

Coordination and planning: central categories in interagency relationships


Coordinação y planificación: categorías centrales en las relaciones interagencias

Abstract: The article reflects, based on a literature review and document analysis, on the coordination and planning categories as central to interagency relations. The study results indicate that cooperation is the most basic level in this type of relationship, given its informality and being based on personal and little institutionalized relationships. Coordination, on the other hand, would be the improvement of cooperation through elaborate arrangements, when agencies would consider the objectives, visions, purposes and desired end states of the other agency in the planning. The second category was worked from theorists and professionals of the interagency environment, who highlighted the importance of relationships to materialize through a planning process that produces an intelligible plan and that increases the chances of success of operations. We conclude that the full interagency relationship effectively materializes when it occurs through joint planning with the participation of all agencies involved in solving the problem.

Keywords: coordination; planning; interagency relationships; interagency operations; planning doctrine.

Resumen: El artículo reflexiona, a partir de una revisión bibliográfica y análisis documental, sobre las categorías coordinación y planificación como ejes centrales de las relaciones interagencias. Los resultados del estudio indican que la cooperación es el nivel más básico en este tipo de relación, dada su informalidad y por estar basada en relaciones personales y poco institucionalizadas. La coordinación, por otro lado, sería el perfeccionamiento de la cooperación a través de arreglos elaborados, cuando las agencias considerarían, en la planificación, los objetivos, visiones, propósitos y estados finales deseados de la otra agencia. La segunda categoría fue trabajada desde teóricos y profesionales del ámbito interagencias, quienes destacaron la importancia de que las relaciones se materialicen a través de un proceso de planificación que produzca un plan inteligible y que incremente las posibilidades de éxito de las operaciones. Concluimos que la relación interagencias plena se materializa efectivamente cuando se da a través de una planificación conjunta con la participación de todos los organismos involucrados en la solución del problema.

Palabras clave: coordinación; planificación; relaciones interagencias; operaciones interagencias; doctrina de planificación.

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1 Introduction

In January 2011, what appeared to be another typical summer storm marked the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro as one of the biggest climatic and geotechnical catastrophes in the history of Brazil. The combination of heavy rainfall and specific geological conditions was one of the determining factors for the disaster: torrents of mud, rocks, trees, and debris came down, sweeping everything along the way. It is worth noting that on this route there were dozens of properties, from slums to high-end houses and hotels. The rains have also caused flooding of the river sources high up in the mountains, which has led to the rivers overflowing and the cities flooding. In this way, streets were covered by a sea of mud, with the consequent destruction of houses, piling up of cars, and many deaths.

Furthermore, the collapse of bridges on highways left towns isolated, which aggravated the situation for residents, who already lacked basic essential services such as drinking water, electricity, and communications of any kind. The tragedy imposed severe damage on the infrastructure, economy and geography of the affected region. It is estimated that this occurrence affected 20 municipalities in the region, affecting 90,000 people, of whom 30,000 were left homeless or displaced and 916 were fatal victims (BANDEIRA; CAMPOS, BANDEIRA, 2011).

During the same period, subsequent heavy rainfall also caused a series of floods in northeastern Australia, mainly in the state of Queensland. It is estimated that 80% of the state's 1.8 million kilometers of land was hit by the waters and as a consequence roads and rail lines were closed as well as mines flooded. Although Queensland was the hardest hit, the flooding spread to neighboring states of New South and Victoria. It is estimated that at least 22 cities and more than 200,000 people were affected and that about 35 people died in the floods (ARKLAY, 2012).

With similar coastal topographies, in which increasingly dense conurbations occupy the ravines, streams and floodplains that would naturally carry water between the mountain and the sea, heavy rains, floods and landslides were therefore experienced in both realities. However, when comparing the number of deaths caused by the rains in the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro and Australia, Margareta Wahlström, UN Under-Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction at the time, said that the tragedy in Rio was greater, mainly because of the lack of planning of the agencies involved in disaster prevention and response in the country (ROTHIER, 2011). To this aspect, Busch and Amorim (2011), added the lack of coordination between the public agencies involved in the response to the Rio de Janeiro disaster in 2011.

It is on these two concepts, coordination, and planning, that this study will focus, from a literature review and document analysis, on the centrality of both categories, specifically, in the interagency relationships.

The first concept is notably grounded in the studies of Kaiser (2011), Nolte, Martin and Boenigk (2012), Nolte, Martin and Boenigk (2012), Raza (2012), Saab et al. (2008), Wankmüller and Reiner (2020), which treat interagency relationships under three complementary approaches: coordination and its interrelation with collaboration and inter-agency coope-

ration. The second, interagency planning, is anchored in the works of Carafano (2011), Field (2021), Moynihan (2005), Quarantelli (2005), and Warmington et al. (2004).

The choice for such an object of investigation is directly related to the importance acquired by the theme of the interagency relations nowadays, notably when its derived operations are triggered, and the perception that the complexity of the problems to be faced in these situations demands a sophisticated level of coordination and necessary planning prior to the actions. Therefore, it is clear that it is necessary to reflect more deeply on these concepts.

It is important to point out that the so-called interagency relations are a broad and sometimes unresolved issue, both in academia and among professionals who work in operations with these characteristics. Expressions such as collaboration, cooperation, coordination, integration, and networking get mixed and confused when thinking about this kind of relationship.

It is worth adding that there is already a significant theoretical production in academia about interagency relations. From this perspective, the following section seeks an approximation with these theories, aiming to situate the main aspects of the debate.

2 Situating the debate around Interagency Relations

Interagency relationships are not something new, since for a long time, even if through simple, disjointed, and sometimes purposeless interactions, organizations have established relationships to share knowledge, achieve joint objectives, obtain material resources, and sometimes compete with each other. In this perception, Kaiser (2011), in his report to the Congress of the United States of America (USA), stated that

Interagency collaboration among federal agencies with overlapping jurisdictions and shared responsibilities is not a new phenomenon. Attempts to foster cooperation among agencies, reduce their number in particular policy areas, or clarify the division of labor among them date to the early days of the republic (KAISER, 2011, n.p., emphasis added).

Although it is not a new phenomenon, the interagency theme may never before have been as relevant as it is now, given the emergence of complex problems¹, to be faced at the dawn of the third decade of the 21st century, namely²: transnational crimes of all kinds, increasingly frequent environmental disasters, health epidemics such as COVID-19, migratory crises,

1 Also called in the literature "wicked problems". Term coined by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, in the article entitled "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning" (1973). These would be problems with the following characteristics, among others: a) they have no definitive formulation; b) each problem is always unique; c) understanding the context that surrounds them is fundamental; d) they can be considered a symptom of another problem; e) the way the problem is explained and formulated will determine the nature of the solution.

2 Challenges described in the Global Humanitarian Overview 2021, published by United Nations-Coordinated Support to People Affected by Disaster and Conflict (UNOCHA).

among others, and to which no public entity is able to provide answers "relying solely on the efforts of a particular institution" (GARCIA, 2014, p. 72).

Despite the importance of the subject, it should be noted that the specific use of the term interagency is still relatively recent, especially in Brazil. The popularization of the expression in the world increased, especially from the 1980s, when it began to be used in the UK and the US (SOUZA; GARCIA, 2014), where the first practices of interagency cooperative relationships were suggested in order to integrate the actions of the US Departments of State and Defense (LEITE; FIGUEIRA, 2019).

In the Brazilian case, there is no time frame that enshrines the use of the term, although, according to Souza and Garcia (2014), the relationship between agencies in Brazilian public management has always occurred to a greater or lesser extent. We can see that the word agency first appeared formally, with the sense of a governmental body endowed with competencies, functions and planning, in law no. 9,649 of May 27, 1998 (RAZA, 2012).

The derivative term interagency, on the other hand, seems to be more common in the military environment (ARAUJO NETO; BARP; CARDOSO, 2017), which may be explained by the diffusion of the manuals³ published by the Brazilian Armed Forces with the theme of interagency operations⁴ in the 2010s, following a trend presented in the US manuals, published from the second half of the 1990s⁵.

At present, this term is understood as explained in the 2017 edition of the manual "Operação Interagências", published by the Brazilian Ministry of Defense:

The term interagency derives, then, from the partnership and synergy of efforts involving governmental and non-governmental agencies, which may be national and/or international, structured to achieve political and strategic objectives of national interest, harmonizing diverse cultures and efforts, **in response to complex problems**, adopting coherent and consistent actions (BRASIL, 2017, n.p, emphasis added, translated).

It is noteworthy that, in this work, interagency relations are understood as the collaborative arrangement that marks the relationship between state and non-state agencies, national or international, at all levels (political, strategic, operational, and tactical), which jointly act to solve some common and usually complex problem, which could not be solved by an individual agency. The solution to the problem must be obtained by triggering one or more interagency operations.

3 MD33-M12: Operações interagências (BRASIL, 2012); e EB20-MC-10.201: Operações em ambiente interagências (BRASIL, 2013).

4 According to the Armed Forces Glossary, interagency operations are defined as: interaction of the Armed Forces with other agencies for the purpose of conciliating interests and coordinating efforts to achieve converging objectives or purposes that serve the common good, avoiding duplication of actions, dispersion of resources, and divergence of solutions with efficiency, efficacy, effectiveness, and lower costs. Same as Operations in Interagency Environment (BRASIL, 2015, p. 196, 288).

5 We cite some US manuals on the interagency theme published since the 1990s: Joint Publication 3-08. Interagency Coordination during Joint Operations (1996), later renamed as Interagency, Intergovernmental Organization, and Nongovernmental Organization Coordination during Joint Operations (2006); and Joint Publication 3-33. Joint Forces Capabilities (1999).

These arrangements range from informality to complete institutionalization, substantially impacting the product obtained from these interactions, that is, the solution. From this perspective, the study of these relationships is relevant to ultimately increase the likelihood of solving problems by achieving the goals that guided the relationship itself, thus providing the correlation between theory and practice. We argue that coordination and planning are key aspects throughout this process. Aspects to be developed in the following sections.

2.1 Interagency Collaboration, Cooperation and Coordination: a dialogue between fundamental concepts

According to Nolte, Martin, and Boenigk (2012), several definitions of the terms surrounding interagency relationships have been published in recent years and the discussion about their interchangeability and connectivity is not yet pacified both in academia and among professionals working in the interagency environment. A similar conclusion was reached by Wankmüller and Reiner (2020) when they analyzed 202 articles on the subject in their *paper*⁶ on logistics supply chains for disaster relief. Other authors, such as Kaiser (2011), simplistically prefer to treat all interagency activities using the term collaboration, encompassing cooperation and coordination, in addition to other terms such as integration and *networking*.

Although there is semantic confusion between the words collaboration, cooperation, and coordination, it is evident in the work of Raza (2012) the importance of trying to distinguish between them in order to better understand what kind of interagency relationship is underway when two or more agencies relate to each other, and thus avoid unpleasantness during the execution of operations. Such perception is supported by Saab *et al.* when stating that

Another reason for performance impediments might be a common misunderstanding about the core aspects of coordination, cooperation and collaboration, because when talking about these terms, it is important to differentiate between them [...] (SAAB *et al.*, n.p, emphasis added).

Contributing to this discussion, Bardach (1998), an author often cited in interagency articles for his work on management theory and practice, postulates that collaboration can be defined as an activity of two or more agencies with the intent of enhancing public values by working together, rather than performing activities in isolation, and that in this interaction there is a noticeable gain for all agencies, when acting in collaborative arrangements.

⁶ Coordination, cooperation, and collaboration in relief supply chain management.

In the wake of this contribution, Raza understands that this perceptible gain is materialized by

a better response to the demands that define and justify their organizational missions, natures, and existences, by adapting, reconfiguring, or transforming their installed capabilities to solve a common problem (RAZA, 2012, p. 17, translated).

The aforementioned author also considers collaboration as a synthesis of cooperative and coordinated arrangements, suggesting that there is no coordination without initial cooperation⁷.

Adding to the debate, Moreira (2018, p. 393), considers collaboration the "structuring concept of the entire interagency relationship." In light of the author's statement, it can be suggested that collaboration would be in the structure of all relationships between agencies. It would permeate and be present in the other arrangements (cooperation and coordination). Without collaboration, there would be no interagency cooperation and no interagency coordination. Collaboration would be the foundation upon which the other arrangements could happen.

From the approaches to the concept of collaboration, one can enter the discussion about the meaning of the term cooperation. And from this perspective, we borrow Rovere's (1999) definition in his book that deals with the organization of health institutions in hospital networks. The author defines it as follows:

cooperation [...] has to do with a co-problematization to cooperate. Sometimes we don't disarm the word cooperation with its logic, but to cooperate is to 'operate with', to operate together. To operate together we must have a common problem, co-problematize (ROVERE, 1999, p. 64).

This idea of a common problem also runs through Franz's (2001, p. 242) definition, who understands cooperation "as a conscious and combined action between individuals or associative groups toward a certain end." Underlying both definitions is the issue of the need to cooperate, either to solve a problem or to achieve some goal, both of which are common to agencies.

However, this cooperation generated by common needs does not yet have a well-defined systematization, as it is characterized by "less formalism in institutional relationships" (RAZA, 2012, p. 16). In the cooperative arrangement, collaboration is present as a link between agencies, but it occurs in an unstructured way, based on personal relationships, and according to Kaiser (2011), voluntarism and discretionary participation of its members. Therefore, in gradual terms, cooperation can be considered as the first level of interagency relations, but let's not forget that it takes place on a collaborative basis, which supports the inter-agency relationship.

⁷ Such consideration is replicated in the fundamentals of interagency operations described in the manual on the subject, edited by the Brazilian Ministry of Defense (BRASIL, 2017, p. 17-72). In the doctrinal publication, collaboration appears as one of the guiding principles of interagency operations.

Another relevant factor concerning cooperation is that it almost always occurs without proper joint planning, since the institutions usually continue planning and executing their operations in a singular way, mainly because they have not established formalized relationships, which may be insufficient to solve complex problems. In fact, such an arrangement can even negatively impact the results of the interagency operation, leading to not achieving the desired end state⁸.

In his work, Raza (2012) details some examples⁹ of what he called cooperation failures during operations. However, it seems that more than errors in the collaborative-cooperative model, the mentioned interagency operations lack proper coordination, and the deficient results lead to indicate this. The collaborative-cooperative relationship tends not to be the most suitable for solving the problems described by the author.

Interagency coordination allows, on the other hand, through more elaborate arrangements, agencies to consider in their planning the goals, visions, purposes, and desired end-states of the other agency participating in the relationship. According to Saab *et al.* (2013), coordination, being more formal, is the next step to cooperation. In this way, coordination could be defined as an enhancement of cooperation, thanks to the institutionalization of the interagency relationship.

However, such a definition is not at all complete. Although it is an improvement, coordination can still be considered hierarchically superior to cooperation in relational terms. This is because the collaborative-coordinated arrangement is an important breakthrough in the search for the solution of complex problems.

According to the Brazilian Army's interagency operations campaign manual (BRASIL, 2017), coordination would even be necessary for mission accomplishment, a statement referenced by Santos Filho (2013, p. 32, translated, emphasis added) when he adjectives it as essential:

Recent experience gained in the interagency environment shows that the coordinated action of the various vectors, whether civilian or military, is **essential** to ensure that the mission objectives are fully achieved.

Less assertively, one could say that without coordination the chances of a successful interagency operation in complex environments would be reduced. The examples listed by Raza (2012) lead to corroborate such a conclusion.

It is still necessary to postulate that the collaborative-coordinated arrangement, or simply coordination, because it is a more institutionalized and structured relationship, tends to be pre-established and imposed by higher levels of decision¹⁰, when an interagency working group is formed to face a complex problem, assigning to one of the agencies the leadership/coordination and the formal and temporal decision-making authority over the others, in a hierarchical model

8 The desired end state is defined as "a succinct description of the conditions that, once achieved, will allow [...] to assume that the [...] mission has been effectively accomplished [...]" (BRASIL, 2020, p. 43/393, 44/393, translated).

9 Described in Raza (2012, p. 9-12).

10 "Echelons into which war management is organized, to which the responsibilities and activities inherent in the war effort are assigned. In terms of the organization, preparation and conduct of war, responsibilities are scaled at the political, strategic, operational and tactical decision levels" (BRASIL, 2015, p. 181/288, translated). The military also calls them levels of war conduct. Such a definition is valid for the organization of the interagency working/planning groups.

of attribution of competencies, as in the Sentinela, Ágata and Fronteira Blindada operations, coordinated respectively by the Federal Police, the Armed Forces, and the Internal Revenue Service (ARAÚJO NETO; BARP; CARDOSO, 2017).

However, coordination can also emerge by consensus during the planning phase that precedes action and after the correct definition of the problem to be addressed, which allows all agencies to be participants in the proposed solution described in the plan and to act from a minimum consensus.

The next section will turn to the difference between these two possible collaborative-coordinated models, during the description of the second category discussed in this paper: interagency planning.

2.2 Interagency Planning as a fundamental aspect for successful operations

We take in this study the concept of planning adopted by the Glossary of the Brazilian Armed Forces (BRASIL, 2015). In the aforementioned manual, the term is defined as

The act or effect of idealizing and fixing, with a greater or lesser degree of detail, the action, operation or activity to be carried out, through the determination and ordering of a set of actions that allow a certain objective to be reached. It comprises the identification of: what; when; how it should be done; and who should do it.
2. Permanent and continuous activity that develops in a guided and rational way, **systematizing a decision-making process in the solution of a problem**, which also involves implementation and control (BRASIL, 2015, p. 206/288, translated, emphasis added).

We have chosen this approach because we believe that this definition can be used by analogy for interagency operations, whose basic difference from purely military operations is the participation of agencies in the decision-making process aimed at solving problems. It could be inferred that the agencies' participation in the process would be closely related to the discussed topic 2.1, which dialogues with the concepts of collaboration, cooperation, and interagency coordination, that is, the more elaborate the arrangement among the agencies and the more it tends to coordination, the greater their participation during planning.

Despite the definition in the Armed Forces Glossary (BRASIL, 2015) and beyond, several authors make considerations about the preparation of plans, a *sine qua non* condition to materialize the interagency relationship. In the wake of this debate, Warmington *et al.* (2004) point out that interagency action materializes when at least two institutions work together, under the guidance of a formal plan, in which it is possible to act both at the operational and strategic decision levels.

Along this same line of reasoning, Moynihan (2005) states that interagency work happens when more than one agency acts jointly, in a collaborative effort and under the direction of a formalized plan, which enables its employment beyond the strategic decision level, that is, also at the tactical level of action.

There is no doubt that having a plan is important for the success of the operation, and that its absence is detrimental to the development of interagency work. Moreira (2018), makes this clear in his article, which takes Operation Serrana 2011 as its object of study¹¹. After interviewing Brazilian Navy officers who helped flood victims in Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, the author comes to the following conclusion:

Analysis of the testimony allows us to identify informal relationships established between [...] [the] agencies involved in disaster responses. For, even though [...] [they] interacted and executed a joint work, [...] these relations occurred in a spontaneous way, not institutionalized and without the guidance of a common planning. Therefore, [...] it can be said that the interagency relationship [...] remained in the realm of cooperation. [...] The [...] statement announces the need for planning measures to cope with disasters (MOREIRA, 2018, p. 385, translated).

But it is not enough just to produce a plan to ensure successful interagency operations. The focus, according to some authors, should not be limited to the production of a plan only, but should be directed to the planning process as a whole.

For Quarantelli (2005), what matters is the collective planning process, not the plan itself. According to the author, it is not a matter of managers producing written plans, broadcasting them as a panacea, formalizing public intentions, but of effectively promoting interactions and relationships that allow knowledge exchange, joint training, and expanded capacity for evaluation, mutual support, as well as committing to the constant updating/socialization of information.

Also contributing to the debate on the planning process, Carafano (2011) points out in his article that in addition to the plan, there must be an interagency methodology to address complex contemporary problems, which is built before addressing them. The author, in his criticism of the US government, indicates that one of the obstacles to better coordination would be the lack of a common language for understanding the agencies involved in the problem, a situation that has not been solved so far and that could be solved with the creation of a standard joint interagency planning process, to be used by all federal agencies in that country.

Still on this subject, Field (2021), in his report on previous experiences of the Australian Armed Forces in interagency disaster response operations, makes a contribution. The author focuses on how to make the planning process more intelligible to civilian agencies and thus more effective in its execution.

¹¹ Operation Serrana was triggered by Ministerial Directive n°001 of January 14, 2011, signed by the Minister of Defense. It aimed at the cooperation of the Armed Forces to the Civil Defense actions in the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro to deal with the consequences of the heavy rains that year. See (BRASIL, 2011).

The effective application of a planning process is a core leadership skill in disaster relief operations to deal with the uncertainty and complexity of these environments [...]. Time is lost and plans delayed when people are frozen by an inability to write, understand or develop products needed for operational governance (FIELD, 2021, p. 17).

After the above considerations, it can be said that the full interagency relationship, that is, with the proper coordination, effectively takes place when it occurs through joint planning with participation in the decision-making process of all agencies involved in solving the problem. This relationship can even determine which agency will be supported by the others and which agencies will be considered as supporters (FIELD, 2021). In other words, it can define which agency will be appointed as coordinator of the others, to the detriment of the hierarchical model of attribution of competencies predetermined by the higher levels of decision.

In summary, the planning category can be understood as the moment in which inter-agency relations are consolidated through the participation of agencies in the decision-making process. This degree of involvement is fundamental to the success of the operations.

3 Concluding Remarks

This work aimed to reflect, based on a literature review and document analysis, on the categories of coordination and planning as central to interagency relationships.

The first category is part of the studies by authors who treat inter-agency relations from three complementary approaches: coordination and its interrelationship with interagency collaboration and cooperation.

In this category, the levels of interagency relationships and the basis on which they would be sustained were described. It was expressed that collaboration would be the structuring relationship, upon which the other interagency relationships would rely. Without collaboration, there would be no interagency cooperation and no interagency coordination.

The gradation regarding the level of interagency relationship was also presented. Cooperation was characterized as the most basic level, as it is more informal and based on personal and not very institutionalized relationships. Coordination, on the other hand, would be the enhancement of cooperation through elaborate arrangements, when agencies would consider in their planning the other agency's goals, visions, purposes, and desired end-states participating in the relationship. In addition, coordination would be hierarchically superior to cooperation, because it is an interagency relationship more conducive to the solution of complex problems.

The second category, interagency planning, was worked on by theoreticians and professionals from the interagency environment, who emphasize the importance of the relationships between the agencies being materialized through a decision-making process that produces a plan, which formalizes these relationships, is more intelligible to the agencies, and promotes greater possibilities for successful operations.

Following this reasoning, it can be pointed out that the full interagency relationship, that is, with the proper coordination, effectively takes place when it occurs through joint planning with the participation of all the agencies involved in solving the problem.

It is also important to stress that planning is the moment in which interagency relations are consolidated through the participation of the agencies in the decision-making process. This degree of involvement is critical to the success of the operations.

Finally, we understand that the issues raised and the results obtained by this work constitute a contribution to the development of further studies that may lead to the development of an interagency planning doctrine, which is understandable to the agencies and which facilitates the solution of complex problems, the reasons why the interagency relationship takes place.

Everything leads us to believe that disasters like the ones that happened in the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro and in Queensland, Australia, in 2011, will continue to occur, producing disruptions in social life, in determined geographical areas and with aggravating impacts on specific social groups. From this it can be inferred that studies related to the interagency theme, especially the coordination and planning failures in the management of crises caused by these events, will be increasingly relevant, as they provide inputs for the improvement of planning and execution of disaster response operations, pointing paths for future research.

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