

STATE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE SERIES

MAY 2014





VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES FROM SENIOR EXECUTIVES

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ABOUT COCOPS

The COCOPS project (Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future) seeks to comparatively and quantitatively assess the impact of New Public Management (NPM)-style reforms in European countries, drawing on a team of European public administration scholars from 11 universities in 10 countries. It analyses the impact of reforms in public management and public services that address citizens' service needs and social cohesion in Europe. Evaluating the extent and consequences of NPM's alleged fragmenting tendencies and the resulting need for coordination is a key part of assessing these impacts. It is funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme as a Small or Medium-Scale Focused Research Project (2011-2014). See http://www.cocops.eu/ for details.

ABOUT THIS PAPER

While Ireland is not one of the ten countries formally participating in the COCOPS project, discussion with the project team led to participation in the survey of senior public executives. This paper therefore follows the format and style of the other country reports produced for the COCOPS project (http://www.cocops.eu/publications/research-reports) in order to facilitate comparison and ensure a consistency of approach.

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FOREWORD

The public service has changed significantly in the last five years. Staff numbers have been reduced by about 10 per cent. Pay has been cut and terms and conditions of employment changed. A public service reform programme has been put in place aimed at improving the efficiency of the public service and maintaining a high quality of service to the citizen. Yet during this time of change, little is known of the views of those charged with implementing the reforms – the senior public servants.

In this paper we explore what senior public servants think about public sector reform. Using a survey designed as part of an EU funded research project we identify and set out the views and opinions of the top management of the Irish public service. We compare these views and opinions with those of top public servants in other European countries, to see where there are similarities and where there are differences.

The Institute of Public Administration was founded to promote the study and improve the standard of public administration. These are goals we take seriously. Our intention is that this paper, and others in our State of the Public Service research series, provides sound evidence as the basis for an informed debate on the future direction of the public service in Ireland.

Brian Cawley

Director General

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future (COCOPS), as one of the largest comparative public management research projects in Europe, intends to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing the public sector in European countries and to systematically explore the impact of New Public Management (NPM) style reforms in Europe. The project brings together public administration scholars from eleven universities in ten countries² and is funded as part of the European Union's 7th Framework Programme between January 2011 and June 2014.³ The research is comparative and evidence-based, drawing on both existing data and innovative new quantitative and qualitative data collection, at both national and policy sector levels. A cornerstone of the project is the COCOPS executive survey on public sector reform in Europe: an original, large-scale survey of public sector top executives, exploring executives' opinions and experiences with regard to public sector reforms in government.

Scholars within the public administration discipline have long underlined the need for more quantitative and rigorous comparative research, going beyond single-country and single-organisation approaches (see Derlien 1992; Fitzpatrick et al 2011; Pollitt 2011; Raadschelders and Lee 2011). Moreover, few research initiatives have explored in depth the transformation of public administrations as triggered by NPM reform discourses in a systematic comparative form (Van de Walle and Hammerschmid 2011). Responding to such concerns, this survey offers systematic evidence regarding the dynamics of public administration reform in Europe, with the goal of creating an encompassing and systematic picture of public administration after more than two decades of NPM reforms.

From a theoretical perspective the survey builds on the perception of three major reform paradigms (NPM, public governance and the neo-Weberian state) as described by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011). Focusing on top executives, it follows pioneering elite studies such as those of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (see Putnam 1976, Aberbach et al. 1981, and Aberbach and Rockman 2006), which lay the foundation for many other both national and cross-national executive surveys (e.g. Mayntz and Derlien 1988; Christensen and Laegreid 2007; Bertelli et al. 2007; Trondal 2010; Bauer et al. 2009; COBRA survey; UDITE survey).

Methodologically it also draws inspiration from cross-national population surveys such as the European Social Science Survey, European Values Survey, the International Social Survey Program; as well as from experiences with cross-national surveys such as those of the survey research centre at the University of Michigan (2010).

As set out by the project's terms of reference the goal of this large-scale survey is to analyse national administrations (both ministries and agencies) in the participating countries and also to take a closer look at the policy fields of employment and health⁴. The survey aims to explore public sector executives' perceptions, experiences and opinions with regards to their work context and administrative reforms, but also other factors such as values and identities and the impact of the fiscal crisis. The core survey implemented in all participating countries consists of 31 questions structured in four parts (a) general information; (b) management and work practice of your organisation; (c) public sector reform and the fiscal crisis; (d) attitudes, preferences and personal information. The survey is a result of the joint work of all the national research teams within the COCOPS project and under the leadership of a team of researchers at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin. In addition, further institutes and universities from other European countries were included as strategic partners to replicate the survey in these countries.⁵

¹ This introduction is based on Hammerschmid, Görnitz, Oprisor and Stimac (2013), and appears in roughly the same form in all COCOPS country reports

² Erasmus University Rotterdam, Hertie School of Governance Berlin, University of Bergen, Bocconi University, University of Cantabria, Cardiff University, CNRS Paris, Corvinus University Budapest, University of Exeter, KU Leuven, Tallinn University of Technology

³ More information on the project is available at www.cocops.eu

This examination of the health and employment policy fields is not a focus of the Ireland country report. Data was gathered from these sectors, but there was a limited response (see section 3.1). The data was made available to the COCOPS project team, but is not reported on in this paper.

The Institute of Public Administration for Ireland, the Vienna University of Economics and Business for Austria, the Kaunas University of Technology for Lithuania, the Technical University of Lisbon for Portugal, Copenhagen Business School, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence for Serbia and the University of Bern for Switzerland

Three essential challenges connected to the design of the questionnaire and the survey methodology had to be handled by the research team: a sample design that would allow systematic comparative analyses; an access strategy to produce (statistically sufficient) high response rates; and a questionnaire design and translation that would assure conceptual equivalence between all countries. As a general principle, the survey team opted for a balanced and pragmatic approach with a view to maximising quality and comparability, while still allowing for sufficient flexibility within each country's context. A core questionnaire developed by the survey team in English was translated into country-specific versions by the respective national research teams and – if assumed helpful - optional questions were added. With regards to the population definition, the research team targeted a group with relevant experience to assess overall developments and trends both on an organisational and policy field level. In general, top executives are viewed as such informants regarding the state of administration, given their privileged vantage point (Walker and Enticott 2004), but also, with the blurring of the classical boundaries between politicians and civil servants (Aberbach et al. 1981), due to their own role in policy-making and their influence on the choice and implementation of reforms (Christensen and Lægreid 1999; Ridder et al. 2006). A major critique raised against elite surveys however (see in particular Enticott et al. 2008) is that they usually focus on a limited selection of individuals at the top of the organisation. As these individuals are relatively disconnected from processes at lower levels in the organisations, and also due to issues of desirability, such an approach is bound to provide a biased image of the respective organisation(s). These are important points to take into consideration when interpreting the results.

In order to avoid random sampling and issues of representativeness, the COCOPS executive survey is based on a full census of all central government ministries and agencies. It covers all high level public sector executives who in their respective positions can be expected to be involved in public administration reform processes. A core set of binding sample principles, based on a detailed mapping of national administrative structures, was followed by all teams in all central government areas. Deviations were only allowed if precise equivalence could not be established due to the specificity of administrative structures. Local government and service delivery levels were excluded for the purpose of this survey. Generally, within all central government ministries and subordinated agencies the two top-administrative levels were addressed; in some cases invitations were also sent to executives on the third level if, due to their policy relevance, this was deemed appropriate. State-owned enterprises and supreme audit institutions were not included due to their different task repertoire. In the fields of employment and health, as special focus areas, regional and state government ministries and agencies were also included if relevant – without addressing however direct service delivery levels (e.g. hospitals, job centres).

Moreover, the survey explicitly covers different units of analysis (see Pollitt 2011: 121, on units of analysis in comparative public administration research) to allow for multi-level analyses: policy field, organisation and individual experiences of the respondent. These are explored through the (self) perceptions of public sector executives, acknowledged in research as the closest channel into objective processes and developments within public organisations and, at least in the absence of stringent limitations, as reliable predictors of administrative behaviour (see Aberbach et al. 1981; Bauer et al. 2009).

The survey was implemented online, with standardised webpages being built in the national language(s) for each country. Flexibility was allowed, and even recommended, in the data collection strategies used by national teams, due to major differences in administrative cultures between the countries. A major emphasis was put on thorough data cleaning and harmonisation at the end of the survey, to make sure that final results were comparable across countries and that any deviations allowed during the implementation process were explained and controlled.⁷

⁶ Though in the case of Ireland, a separate survey of local authority senior public executives was carried out, the results of which will be reported on separately by the Institute of Public Administration.

The details of the survey design and implementation process can be found in the survey research report (see Hammerschmid, Oprisor, Stimac, 2013).

The survey in the ten participating COCOPS partner countries was launched in May 2012 and implemented in two rounds (May-July 2012, and September-November 2012). In these two rounds combined, the survey was sent out to over 20,000 high ranking civil servants in the ten participating countries via post and email (using either a personalised access link or an anonymous one), depending on each country's predefined access strategy. Invitations were followed by reminders and, in cases where response rates were low, teams took additional measures, such as phone or postal reminders, to increase the number of survey participants. At the beginning of November 2012, all surveys were closed, and all datasets were cleaned, checked and harmonised according to a standardised procedure for all countries. By the end of 2012 there were 4814 valid answers available from ten participating countries and an overall response rate of 23.7 per cent (for details see Table 1). These answers are the basis for the respective country reports. The data in both the national and the integrated datasets are subject to strict anonymity regulations, to protect individual respondents, whereas aggregate data will be published according to a set of rules commonly agreed upon by the research teams involved.

In Ireland, the survey was carried out in September and October 2013. 437 valid responses were received, giving a response rate of 27 per cent (see Table 1).

The current country report summarises the findings for Ireland along with some first comparisons with the aggregate results from all of the ten validated surveys in Austria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and UK.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF INVITATIONS AND RESPONSE RATES OF THE COCOPS SURVEY

Country	Invitations sent*	Survey completions	Response rate %	
Austria	1745	637	36.50	
Estonia	913	321	35.16	
France	5297	1193	22.52	
Germany	2295	566	24.66	
Hungary	1200	351	29.25	
Ireland	1620	435	26.90	
Italy	1703	343	20.14	
Netherlands	977	293	29.99	
Norway	1299	436	33.56	
Spain	1778	321	18.05	
UK	3100	353	11.39	

2.

CONTEXT AND STATUS QUO OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN IRELAND

Ireland is a small country with a population of 4.6 million. Irish government is loosely based on the Westminster and Whitehall public interest and common law traditions, although with a written Constitution and a popularly elected president, who has limited powers. Ministerial responsibility to *Dáil Éireann* (the lower house of the Irish Parliament or Oireachtas) is the principal accountability link between the political and administrative spheres. The constitution provides for no more than 15 ministries, and this cabinet-style government in Ireland remains highly centralised. The only other tier of elected government is local government, which has limited functions (MacCarthaigh and Boyle, 2011).

2.1 Administrative reform prior to the fiscal crisis

As a small liberal market economy, Ireland has been very open to the ebb and flow of international markets. In terms of international reform trends, however, it was some years after New Zealand, Canada and the UK had embarked on their reform agendas before the effect of new public management (NPM) related initiatives came to be felt in Ireland. The launch of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) in 1994 promised much by way of improving the efficiency, speed and coherence of government (Boyle and Humphreys, 2001) but had particular impact on the civil service (OECD 2008: 77). A coordinating group of secretaries general, the most senior administrative grade in the Irish civil service, was charged with overseeing its implementation and were responsible for producing a specific plan for civil service reform titled *Delivering Better Government* (DBG) in 1996.

Further public service modernisation initiatives took place until in 2008 the OECD published a landmark report on the Irish public service (OECD, 2008). It was the first time the OECD had ever attempted to benchmark a complete national public service against good international practice. Overall, their report, produced at a time prior to the economic and fiscal crisis, suggested that Ireland had been able to deliver public services relatively well in comparison with other countries. But their report also found considerable scope for improvement, suggesting that there were significant challenges that Irish public services had not yet tackled with sufficient rigour.

Two of the most important issues for improvement identified by the OECD were better integration and coordination of public services, and the need for more of a focus on performance and value for money across government. The report also had much to say about the capacity of the public services. Some of their conclusions aligned with those identified through research carried out for an Institute of Public Administration publication *Ireland 2022 – Towards 100 Years of Self Government* (Callanan, 2007), including a need to get more senior public service positions filled by people with direct frontline experience, and a more open recruitment process allowing greater transfer of experience across, into and out of the public service. A more general point raised in *Ireland 2022* was the limited political underpinning of public service reform, with the reform process seen as driven primarily by public servants.

2.2 Administrative reform after the fiscal crisis

Since the publication of the OECD report in 2008, the national and international financial and economic crisis has created a vastly different environment for reform of public administration. As the *National Recovery Plan* (2010) noted, in 2010 the level of GDP was some 11 per cent below, and GNP some 15 per cent below, their respective levels of 2007 in real terms. Employment had fallen by about 13 per cent from its peak of 2007 while the unemployment rate had risen from 4.6 per cent to 13.5 per cent. The *National Recovery Plan* (2010) went on to state: 'A downturn of this size is without precedent in Ireland's recorded economic history and has few modern parallels at an international level'.

At the end of 2010, in response to the crisis, the government signed a memorandum of understanding for the provision of €85 billion of financial support to Ireland by member states of the European Union through the European Financial Stability Fund and the European Financial Stability Mechanism; bilateral loans from the UK, Sweden and Denmark; and funding from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Extended Fund Facility, on the basis of an agreed support programme. In essence this programme set out the overall fiscal limits and framework within which the Irish government would operate over a three-year period. This constraint inevitably forced a reassessment of priorities with regard to the delivery of public services and programmes and the general operation of the system of public administration.

In response to the crisis, the government has reduced numbers and pay levels in the public service as part of the fiscal response required to address excessive levels of expenditure given available revenue streams. An agreement entitled the *Public Service Agreement* (2010) set out plans for numbers and pay reductions and changes to terms and conditions of employment. An extension of the *Public Service Agreement* was proposed by the government and published as the *Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016* (*The Haddington Road Agreement*) by the Labour Relations Commission (2013). The basis of this extension of the agreement was the need to achieve additional savings to the public service pay and pension bill of €1 billion by 2016, as identified as required by the government to achieve its fiscal targets for the period. Further pay cuts and changes to terms and conditions of employment were contained in the updated agreement.

The reduction in numbers and pay levels to date has been significant. From its peak in 2008, the total number of people employed in the public service has dropped from 320,000 to 287,780 in 2013, a drop of 10 per cent. From 2008 to 2013, as the cutbacks in numbers and pay introduced by the Government have taken effect, expenditure on public service pay and pensions has decreased from its high of €18.7bn to €16.6bn in 2013 (the cost of the pay bill alone fell from €17.5 billion in 2009 to €14.1 billion in 2013 due to both pay cuts and staff reductions). But at the same time as public service numbers have been reducing, the population has been increasing. Public service employment relative to the population was relatively stable at between 70 and 73 public sector employees per 000 population up to 2008, but has been dropping since 2008 and was at 63.2 public service employees per 000 population in 2013 (Boyle, 2014).

Looking beyond changes in numbers and pay, there has been considerable redeployment of staff across the public service in the context of reduced resources and numbers. Public bodies and individual public servants have had to increase their flexibility and mobility to work together across sectoral, organisational and professional boundaries. And in 2011 the government produced a document entitled *Public Service Reform* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2011) that set out a plan for changes to the operation of the public service. The plan identified five priorities: customer service; maximising new and innovative service-delivery channels;

radically reducing costs to drive better value for money; leading, organising and working in new ways; and a strong focus on implementation and delivery. Issues such as the development of shared services, procurement and outsourcing were emphasised. A review of progress (Boyle, 2013) suggests that most actions identified in the plan had been implemented to some degree, but that significant challenges still remain. The reduced pool of staff under the age of 30 caused by the recruitment moratorium was identified as an issue in need of particular attention. The challenge will be to ensure that there are people of the right calibre to manage and deliver the public service of the future.

In January 2014 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform announced a further reform initiative. The *Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2014) identifies four main reform themes: delivery of improved outcomes, reform dividend (using savings to invest in new or improved services), digitalisation/open data, and openness and accountability.

3. DATA AND METHOD

3.1 Sampling and access strategy and survey implementation

The Irish COCOPS survey was conducted by the research team of the Institute of Public Administration. The survey of senior public executives in Ireland followed the COCOPS survey's general principles and population definition, and accordingly the survey was a full census, avoiding random sampling. The survey population comprised the top three levels of management in government departments (secretary general, assistant secretary general and principal officer in government departments), and the chief executive and their management team in state agencies (normally comprising the top two or three levels of the organisation, encompassing director and heads of division). All government departments and non-commercial state agencies were surveyed⁸.

The employment and health policy areas were of interest to the COCOPS project team. Accordingly, for the employment policy area, as well as the government departments and agencies involved, the chief executives of thirty county and city enterprise boards were surveyed. In the health policy sphere, again in addition to the Department of Health and relevant national state agencies, the top three management tiers in the Health Service Executive (responsible for Ireland's health and social care needs) were surveyed.

Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent out by email. The survey had the support of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and of the Association of Chief Executives of State Agencies (ACESA). The invitation to participate sent to government departments was accompanied by a note from the secretary general of DPER encouraging completion of the survey. A similar note from the chair of ACESA accompanied the email inviting participation to state agencies.

The Irish survey was kept very close to the core questionnaire, with only the wording of question 1 modified for the Irish context. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent out on 25th September 2013. Two subsequent reminder emails were sent out to encourage responses, on 7th October and 17th October. The survey was closed on 25th October.

Overall, the survey population comprised a total of 1620: 1560 central government executives (760 in government departments, 800 in state agencies), 140 health sector executives, and 150 executives in the employment sector. In total, the survey received 435 partially or fully filled out questionnaires, which led to an overall response rate of 26.9 per cent, as shown in Table 2. Total response rates in the Irish case are slightly above the average from the COCOPS survey of ten countries (26.9 per cent Ireland versus 23.7 per cent in the COCOPS sample 10). For the health and employment sectors, the Irish response rate is comparatively lower (23.6 per cent versus 30.6 per cent and 18 per cent versus 26.9 per cent respectively).

TABLE 2 SAMPLE SIZE AND RESPONSE RATES

	Central government	Health sector	Employment sector	Ireland total	Total COCOPS sample
Invitations sent	1560	140	150	1620	20307
Completed surveys	435	33	27	435	4814
Response rate (Total COCOPS sample)	27.9% (21.4%)	23.6% [30.6%]	18.0% (26.9)	26.9	23.7%

⁸ As noted in section 1, a survey of local authority senior public executives was also undertaken, and is being reported on separately.

These add up to more than 1620 as some of the health and employment executives also appear in the central government category.

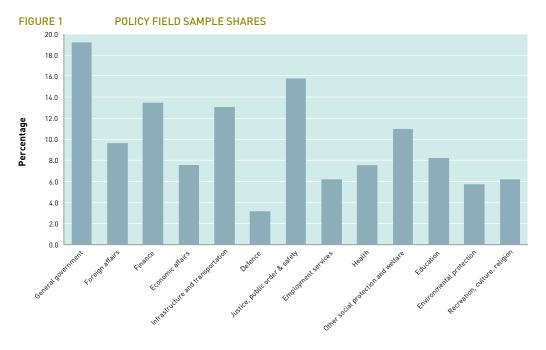
Throughout this document reference to the COCOPS sample refers to the ten country sample of those countries that are formally members of the COCOPS project: Austria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and UK.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following categories are used to interpret the results: if a scale ranging from 1 to 7 is used, 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 7 means 'strongly agree', the percentage shares for scale numbers 1, 2 and 3 (vs. 5, 6 and 7) are added and interpreted as 'rather disagree' (versus 'rather agree'). In other cases, the percentage shares for scale numbers 1 and 2 (versus 6 and 7) are calculated and interpreted as 'agree' vs. 'disagree'.

3.2 Organisational context of respondents

Before exploring respondents' opinions and attitudes towards their role and work in public administration, it is important to establish some of the key contextual features that set the organisational and socio-demographic background of the respondents.

Policy field (Figure 1). Looking at the survey results, there is a good spread across the various policy fields in Ireland. The majority of respondents describe themselves as working in general government (19 per cent) and justice, public order and safety (16 per cent). These are followed by finance (14 per cent) and infrastructure and transportation (13 per cent). The lowest share of responses come from the policy fields of defence (3 per cent), environmental protection, recreation, culture and religion, and employment services (all around 6 per cent). Compared to the COCOPS sample Ireland has a higher share of respondents in general government, finance, and justice, public order and safety, and a lower share of respondents in the employment services and health policy fields.



Organisation type (Figure 2). By far the largest share of responses in Ireland (58 per cent) comes from respondents who work in a ministry at central government level (the civil service). 37 per cent come from an agency or subordinate body at central government level. And only 5 per cent of responses are from those working in an agency or subordinate body at local or regional government level. As a small country with a highly centralised system of government, these results are in line with expectations. By contrast, 35 per cent of respondents in the COCOPS sample work at state, regional or other sub-national level.

¹¹ Senior executives working in local government were excluded from this survey. Their views were recorded in a separate survey, to be published separately.

Organisation size (Figure 2). There is a wide spread of organisation sizes amongst Irish respondents. The largest share of respondents (25 per cent) work in organisations of 100-499 people. Almost as many (23 per cent) work in organisations with over 5000 employees. 55 per cent in total work in organisations with over 5000 employees, and 20 per cent in organisations with less than 100 employees. These results are broadly in line with the COCOPS sample.

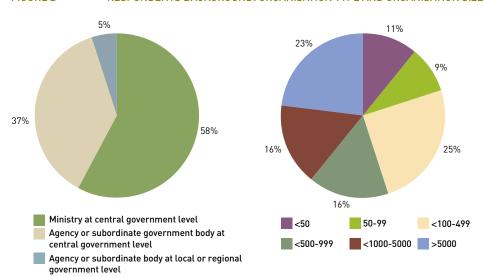


FIGURE 2 RESPONDENTS BACKGROUND: ORGANISATION TYPE AND ORGANISATION SIZE

3.3 Socio-demographic background of respondents

Gender (Figure 3). Roughly two-thirds of Irish respondents are male and a third female. This is in line with the COCOPS sample and with the general picture in the Irish civil service at senior levels.

Age (Figure 3). Almost half of the Irish respondents (48 per cent) are in the 46 to 55 age range. Just over three quarters of the sample are aged over 45. Only 1 per cent is under 35. In comparison to the COCOPS sample, in the Irish sample there are fewer under the age of 35 (around 6 per cent in the COCOPS sample) and slightly more aged between 36 and 55 (70 per cent as opposed to just over 61 per cent). This situation reflects in part the changes that have been taking place in the Irish civil service since the fiscal crisis in 2008. There has been a moratorium on recruitment into the civil service and incentivised packages for early retirement, meaning relatively few younger people coming through the system, and some more senior experienced staff leaving the public service.

Hierarchical level (Figure 3). Responses are roughly evenly split between the hierarchical levels, with 30 per cent of Irish respondents at the top level of their organisation, 31 per cent at the second level, and 39 per cent at the third level of management. This is broadly in line with the COCOPS sample.

Education (Figure 3). 62 per cent of Irish respondents have a postgraduate degree at Masters level and 38 per cent a graduate degree. A significant difference with the COCOPS sample is the absence of any respondents with a doctoral degree, who make up around 15 per cent of the COCOPS sample.

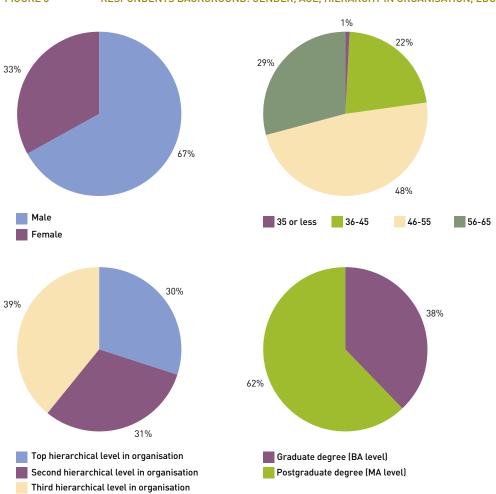
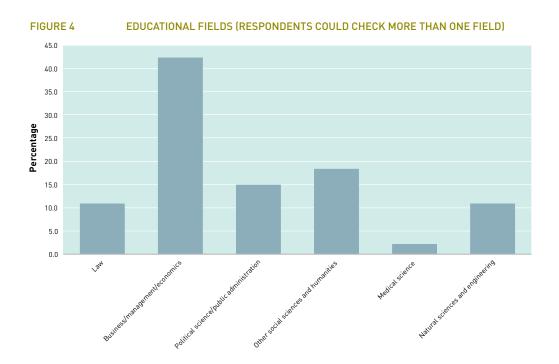


FIGURE 3 RESPONDENTS BACKGROUND: GENDER, AGE, HIERARCHY IN ORGANISATION, EDUCATION

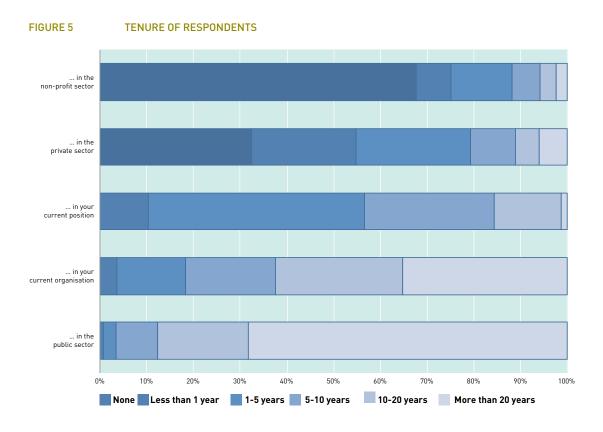
Disciplinary field of education (Figure 4). By far the highest proportion of Irish respondents (42 per cent) comes from the field of business/management/economics. Other social sciences and humanities (18 per cent) is the next highest field of education, followed by political science/public administration (15 per cent). There are significant variations amongst COCOPS countries in response to this question. Reflecting the differing civil service traditions, in many COCOPS participating countries law features more prominently (COCOPS average 28 per cent).



Tenure (Figure 5). The responses show that the majority of Irish respondents have spent a long time working in the public sector. 87 per cent of respondents have worked in the public sector for over 10 years, with 68 per cent having worked in the public sector over 20 years. This is a little higher than the COCOPS sample, where 58 per cent have worked over 20 years in the public sector. Only 4 per cent have worked in the public sector for less than 5 years versus 14 per cent in the COCOPS sample.

Relatively low mobility in the sector is shown by the fact that 62 per cent of respondents have worked in their current organisation for over 10 years (versus just under 50 per cent in the COCOPS sample). There has been more movement in position over time. 56 per cent have been in their current position less than 5 years. 15 per cent have been in their current position more than 10 years (roughly in line with the COCOPS sample).

With regard to respondents experience outside the public sector, quite a high proportion has some private sector experience. Two thirds of respondents have spent some time working in the private sector, with the majority of these having less than 5 years' experience in the private sector. This is broadly in line with the COCOPS sample, though a slightly higher proportion of the COCOPS sample has spent some time working in the private sector (73 per cent). Previous experience in the non-profit sector is less frequent, with two-thirds having no experience here, and those that have experience usually working there for less than 5 years.



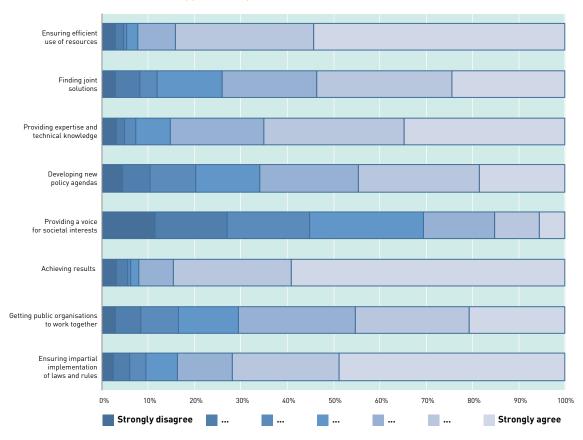
4.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC SECTOR EXECUTIVES

The following section presents data on how senior public sector executives in Ireland perceive their role as executives, their motivation and social values and preferences.

Identity and role perception (Figure 6). When asked about their self-understanding as public sector executives, a clear majority of the respondents agree that ensuring efficient use of resources (84 per cent), achieving results (84 per cent), ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules (72 per cent), and providing expertise and technical knowledge (65 per cent) are central to their role. While a majority (65 per cent) rather agree that their role includes developing new policy agendas, 20 per cent rather disagree that developing new policy agendas is part of their role. This probably reflects a number of factors including the fact that the sample contains a number of public servants (particularly in agencies) whose primary role is service delivery rather than policy development, and that there exists a divergence of views as to what extent policy should be determined by politicians and the role public executives should have in policy development as opposed to policy implementation. A majority (45 per cent) rather disagree that it is their role to provide a voice for societal interests, though 31 per cent agree that they see this as part of their role.

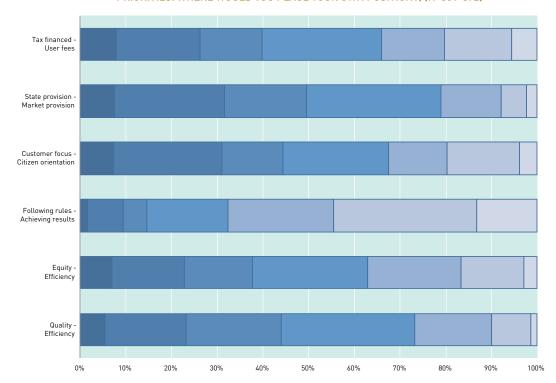
FIGURE 6 ROLE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING (Q: I MAINLY UNDERSTAND MY ROLE AS A PUBLIC SECTOR EXECUTIVE AS ...) (N=426-435)



The answers from Irish public sector executives are in line with the results from the COCOPS sample. The same four roles are agreed with as central for public officials: achieving results (92 per cent) ensuring efficient use of resources (89 per cent), providing expertise and technical knowledge (86 per cent), and ensuring impartial implementation of law and rules (84 per cent).

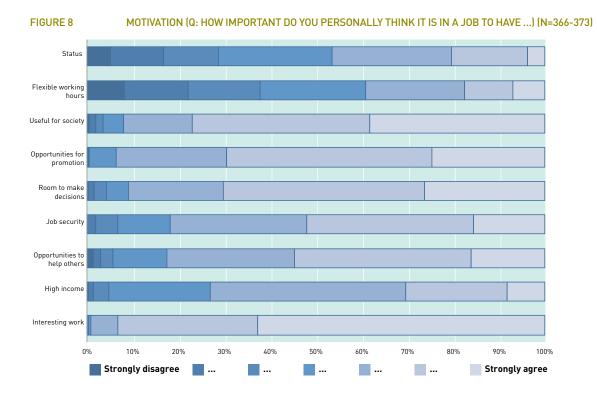
Value preferences for public sector priorities (Figure 7). Senior executives were asked about value preferences related to public administration. The question was designed in such a way as to let respondents choose between two opposing values on a 7 point Likert scale. For example, when balancing different priorities, would you position yourself more towards tax financed services or towards user fees? The clearest value preference is in favour of achieving results as against following rules (67 per cent rather agreeing achieving results is a priority as against 15 per cent rather disagreeing). Next highest is in favour of state provision versus market provision (50 per cent versus 20 per cent). Respondents tend also to broadly favour quality over efficiency (44 per cent versus 27 per cent). Respondents also tend to slightly favour a customer focus rather than a citizen orientation (44 per cent versus 33 per cent). Respondents are relatively evenly split in their responses to whether services should be tax financed or paid from user fees (40 per cent versus 35 per cent) and in terms of where the balance should lie between equity versus efficiency (38 per cent versus 37 per cent respectively). Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish respondents show a higher preference for a customer focus (44 per cent rather agree versus 28 per cent).

FIGURE 7 PRIORITIES AS PUBLIC SERVANTS (Q: PUBLIC SERVICES OFTEN NEED TO BALANCE DIFFERENT PRIORITIES. WHERE WOULD YOU PLACE YOUR OWN POSITION?) (N=361-372)



Motivation (Figure 8). In response to being questioned about what motivates them personally, nearly all (99 per cent) Irish officials rather agree that interesting work is a motivating factor. Similarly very high percentages note opportunities for promotion (94 per cent), doing something useful for society (92 per cent) and having room to

make decisions (91 per cent) as important motivational factors. The two lowest motivators from the list are status (47 per cent rather agree it is an important motivator) and having flexible working hours (40 per cent).

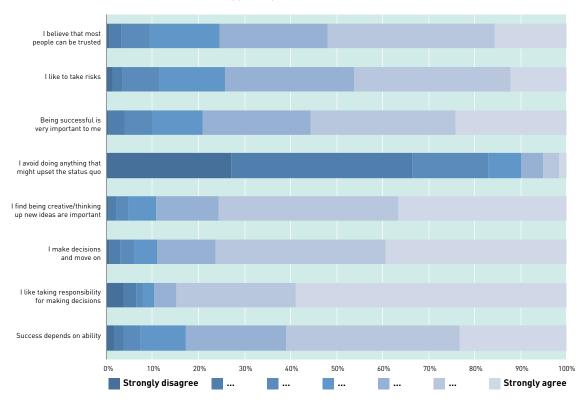


In terms of differences with the COCOPS sample, opportunities for promotion is seen as of higher importance by Irish respondents (94 per cent rather agree versus 74 per cent), as is job security (82 per cent versus 69 per cent). This is probably a result of the job losses and extremely limited promotion opportunities in recent years. Irish respondents also give a higher priority to opportunities to help others than the COCOPS sample, and this plus the high importance given to usefulness to society as a motivational factor suggests high altruistic motivation on the part of Irish public sector executives.

Social value preferences (Figure 9). In a further value oriented question officials were asked to what extent they agree, or disagree, with a number of statements that aims to assess their social value preferences. Irish public executives are generally strongly in agreement with the statements as listed, apart from one – 'I avoid doing anything that might upset the status quo' (83 per cent rather disagree with this statement). The strongest preference is in response to the statement 'I like taking responsibility for making decisions' (90 per cent rather agreeing and 59 per cent strongly agreeing with this statement). Next strongest agreement is with the statement 'I find being creative/thinking up new ideas are important'. The results are broadly in line with the COCOPS

sample. They also contrast with the stereotypical view of the public servant as resistant to change, risk averse and unaccountable.

FIGURE 9 SOCIAL VALUE PREFERENCES (Q: PLEASE INDICATE HOW FAR YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS) (N=376)



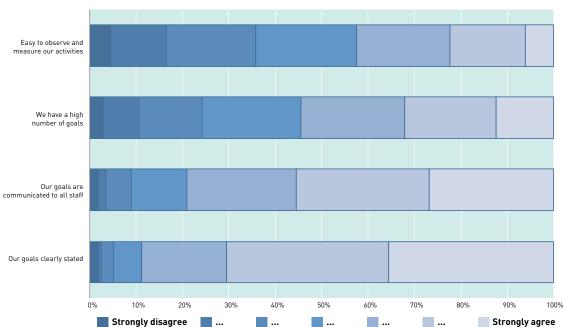
5.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORK CONTEXT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

This chapter analyses how Irish senior public executives perceive their work context and examines to what extent the results indicate that management practices can be incorporated successfully to public administration.

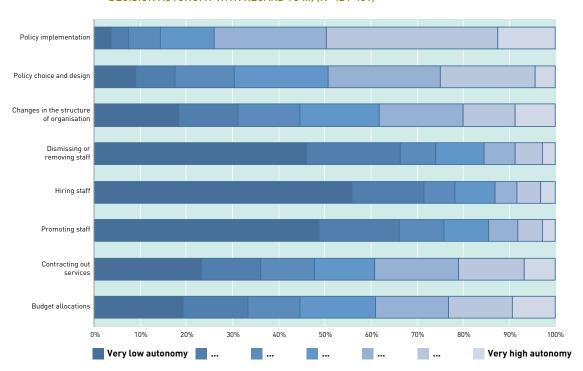
Goal ambiguity (Figure 10). Debates about goal ambiguity tend to emphasise that performance management is best implemented when goals are limited, clearly stated and communicated, and activities are easily observed and monitored. Irish respondents overall agree that their organisational goals are clearly stated and communicated to all staff (89 per cent and 80 per cent rather agree respectively). There are more mixed views when it comes to the number of goals for the organisation: 54 per cent rather agree they have a high number of goals and 24 per cent rather disagree. There is a relatively even spread between those who feel that it is easy to observe and measure their activities and those who disagree that it is easy to observe and measure their activities (42 per cent rather agree versus 35 per cent rather disagree). The results are broadly in line with views expressed in the COCOPS sample, though Irish respondents are somewhat more likely to believe that their goals are clearly stated (89 per cent versus 78 per cent in the COCOPS sample) and somewhat less likely to say they have a high number of goals (54 per cent versus 65 per cent).





Management autonomy (Figure 11). Overall, Irish officials feel they have a low level of management autonomy. The lowest degree of management autonomy is expressed with regard to hiring staff (78 per cent rather low autonomy), promoting staff (76 per cent rather low autonomy) and dismissing or removing staff (74 per cent rather low autonomy). Views on autonomy are more evenly split with regard to contracting out of services and the ability to change the structure of the organisation. The only two areas where more feel they have high autonomy than low autonomy are the fields of policy implementation (74 per cent rather agree versus 15 per cent rather disagree) and policy choice and design (49 per cent rather agree versus 30 per cent rather disagree).

FIGURE 11 DEGREE OF MANAGEMENT AUTONOMY (Q: IN MY POSITION, I HAVE THE FOLLOWING DEGREE OF DECISION AUTONOMY WITH REGARD TO ...) (N=424-431)



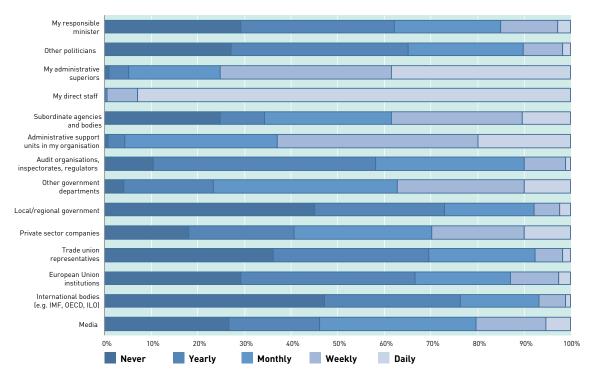
These levels of management autonomy are generally much lower than those expressed in the COCOPS sample. For example only 13 per cent feel they have a rather high degree of autonomy in hiring staff compared to 41 per cent in the COCOPS sample. A similar degree of difference is shown with regard to promoting staff (14 per cent expressing a rather high degree of autonomy compared to 38 per cent). The only exceptions are with regard to policy implementation and policy choice and design, where Irish respondents express a higher degree of autonomy than the COCOPS sample. This reflects the fact that historically the management of the Irish public service has tended to be relatively highly centralised, and also that in response to the financial crisis measures were introduced which further restrict the ability of managers with regard to issues such as staff recruitment or promotion.

Interaction frequency (Figure 12). This question explores the degree to which senior public executives interact with different stakeholders. By far the highest level of interaction, as might be expected, is with their direct staff (93 per cent state they interact with their staff on a daily basis). The next highest levels of interaction are also

internal to the organisation: with administrative superiors and administrative support units. There is a reasonable degree of contact with other departments, with 37 per cent interacting with other departments weekly or daily and a further 40 per cent interacting on a monthly basis.

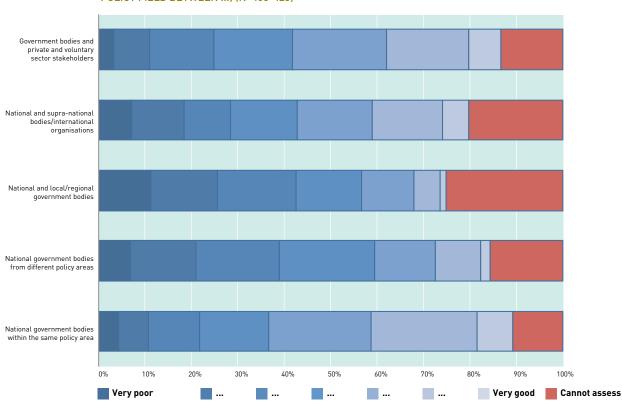
There is a relatively limited degree of direct political interaction given the sample is of senior officials. Almost a third (29 per cent) state that they never interact with their responsible minister, with a further 33 per cent stating they only interact with him/her yearly (though these percentages are lower for civil servants, where 18 per cent say they never interact with their responsible minister). Contact with other politicians is even less frequent, with 65 per cent stating they either never or yearly interact with other politicians. There is also a perhaps surprisingly low level of interaction with EU institutions, with 13 per cent interacting on a weekly or daily basis but 29 per cent never interacting and 37 per cent only interacting on a yearly basis. And there is an even lower level of interaction with regional and local government, with almost half (45 per cent) never interacting with local and regional government and a further 28 per cent interacting only yearly. The level of interaction would broadly be similar to that of the COCOPS sample, though on the whole displaying a slightly lower level of interaction with stakeholders outside their own organisation, notably with local and regional government, illustrating the centralised nature of Irish public services.

FIGURE 12 INTERACTION FREQUENCY (Q: PLEASE INDICATE HOW FREQUENTLY YOU TYPICALLY INTERACT WITH THE FOLLOWING ACTORS OR BODIES) (N=353-415)



Coordination quality (Figure 13). It should first be noted that a significant proportion of respondents (11 to 25 per cent) did not feel able to assess the quality of coordination with other actors in their organisation's policy field. Of those who could answer, the highest level of coordination is with national government bodies in the same policy area (53 per cent feel coordination is rather good), and with the private and voluntary sector (45 per cent feel coordination is rather good). The lowest level of coordination is seen as between national and local/regional government (42 per cent feel coordination is rather poor) and with national government bodies in different policy areas (39 per cent feel coordination is rather poor). This perception of poor coordination has implications for the management of cross-cutting issues. There are mixed views on the quality of coordination with supra-national and international bodies, with 37 per cent viewing coordination as rather good and 28 per cent as rather poor. The main difference with the COCOPS sample is there is a much lower perceived level of coordination between national and local and regional government in Ireland (18 per cent seeing coordination as rather good versus 40 per cent for the COCOPS sample). This probably reflects the relatively higher status and range of functions carried out by local government in many other European countries.





Degree of politicisation (Figure 14). Public executives were asked about the degree of politicisation in their work, and the degree to which decisions are based on technical or political criteria. 63 per cent of respondents rather agree that removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies. At the same time, 59 per cent feel that politicians respect the technical expertise of the administration (as opposed to 28 per cent who rather disagree with this statement). On balance, more feel that the administration and not the political level initiate reforms or new policies (44 per cent rather agree with this statement).

The majority of respondents rather agree with the statement that in their organisation politicians do not interfere with routine activities (52 per cent rather agree with this statement compared to 36 per cent who rather disagree). And there is a relatively strong view that politicians do not influence senior level appointments (63 per cent rather disagree with the statement that politicians regularly influence senior level appointments in my organisation).

Removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies The administration and not the political level is the initiator of reforms or new policies In my organisation politicians interfere in routine activities Politicians regularly influence senior level appointments in my organisation Politicians respect the technical expertise of senior executives 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100% Strongly disagree ... ---Strongly agree Cannot assess

FIGURE 14 DEGREE OF POLITICISATION (Q: WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ...) (N=404-410)

Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish officials are much more likely to see the appointments process as independent of politicians (63 per cent rather disagree with the statement that politicians regularly influence senior level appointments versus 39 per cent in the COCOPS sample). On the other hand, Irish officials are more likely to agree that politicians interfere in routine activities (36 per cent rather agree versus 22 per cent). Irish officials are also somewhat more likely to agree that the administration rather than the political level initiates reforms or new policies.

6. RELEVANCE OF NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND POST NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REFORMS

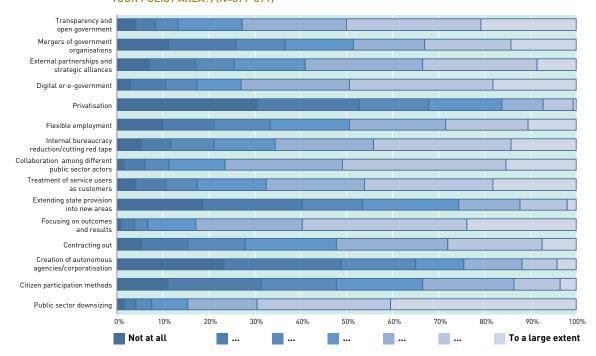
This section provides information on the perceptions of senior public executives with regard to the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) and post NPM reforms, the latter being characterised by a stronger emphasis on collaboration and network forms of governance. The respondents were asked to assess the type and character of reform trends in their policy field, their organisation and their own working practices.

6.1 Policy field level

Reform trends (Figure 15). Public sector reform trends can have very different characteristics. While what might be regarded as 'typical' NPM reforms include measures like performance management, contracting out, privatisation or more flexible employment, post NPM reforms have been characterised as adopting reforms such as enhancing transparency, partnership working, citizen participation or reducing bureaucracy. Overall, 84 per cent of Irish senior public servants believe that public sector downsizing has been an important reform, while a similarly high percentage, 83 per cent see focusing on outcomes and results as one of the most important reforms in their policy areas. Collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors (77 per cent), transparency and open government (73 per cent) and digital or e-government (72 per cent) are the next three most important ranked reforms. The reforms that respondents thought least important are privatisation (68 per cent regard this as not at all or only of limited importance), the creation of autonomous agencies (65 per cent), and extending state provision into new areas (54 per cent).

These rankings are broadly as might be expected, given the emphasis on budget cuts and staffing reductions in recent years. The highlighting of collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors as an important reform trend is perhaps a little surprising, given the low score give to coordination in Figure 13. It suggests possibly a gap between the rhetoric and practice of reform in this area.

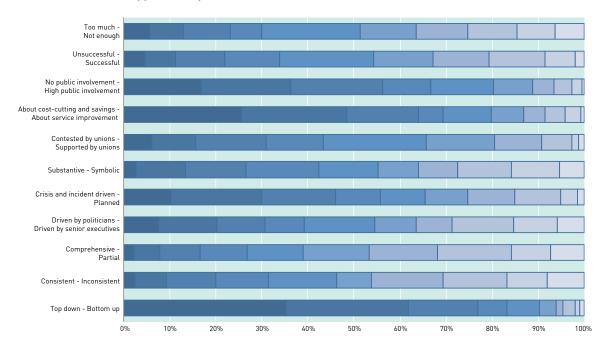
FIGURE 15 IMPORTANCE OF REFORM TRENDS (Q: HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING REFORM TRENDS IN YOUR POLICY AREA?) (N=379-391)



When compared to the average results from the COCOPS sample, Irish respondents rate contracting out, a focus on outcomes and results and transparency and open government as more important reform trends. Irish public servants also identify the creation of autonomous agencies as a less important reform trend than the COCOPS sample, even though it is one of the less important reform trends in the COCOPS sample also. This is not surprising given the emphasis put on reducing the number of state agencies in political circles and in reform programmes in recent years.

Dynamics of public sector reform (Figure 16). The vast majority of respondents (90 per cent registering points 1-5 on the ten point scale) feel that the reforms have been more top down than bottom up. A high percentage also feel that the reforms have been more about cost cutting and savings than about service improvement (80 per cent), and have had tended towards no public involvement rather than high public involvement (80 per cent). Respondents are also more likely to see the reforms as crisis driven, partial and contested by unions than planned, comprehensive and supported by unions. Views are relatively even split as to whether reforms are consistent or inconsistent, or too much versus not enough. A small majority (55 per cent versus 45 per cent) feel that the reforms are more driven by politicians than by senior executives. A similar small majority (54 per cent versus 46 per cent) see the reforms as more unsuccessful than successful.

FIGURE 16 DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM (Q: PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS IN MY POLICY AREA TEND TO BE ...) (N=381-387)

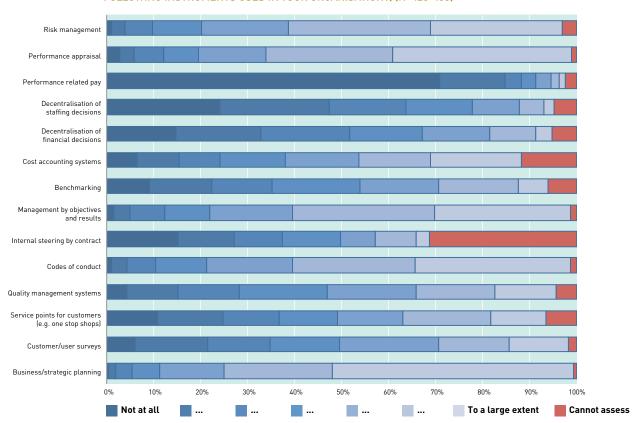


The Irish results are broadly in line with the COCOPS sample. Irish respondents, however, are somewhat more likely to view the reforms as partial and symbolic. On the other hand they are somewhat less likely to say that there has been too much reform, and are somewhat more likely to see the reform process as being consistent.

6.2 Organisational level

Management instruments (Figure 17). Moving on to the organisational level, respondents were asked about the extent to which different management instruments are used in their organisation. The most commonly used instruments are business/strategic planning, performance appraisal, codes of conduct, management by objectives and results, and risk management (the percentage that indicate they use these to a rather large extent being 88, 79, 77, 77, and 76 per cent respectively). Those management instruments less frequently used include decentralisation of staffing and financial decisions (63 per cent and 52 per cent respectively indicate they use these not at all or to a limited extent). The instrument by far least frequently used is performance related pay, with 71 per cent of respondents indicating it is not used at all, and only 6 per cent indicating it is used to a rather large extent). The one instrument many respondents (31 per cent) indicate they could not assess is internal steering by contract, suggesting that the concept is not a familiar one in the Irish public service. Of those that did respond to this question, the majority believe it is only used to a limited extent or not at all.

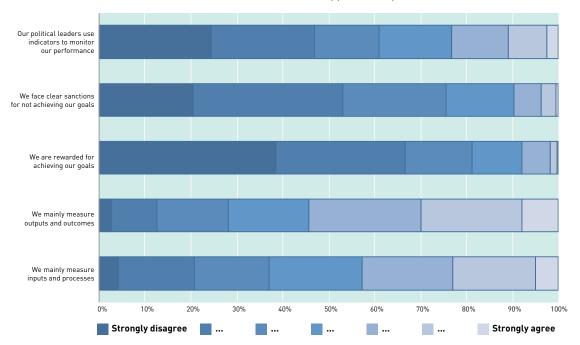
FIGURE 17 RELEVANCE OF DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT INSTRUMENTS (Q: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE FOLLOWING INSTRUMENTS USED IN YOUR ORGANISATION?) (N=425-435)



In comparison with the COCOPS sample, Irish public executives put a much greater emphasis on risk management as an important management instrument (76 per cent use it to a rather large extent compared to 50 per cent for the COCOPS sample). Irish officials are also more likely to make use of business/strategic planning and codes of conduct. Conversely, Irish officials make less use of decentralisation of staffing decisions and performance related pay (63 per cent versus 54 per cent and 85 per cent versus 62 per cent respectively do not use these instruments at all or only use them to a limited extent).

Relevance of performance management (Figure 18). Public executives were asked to indicate the relevance of performance management in their organisation. The strongest expressed reaction was to the statement 'we are rewarded for achieving our goals': 39 per cent strongly disagree with this statement, and 82 per cent in all rather disagree. Respondents also feel that they would not face sanction for not achieving their goals (75 per cent rather disagree that they would face clear sanctions for not achieving their goals). A significant majority also disagree with the statement that political leaders use indicators to monitor executive performance (61 per cent rather disagree with this statement, compared to 25 per cent who rather agree with it). Views are more mixed as to whether they mainly measure inputs and processes or outputs and outcomes (43 per cent rather agree they mainly measure outputs and outcomes as opposed to 28 per cent who rather disagree).

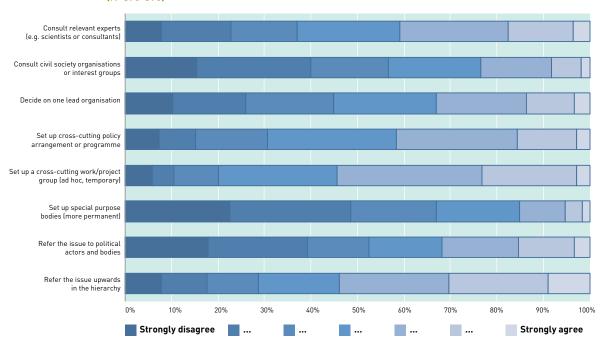
FIGURE 18 RELEVANCE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (Q: TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS APPLY TO YOUR ORGANISATION?) (N=425-432)



The main difference with the COCOPS sample is that Irish officials are much less likely to feel that they are rewarded for achieving their goals (only 7 per cent rather agree versus 22 per cent in the COCOPS sample). The fact that the survey was carried out shortly after senior officials had received further pay cuts and reductions in terms and conditions arising from the government response to the financial crisis is likely to have influenced views here. On the other hand Irish public executives are less likely to agree that they will face sanctions for not achieving goals (9 per cent agree versus 17 per cent in the COCOPS sample). Irish officials are also less likely to agree that political leaders use indicators to monitor performance (23 per cent rather agree versus 37 per cent).

Coordination solutions (Figure 19). The question on coordination solutions is intended to capture the extent to which post NPM reforms, in the form of new coordination mechanisms and measures to counter fragmentation, have been implemented. When faced with coordination problems, Irish senior executives are most likely to refer the issue up the hierarchy (54 per cent rather agree with this statement) or set up a temporary cross-cutting work group (54 per cent rather agree). The least favoured option is setting up special purpose bodies.

FIGURE 19 COORDINATION SOLUTIONS (Q: WHEN MY ORGANISATION'S RESPONSIBILITY OR INTERESTS CONFLICT OR OVERLAP WITH THAT OF OTHER ORGANISATIONS, MY ORGANISATION TYPICALLY ...)
(N=370-390)

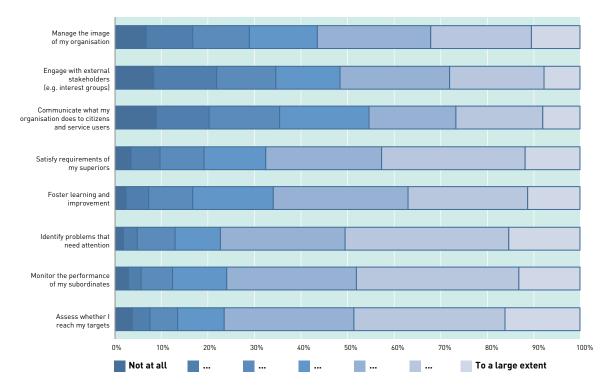


Despite a majority of respondents agreeing that they would typically refer a coordination issue up the hierarchy, Irish respondents are less likely to favour this route than the COCOPS sample (54 per cent rather agree as opposed to 67 per cent rather agree in the COCOPS sample). Conversely, Irish officials are more likely to set up cross-cutting arrangements, either temporary work groups or specific policy arrangements or programmes (54 per cent versus 44 per cent and 42 per cent versus 29 per cent respectively rather agree to typically using these options).

6.3 Individual level

Use of performance indicators (Figure 20). At the individual level, just over three-quarters of Irish respondents note that they use performance indicators to assess whether they reach their targets, identify problems that need attention, and monitor the performance of their subordinates. The only category where less than half of respondents (46 per cent) agree they used performance indicators is in communicating what their organisation does to citizens and service users, though even here there are more agreed they use them than feel they use them only a little or not at all.

FIGURE 20 USE OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (Q: IN MY WORK I USE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO ...) (N=428-435)



For all of the statements listed, Irish public executives say they use performance indicators to a rather large extent to a much higher degree than the COCOPS sample average. For example 77 per cent say they use performance indicators to assess if they reach their targets to a rather large extent compared to 57 per cent for the COCOPS sample. 51 per cent say they use indicators to a rather large extent to engage with external stakeholders compared to 32 per cent. Irish respondents are much more likely to use performance indicators at the individual level. UK respondents also were more inclined to use performance indicators, suggesting a Westminster-style of government adoption of this element of management practice.

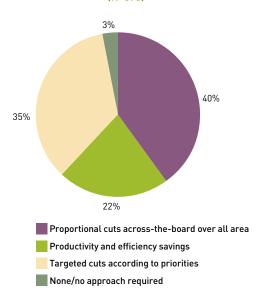
7.

IMPACT OF THE FISCAL CRISIS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The international fiscal crisis combined with domestic challenges has had a profound impact on Ireland. As set out in section 2.2, in response to the crisis, the government has reduced numbers and pay levels in the public service as part of the fiscal response required to address excessive levels of expenditure given available revenue streams. The government has also embarked on an extensive programme of public sector reform, with initiatives such as shared services, centralised procurement and e-government to the fore in an attempt to enhance efficiency while at the same time continuing to deliver effective public services.

Main saving strategies (Figure 21). Concerning the savings in specific policy areas, the majority of respondents (40 per cent) indicate that they feel the approach to achieving savings has primarily been through the use of proportional cuts across the board. However, 35 per cent believe that targeted cuts have been the main savings approach used. 22 per cent suggest that productivity and efficiency savings has been the main approach in their policy area.

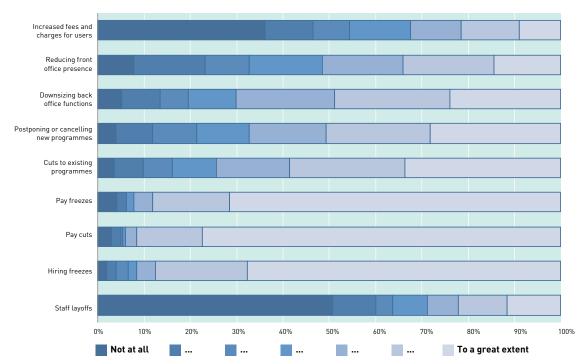
FIGURE 21 CUTBACK MEASURES AT ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL (Q: IN RESPONSE TO THE FISCAL CRISIS, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE BROADER APPROACH TO REALISING SAVINGS IN YOUR POLICY AREA?)
[N=373]



These strategies for making savings are broadly similar to those noted in the COCOPS sample. A higher proportion of Irish respondents (40 per cent versus 30 per cent for the COCOPS sample) emphasise across the board cuts. And a smaller proportion (3 per cent versus 11 per cent) suggests that there were no cutbacks applied in their policy area.

Cutback measures at organisational level (Figure 22). In the view of Irish public executives, the main cutback measures applied are pay cuts, pay freezes and hiring freezes (over 90 per cent agree to a rather large extent, with a significant majority strongly agreeing). This is to be expected given the government response to the fiscal crisis outlined in section 2.2. The only listed measures given that the majority of Irish respondents feel have been applied to a rather limited extent are staff layoffs and increased user fees and charges (64 per cent and 54 per cent respectively feel that these measures have been applied to a limited extent or not at all).

FIGURE 22 CUTBACK MEASURES AT ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL (Q: IN RESPONSE TO THE FISCAL CRISIS, TO WHAT EXTENT HAS YOUR ORGANISATION APPLIED THE FOLLOWING CUTBACK MEASURES?) (N=348-368)



Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish public executives are much more likely to feel that all the listed cutback measures have been applied to a greater extent. For example only 21 per cent of the COCOPS sample note pay cuts as being applied to a rather large extent compared to 93 per cent of Irish respondents. 75 per cent of Irish respondents feel that cuts to existing programmes are being applied to a rather large extent compared to 55 per cent in the COCOPS sample. This indicates the extent of the impact of the fiscal crisis on Ireland, and the resultant cutback measures arising from the EU/IMF bailout programme.

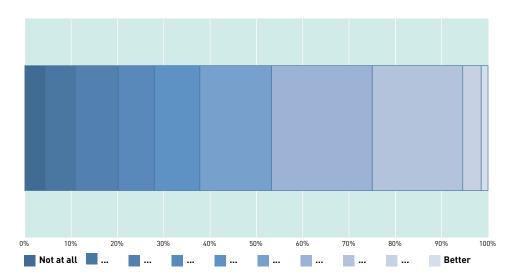
8. IMPACT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

One of the main goals of the COCOPS study is to obtain systematic information on how senior public servants assess the impact of the various managerial reforms at policy, organisational and individual levels. In this section, the results are presented with regard to these themes.

8.1 Overall assessment of public administration reforms

Overall assessment of public administration (Figure 23). Irish public executives on the whole feel that public administration has got better over the five years to the end of 2013: 62 per cent feel that it has got better, and 38 per cent feel that it has got worse. The majority of respondents (42 per cent marking boxes 7 or 8 on a 10 point scale) feel that public administration has got somewhat better. This finding needs to be interpreted in the context of the scale of cutbacks applied to the Irish public service over this period. Also, it reflects more positive views on the reform process than the COCOPS sample (where 54 per cent opted for got better versus 46 per cent who feel it has got worse) where in most countries cutback measures have not been applied to the same extent. So to some extent this might be seen as a rather positive assessment by Irish senior public servants.

FIGURE 23 OVERALL PA ASSESSMENT (Q: COMPARED WITH FIVE YEARS AGO, HOW WOULD YOU SAY THINGS HAVE DEVELOPED WHEN IT COMES TO THE WAY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RUNS IN YOUR COUNTRY?) (N=323)

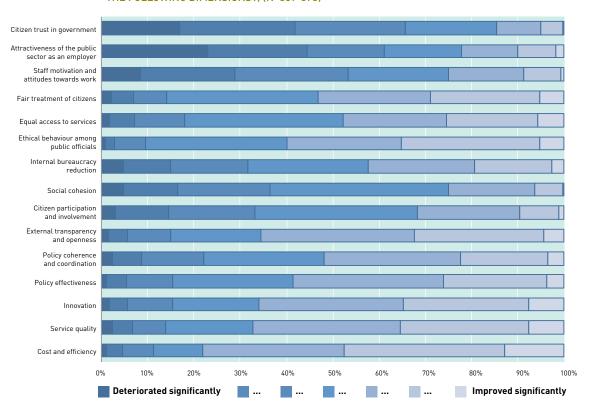


8.2 Impact within policy fields

Developments in public administration (Figure 24). To complement the overall results, a more nuanced question was asked addressing a spectrum of different performance dimensions within the respondents' specific policy area. The dimensions where Irish public executives feel there has been the greatest improvement in performance over the last five years are in terms of cost and efficiency, service quality, innovation, and external transparency

and openness (79, 68, 66 and 66 per cent respectively rather agree that things have improved significantly). Dimensions where respondents feel that there has been the greatest deterioration are in terms of citizen trust in government, attractiveness of the public sector as an employer, and staff motivation (66, 62 and 52 per cent respectively rather feel that things have deteriorated significantly).

FIGURE 24 DIFFERENT PERFORMANCE DIMENSIONS (Q: THINKING ABOUT YOUR POLICY AREA OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE WAY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION HAS PERFORMED ON THE FOLLOWING DIMENSIONS?) (N=359-378)



Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish respondents tend to be somewhat more positive in their assessment of how public administration has performed over the last five years. Notably with regard to policy effectiveness, policy coherence and coordination, cost and efficiency, external transparency and openness and ethical behaviour, a larger share of Irish respondents feel things have improved (59 per cent versus 41 per cent, 52 per cent versus 35 per cent, 79 per cent versus 64 per cent, 66 per cent versus 53 per cent, and 60 per cent versus 47 per cent respectively). Conversely, Irish executives are more likely to feel that things have deteriorated with regard to citizen trust in government, the attractiveness of the public sector as an employer and staff motivation (66 per cent versus 48 per cent, 62 per cent versus 45 per cent, and 52 per cent versus 41 per cent respectively).

Social capital and trust (Figure 25). The survey aimed to assess the type of impact that public administration reforms has had upon social capital, trust and social cohesion within organisations. Overall, Irish public executives tend to agree with all the statements listed. The largest share of respondents agree that people in their organisation are trustworthy (84 per cent rather agree), have confidence in one another (73 per cent), and willingly share information with one another (71 per cent). The aspects of social capital and trust that show the

largest share of disagreement are in terms of sharing and accepting constructive criticism without making it personal and viewing themselves as partners charting the organisation's direction (25 per cent in each case rather disagree). In all, the findings suggest that a notable majority of respondents feel they operate in organisations with high organisational social capital, meaning high levels of shared organisational value-sets, trust and pro-social behaviour among their employees. The results are very closely in line with those obtained in the COCOPS sample.

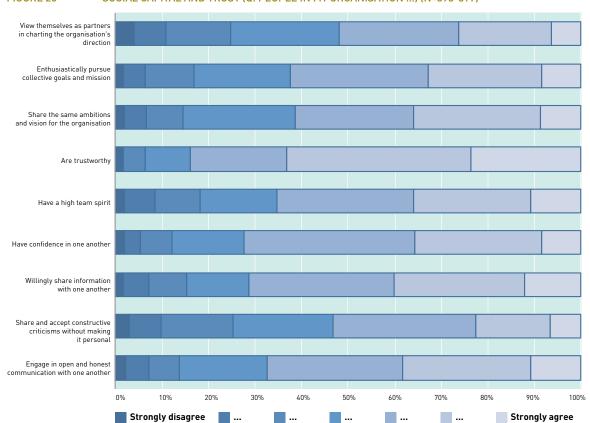
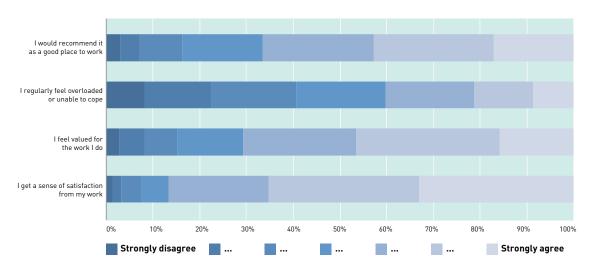


FIGURE 25 SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRUST (Q: PEOPLE IN MY ORGANISATION ...) (N=393-397)

8.3 Impact at the individual level

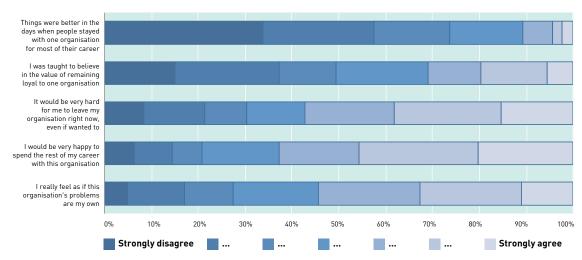
Job satisfaction (Figure 26). Overall results are positive with regard to individual's perception of their job satisfaction. 87 per cent rather agree that they get a sense of satisfaction from their work. 71 per cent feel valued for the work they do. And 67 per cent would recommend their organisation as a good place to work. The only aspect where there is a more even split of views is in regard to the statement 'I regularly feel overloaded or unable to cope': 41 per cent rather agree with this statement and 40 per cent rather disagree. The response to this statement was also the only notable difference with the COCOPS sample where 60 per cent rather disagree they feel overloaded or unable to cope. This suggests that the impact of the downsizing of the Irish public service may have put additional workload pressures on executives which have affected their views on being able to cope with the workload.

FIGURE 26 JOB SATISFACTION (Q: WHEN THINKING ABOUT MY WORK AND THE ORGANISATION I WORK FOR ...)
(N=395-399)



Organisational commitment (Figure 27). Respondents were asked to assess five statements with regard to the organisation they work for. Very few public executives agree that things were better when people stayed with one organisation for most of their career (10 per cent rather agree). The respondents' loyalty to one organisation is not overly high (31 per cent rather agree they were taught to believe in the value of loyalty to one organisation). Though 62 per cent suggest they are rather happy to spend the rest of their career with the organisation. A majority feel it would be hard for them to leave their organisation right now and that they feel the organisation's problems as their own. The only notable difference with the COCOPS sample is that a much lower proportion of Irish respondents believe in the value of remaining with one organisation (31 per cent as opposed to 62 per cent in the COCOPS sample).

FIGURE 27 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT (Q: WHEN THINKING ABOUT MY WORK AND THE ORGANISATION I WORK FOR ...) (N=393-398)



9. CONCLUSION

In interpreting the results from the survey, it is important to understand, as Rhodes and Boyle (2012: 43) point out, that Ireland's public administration can be difficult to characterise. In a formal sense, Ireland can be seen as exhibiting a public interest culture as it inherited the Westminster tradition of government from the UK and displays many similar characteristics to the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. But on the other hand it is possible to see elements of neo-Weberian culture of the northern European kind. In the typology of public service reform laid out by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011), Ireland is best described as a 'moderniser' (Murray, 2001).

In terms of the profile of the Irish senior executives who responded to the survey, it is interesting that in comparison to the COCOPS sample there are fewer under the age of 35 and slightly more aged between 36 and 55. This situation reflects in part the changes that have been taking place in the Irish public service since the fiscal crisis in 2008. There has been a moratorium on recruitment into the public service and incentivised packages for early retirement, meaning relatively few younger people coming through the system, and some more senior experienced staff leaving the public service. The effect of the fiscal crisis is a recurring theme influencing many responses throughout the survey.

The majority of respondents have spent a long time working in the public sector. Almost 90 per cent have worked in the public sector for over 10 years, with almost 70 per cent having worked in the public sector over 20 years. This is a little higher than the COCOPS sample. There is also relatively low job mobility between organisations, though there has been more movement in job position over time.

Interestingly and perhaps contrary to popular perception, quite a high proportion of Irish senior public executives have some private sector experience. Two thirds of respondents have spent some time working in the private sector, with the majority of these having less than 5 years' experience in the private sector. This is broadly in line with the COCOPS sample.

With regard to **role perception**, there is a preference for managerial values associated with improving organisational performance and results. The clearest value preference is in favour of achieving results as against following rules. Though in all the responses suggest a mixture of managerial and Weberian values exist alongside each other. With regard to motivation, virtually all Irish officials agree that interesting work is a motivating factor. Irish respondents give a higher priority to opportunities to help others than the COCOPS sample, and this plus the high importance given to usefulness to society as a motivational factor suggests high altruistic **motivation** on the part of Irish public sector executives.

A major focus of this report is the executives' perception of their **work context**. Irish respondents are somewhat more likely to believe that their goals are clearly stated and communicated and somewhat less likely to say they have a high number of goals than the COCOPS sample. These findings reflect a long-standing experience with managerialist techniques, especially since the introduction of the Strategic Management Initiative in 1994.

However, contrary to the more managerialist doctrine of NPM, Irish officials feel they have a low level of management autonomy. The levels of management autonomy expressed are generally much lower than those in the COCOPS sample. This reflects the fact that historically the management of the Irish public service has tended to be relatively highly centralised, and also that in response to the fiscal crisis measures were introduced which further restrict the ability of managers with regard to issues such as staff recruitment or promotion.

There is a relatively low level of **interaction frequency** with actors outside the organisation, with limited interaction with politicians, EU institutions, and with regional and local government. The level of interaction is broadly similar to that of the COCOPS sample, though Irish officials on the whole display a slightly lower level of interaction with stakeholders outside their own organisation, notably with local and regional government, illustrating the centralised nature of Irish public services.

Coordination is viewed as good between national government bodies in the same policy area. But almost half of the respondents feel that coordination is poor between national and local/regional government and between national government bodies in different policy areas. This perception of poor coordination has implications for the management of cross-cutting issues. The main difference with the COCOPS sample is there is a much lower perceived level of coordination between national and local and regional government in Ireland. This probably at least in part reflects the relatively higher status and range of functions carried out by local government in many other European countries.

With regard to **politicisation**, compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish officials are much more likely to see the appointments process as independent of politicians. On the other hand, Irish officials are more likely to agree that politicians interfere in routine activities.

With regard to **reform trends**, the overwhelming majority of Irish senior public servants believe that public sector downsizing and focusing on outcomes and results have been very important reforms in their policy areas. The reforms that respondents thought least important are privatisation, the creation of autonomous agencies, and extending state provision into new areas. These rankings are broadly as might be expected, given the emphasis on budget cuts and staffing reductions in recent years. The majority of Irish respondents feel that the reforms have been top down, focused on cost cutting, crisis driven, and partial.

There is evidence that many though not all of the **management instruments** associated with the NPM-style reforms are more prevalent than in the COCOPS sample. The most commonly used management instruments are business/strategic planning, performance appraisal, codes of conduct, management by objectives and results, and risk management. One point of interest is that despite the fiscal crisis, the more far-reaching NPM types of reform, such as privatisation and agencification, appear to be of no more relevance in Ireland than elsewhere in Europe (and indeed there is a trend to reduce the number of agencies), though contracting out is seen as of more importance. There is no evidence of the fiscal crisis yet shifting Ireland significantly more towards the 'marketise' and 'minimise' states in the Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) framework.

Public executives were asked to indicate the relevance of **performance management** in their organisation. The main difference with the COCOPS sample is that Irish officials are much less likely to feel that they are rewarded for achieving their goals. The fact that the survey was carried out shortly after senior officials had received further pay cuts and reductions in terms and conditions arising from the government response to the financial crisis is likely to have influenced views here. On the other hand Irish public executives feel they are less likely to face sanctions for not achieving goals or that political leaders use indicators to monitor performance. At the individual level, Irish senior public executives say they use performance indicators to a much higher degree than the COCOPS sample average.

In the view of Irish senior public executives, the main **cutback measures** applied are pay cuts, pay freezes and hiring freezes Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish respondents are much more likely to feel that cutback

measures have been applied to a greater extent. This indicates the extent of the impact of the fiscal crisis on Ireland, and the resultant cutback measures arising from the EU/IMF bailout programme.

When looking at the **impact of the various public administration reforms**, Irish senior public executives on the whole have broadly positive views on how public administration has developed over the five years to the end of 2013: almost two-thirds feel that it has got better. Given the scale of cutbacks applied to the Irish public service over this period, and the fact that the results are more positive than the COCOPS sample where in most countries cutback measures have not been applied to the same degree, this can be seen as a relatively positive assessment by Irish senior public servants.

When looking in more detail at different dimensions of reform, the dimensions where Irish public executives feel there has been the greatest improvement in performance over the last five years are in terms of cost and efficiency, service quality, innovation, and external transparency and openness. Dimensions where respondents feel that there has been the greatest deterioration are in terms of citizen trust in government, attractiveness of the public sector as an employer, and staff motivation. Compared to the COCOPS sample, Irish respondents tend to be somewhat more positive in their assessment of how public administration has performed over the last five years.

At the organisational level, the findings suggest that a notable majority of respondents feel they operate in organisations with high social capital, meaning high levels of shared organisational value-sets, trust and prosocial behaviour among their employees. Results are also positive with regard to individual's perception of their job satisfaction. However, compared to the COCOPS sample Irish respondents are much more likely to feel overloaded or unable to cope. This suggests that the impact of the downsizing of the Irish public service may have put additional workload pressures on executives which have affected their views on being able to cope with the workload. Very few Irish public executives agree that things were better when people stayed with one organisation for most of their career, and respondents' loyalty to the idea of staying in one organisation is not overly high. Compared to the COCOPS sample a much lower proportion of Irish respondents believe in the value of remaining with one organisation.

Overall, the results tend to underline the mixed managerialist/Weberian character of Irish public administration. There is also evidence of what Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) describe as a new public governance (NPG) reform agenda receiving more emphasis. The influence of the fiscal crisis has been strong and is reflected in aspects of reform such as the emphasis on downsizing, cost cutting and efficiency. Coordination across sectors and levels of government is identified as a weakness. At the same time, Irish senior public executives have a broadly positive view of many aspects of public sector reform.

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