

Great Expectations of Public Service Delegation

A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Politicians use a variety of expectations to justify the delegation of public services to public, semi-public or private organizations. This paper reveals expectations of delegation, as well as its correlates. Empirical evidence is drawn from a systematic review of 250 peer-reviewed articles published in leading public administration journals between 2000 and 2012. This study identifies a discourse with three main categories of justifications: scientists and practitioners expect economic, political, and organizational benefits. The effects associated with delegation are not in line with these expectations. Delegation has inconsistent correlations to outcomes when governments maintain a role in service delivery. Complete privatization is associated with negative outcomes. These results have important implications for the study and practice of delegation.

Keywords

Delegation, systematic review, privatization, contracting out, agencification, decentralization.

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Great Expectations of Public Service Delegation – *A Systematic Review*

The delegation of public services is at the heart of many reforms in the public sector. Delegation is, in short, the transfer of decision powers to another organization (see section ‘Delegation’). The New Public Management (NPM) discourse created great expectations of delegation (Hood 1991; Majone 2001; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1993). Yet, Pollitt and Dan have already noted that: ‘there is an ocean of studies of the application of NPM ideas [...], but only a modest sea of works that offer direct empirical analysis of outputs, and no more than a small pond that convincingly connect specific reforms to particular outcomes’ (Pollitt and Dan 2011, 25). Nevertheless, the IMF, the UN Good Governance Agenda, and various other reform programs have promoted a variety of delegation forms, and continue to do so. These forms include privatization and contracting out, but also decentralization and the creation of semi-autonomous agencies (Hood 2011). But it remains unclear what politicians and researchers exactly expect of delegation, and whether their expectations are in line with correlates associated with delegation. This study, therefore, focuses on these expectations and their associated effects. It is the aim of this study to map the expectations for delegation systematically, as well as to evaluate the effects thereof, based on existing studies. To do so, two questions will be addressed in this paper. First, what do we know about expectations about the delegation of public tasks? And, second, what do we know about the effects associated with delegation?

To address these questions, a systematic review of 250 journal articles from leading public administration journals was conducted. Academics sometimes make claims about the effects of delegation, but more often, they report about expectations that politicians, consultants, and practitioners have. The results obtained from the analysis of the articles show that there are three main categories of expectations in which these expectations concerning delegation can be placed, in line with the NPM discourse. These include economic, political, and organizational benefits. The reported effects of delegation are generally mixed and case specific. It is only in the case of privatization that most of the reviewed articles that present empirical evidence point to a decrease in performance. It is clear, however, that the institutional setting in which delegation takes place is vital to delegation’s success or failure. These findings are in keeping with earlier, though still scarce, overview studies and meta analyses (Bel, Fageda, and Warner 2010; Dan 2014; Hodge 2000; Letza, Smallman, and Sun 2004; Pollitt and Dan 2013).

This study contributes to our understanding of delegation, not only by adding up and summarizing the evidence that is available on both the expectations and reported effects of delegation. Up until now, overview studies have focused mainly on contracting out and privatization, with an emphasis on local government (Bel, Fageda, and Warner 2010; Bel and Fageda 2009; Hodge 2000). Others have focused on networks, but they have made no clear distinction between the types of organizations that act as delegates (Milward and Provan 2000). In systematic reviews or meta-analyses, virtually no attention has been devoted to delegation to

other public organizations, such as decentralization or the creation of semi-autonomous agencies (one exception is Dan 2014). This study combines the perspectives of all these four delegation forms. Moreover, this study compares the justifications given, and the effects attributed to delegation at the local, regional, and national/federal levels of government.

Delegation

Delegation is defined in this paper as the (partial) transfer of decision powers over a public task from an organization that is directly controlled by a democratically elected official or a member of a presidential cabinet, to another public or private organization (compare Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002). Organizations that can engage in such delegation at the national level are, for example, (federal) executive departments, or ministries. At a regional or local level, the delegating organizations are part of the core state, provincial, or municipal administration. Delegation as a attributing power to a democratically elected representation or executive, to international organizations (EU, UN) and delegation by legislative powers are beyond the scope of this study.

TABLE 1: Delegation ideal types

	Decentralization	Agencification	Contracting Out	Privatization
Explanation	Redefine relations between government levels	Disaggregate ministerial organization	Buy services from third party	Sell publicly owned assets
Ownership	Public	Public	Private (mostly)	Private
Coordination mechanism	Democratic control	Network management	Contract monitoring	Market forces
Responsibility	Elected official	CEO/board	Elected official	CEO/board
Control loss	High	Low	Low	High

This study distinguishes four ideal typical forms of delegation, see table 1. Clearly, numerous hybrid forms exist alongside these four. Defining distinctions include ownership, coordination mechanisms, the bearer of responsibility, and the loss of control. First, decentralization is the delegation of tasks from higher to lower tier governments and, therefore, the task remains publicly owned. Municipalities or provinces can, for example, take over tasks from central or federal governments (Pollitt 2005, 373–377). Agencification, second, is the transfer of tasks to structurally disaggregated public bodies (Van Thiel 2001; Verhoest et al. 2012). These bodies are disaggregated from the hierarchy and democratic control in ministries. Examples are independent regulatory agencies or British Next Steps Agencies. Control loss is less than in case of privatization as the agency can be recentralized, merged, or abolished (James et al. 2015). Moreover, political principals often appoint CEOs or board members. The third form of delegation is the contracting out of public tasks to private (or in some cases public)

organizations. In that case, the provision of a service is separated from the government administration and delegated to a third party, usually winning a competitive tender. The third party is often private, and sometimes public. The responsibility for this task remains, usually, with the political principal. The last form of delegation that this study distinguishes is privatization, in which case a government divests a certain task or organization (see Hodge 2000). In other words, a formerly public organization is sold off to the private sector.

Theoretical frameworks that are used to discuss delegation, as defined in this study, generally have two intellectual origins (James and Van Thiel 2011). On the one hand, these theories are rooted in the NPM tradition, while on the other hand institutional explanations play a large role in the debate (Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002). NPM inherited ideas from public choice and principal agent theory (Hood 1991), which is reflected in the economic and political expectations. Moreover, NPM also has its traits from managerialism reflected in organizational expectations of delegation (Pollitt 1993). From this NPM perspective, it can be economically or politically beneficial to delegate tasks, however, there is a risk of agency loss if the goals of principal and agent are not aligned, or if relationships are not clearly defined (Hood 2011; Majone 2001; Milward and Provan 2000). Therefore, good control mechanisms to monitor delegates need to be in place (Gilardi 2008). These perspectives on delegation find their origins in the American practice of delegation to non-majoritarian organizations (Pollack 2002). Although these theories are a good starting point for analysis, they certainly have their limits, and additional contextual understanding is required for an adequate understanding of delegation (Thatcher 2002). Moreover, as Andrews already noted (2010, 288), in most empirical studies involving NPM ideas, the theoretical NPM framework is not comprehensively developed. Yet, these theoretical approaches usually provide testable hypotheses or expectations, such as more efficiency, citizen satisfaction, and flexibility.

Expectations about delegation are the first object of study in this paper. Some authors have expectations of delegation or analyze underlying causes and predictors, while most report on expectations and justifications from delegating politicians. The decision to delegate is not always a tailored response to a clearly defined problem, but in some cases rather a concept borrowed from another context (McNamara 2002; Scott and Meyer 1994). Institutional theory underlines the environment's role for an additional understanding of delegation. In that perspective, delegation is more than a functional replacement of tasks; it has important symbolic and legitimizing functions (McNamara 2002; Smullen 2010). In order to benefit from good reputations, delegation can become the acceptable political norm. Besides normative mechanisms, coercive mechanisms can play a role (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), as is the case in many EU-informed public sector reforms, such as the creation of independent market authorities. These processes are sometimes explained as path dependence (Pierson 2000). Reasons for delegation should, therefore, be sought after in both expectations and environmental factors.

The outcomes that correlate with delegation are the second object of study in this paper. From the 1990s onwards, the NPM philosophy in general has suffered from the critique that the normative claims underlying its doctrines have not been proven (Hood and Jackson 1991, 192–193; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Moreover, outcomes can be positive as well as negative. In this paper, positive outcomes are those in line with expectations or in line with NPM ideas, whereas negative outcomes are contrary to those expectations. Positive outcomes of delegation, thus, include, for example, a more efficient public sector or satisfaction with public services, while negative outcomes include their counterparts.

Data and Methodology

Systematic reviews are relatively scarce in public administration research, but have become common practice in medicine and health care research. The PRISMA guidelines give a good indication of the necessary steps for a robust systematic review (Moher et al. 2009). Using these steps where possible, academic publications have been selected that were published between 2000 and 2013 in leading public administration journals, all listed in ISI Web of Science index. Articles from the top 7 journals, based on 5-year impact factor were included, from which *Philosophy and Public Affairs* and *Journal of European Policy* were excluded, based on their scope of interest. This resulted in the selection of 5 journals: *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration*, *Policy Sciences*, *Governance*, and *Public Administration Review*. Because of their respective scopes of interest and the comparative character, *Public Management Review* and *International Review of Administrative Sciences* were included as well. See table 2 for the number of articles by journal. Articles were selected using 8 keywords in article topics in Web of Science, supplemented with the same query in the EBSCO search engine. These keywords include: delegation, decentralization, agencification, agency creation, quango, corporatization, contracting out + government, and privatization. The query yielded 243 articles in Web of Science, and 147 articles in the EBSCO search engine, including 81 duplicates. Close reading of these articles led to the exclusion of 59 articles based on their contents; these articles dealt, for example, with delegation to EU or delegation from citizens to parliament. In total, 250 articles are included.

In all articles, the definition of delegation was categorized, and expectations and correlates were labeled. It was noted whether original empirical evidence was used and presented, which time span and geographical location were covered in the study, and which level of government was studied. Some articles report expectations of delegation and effects thereof in a byline, while other articles provide empirical evidence for reasons in the environment to delegate or associated effects. 92 articles contained no original empirical evidence, 46 provided evidence for reasons to

delegate, and 112 provided evidence for correlating concepts. Empirical evidence was equally distributed among journals.

TABLE 2: Journals

Publication Title	Frequency
Public Administration Review	53
Public Administration	50
Governance	45
International Review of Administrative Sciences	43
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	33
Public Management Review	21
Policy Sciences	5

The Western world was overrepresented in the articles that were selected. Most of the articles concerned studies that either focused on the EU-15 plus Norway and Switzerland (107) or North America (80). Asian governments were researched in 29 studies, and other European countries were studied in 20 articles. All other continents, including Australia/Oceania, South America, Central America, and Africa occurred in 15 or less articles.² The forms of delegation that were described earlier (decentralization, agencification, contracting out, and privatization) all occurred more or less equally (17-25%), see table 3. Some articles used no definition, all forms or other forms. Other forms can include, for example, public-private partnerships or agency mergers. The vast majority of studies into contracting out (69%) were conducted in North-America. Studies into agencification were mostly (68%) conducted in Europe. Privatization was studied in Europe, as well as in North America, and decentralization was studied relatively equally in all geographical contexts.

TABLE 3: Forms of delegation

Type	Frequency
None	9
Agencification	51
Contracting Out	62
Decentralization	47
Privatization	43
All Delegation Forms	11
Other Definition	27

In the remaining sections of this paper, the analysis of the articles is presented. All expectations and effects of delegation were coded in an inductive manner, and later on, compared, linked and categorized, as is common practice in content analysis and systematic reviews (Krippendorff

² Some studies were focused on multiple countries; double counts occur in this description.

1980). Patterns are identified, mainly based on the different conceptualizations of delegation, in combination with the discussed expectations and effects.

Results: Expectations

Expectations derived from NPM, as well as the environment in which the delegation takes place, provide insight into possible expectations (James and Van Thiel 2011). In many cases, politicians make claims that can be traced back to the NPM discourse, even though politicians might not apply a comprehensive framework in their reforms. Institutional analyses of public sector reform show that there are other reasons for delegation, as well. Examples of such predictors include larger governments and spillover, yet these analyses provide but few clues as to what to expect of delegation. As we will see later in this analysis, however, such contingencies often mediate the relation between delegation and the expected effects.

Nine categories of expectations found in the articles fit the NPM approach. These fit in three dimensions of expectations: economic, political, and organizational. This categorization is consistent with the dimensions of NPM, identified by Hood (1991) and Pollitt (1993): economic and political expectations fit the principal agent framework, while organizational expectations fit the managerial framework. Each of the following sections includes a number of key expectations that will serve as criteria to assess the attributed effects. Five other categories of reasons for delegation are derived from the institutional environment.

Economic Expectations

The economic argument is the justification for delegation that is most often reported. More than half (57%) of the reviewed articles that mention economic justifications for delegation, discuss competition or market forces to achieve more efficiency in the public sector. In 76% of the articles on contracting out and in 65% of the articles dealing with privatization, references are made to possible efficiency gains. Efficiency is, therefore, most expected to come from delegation to privately owned organizations. This expectation features less prominent in the articles on decentralization (42%) and agencification (25%).

Politicians expect delegation to lead to efficiency in diverse ways. One commonly discussed expectation is rooted in public choice theory (Niskanen 1971). When a monopoly is broken, managers will have incentives to lower costs and enhance services in order to be a competitive partner. Contrastingly, monopolies might also lead to efficiency gains through economies of scale, mentioned both in the literature on contracting out and, to a lesser extent, in the literature on decentralization (Warner and Bel 2008). Warner and Bel (*ibid.*) found that politicians used the economies of scale argument to justify contracting out municipal waste collection in Spain, while

in the US the competition argument prevailed. Particularly in most municipal service delivery, population size is claimed to be too small for efficient service delivery. Municipal cooperation can lead to larger tasks that can be contracted out jointly (Prager 2008).

Another, parallel, line of argumentation that leads to efficiency follows the idea of 'let managers manage' (Moon and deLeon 2001). Autonomy is, then, the main source of efficiency gains. Furthermore, managers at the local level in developing countries or former communist countries are expected to be more accountable to their local community and, therefore, less corrupt and more innovative, leading to more efficiency (Guess 2005).

Increased technical performance or effectiveness of service delivery through competition is often observed as an expectation from delegation, as well (for example in Amirkhanyan 2006; Ya Ni and Bretschneider 2007). But increasing technical performance is also expected from recentralization by means of improved coordination, as found in Norway (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007). In addition, it is often mentioned or assumed that there is more innovation outside the government administration (for example in Brown, Potoski, and Van Slyke 2006).

A last justification that is mainly present in the literature on privatization is the need to cover budget deficits, or to increase the available financial assets. Public organizations can be considered deadweight costs and, therefore, it might be economically more attractive to sell off that service (see, for example, the justification for the privatization of Sallie Mae in Corder and Hoffmann 2004). The need to cover deficits can also be an important driver for privatization of state owned enterprises such as electricity, railways, or telecommunication services (Albalade, Bel, and Fageda 2009). In some countries, the private market is underdeveloped and can be stimulated by transferring certain tasks to the private sector and liberalizing the market (González-Gómez, Picazo-Tadeo, and Guardiola 2011).

Political Expectations

Political expectations are those that refer to a change in the relationship between administration and others: citizens, political principals, or private organizations. A total of 90 articles (36%) mention political expectations of delegation. These expectations are categorized in citizen interests, accountability, and political stability. The former include satisfaction, trust, and democratization. Political expectations of delegation are more prominent in the articles on agencification and decentralization than in the articles on privatization and contracting out. Citizen interests are mentioned in 67 articles, 25 of which (38%) deal with decentralization. Likewise, 44% of the articles that discuss decentralization mention accountability. Political stability is the third category of expectations, and is mentioned in 20 articles. Seven of these (35%) deal with agencification.

A decision to charge a task to an agency is seen as the willingness of politicians to refrain from interfering in task execution and separates politics from service delivery, which should ensure

objective and independent decision-making (Knox and Carmichael 2006; Van Thiel and Yesilkagit 2011). This act of de-politicization is expected to improve the quality and impartiality of policy implementation, as well as it should improve political credibility (Batory 2012; Majone 2002). The same mechanism also works in the inversed direction: the distance between decision making and implementation leads to agency officials paying less attention to their political principals (Egeberg and Trondal 2009; see also Roberts 2010). In the logic of depoliticization, increasing political trust is a reason for the transfer of tasks. Politicians can delegate tasks to an agency, when they want their heritage to live beyond their own time in office and improve their credibility (Bertelli 2006b; Majone 2002). More credibility should be reflected in the amount of trust citizens have in politicians. In the same vein, Flinders (2009) finds a tendency to less political appointments in agency boards in Britain. As a result of a lower trust in government, he suggests that a rationalization has taken place in response to challenges of modern governance in developed democracies.

Together with trust, also satisfaction with the government is expected to increase. A better representation of citizens' interests is expected as a result of delivery of public services closer to citizens. 8% of the articles made a reference to increasing responsiveness; 6% mention participation and 4% mention democratization as an expectation from delegation. The logic behind these expectations is that delegation facilitates discretion on the executive side of policy. This task discretion was tested in Dutch agencies, and found not to be moderated by political saliency or legislative capacity of the agency (Bertelli 2006a). This discretion also facilitates more interaction with citizens, as more possibilities for locally tailored service delivery are present (cf. Van Thiel 2001). It is even suggested that the transfer of tasks to other organizations might lead to democratization through increased spending on local programs and the strengthening of local NGOs, which should be curbing government corruption (Snively and Desai 2001).

Political responsibility for delegated tasks is often limited. When accountability in traditional forms decreases, other forms and mechanisms are expected to occur, which might even lead to an increase in accountability (Bertelli 2005; Hodge and Coghil 2007). International institutions, such as the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund use accountability in their good governance agenda to justify pressure for decentralization in low- and middle-income countries, as it would hinder government corruption (Guess 2005). At the same time, the training of civil servants in decentralized systems might be of inferior quality to that of centralized systems. Witesman and Wise (2009), for example, found evidence for less anticorruption and policy skills training in the Ukraine.

Organizational Expectations

The third category of expectations for the transfer of public tasks to another organization within the NPM philosophy consists of claims to benefits for the internal organization. These expectations are not observed as much as the previous two categories but are, nevertheless,

important. In 27 articles (11%), a reference to these expectations was observed in the review. Roughly, there is a distinction between two categories of expectations, being the reasons regarding staff (about 25%) and regarding organizational structure (about 75%). Higher motivation, increased productivity, and innovation belong to the former and are mostly observed in the context of decentralization. Flexibility, increased autonomy and the possibility to deal with complexity belong to the latter group, and are mostly posited as expectations of agencification.

With reference to Osborne and Gaebler (1992), Peckham *et al.* (2008) explain that employees work more closely with their ‘customers’ and have more room to be innovative in decentralized units. This, in turn, leads to higher commitment, motivation and productivity (Cogburn 2005; Turner 2012). Within government, employees’ motivation is supposed to be better aligned with the organization’s mission than in the private sector (Brown, Potoski, and Van Slyke 2006). Note that other studies outside this sample claimed that it should also be easier to recruit suitable specialists in single-purpose organizations (Smullen 2010; Wright and Pandey 2008).

The expectations that refer to the organizational structure are found more often in the articles about agencification and decentralization. Especially semi-autonomous agencies are supposed to be flexible, because the government can use a variety of legal forms and structures at will (Sawyer (1983), in Bertelli 2005). In the literature on decentralization, the argument of flexibility of the organization or service delivery is used (Norgaard 2003). In many cases, this logic coincides with the increased autonomy of semi-autonomous agencies (Bertelli 2006a). This does not mean that flexibility or autonomy is absent from the literature on privatization or contracting out, but in this case as well, it is less prominent in that stream of literature (see Brown, Potoski, and Van Slyke 2006). A last justification, both for transferring tasks to a public and a private organization is the possibility to deal with complex tasks as a result of a high number of skilled specialists in an organization (Breul 2010). However, it should be noted that in many cases these specialists are former civil servants.

Expectations in context

Delegation is a widespread reform instrument, yet certain expectations are more common in some contexts than others. In the sample 46 articles provide empirical evidence for the context in which why governments decided to delegate. Such factors are mentioned exclusively in 29 articles (with or without empirical evidence), and 38 articles mention the expectations within their context. Environmental factors include: external pressure, ideology and idea spillover, bigger governments, and environmental complexity. Such contextual factors are often presented as predictors for delegation and do not include specific expectations, even though these are important to acknowledge in analyzing delegation (Brown and Potoski 2003b).

An important enabler for delegation is the pressure from third parties, such as the European Union pushing for the establishment of independent regulatory authorities (Moynihan 2006). International donors and the WTO also pushed for agencification, including the creation of state

owned enterprises (Pearson 2007). These external parties justify their pressure mostly with economic expectations. Such external pressure is often found to be a driver for agencification, more than for the other types of delegation. It should, however, be noted that this might be due to academic interest for agency creation. Furthermore, businesses push for contracting when they have interests in contracting out decisions (Witko 2011).

Adoption of delegation practices by neighboring governments in the same policy field also proves an important predictor for privatization (Amirkhanyan 2006), as well as for agencification (Grossi and Reichard 2008). Other factors influencing the decision to delegate in either form are growth of government and population size (Flinders 2004; Ya Ni and Bretschneider 2007). These latter factors are also important in explaining the success of delegation practices, as discussed later in this paper: in many instances, the organizational capacity proved decisive for the success of delegation. Lastly, delegation is more prevalent to have specialist agencies or contracted organizations deal with wicked problems in complex environments (Birner and Wittmer 2006; Brown and Potoski 2003a).

In short, authors report economic, political, and organizational expectations of delegation. These expectations are mostly rooted in the NPM, and NPM has been a major driver of delegation in the public sector. Some of the expectations correlate closely with the chosen form of delegation. Economic expectations are often reported together with contracting out decisions. Accountability and the promotion of citizen interests are often reported as a justification for decentralization. Better staff motivation, productivity, and innovativeness are also reported as a justification for decentralization. Agencification is often accompanied by claims to increased political stability, as well as claims that the semi-autonomous organizational structure and autonomy will benefit performance.

Results: Delegation Correlates

111 articles (44%) present original empirical evidence of associations with public service delegation. The class of empirical data was equally distributed: 58 articles presented results of qualitative case studies, institutional analyses, or qualitative comparative analysis based on fuzzy sets, while 58 other articles presented quantitative analyses. Four reviews contained structured comparisons of previous studies (for example, Letza, Smallman, and Sun 2004) or literature reviews (Milward and Provan 2000). The article sample does not contain randomized controlled trials or other designs that formally test cause and effect. All effects mentioned here should, therefore, be understood as correlates that are associated with delegation.

Effects that were expected in the NPM discourse were tested and sometimes found. As mentioned earlier, positive associations are those in line with expectations based on NPM ideas, whereas negative associations are contrary to those expectations. The anticipated effects include effects in the economic dimension, the political dimension and the organizational dimension. Beyond the hypothesized effects, many associations were found with coordination in a broad sense. This also includes shifting of power to other arenas, increasing regulation, or increasing power for business corporations. These issues are discussed in the last part of this section.

Economic Associations

As mentioned earlier, efficiency gains are mainly expected from delegation to private organizations, as happens in contracting out or privatization. The economic correlates associated with contracting out are studied more than the correlates associated with other forms of delegation, see table 4. In 15 articles, evidence about these associations is presented, showing mixed results. Positive economic associations are found in several larger scale studies, mostly based on perception data. Data sources include the ICMA surveys in the US, the Texas School Districts data, and a large number of municipalities in Spain, as well as a large number of interviews in the Bay Area (Potoski 2008; Bel, Fageda, and Mur 2012; Rho 2013; Suárez 2011). However, favorable market conditions must be present, there should be sufficient organizational capacity to manage contracts, and the task should be simple (Hefetz and Warner 2004; Zullo 2007; Savas 2002). Increasing coordination costs because of dispersed ownership and absence of competition also led to objectively measured lower efficiency in Norwegian waste collection, and a perceived lower efficiency in social service delivery in New York City (Sørensen 2007; Van Slyke 2003). These contingent findings on contracting out are mostly in line with the earlier overview study by Bel *et al.* (2010), as well as by Letza *et al.* (2004), despite the differences in data samples. Some positive associations are found as a result of privatization. One study on the Greek case reports more efficiency, foreign investment and availability of capital through privatization (Pagoulatos 2001). The reported effects include a technical performance that has not improved in Central and Eastern Europe (Nemec and Kolisnichenko 2006), or has even become worse in Congo (Kuditshini 2008).

TABLE 4: Empirical Evidence for Economic Associations

Effect	Decentralization	Agencification	Contracting Out	Privatization
Positive	2	3	7	1
Negative	1	2	4	2
No directional Effect	2	0	2	0
Contradictory or Moderated	2	0	2	0

Decentralization is reported to be associated with positive associations on technical performance in two studies, although evidence is limited and case specific (see Dragos and Neamtu 2007 in Romania; Turner 2012 in Mongolia). A case-study in the US, however, shows inefficiency, ineffectiveness and coordination problems as a result of decentralizing community development grants (Handley 2008). Agencification is associated with positive effects on efficiency and technical performance in two large-scale studies in the North-American context, one of which is based on objective measures in a longitudinal Canadian study, and the other a review study in the US (Bilodeau, Laurin, and Vining 2006; Milward and Provan 2000). Negative effects occur as well. Findings from 153 local governments in Spain show that agencies are used to hide public debt (Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Garcia-Sanchez, and Prado-Lorenzo 2013), and an in-depth study employing a mixed methods design in England, shows that the rupture of services has proven inefficient (Carter et al. 2013). Bartori (2012) finds that performance of agencies is dependent on the discretion of the ruling political party that can bind the hands of agencies created by political opponents.

Political Associations

The first part of this study showed that accountability, trust, and satisfaction are expected the most from decentralization. Decentralization has, indeed, several positive associations in case studies in developing countries, such as accessibility to services in Vietnam (Clement 2009), consensus between tribes in Iraq (Brinkerhoff and Johnson 2010), the possibility for judicial review in Togo (Pagnou 2013), and increase in political participation in Indonesia, the Phillipines, and Cambodia (Turner 2012). A more extensive and global study by Sellers and Lindström (2007) found that empowered local governments are necessary for the creation of a social democratic welfare state. However, the success and failure of contracting out often depend on contingencies, such as size: delegation leads to greater transparency in smaller jurisdictions among 691 municipalities in Spain (Esteller-Moré and Polo Otero 2012).

TABLE 5: Empirical Evidence for Political Associations

Effect	Decentralization	Agencification	Contracting Out	Privatization
Positive	4	1	2	0
Negative	2	2	4	6
No directional Effect	0	2	1	1
Contradictory or Moderated	3	2	1	1

Agencification is expected to lead to political stability, but agencification research in Norway finds that this particular form of delegation leads to ambiguous roles and the undermining of political control. Moreover, agency heads reported to pay less attention to the executive politicians (Christensen and Lægveid 2003; Egeberg and Trondal 2009). Nevertheless, the parent ministry often remains the main focus of an agency, as reported by agency heads in a Dutch study (Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2011). Bertelli (2005) used Dutch data collected by the Netherlands Court of Audit and found that public monitoring for several tasks is reduced in favor of a discipline that is enforced through market mechanisms. A decrease in monitoring as a result of contracting out is also found in the US, based on the ICMA surveys (Marvel and Marvel 2007). Public accountability is reduced after contracting out in the EU as well (Mörth 2009). The two former studies included, a total of 4 studies report such negative political associations with contracting out. These effects also include a lower satisfaction with public service delivery in 1000 US municipalities (Mohr, Deller, and Halstead 2010).

Privatization, finally, has a plethora of negative political associations, according to the reviewed studies. These associations vary from problematic corruption in privatized firms in China (Caulfield 2006), to inaccessibility to public services for the poor in Chile under the Pinochet administration (Borzutzky 2005). But also in Europe and North America, negative associations are found, such as a decreasing participation of citizens (Hira, Huxtable, and Leger 2005), political instability and conflict in the UK (Maloney 2001), and political (vote) losses (Hodge and Coghill 2007). It is noteworthy that these negative associations are not counterbalanced by any evidence for positive political effects associated with privatization in the reviewed articles. Table 5 presents an overview of the results.

Organizational Associations

Staff motivation is one of the motives for decentralization, as discussed in the first part of this paper. Decentralization of HRM can have negative effects on staff if the agencies lack organizational capacity to administer their HR practices, as Coggburn (2005) found, based on a survey among 101 Texan HR managers. In Europe, this HRM decentralization seems to consist mostly of rhetoric, rather than tangible discretion for managers, found Meyer and Hammerschmid (2010); despite decentralization speak, most systems were still highly centralized. Findings in South-Africa were in line with the Texan results: vacancies could not be filled in time and staff was poorly skilled (Cameron 2010). However, the productivity of staff rose in the Canadian study into agencification that was mentioned before, by Bilodeau *et al.* (2006). At the same time, a study among 260 Ukrainian civil servants showed that adequate training in democratic values lacked as a result of agencification (Wooldridge 2004).

As mentioned earlier, civil servants need new skills to successfully contract out public services (Brown and Potoski 2004). This could be one of the reasons that civil servants feel threatened by the privatization of services (Battaglio Jr and Legge Jr 2009). At the positive side, privatized

organizations might benefit from greater organizational flexibility when not constrained by a rigid public law framework, as found after the German reunification (Cassell 2001), as well as in the US and Spain (Warner and Bel 2008). See table 6 for an overview.

TABLE 6: Empirical Evidence for Organizational Associations

Effect	Decentralization	Agencification	Contracting Out	Privatization
Positive	0	1	0	2
Negative	2	1	1	2
No directional Effect	1	0	0	1
Contradictory or Moderated	1	0	1	0

Coordination

The three dimensions of expectations that stem from the NPM discourse facilitate the development of clear hypotheses about effects, for example, more efficiency, higher satisfaction and increasing flexibility. On the flipside, there are coordination issues arising from delegation, as well. Coordination, then, refers to organizing governance structure within the public sector. Many articles reporting about agencification mention issues with coordination (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003). Such coordination issues, usually, are either neutrally described, or presented as contradictory. In Norway, for example, contacts between agencies and ministries depend on the cooperation between managers and unions (Kirkhaug and Mikalsen 2009). In 219 Dutch agencies, Van Thiel and Yesilkagit (2011) find higher reported trust levels in the relation between agency and parent ministry when agencies have less autonomy. Moreover, a Flemish study shows that semi-autonomous agencies try to act strategically to gain trust from their parent ministry (Rommel and Christiaens 2009). Positive coordination effects (2 articles) include better cooperation between organizations or improved control in cases in Guatemala and England (Birner and Wittmer 2006; Goodwin and Grix 2011).

TABLE 7: Empirical Evidence for Coordination Issues

Effect	Decentralization	Agencification	Contracting Out	Privatization
Positive	0	2	0	0
Negative	2	2	1	2
No directional Effect	1	7	3	5
Contradictory or Moderated	0	2	0	0

Decentralization can also lead to coordination problems (Handley 2008). But when decentralization is studied, authors often report that there are no tangible effects. Ironically, this is because the decision to delegate is, in fact, not implemented, as reported above in the study by Meyer and Hammerschmid (2010). What is more, Sosin (2012) reported a paradoxical decrease in autonomy as a result of the introduction of decentralized policy. In practice, these programs experienced a shift of administrative dominance from state level to the federal level, and thereby, a loss of autonomy.

Studies into contracting out report an increase in cooperation and contacts between actors involved. Such findings include additional opportunities for contacts between private firms and political decision makers, hence more possibilities to influence decision-making (Kelleher and Yackee 2008). Local governments in the US, where this form of delegation is common, show more cooperation by jointly contracting (Hefetz and Warner 2004; Girth et al. 2012). Findings from full privatization, lastly, include the shift of power balances, for example, an Irish survey among employees reported a reduction in bargaining power for unions (McCarthy, Reeves, and Turner 2011). Other evidence for external effects of privatization is often based on case studies that find an increase in regulation for the newly created market or firms, or that courts decide that (new forms of) administrative law should apply to the privatized organization (Benish and Levi-Faur 2012).

Conclusions

There are some obvious limitations to this study. First, no new empirical material was collected to answer the current research question. The nature of the research design allows for a systematic comparison of existing work, yet it relies on all of the limitations that the authors of the reviewed studies faced. However, the systematic synthesis and comparison of these works facilitate a general overview. Second, the forms of delegation were ordered using ideal typical categories. Hood (2011, 78) identifies the clarity of delegation as an additional dimension. He argues that only parts of a task could be delegated, rather than all of it, resulting in clear cut versus fuzzy delegation. Unfortunately, this dimension is not often mentioned throughout the papers in the present study, which prohibits an analysis along this dimension. The remaining level of interference by central government was mentioned sometimes as a success factor (Andersson and Ostrom 2008; Freitag and Schlicht 2009), which shows that there is at least some potential for this approach in future research. Lastly, the present study is a systematic review, and not a meta-analysis. In part, this is because there is no single outcome measure that can be compared over multiple studies. Another reason to stick to a systematic review is to be able to include qualitative evidence for delegation effects.

This review reflects a large part of public administration research on delegation since the year 2000. The paper concludes with four propositions that reflect the current state of our knowledge and could shape our future research agenda.

It has become clear from this synthesis that the expectations of delegation follow three main paths: economic, political, and organizational. These reflect the main theoretical streams in the NPM discourse (Hood and Jackson 1991; Pollitt 1993). As discussed earlier, economic claims are often used to justify contracting out. Political expectations, such as accountability increase and citizens' interests are found in association with decentralization decisions. Increased political stability is an expectation that is part of the discourse in the justification for creating semi-autonomous agencies. The first proposition that this study brings forward is, therefore:

- **Proposition 1:** Each form of delegation has a dominant set of justifications: economic expectations for contracting out, political expectations for decentralization, and organizational expectations for agencification.

The effects of delegation, however, are not always in line with the expectations. Based on the reviewed studies, there is not enough evidence for (un)favorable effects attributed to decentralization, agencification, and contracting out to support a position in favor or against these forms of delegation in general. Clearly, in the right circumstances, positive effects are observed, but the contrary is true as well. Once the decision to delegate a public task has been made, the environment is decisive for successful execution. More than half of the articles mentioned economic gain of some sort as an expectation from delegation. While these gains are observed in a substantial numbers of large-scale studies, they should be evaluated in their respective contexts. Necessary conditions include favorable market skills, organizational capacity, and the right task. Case studies from non-Western countries showed the negative effects of delegation in unfavorable contexts. It is recognized in many studies that delegation, and especially contracting out, requires new skills, competent public managers and capable civil servants. Furthermore, political parties can inhibit the performance of semi-autonomous agencies, and central government can continue to interfere in decentralized tasks, both leading to suboptimal performance.

- **Proposition 2:** Expected effects of delegation are moderated by contextual factors. Skilled staff, enough budget, and no counterproductive political interference are indispensable.

In the case of privatization, governments decide not to interfere in the delegated task as they had done in the past. In such complete divesting or selling-off of public enterprises, negative associated effects predominate, even though economic effects of privatization are mixed. Negative political effects, however, are prolific in the literature. Although part of the evidence is case specific and drawn from low and middle-income countries, the high proportion of negative effects is remarkable. Moreover, negative effects are found in European countries as well.

Therefore, it can be expected that privatization could be beneficial to efficiency in some cases, but at a heavy cost. Negative effects include decreasing political participation of citizens, political instability, and corruption. These problems should be carefully considered when privatizing tasks.

- **Proposition 3:** Privatization, usually, has more negative than positive effects.

The systematic analysis that was conducted for this study has clearly shown that future research should look beyond the regularities found in an administrative philosophy such as the NPM discourse. Although some general ideas, expectations, and hypotheses can be distilled from the NPM discourse, a careful understanding of the institutional moderators is indispensable in evaluating the effects of delegation, and public sector reform in general (Brown and Potoski 2003b). An analysis of causes for delegation based on institutional theory does not always imply obvious hypotheses about potential effects, but the institutional environment shapes delegation effects. Therefore, the last proposition that is formulated concerns the theoretical contribution of this paper.

- **Proposition 4:** Expectations of delegation based on NPM should be analyzed in the delegation context, in order to make valid inferences about effects.

This research synthesis shows that important steps have been taken in the research about delegation. Both expectations and effects have been extensively studied – particularly regarding the economic effects– and these continue to deserve our attention. However, some caveats in our understanding still remain. Most notably, there is the underrepresentation of studies that concern countries outside the Western world. The effects of delegation on staff are understudied as well, and merit our further attention. The above propositions reflect the necessity for taking a holistic approach in further exploring these issues.

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