The Swedish public sector has particular features which distinguish it from other European or Western models. In Sweden the Constitution requires collective decision-making, producing a system ‘which is collective in the extreme and individual ministers may decide themselves only in exceptional circumstances’ (Larsson 1995). The government – not individual ministers – issues directives to administration, although the individual minister can take some decisions concerning the internal organization and staffing of his department (Hustedt and Tiessen 2006). Moreover, Sweden has a dual administrative structure, with rather small government offices – mainly focusing on policy design, planning and coordination – and a large number of independent executive agencies. Moreover, there is a high level of decentralization with substantial responsibility located at the level of local authorities. The Swedish administrative culture has been described as ‘cooperative, consensus seeking, problem oriented and pragmatic and is characterized by a high degree of informality, bridging organizational borders and hierarchical levels’ (Hustedt and Tiessen 2006: 38).

The Swedish administrative system is composed of three levels (Statskontoret 1999) – central, regional and local. The central level, the main focus of this chapter, consists of the parliament, government offices, agencies and public utility companies. The agencies implement the decisions taken by the government and the parliament within the area of the central government’s duties. There are about 300 agencies, and they differ in size (ranging from a few employees to 28,000, as in the case of the recently established agency for the army). About 70 agencies are considered ‘central agencies’, performing tasks of major social importance, operating on a nationwide basis and in many cases split into sub-units. The agencies at regional and local level execute central government duties at their level. Moreover, at the beginning of
the 1980s, a limited number of ‘public enterprises’ such as Swedish Post, Swedish Telecom and the Swedish State Railways existed.

### 7.1 Around 1980

Figure 7.1 shows the mechanisms for coordination within Swedish central government in 1980. On the one hand there was the limited number

---

**Legend** PM: Prime Minister; Cab Off: Cabinet Office; Ad Hoc Com: Ad hoc Commissions

1. Coordinating function of Prime Minister
2. Prime Ministers’ Office
3. No formal cabinet committee structure, but informal cabinet and interministerial discussions
4. Mandated interdepartmental coordination by delning
5. Ad hoc interdepartmental coordination (facilitated by small ministries)
6. Commissions of inquiry
7. Advisory committees
8. Coordination role of Ministry of Finance
9. Multiple objectives agencies, laymen boards and ad hoc coordination between agencies
10. Input control of departments and agencies by central agencies

(NR) Informal network between civil servants (and politicians) through political affiliation and by careers

*Figure 7.1* Specialization and coordination in Sweden in the early 1980s