has a new and more central role to play, and external consultants are systematically involved. Basically this is about developing a new quality assurance culture, but it is too early to tell what the major content of this culture will be. One major question will be whether and how the involvement of external consultants will change the more traditional planning culture of major public projects and develop a distinct and modern quality assurance culture, and if so with what effects.

## **An environmental perspective**

Meyer and Rowan (1978) emphasize that the environment of an organization is divided into two parts: the technical environment and the institutional environment. The technical environment is connected to technical activities in an organization, i.e. an organization is concerned with making decisions and producing services and as such is connected to the environment, because it is dependent on resources from the technical environment or dependent on the technical environment receiving its products. Examples could be that a university has the Ministry of Higher Education as the technical environment, and it must both follow formal rules and procedures, accounting for the money received for its daily activities, and produce research, educational services and graduates. Another example is an agency, which has the superior ministry as a technical environment. A third example might be the European Union whose directives are a technical environment for Norwegian government organizations.



This way of looking at the environment is very much in accordance with the instrumental perspective. One crucial question is how important the technical environment is for the individual public organization. At one extreme, in a deterministic version, the organization is a sort of ‘prisoner of the environment’, i.e. the relationship is very asymmetric in disfavour of the single organization (Olsen 1992, Scott and Davies 2006). This is an organization that is extremely dependent on and vulnerable towards the technical environment. At the other extreme, a public organization may be so strong that it in many ways may dominate its technical environment, like a very powerful Ministry of Finance in some countries. This means that the organization in many ways may create its own technical environmental constraints. Of importance is that the technical environment consists of either a rather homogeneous set of actors, or one dominant actor, or a rather heterogeneous set of actors, where the different actors may have different interests and put different types of pressure on the organization. It is quite common for the internal technical-formal structure of a public organization to be similar to or congruent with the structure of important actors in the environment.

How might this way of thinking be relevant for understanding the quality assurance system? First, we must decide what the unit of analysis is. If it is the single project, the technical environment will primarily be the quality assurance system and the actors organizing and controlling it. This technical pressure relates primarily to the mandatory demand for going through QA1 and QA2, which could be seen as allowing relatively little discretion. Our focus, however, is on the quality assurance system as such, and the technical pressure here could point in different directions, depending on the interests of stakeholders. The cabinet, the Cabinet/Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Finance may wish to save public money for other public purposes and overall improve the quality of major projects, and to increase their legitimacy, because the quality assurance works well as a technical system. Sectoral ministries and agencies, particularly the most relevant ones with many large projects, would probably share many of these concerns, but might be skeptical towards either the way the quality assurance is organized and controlled or the way it works. The Stortinget would generally share many of the considerations of the political executives, but different parties might have different agendas concerning the system, not guaranteeing always to support it. Other technical pressure could come from international organizations, like the European Union, or standardization and quality assurance-type organizations, domestic private stakeholders like consulting firms, which both have potential expertise to offer and business to earn, the media, and public and private actors who are affected by the major public projects at a lower level. If external pressure is consistent and strong, the actors running the quality assurance would have little leeway and would have to deliver to sustain their legitimacy, while a more

heterogeneous environment and demands pointing in different directions would make it more feasible to engage in negotiations or attend to some demands but not others.

The term 'institutional environment' is inspired by the theories of social constructivism, anthropology and symbolism, often collected in what is labeled new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Scott 2001). The main thought is that generally an organization or formal structure, in this case the quality assurance system, is exposed to an institutional environment where there may be many myths circulating, for example, about how to organize public organizations. Primary here is not so much technical pressure with more specific technical rules and demands, but instead the symbolic pressure of the institutional environment. The environment, whether international or national, may, for example, take for granted that certain reforms or new systems for organizing, recruiting or improving quality are better than all the others and should therefore be implemented (see Sahlin-Andersson 2001). As in many other aspects of New Public Management reforms there may be ideological reasons for this or it may simply be that actors – like the OECD, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, etc. on an international level, or domestic actors in Norway such as ministries or private actors – would like to improve their standing and influence. Myths may be either very broad or narrower and are in the latter definition often labeled institutional standards, concepts or 'prescriptions' (Røvik 2007).

This theory further says that pressure from the institutional environment is strong and not easy to deflect or avoid (Meyer and Rowan 1978). Myths that are completely dominant are particularly difficult to avoid and one has to implement them in order to be seen as modern or efficient, whether they have been proven efficient or not. When many organizations adapt to the myths in the institutional environment, organizations develop isomorphic features, i.e. they become similar, at least on the surface (Scott and Davies 2006).

What myths can offer an individual public organization exposed to them is a promise of enhanced legitimacy (Brunsson 1989). Normally an organization's legitimacy is connected to technical matters and results, but according to this theory it is also related to the manipulation of myths. A successful organization would be able to 'double-talk', meaning that in some periods or situations it would act technically, while in other periods it would deal in symbols and talk without actually doing much instrumentally. It is said that balancing these two aspects may enhance legitimacy. It is also possible to relate to the environment with talk and to the internal organization with action, or to relate to certain parts of the environment or the internal organization with talk and other parts with action

(Brunsson 1989). The main thing about imported myths is that they are not implemented as such, but will act as window-dressing, i.e. symbols that, for example, create the superficial impression that there is something modern going on in the organization. To say it in Goffman's words (1990) – front-stage there are myths, symbols and talk, back-stage there is action not much coupled to what's going on front-stage.

This type of theory may sound cynical, but it reflects a long tradition in political theory of attending to the importance of symbols for actors and decisions in political life (Edelman 1964). This particular myth theory has, however, been both criticized and elaborated on various grounds. The main critique is that it presumes that myth-related processes are natural system processes, meaning that myths are created, spread and imported through processes in which no actor can interfere very much. Public organizations have to take myths on board, through a kind of deterministic process.

The alternative interpretation of this is that an organization's relationship with the institutional environment is also governed by instrumental elements (Røvik 2002 and 2007). These may take the form of gate-keepers – i.e., actors that are selecting and influencing the myths a public organization should be exposed to, consciously keeping action and talk apart, or the handling and implementation of myths, etc. According to this interpretation leaders or experts in public organizations may intentionally import myths, whether from one source or from different organizational fields, but in reality they are able to keep talk and action apart via a variety of strategies and they will also try to implement and use some of the myths, or translate or combine some myth elements.

Another type of critique calls into question a core element of the myth theory – namely, the argument that double-talk is possible and increases legitimacy, i.e. basically a positive interpretation. It argues that double-talk is not that easy and may lead to problems. Brunsson (1989) shows in some of his empirical studies that there may be a problem of levels, i.e. leaders will more easily understand the dynamics of double-talk since they are at a high level in the hierarchy, but actors at a lower level may see talk as tantamount to action. The same type of mechanism is shown by Christensen (1991) in his study of the implementation of Management-by-Objectives (MBO) in higher educational institutions, where managers on a middle and lower level saw the reform as a real program that had to be implemented, while at the level of higher leadership the reform was seen largely as symbolic. A third example of potential problems is Christensen and Læg Reid's (2002) study of the Bondevik I government in Norway from 1997 to 2000. The government's main slogan was 'a simplified Norway'. Initially most cabinet members saw this slogan as both a symbol and as action, but over time they

realized that the balance had shifted to more talk and less action, a development that was not seen as only positive, since it created cynicism.

This environmental perspective may be used to understand some aspects of the quality assurance system. Overall, many modern reforms, like quality assurance systems, can be understood not only as technical systems but as myths (see Moldenæs 1999). Main actors often argue that installing such systems indicates the existence of a modern and efficiency-oriented public sector that cares about quality. Whether this is true or not may not be that important if it is accepted that this is the case. In other words this involves influencing other actors' meaning and definition of problems and solutions, a process that is not technical. The success of quality assurance systems as myths may therefore also depend on public leaders manipulating those systems as symbols. Are they able to portray the system as modern, good and efficient, and are they able to define the outcome of using such a system as a success? For ordinary citizens it is rather difficult to understand the effects of a quality assurance system for major public projects, because the system is complex and they lack insight and information. It may also be difficult even for civil servants – hence the need for someone in charge of the quality assurance system or the projects to interpret what is going on. When it comes to using symbols this gives central actors an obvious advantage. It may, for example, be rather difficult to determine whether a major public project has actually saved money or furthered more realistic budgeting because of the use of a quality assurance system, and here symbols may have a useful role to play.

What is also typical for myth-related systems is that they are potentially vulnerable to counter-myths. This is what happened with New Public Management-related reforms after some time, i.e. alternative definitions of effects, with related symbols, were launched as counter-myths (Christensen, Lie and Lægreid 2007). In the same way, this would potentially enable actors who are against the quality assurance system, whether inside or outside the public sector, to use counter-myths either to attack the system as such or its effects or to try to change it.

## A garbage can perspective

This perspective makes two basic observations about decision-making processes – most actors (like public leaders) are part-time actors, because they have attention and capacity problems, and in most decision-making situations the stimuli for action are ambiguous (March and Olsen 1976). This means that collective rationality and instrumentality in decision-making processes is rather low. Decision-makers come and go in unpredictable ways, definitions of problems and

solutions are ambiguous and shifting, and decision-making situations are flexible and subject to change.

The metaphor used for such processes is a garbage can, meaning that decision-making processes are organized, or disorganized, and streams and compositions of actors, problems, solutions and decision-making opportunities are unpredictable in much the same way that the contents of garbage cans are. Moreover, the cans can be removed and replaced in unpredictable ways. Solutions may be looking for problems, rather than the other way around. All this creates decision-making processes that have obviously anarchic features, or as it is labeled, 'organized anarchy'. Some use the term 'temporary order' (Olsen 1988). Like the above theory of myths and symbols, garbage can theories also have symbolic features, because symbols can be used to make processes look more rational, or actors may use symbols to include non-decision-making factors of a social character that are not normally prominent in public decisions. March and Olsen (1976) emphasize that decision-making situations are as much social occasions as they are formal choice opportunities. They represent opportunities for making friends or enemies, allocating blame and rewards, deriving social satisfaction from making decisions, interpreting the past and the future, engaging in superstitious learning, etc. All this adds to the complexity and ambiguity of the processes.

The instrumental perspective underscores that organizational rationality is typical for decision-making processes and that the limited rationality of individual actors in organizations is modified by the total design of the organization, whereby the actors are placed in an organized system of levels, units, positions and tasks (Simon 1957). The garbage can perspective looks more into how potentially rational individual actors may participate in creating collective or organizational irrationality, because of a lack of formal organization and coordination, capacity problems or changing contexts. Allison (1971), in his analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, uses a perspective that examines the relevance of local rationality. Separate organizations that are supposed to collaborate may instead compete or play down coordination and follow their own local rules and procedures, often leading to problematic or even disastrous collective results.

There are different views on whether garbage can features of public decision-making processes are common and desirable or not. One rather common view is that garbage can features are of limited significance, since many such processes have rather unambiguous procedures and rules, particularly concerning the participants. But this is less often the case with regard to problems and solutions (Christensen et al. 2007). Hence such a perspective is often used to focus on processes that have special features, such as decisions that are prolonged over a long period of time (like the decision on the new main airport in the Oslo area that

lasted around thirty-eight years), that are particularly complex or emotive, or that are particularly subject to fluctuations and unexpected events, etc. Major public projects can quite easily fit into this description.

Whether garbage can features are desirable or not is also debatable. From one angle, they are potentially damaging to the rationality and instrumentality of public decisions and result in inefficiency, increased conflicts and loss of legitimacy. From another angle such features may have advantages, like creating a more open and innovative process. Hood (2002) has also pointed out, for example, that randomness is possible to design and use for control or scrutiny purposes, like contrived randomness in public controlling and auditing of private firms.

The relevance of this perspective for major public projects and the quality assurance system should be rather obvious. In their presentation of the quality assurance system, Samset, Berg and Klakegg (2006: 4) state that:

*'The Norwegian governance system was designed to improve analysis and decision-making in the front-end phase, and particularly the interaction between the two. It was based on the notion that the necessary binding rules for decision-making were already in place; however, there were no binding rules that could ensure quality and consistency of analysis and decisions. In an ideal technocratic model for decision-making this would not be necessary. Here decision and analysis follow in a logical and chronological sequence that would eventually lead to the selection and go-ahead of the preferred project without unforeseen interventions or conflicts, as illustrated in Figure 3. In reality, the process may to a larger degree resemble an anarchic process affected by various stakeholders, which is complex, less structured and unpredictable. Analysis may be biased or inadequate. Decisions may be affected more by political priorities than by rational analysis. Political priorities may change over time. Alliances and pressures from individuals or groups of stakeholders may change over time. The amount of information is over-whelming and may be interpreted and used differently by different parties. The possibility for disinformation is considerable, etc.'*

This sweeping description certainly fits in with basic characteristics of the garbage can perspective. One crucial question is, however, how the quality assurance system is able to influence or modify such potential features of project processes. The quality assurance system as such structures and controls the pre-project phase more than the actual implementation of the project, and QA1 in particular implies more systematic control by the top political leadership. Therefore the possibility exists of making major public projects overall more organized and more predictable. On the other hand, creating QA1 may intensify political lobbying and political conflicts, because it will be seen by many actors as crucial. And many of the stakeholders will probably try to utilize various creative strategies to influence

QA1 and QA2. Also significant is the use of private consultants, who may potentially make the pre-project phase more legitimate, but who may also increase the level of complexity and conflict if they disagree with the content of the planning documents drafted by ministries and agencies.

## Summing up

The content of the analytical perspectives and their relevance can be summed up in the following way:

<i>Type of perspective</i>	<i>Sub-elements</i>	<i>Relevance and use of perspectives for the following questions</i>
<b>Economic-rational</b>	Principal-agent Public choice Transaction cost Capture	The role of self-interest for central actors Apriori goals and unambiguous means-end thinking The central role of political executives and private consultants
<b>Instrumental-structural</b>	Hierarchical Negotiations	Fulfilling main aims Influence pattern in the system Separate quality assurance system, adding QA1 Structural complexity Quality of organizational thinking
<b>Cultural-institutional</b>		Role of traditional project culture Developing new project culture
<b>Environmental</b>	Technical Institutional	Technical pressure to improve major public project planning and quality Quality assurance as myth and symbol
<b>Garbage can</b>		The complexity of the quality assurance system



# NPM and post-NPM reforms in a comparative perspective

## Main features of New Public Management reforms

Traditionally, political and administrative systems in Western democracies are based on a complex set of norms and values that are balanced in different and often ambiguous ways. This government model, which may be labeled 'old public administration', allows for trade-offs and prioritizing between different and often competing values and goals (Christensen and Lægheid 2001, Olsen 1997). Since the early 1980s, however, this multifunctional and hence complex civil service model has been challenged in many countries by New Public Management (NPM), which offers more one-dimensional solutions to complex structures and problems (Self 2000). Most New Public Management reform efforts have had similar goals: to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector, enhance the responsiveness of public agencies to their clients and customers, reduce public expenditure and improve managerial accountability (Wright 1994). The means used to achieve these goals have been a whole series of reforms connected to structural devolution – strong vertical and horizontal specialization of administrative systems, competitive tendering, customer choice, etc. In addition, New Public Management prescribes cultural changes aimed at making the government apparatus more user-friendly and market-oriented (Christensen and Lægheid 2001).

Even though the basis of New Public Management is rather narrow, it is actually a rather loose concept, encompassing several different administrative doctrines, inspired, in turn, by a combination of newer institutional economic theory and management theory (Boston et al. 1996). This makes New Public Management rather contradictory, for it simultaneously prescribes centralization, regulation and control and de-centralization, deregulation, flexibility and autonomy, with the latter aspects often prevailing (Christensen and Lægheid 2001). These tensions result from the contradiction between the centralizing tendencies (make the managers manage) of contractual arrangements and the de-centralizing tendencies (let the managers manage) of management (Boston et al. 1996, Kettl 1997).

The implementation of New Public Management started in the early 1980s, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries, like Australia and New Zealand, while the Scandinavian and some Continental European countries lagged behind (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). The reasons for this difference can be explained using some of

the perspectives already presented. The New Public Management trail-blazers normally had a lot of environmental pressure, whether technical or institutional: New Zealand, for example, had major economic problems specifically related to its foreign trade. Overall, the Anglo-American countries also had polity conditions conducive to reforms – few constitutional constraints, or a dominant two-party system with an ‘elective dictatorship’, giving reform entrepreneurs a lot of leeway (Hood 1996). With regard to cultural factors this group is more mixed. When they launched the reforms New Zealand and Australia had a political-administrative culture that quite closely resembled the Scandinavian one, and the reforms were implemented by Labour parties; but rather surprisingly, political entrepreneurship and environmental pressure prevailed over cultural restraining factors (Aberbach and Christensen 2001). In the USA and the UK cultural features like individualism and efficiency- and market-orientation helped initiate and implement the reforms. Until about a decade ago Norway was seen as a reluctant reformer, mainly because its healthy economy produced little environmental pressure, and a series of minority governments made it difficult to decide on and implement reforms; this was further compounded by a traditionally collectivistic and efficiency-skeptical culture (Christensen 2003, Olsen and Peters 1996).

## Effects of New Public Management reforms

It is important to distinguish between *reforms* and *actual changes*. Actual changes do not need to be a product or result of reforms, and reforms do not need to result in actual changes (Christensen et al. 2007). There are different ways to assess the effects of New Public Management-oriented reforms. A first, rather broad approach is to look at whether the reforms have changed the general decision-making behavior and role-enactment of central political and administrative actors (Christensen and Lægreid 2002, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). A second, narrower approach examines the functioning of New Public Management-inspired management systems. We lean more towards the first way of measuring effects, but operate with an extended effect concept. Therefore, we include external political effects as well as internal administrative effects and technical-economic effects (Olsen 1996). A substantial democratic dilemma related to New Public Management reforms is how subordinate leaders and units, like agencies and commercial units, are to gain enough autonomy to function efficiently, but not so much freedom as to make them politically uncontrollable (Christensen and Lægreid 2004a).

What were the effects of the New Public Management-inspired reforms that took place in the 1980s and 1990s? Did this type of reforms alter the conditions for

political control? The expectations from the OECD-initiated 'official model' (Pollitt et al. 2004) or 'public interest perspective' (James 2003) were that structural devolution and more managerial autonomy, combined with performance management, would improve performance and efficiency, without having negative side-effects on other values like control and democracy. The underlying argument was that more autonomy for managers would allow politicians to spend more time steering the 'big' issues and less time dealing with 'small' issues. In other words, the political authorities were to abstain from involvement in individual cases but at the same time strengthen their role as general regulators (Christensen, Lie and Læg Reid 2007). However, is it possible simultaneously to give managers more freedom, subject them to more control by the ministries and also make them more responsive to consumers (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004)? Several studies show that this is a difficult challenge.

The main comparative picture concerning reforms seems to be that New Public Management has contributed to undermining the control of political executives (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). The influence of central administrative leaders, in ministries and particularly in agencies, has increased, not to mention the influence of leaders of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The main reason for this feature is that structural devolution or vertical specialization has increased the distance between political executives and the leaders at subordinate levels and in subordinate institutions, and the levers of control have therefore been weakened (Egeberg 2003). Political signals are seen as less important at subordinate levels. There has also been a cultural change related to superior steering and control, implying that political leaders should stay away from active hands-on control. In addition, increased horizontal specialization between administrative units and tasks has increased fragmentation, coordination and capacity problems for political executives.

For many reform entrepreneurs the most important part of New Public Management was to roll back the state and increase efficiency in public organizations (Self 2000). Very few countries have managed to cut down on the number of public employees through New Public Management, with New Zealand as one of the few examples of a temporal nature (Gregory 2001). Rather the tendency has been in the other direction because of a new type of public bureaucracy related to new control and scrutiny systems. The overall picture of typical New Public Management-countries is that they have not had any more macro-economic success than the more reluctant countries. Many economists argue that the efficiency of public services has increased as a result of New Public Management (Domberger and Jensen 1997, Domberger and Rimmer 1994, Sørensen, Borge and Hagen 1999), while others, including some political science and public administration scholars, are more skeptical and think that the results are

more mixed and that the efficiency gains have been primarily in areas related to simple, technically-oriented services, but not in more complicated ones (Boyne et al. 2003).

Management by objectives and results (MBOR), which was implemented in 1990, became an important feature of the reluctant Norwegian reforms early on, though competitive tendering and privatization did not. In the early 1990s it was followed by a rather gradual program of structural devolution. The gradual gain in autonomy by the traditional agencies aroused little controversy among political and administrative elites, according to a study of this group (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002). On the contrary, political leaders thought that this increased autonomy, which was controlled via the MBOR system, the yearly letter of allocation and a formal and informal steering dialogue, worked rather well. Moreover, administrative leaders in the ministries believed that increased autonomy for traditional agencies had been implemented as intended. The increased autonomy of the state-owned enterprises was more controversial, as were the partial privatization processes related to Statoil and Telenor. When asked, the cabinet members of the Bondevik I government were somewhat reluctant to accept some of the undermining of political control they had experienced, and did not much like strategic steering, even though they had mostly supported the gradual New Public Management-related reforms.

## Post-NPM reforms - why and how

After outlining some of the main features of the first wave of New Public Management reforms in a comparative perspective, one could ask how the effects of the first generation of such reforms have influenced and fed into the second generation of reforms – labeled post-NPM reforms – that emerged in the late 1990s (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007). There seem to have been a number of main reasons for the emergence of the post-NPM reforms (Christensen 2006). One was that it has failed to deliver on one of the main goals of the reform, namely, increased efficiency, both in a micro and particularly macro way. Related to the emphasis on efficiency there have also been discussions in many countries about the decrease in the quality of public services and the costs of the reforms, such as increasing social inequality (Stephens 1996).

A second reason was the increased fragmentation that resulted from the New Public Management reforms. Political executives, whether on the left or right of the political spectrum, became increasingly skeptical towards the increasing challenges of coordination and capacity and the undermining of political control

and wanted to 'bring the system back together again' (Gregory 2003). A third reason was the fear factor, prompted by an increasingly insecure world. Most typically this has been related to the effects of 9/11 and the increase of political control introduced to counter the terrorist threat, particularly in the USA, Australia and the UK (Kettl 2004). In addition the fears created by the large tsunami, pandemics like SARS and bird flu, and national concerns related to the latter, like bio-security concerns in New Zealand, have also pointed to a renewed need for greater integration and coordination (Christensen and Painter 2004). So it has been increasingly easy to argue for more central political and administrative control.

So how can one characterize the content of the post-NPM reforms in a comparative perspective? In many countries New Public Management has created a highly disaggregated and de-centralized apparatus for pursuing public goals. Many political systems are now trying to 'rebuild' the state or at least create more central governance capacity within the state (Christensen and Lægreid 2006, Halligan 2006). According to Shergold (2004), 'there is a tendency to bureaucratic fragmentation'. Terms like 'joined-up government', 'whole-of-government', 'reassertion of the centre' and 'horizontal management' are often used to describe moves towards greater coherence in the post-NPM era. But what do these terms mean? Often they are used interchangeably, and different terms are used in different parts of the world, for example 'joined-up government' in the UK and 'whole-of-government' in Australia (Christensen and Lægreid 2006, Hunt 2005). The terms are new, but they have been coined to address old problems concerning co-ordination and control.

In addition, the term 'whole-of-government' can have different meanings: a whole-of-government approach may be comprehensive or specific, formal or informal; it may take place at different organizational levels and involve policymaking and/or implementation. However, there are some elements that are common to all frameworks where whole-of-government is involved. Generally speaking, whole-of-government seems to be more about informal than formal collaboration, and a whole-of-government approach brings together different stakeholders in specific policy areas. Moreover, departmentalism is considered to be the opposite of whole-of-government, for whole-of-government involves collaboration across organizational boundaries and therefore implies first and foremost horizontal collaboration, in contrast to departmentalism (Hunt 2005, Richards and Kavanagh 2000). Nevertheless, vertical and hierarchical aspects are also discernible in the concept of whole-of-government. One of its aims is to better equip civil servants to handle 'wicked' issues that cut across policy areas, by reducing tunnel vision and 'vertical silos' (Bogdanor 2005). Bakvis and Juillet (2004) capture some important elements when they state that 'horizontal management can be defined as the coordination and management of a set of activities between two or more

organizational units, where the units in question do not have hierarchical control over each other and where the aim is to generate outcomes that cannot be achieved by units working in isolation’.

Reorganization of public activity in Norway over the last ten years has been characterized by a gradual move away from an integrated state and towards a more fragmented one. Nevertheless, Norway still lags somewhat behind the Anglo-American New Public Management pioneers. One of the main features of the Norwegian reforms has been increased structural devolution, whereby ordinary agencies have been given more autonomy, without changing their formal status, but several of them have also been transformed into state-owned companies (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007). The main reform strategy in Norway has been to avoid privatization by concentrating on structural devolution within the public sector (Christensen and Læg Reid 2004). Another New Public Management-inspired reform was the reform of the hospital system. In 2002 responsibility for Norwegian hospitals was transferred from the counties to central government. Ownership was thereby centralized to the state. The reform also set up new management principles for the hospitals based on a de-centralized enterprise model (Christensen, Læg Reid and Stigen 2006, Læg Reid, Opedal and Stigen 2005).

After the general election in 2001, the incoming Conservative-Centre minority government, dominated by the Conservative Party, embarked on a more radical New Public Management-inspired reform agenda, at the same time as countries like New Zealand were moving away from certain elements of New Public Management. The agenda imitated the main features of the New Zealand reform agenda in the 1980s, assigning a prominent role to structural devolution, ‘single-purpose organizations’, competitive tendering, efficiency measures, consumer choice, decentralizing service provision, etc. (Christensen, Lie and Læg Reid 2007).

The most controversial reform attempt between 2001 and 2005 was the reform of the regulatory agencies. In 2003 the government put forward a White Paper to the Storting (St. meld. nr. 17 – (2002–2003) proposing changes in regulatory agencies. The recommendation from the OECD (2003) was to separate the regulatory function from the commercial and other functions. In addition, it recommended reducing the potential for ministerial intervention, by making agencies more autonomous and professional – a standpoint very much inspired by the economic-rational perspective presented. Evidence-based decision-making was to replace consensus-based decision-making, with advice on specific decisions being provided by expert appeal bodies outside the political system (Christensen and Læg Reid 2004). The White Paper took on board the OECD’s mantra that it was important to face future challenges, even though there were no major problems with the way regulatory agencies worked. The result of the negotiating process in the Stortinget

was a mixed solution (Hommen 2003). Although the government got support for moving eight regulatory agencies out of Oslo, it had to agree to a number of compromises on the formal changes. The Stortinget stated that appeals should not be moved out of the ministries for the time being and that proposed changes concerning other aspects of the regulatory agencies should be made only on a case-by-case basis and not in a general and sweeping way. Thus, the eventual solution was a hybrid one.

Even though the Conservative-Centre government was very eager to pursue typical New Public Management reforms, its record in actually implementing them was rather mixed. It eagerly pushed for getting local authorities to establish 'one-stop shops' for local service provision and to proceed with a broad program for converting public administration agencies into state-owned companies. The agencies affected included such areas as road construction, the airport administration and the agency for government administrative development. In the sphere of immigration, however, a decision was taken to bring the immigration authorities back under closer government control, which went against the grain of the regulatory agency reform (Christensen and Læg Reid 2005, Christensen, Læg Reid and Ramslie 2006).

The new Employment and Welfare Administration established from 2006 is in some ways a typical post-NPM reform, but also has elements from New Public Management. The aim of the new administration is to get more people working and active and fewer on benefits, and to provide a more co-ordinated, user-friendly and efficient employment and welfare administration (Christensen, Fimreite and Læg Reid 2006). The Labour Market Administration and National Insurance Service have now been merged in a new central agency and are to collaborate with locally based social services in local work- and welfare-offices (St. prp. nr. 46 (2004–2005)). This is one of the largest reforms ever in Norway and includes elements of New Public Management, like structural rationalization and increased efficiency, but it also has some stronger major ideas related to post-NPM, namely the coordination and collaboration of large public service organizations. By introducing a more complex, multi-purpose organization the reform goes against the idea of the single-purpose organization and the new organization will also potentially increase central political and administrative control.

Before the national election in 2005 the Labour Party formed an alliance with the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party. This alliance ran pretty much on an anti-NPM ticket arguing that such reforms should be stopped or modified because of their negative consequences, such as reduced political control, more fragmentation and too much focus on efficiency. This view was particularly interesting coming from the Labour Party, which had previously been seen as supporting New Public

Management. The alliance won the election and formed a Red-Green government. The crucial question now is whether the anti-NPM rhetoric will remain just rhetoric or whether it will result in major changes. In the course of its nearly two years in power the government has started to modify or stop some of the New Public Management-style reforms, like limiting the influence of the competition agency, allowing some major mergers in the private sector, limiting the spread of private schools, limiting the scope of private providers in the health service, pursuing a more active ownership policy towards state-owned enterprises. etc. What this will eventually add up to is not easy to imagine now, but it probably will not amount to much more than a rebalancing of the New Public Management reforms in a post-NPM direction (Christensen and Lie 2007). The PM Jens Stoltenberg pretty much sums up this somewhat ambiguous rebalancing in the title of an article he published in 2006 – ‘modernized renewal’ (Stoltenberg 2006).

## Whole-of-government according to the perspectives outlined

Viewing the situation from an economic-rational perspective it is interesting to note that one major argument for New Public Management reforms still prevails in the post-NPM reforms, i.e. the emphasis on efficiency. How both a fragmented public structure and a more integrated structure can both improve efficiency is not that easy to understand, showing that this way of thinking is rather underdeveloped concerning the relationship between organizational design of public structures and efficiency (see Boston et al. 1996). Another observation is that things have changed concerning the mix of centralizing and decentralizing elements in the reforms. While New Public Management typically has tended towards managerial-style thinking with regard to devolution and decentralization, post-NPM is informed to a greater extent by the more centralizing ideas in new institutional economic theory related to control through contracts. If we applied the principal-agent theory, we would argue that the controlling concerns of the principal are now stronger than the autonomy concerns of the agent, autonomy that New Public Management argues serves to increase efficiency and keep the political executive at arms-length.

Seen from an instrumental-structural perspective, the post-NPM reforms are primarily about structural redesign or reorganization. The reforms are seen as a reaction to increased fragmentation under New Public Management, brought about by increased vertical structural devolution or specialization and increased horizontal specialization via the principle of single-purpose organizations (Christensen, Lie and Lægveid 2007). Post-NPM is very much about reversing those tendencies. Agencies and SOEs have been given a shorter leash by reinvigorating the instrumental hierarchical levers of the political executive, and



some of them have even been dissolved or have changed their formal status, as in Australia and New Zealand (Halligan 2007). In addition, there is some horizontal integration going on, not so much through mergers and structural integration as through somewhat looser structures like intra-sectoral or cross-sectoral cooperation, networks, programs, projects, 'tsars' etc. And the political and administrative leadership has also tried to combine vertical and horizontal coordinative measures.

Compared to the New Public Management reforms the post-NPM reforms are generally more about cultural than structural features. While the New Public Management reforms offered structural solutions that also fragmented the political-administrative culture and catered to sub-cultures, the post-NPM reforms have not only focused more on holistic structural solutions, but also on holistic cultural solutions. Now the mantra is to think about the collectivity and to find ways to collaborate with other public entities to find good solutions (see Bardach 1998). And the focus on public ethos and standards is now more important than before (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000). In Australia the focus is on what is called 'value-based management', where collaboration and unity are seen as more important than competition and fragmentation.

The environmental perspective can also help to explain some features of the post-NPM reforms. The technical environment has in many ways changed. There has been increasing criticism from stakeholders in the environment that New Public Management has failed to deliver instrumental and efficiency gains (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). The political executive has increasingly had the feeling that through New Public Management it has lost potential levers of control and influence, and that it would like to have some of them back in order to cope with increasing challenges in the environment – obviously 9/11 is a major environmental challenge, as are concerns about tsunamis, pandemics/national epidemics or bio-security (Kettl 2004).

The institutional environment is part of the equation concerning post-NPM. For a long time New Public Management ideology and ideas dominated completely among the major political and administrative stakeholders, and also in the media. That is no longer the case. More and more criticism has been directed at New Public Management, partly because of increasing frustration among political leaders about their lack of control and capacity, but also because of negative experiences reported in the media, and also increasing worries about threats and insecurity. All this has increased the importance of counter-myths opposing New Public Management. It is now much more appropriate to talk about bringing the political-administrative system back together again and to criticize New Public Management.

The garbage can perspective is also relevant, in at least two respects. One angle is that when post-NPM reforms are introduced, the mixture of different structural and cultural elements becomes more complex, opening up the possibilities for increased ambiguity and confusion in public decision-making processes. It is also interesting to follow the major arguments and thoughts behind post-NPM. They are not only characterized by technical arguments about restructuring, but also by symbols about the advantages of coordination and integration (Gregory 2003). Thus post-NPM has similar features to the New Public Management reforms. Both types of reforms are partly characterized by ambiguous organizational thinking, and as mentioned, the contradictory and strong arguments about efficiency also underscore this feature.

## Norway in the broader reform picture

As stated, until the end of the 1990s Norway was a typical reluctant reformer in a comparative perspective. It was primarily seen as reluctant relative to the main international trend represented by the Anglo-American countries, which from the early 1980s embarked on a New Public Management path. With regard to reforms Norway displays similar features to the other Nordic countries and to some Continental European countries, like Germany and France (Christensen 2004). The Norwegian reform profile is characterized by New Public Management reform rhetoric in two reform programs during the late 1980s, but actual implementation of such reforms did not take place until the 1990s, and even then it did so in a gradual and slow way, choosing more moderate reform elements. The main reasons for this were that Norway had relatively little pressure from the environment to reform, the economic situation was (and still is) good, the historical-cultural tradition was not very compatible with New Public Management, and two decades of minority government gave little instrumental potential (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). Added to this was the typically Scandinavian style of collaborating with interest groups/civil service unions that were skeptical towards New Public Management.

Norway pursued a more radical New Public Management path in the period 2001-2005, because the government of that period was more ideologically open to such a path, thus bringing Norway closer to the situation in the Anglo-American countries (Christensen, Lie and Læg Reid 2007). This development took place, however, in a period when those countries had already started to embark on a post-NPM path. Since the new Red-Green government came to power in 2005, the rhetoric has become more anti-NPM and some of the action is also in that direction.

## The quality assurance system and elements of New Public Management and post-NPM reforms

Quality systems in public or private organizations, whether they are called quality assurance, quality assessment, quality review, quality-at-entry, quality standards, or quality steering, are nothing new and they in many ways pre-date New Public Management (Hallandvik 2005). It is, however, probably fair to say that quality systems have focused more on quality in projects or established organizations after a formal decision has been taken and the implementation is going on or is finished, than on quality in the planning and pre-decision phase with which the quality assurance system is concerned. The QA2 phase of the quality assurance system in Norway seems to be the most traditional one, while the QA1 does not seem to have many counterparts in the public sector in other countries. The main question here is whether the quality assurance system in Norway contains elements from New Public Management and/or post-NPM reform measures.

Overall, quality systems can be defined in both a New Public Management and post-NPM direction. One of the central goals or promises of New Public Management is to increase efficiency and quality in the public sector, so quality is a central part of the concept. Understood as a technical aspect of reforms, quality systems are supposed to be furthered through a greater focus on independent professional competence, more structural specialization and clearer roles, increased transparency in public decisions and activities, increased participation by users of public services, etc. One question that arises is how easy it is to further efficiency and quality at the same time, but also the consistency and trade-offs between the other aspects could be discussed (Christensen and Lægveid 2001). Accordingly, some see quality systems as symbolic systems, where it is important for political and administrative leaders to manipulate myths and as part of a kind of impression management, aimed at selling or even over-selling reforms.

But quality systems can also very much be seen as control systems, either ex ante, like the Norwegian quality assurance system, or ex post control. As underscored, New Public Management is a concept that advocates both devolution and regulation at the same time, i. e. it is often said that there is a dynamic relationship in the concept between 'let the managers manage', the autonomy part, and 'make the managers manage', the incentive and control part (Kettl 1997). But this feature, which is related to contract theory in new institutional economic theory, may also be seen as an inconsistent or ambiguous feature of New Public Management.

What is very typical for post-NPM is that it puts more emphasis on the control part than New Public Management, thus tilting the balance between autonomy and control. In post-NPM there are not only restructuring measures, implying more

control by political and administrative leaders, but also overall more control, scrutiny, audit and reporting systems. So quality systems, like the quality assurance system in Norway, may primarily be defined as a post-NPM ex ante control or regulation system. The control part is particularly evident in the QA1 phase.

If we look more closely at the Norwegian quality assurance system we see that overall it is built on the idea that it's good to 'stop and think' (Lave and March 1992) about major projects before central actors decide on them, i.e. particularly to give them more of broad societal-based cost-benefit analyses. The hope is that by doing this better and more needed projects will be chosen, budgets would become more realistic and money will be saved on the projects that are chosen, and the overall quality of the projects will be improved. This could very much be interpreted as addressing rational calculation and improving organizational thinking, so that the coupling between goals, the projects chosen and expected effects becomes tighter. But a quality assurance system also very much implying a political process in which different actors and stakeholders are involved. As already mentioned, the quality assurance system is organized in two phases, whereby the first phase (QA1) is more open to hierarchical political steering or political negotiations, while the QA2 phase is potentially more of a technocratic phase dominated by professional expertise. After QA2, when the project proposal reaches the Storting, the process may become more politically oriented and open again.

One feature of the Norwegian quality assurance system that is very typical of New Public Management is the bringing in of external consultants to improve the quality of preparatory planning documents for major public projects, whether it is seen as vertical specialization or alliances with actors in the private sector (see Hodge and Greve 2005 for the literature on Public-Private Partnerships). When New Public Management started twenty-five years ago, rolling back the state, devolution, competitive tendering, privatization, etc. were typical features (Christensen and Lægveid 2001). It was also asserted that if the public sector did not produce high-quality and efficient services, it would be better to leave it to the private sector, either through competitive tendering or privatization. Later on bench-marking was introduced, urging public organizations to compare themselves with and learn from the private sector. All of this has an anti-political flavor, and also smacks of skepticism towards the professional competence of the public sector. The thinking in New Public Management ideology was obviously that the decisions made and the services produced would become better and more professional if the political executive stayed away from them and private sector expertise was brought in.

So how does the Norwegian quality assurance system measure up to such a view? First, bringing in external consultants as experts obviously has features of this view. This measure can be seen as a technical device to improve the projects and as such an instrument that implies greater trust in competitive external expertise than in the expertise of the ministries and agencies, or simply that internal expertise is lacking. If this can be shown to work in practice, it may enhance the legitimacy of the political and administrative leadership; however, it could also be a symbolic feature whose effects are difficult to prove and which will increase internal conflicts in the central civil service, because it could be seen as mistrust towards internal expertise. A less dramatic view would be to emphasize that the external expertise is there to help and supplement the internal expertise and political and administrative leaders.

Second, had the quality assurance system consisted only of QA2, an argument of influential external experts would have been easier to advance, since one alternative would have been to keep the whole QA2 process inside the central civil service. But the introduction of QA1 has changed this picture, not so much because of the use of external experts provided for in this phase, but because of the tighter coupling of the political and administrative leadership to this phase. So one crucial question is how the QA1 phase changes the overall quality assurance system. Does it really mean more political control and influence relative to in-house and external expertise, and in that case is it the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office or Ministry of Finance that has gained influence? Is it about increasing the influence of administrative leaders, for example in the Ministry of Finance, on the processes related to major projects, and decreasing that of the sectoral ministries and agencies engaged in planning the projects?

Third, if the effect of the quality assurance system is to increase political and administrative influence and control over major public projects, this would very much be in line with post-NPM reform features. If that is true, it would probably be related to the QA1 phase. The fact that the quality assurance system takes a lot of time could, however, both bring in more stakeholders and make the decision-making process more complex, so that the time and resources used up front and ex ante could have a potential negative effect on both political control and the efficiency of the projects.



# The quality assurance system – main features, effects, alternatives and improvements

## The main features of the quality assurance system analyzed

Bringing together the analytical perspectives presented and the main features of comparative public reforms gives us some good instruments to understand the design of the Norwegian quality assurance system. The system is a rather complex and somewhat hybrid system and we will try to sum up and analyze its main elements.

First, the plain fact that such a system focusing on the front-end phase of the projects has been established is interesting in itself, but it is not all that clear what kind of phenomenon it represents in the public sector. It may be seen as a pre-project control and regulation device, an ex ante planning instrument or an ex ante quality-assurance system. Whether these distinctions are of any major relevance when analyzing the system is another question, and we focus on the system as such without labeling it in any definite way. The pure fact that this is a separate system, composed of mandatory procedures and rules and involving certain actors, is interesting, because it signals that this type of system is held to be better than an integrated system where quality assurance is either taken care of in an in-house administrative unit or separately in each ministry/agency involved in major public projects. Since it involves private actors it also bears some resemblance to the increasingly popular public-private partnerships (see Hodge and Greve 2005), although it is not, of course, a public-private partnership for financing and implementing major public projects but for adding external expertise.

Second, one important rationale of the quality assurance system is to have more realistic budgets, a typical motive according to an economic-rational perspective and one that is central to understanding New Public Management reforms. The establishment of the quality assurance system reflects increasing worries in the public leadership about the costs of major public projects. Reducing the costs through the quality assurance system could potentially happen in a number of different ways: choosing a lower-cost alternative, scaling back the project, improving the technical quality of the planning, devising strategies for implementation, including cost-saving proposals concerning providers, etc. The

crucial point, however, is what potential designing a quality assurance system offers in itself. We will return to this later on in our discussion of effects.

Third, the instrumental-structural perspective is the one best able to explain the complexity of the quality assurance system. One point is that it has centralizing elements in the anchoring of the system in the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office and primarily the Ministry of Finance. It involves the relevant ministries and agencies because they provide the mandatory planning documents for the quality assurance system, but it also formally weakens their position, because the front-end phase of their projects is partly 'taken over' by other actors. This feature is very typical of post-NPM, i.e., it is concerned with central control and coordination. So this the political aspect of QA1 is strong, and the aim is that the top political executives should be involved early in the process, to put the project in a broader societal perspective, and try to control other potential actors.

Interestingly enough, another important feature is the lack of formality, because there are some procedures that imply indirect regulation through the involvement of external consultants. So centralization and features of delegation to private actors go hand in hand. The private consultants are prequalified so there is a control element in that; on the other hand, this is potentially modified by the power of the ministries/agencies to choose among a selected few.

Fourth, the use of private consultants is the most notable feature of the quality assurance system. These consultants are primarily brought in to improve the quality of the planning documents and participate in reducing costs and create realistic budgets. In an ideal world they should make professionally oriented and good analyses of the planning documents of the proposals, be value neutral, and deliver solid conclusions. But in the real world they are also at the same time participants in a public decision-making process, where their participation may change the pattern of influence among the public actors and influence the evaluation alternatives and basic decision premises, something we will come back to. The role of the private consultants is obviously potentially more political in the QA1 phase than in the QA2 phase, where their professional role seems to be clearer. It is interesting that the argument for adding the QA1 phase was more to strengthen society-related choices and economic considerations, and anchor those choices and considerations more in the political leadership, than to improve the professional quality of the projects and thus reduce costs. Why the private consultants should also participate in the QA1 phase is not all that evident, but this is also something we will discuss below. The distinction between the QA1 and QA2 phases could also have been defined more clearly in this respect.



Culturally speaking, New Public Management is very much geared to learning from the private sector, whether this learning involves a management orientation, more emphasis on efficiency and quality, or more service orientation, but also about bench-marking and best practice (Boston et al. 1996). Basically, it is held that the public sector should learn from the private sector, not the other way around. When it comes to structural fragmentation, it is appropriate to attend to sub-cultures like professional cultures. The quality assurance system has some of these features. Bringing in private consultants reflects an orientation that stresses the importance of learning from the private sector, particularly large firms, the implication being that these people have superior planning and quality assurance competence. But a crucial question is what kind of culture will emerge as a result of the quality assurance system, and how much private consultants will influence this culture. Will adding the QA1 phase make it a more holistic culture, inspired by post-NPM reforms, or create cultural inconsistency and tension? The probability for the first option may have something to do with how consistent the private experts are acting and furthering a new control culture, making the public actors learn and socialize to this culture, something that is worth studying further. The potential for conflicts and cultural heterogeneity is also there, particularly between the external experts and the sectoral ministries and agencies proposing the major public projects. Lack of compatibility between the expertise and culture of the private experts could also be an issue.

Fifth, in the New Public Management reforms there was a greater focus on efficiency gains than in the post-NPM reforms, even though both reform waves argue that they further efficiency. Accordingly, technical external pressure on major public projects seems to have been important for developing the quality assurance system. While it is natural to try to reduce costs in major public projects, because the money saved may be used for other purposes, a more crucial issue is whether it was necessary to introduce the quality assurance system to cope with these problems. Thus, a potential tension is built into the system between the sectoral ministries, particularly the ones with major public projects, the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance, and the private consultants. Whether this tension decreased after establishing the system, against opposition, or increased with the introduction of QA1, is a question we will come back to.

The rhetoric of the quality assurance system, reflecting pressure from the institutional environment, resembles New Public Management rhetoric in the sense that it emphasizes cost-benefit analyses and efficiency gains. In addition symbols connected to structural devolution and the importance of independent professional competence are typical for both New Public Management and the Norwegian quality assurance system. But when QA1 was added the symbols

changed somewhat, pointing more towards the demand and need for more central political control and broader societal considerations when planning major public projects. These are all arguments that are very much typical for post-NPM reform rhetoric.

Sixth, describing the quality assurance system as a complex decision-making system may also imply garbage can elements. Even though the decision-making structure – the structure of participants – is fixed in the quality assurance procedures and rules, this structure provides for potential disagreement between different interests. The access structure – the structure of problems and solutions – is less fixed, as is normally the case in the public sector, and may be diverse if the different actors define the problems and solutions in divergent ways. This is an alternative to describing the quality assurance as formally well organized and predictable.

## Potential effects of the quality assurance system

An effects analysis of the quality assurance system based on an economic-rational perspective may simply ask whether the introduction of the system has yielded efficiency and more realistic budgets. If this is the case, as might be evidenced, for example, by studies of major public projects exposed to quality assurance, one could then ask what kind of mechanisms are involved. Are the gains produced by introducing a system that encourages a more careful consideration of major public projects? Are the centralizing elements crucial or is it the structural devolution and professional competence that are important? What about the involvement of external experts? What type of expertise or professional models are most promising? These are relevant, but often difficult questions to answer. And of course there may be other perspectives and logics of action involved as well, rather than just the purely economic, technical or managerial ones. It may, for example, be the simple fact that major public projects have been changed in the process that has made them different or that other environmental factors, like international constraints or national conditions like changing provider conditions, have been crucial and not the quality assurance system.

Using the structural-instrumental perspective and several New Public Management and post-NPM studies, it is possible to make some inferences about some of the potential effects of the structural design of the quality assurance system. Compared to a more integrated system of quality assurance for major public projects, one can draw some rather simple conclusions about the quality assurance system, namely that the new system will give the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and private consulting firms potentially more influence and the sectoral

ministries and agencies planning and implementing the projects potentially less influence, because the whole system and particularly the QA1 is typically an top-down effort. The simple rationale here is that the former actors are central and organized into the process, while the latter actors have a formally weaker position.

Among the 'winners', it is not all that clear about the relative effects. One option would be to conclude that the main story is that the political and administrative executives in the central units involved are the winners, because they will dominate QA1 and therefore control the involvement of both the administrative leadership and the private consultants. Another scenario might be that it is the central administrative leaders running the system who are the winners, or a third one that the external consultants will gain a lot of influence deep inside the central public apparatus. Another, more open question is whether there are some systemic features here or whether the pattern of influence will vary between different processes. Because it is a complex system with different and partly inconsistent structural elements, it is also likely that all the different actors on the winners' side will gain influence, but to a different degree.

When the quality assurance system was established in 2000, it started a new tradition or cultural path. What the content of this new culture is all about is not obvious. With QA2 the culture probably tended in the direction of a private planning and quality assurance culture, while QA1, with its post-NPM emphasis on central control and coordination, probably to some extent counteracted this. If we look at the tension between the old and more internally related quality assurance culture and the new culture, it is probably safe to say that the old one has been weakened. But that may also imply that there is cultural resistance in the ministries and agencies with major projects, something that may modify the intended effects of the quality assurance system.

The external technical environment of the quality assurance system is a complex combination of public and private actors trying to influence the definition and selection of major public projects, but also to position themselves in a tug-of-war for political and administrative influence. It is not all that clear, aside from the hope of improving the realism of budgets of major public projects and generally improving the quality of the projects, how the quality assurance system will influence the selection and content of the projects. That is more related to comparative case design. What is rather evident is that the introduction of the quality assurance system, and particularly the QA1 part, was meant to change the structure of these decision-making processes and that this has probably also happened in practice. One aim of the new system was to move away from a traditional bottom-up process related to the projects, where alliances between local stakeholders, sectoral administrative leaders and some central politicians had a

tendency to restrict the options and choices for the government. The new system changes this pattern and gives central political and administrative actors relatively more influence; very much in a post-NPM way.

But what about the effects of some of the rhetoric and symbols connected to the quality assurance system? One winning formula is, of course, to promise that the system will create more efficiency and budget realism, a goal that can hardly be disputed. Whether this is actually true or not is not that important in a complex world, as long as the major argument is accepted. Another question is how the money saved should be used. If it helps to realize more public projects, the quality assurance symbols may eventually lead to more support for the system from the actors with the most major public projects, like the ministries of defense and transport/communications. This would then have softened resistance towards the system, at least from these actors.

Another part of the quality assurance system rhetoric is the symbols connected to the involvement of external consultants. The more or less implicit argument here is that bringing in private actors in the front-end phase will improve the quality of major public projects. This is, however, much more tricky to sell broadly in the central administrative apparatus, because it implies a lack of trust in internal expertise and potentially undermines the influence of internal actors. But there could be more of an external effect here for the firms. Their job with the major projects in the public sector could be seen as some kind of branding for them that is giving them advantages concerning other jobs for the public sector, but also prestige in the broader market, creating a stronger market position in other segments.

Last, the more garbage can-related features of the quality assurance system, related to complexity and ambiguity, may have both advantages and disadvantages concerning effects. The advantages are that the quality assurance system could be seen as an invention and innovation that has improved project processes, so it is not that important if not all the elements in the system add up. An alternative view is that the quality assurance system is too complex and ambiguous and that the effects are uncertain and fluctuating.

## Improvements and alternatives

Talking about improvements and alternatives to the existing quality assurance system may mean different things. One is to take as a point of departure the original aims of reducing costs and have more realistic projects, to change the basic

decision-making processes through which major public projects are decided on, and improve the professional quality of planning. One may ask whether there is possible to improve the system even more, taken for granted that the quality assurance system is working better than the old system, or ask whether there are possible alternatives that could be better according to the aims. Another angle, that could cover parts of the first, is to ask how we could see improvements or alternatives based on the five models or perspectives outlined.

Based on the rational perspective, public decision-making should have clear apriori goals and intentions, as a basis for evaluating both the broader or narrower economic aspects of major public projects. One can ask whether this is really the case now with the quality assurance system or whether there is a need for improvement. One way would be eventually to formalize the quality assurance system more, by defining the system more clearly through a set of strengthened formal rules and procedures, instead of the rather broad formal frames existing today. In this regard it would also be pertinent to state more clearly what the goals and main intentions of the system are, how these intentions can be implemented through the different elements of the system, and to point to relevant studies and experience that show that the effects are probably in accordance with the goals and intentions. Even though the Concept program plays an important role in this respect, this function could be strengthened.<sup>2</sup> One critique towards such a proposal could of course be that formal rules and frames potentially already are there, whether one talk about the economy steering rules or planning and evaluation rules, but that they are too general and not much used. If this is the case, more clarifying the goals and rules close to major public projects could be preferable. Another aspect that is also related to the structural perspective, is whether it is necessary to improve the quality of the organizational thinking in the quality assurance system, for example in the quality and realism of the alternatives in the QA1 phase.

Another aspect is whether there is possible to improve the principle-agent relationship in the quality assurance system. One such relationship is the one

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<sup>2</sup> For information about the Concept program, see [www.concept.ntnu.no/index\\_engelsk.htm](http://www.concept.ntnu.no/index_engelsk.htm). There are also two collegial bodies connected to the quality assurance system: The forum for the project owners – the ministries – that is trying to clarify concepts and principles across sectors, and the forum for project leadership – with the relevant agencies involved - that is working on identifying and spreading best practice for handling major public projects. The Concept program follows the development on these two arenas as part of its developmental work.

between the political-administrative leadership and the sector ministries and agencies; another is the one between the political-administrative executives and the private, external consultants. If we take it for granted that the actors proposing major public projects try to further biased information to the principal, whether intentional or not, there seems at least to be three potential changes to be made. One is to do something with the sectoral ministries or agencies. They could either be given more resources to improve their own planning and the proposals on major projects they further, or their role in the process be even more restricted. The other measure could be to increase the resources of the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office or particularly the Ministry of Finance directed towards the project process, to strengthen the principal and to counteract the influence of the sector actor or the private experts. A third measure could be to either increase the role of private consultants, to counteract the influence of the sectoral actors, or diminish their role to strengthen the principal. If one trusts the sectoral ministries and agencies and their proposals more this would not be a major problem, but it could anyhow be an idea to strengthen their planning expertise.

The structural perspective will very much attend to whether the quality assurance system is structured in such a way that it's fulfilling the general aims, whether explicit or not. More efforts could be used to clarify the relative importance of the top political and administrative decision-making premises on the one hand and the sectoral and 'local' ones on the other hand. There could also be more discussion and clarification of the relative importance of the political and administrative decision-making premises on the one hand, and the professional premises on the other hand, whether internal or external. One central feature with the system is that it is complex or hybrid, so one improvement could be to make the system simpler. Simplification could be to see whether the QA1 and QA2 phases could be merged or at least simplified in certain ways, or the role of the private consultants made more limited, for example connected to QA2, or establishing a rule saying that no firm could participate both in QA1 and QA2.

The structural perspective will also very much attend to the pattern of influence in the quality assurance system. One consideration could be whether the effect of the system, despite the QA1, is that the political leadership has too little influence, and that this is a democratic concern. An improvement based on this would be to limit or cut the participation of the private experts, as mentioned above, or to bring in even more the political executives into the QA1 process. The latter would also balance more the role of the political and administrative executives in the process. If the concern is not the political leadership's role, but more the professional role of the external experts, one improvement could be to increase the resources in the Ministry of Finance, so that control of the experts and that they stick too their professional role could be improved. Strengthening the resources in a quality

assurance unit in the Ministry of Finance could improve the purchaser competence of the principal, so that it's easier to detect whether the experts have done a bad professional job. The experts in Ministry of Finance are also a filter between the private experts and the political executives. This would also reassure more those that are skeptical towards the private experts and fear that they are playing a political role in the quality assurance process. If the concern is about the independence of control, and there is skepticism about the external experts in this role, one could eventually establish an independent control and scrutiny body for major public projects.

Following on from the above points, more resources could be used to compare the planning expertise of the ministries/agencies and that of the external consultants, to find out whether their expertise is competing, supplementary or similar. Competing expertise could create tensions, but also introduce further dynamics to the planning of major public projects. Supplementary expertise, which seems to be the most important feature of the system, would create a need to decide how to balance the different types of expertise, possibly readjusting the mix between them. If the expertise turns out to be similar this would make it rather difficult to legitimize the participation of the external experts. Related to this, it's an interesting question whether the external experts primarily is digging into the procedures of quality in planning or whether their participation is more related to the securing quality of the content of the planning documents. In principle the external experts should enact a control of realities and content, and not having a check-list mentality or attend mostly to procedural features, but the reality could deviate from this. The system as such is, however, containing a lot of procedures about how one is working with quality control.

Transparency in public decision-making processes could be understood both from a cultural perspective and from an institutional environment angle. Transparency is important both for legitimacy of the decision process, but also for revealing pattern of influence. Both these aspects have instrumental features, but primarily combine basic ethical and symbolic features. Potentially, the transparency could be improved in the quality assurance system, giving the public more insight into the process. One improvement could be to make better known the basic rules and procedures of the system, another to make public both the QA1 and QA2 reports, not only the latter. The concerns of secrecy would of course have to be taken into considerations if such changes were made. Involving external experts is also potentially part of the transparency.

The garbage can perspective is participating in explaining that public planning and control system are often very complex and even chaotic. There may be arguments favoring certain of such features, for example that 'creative chaos' may improve

innovation or that complexity gives flexibility and attending to many considerations and decision premises at the same time. But creating systems like quality assurance often try to make public decision-making more structured and simple. In this respect, some of the simplifying measures mentioned above could be appropriate.

The most radical alternative to the quality assurance system would be to remove it, on the grounds that it potentially undermines the autonomy and influence of the ministries/agencies implementing the major projects, and to go back to the old system. The logic of this, if one cares about the goals of the quality assurance system, could be discussed and the costs of such a change could also be too large. Two modified versions of this might be to strengthen the planning and quality assurance expertise in those units with the most projects, or to establish a larger central unit to obtain resources to develop the professional strength of such a system. Such a unit could be connected either to the Cabinet/Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Government Administration and Reform.

A third alternative between developing and improving the existing quality assurance system and removing it, which might strengthen some internal parts of it, would be to modify the role of the external consultants. The most natural solution would be to remove the private consultants from the QA1 phase, because this is meant to be a more typically politically oriented phase, and external professional expertise is more relevant for the QA2 phase. An alternative to this would be to limit the role of the external consultants in the QA1 phase, and possibly also in the QA2 phase.



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