



Public Sector Reform in Ireland: Views and Experiences from Civil Service 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.

A report on central government executives views (covering both civil service and state agency managers) was produced and published (available for download at <http://www.ipa.ie>)

This paper focuses solely on the response of executives in the civil service to the survey. The paper follows the format and style of central government report and the other country reports produced for the COCOPS project (<http://www.cocops.eu/publications/research-reports>) in order to ensure a consistency of approach.

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1. Introduction¹

This report focuses on analysing the views of senior civil servants (defined as secretaries general, assistant secretaries general and principal officers) on public sector reform.

The basis for the report is the Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future (COCOPS) project, one of the largest comparative public management research projects in Europe. The COCOPS project aims 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 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 regards to public sector reforms in government. Ireland is the only country that surveyed both central and local government executives: in all other countries only the views of central government executives were obtained.

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).

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,

¹ This introduction is based on Hammerschmid, Görnitz, Oprisor and Stimac (2013), and appears in broadly 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

further institutes and universities from other European countries were included as strategic partners to replicate the survey in these countries.⁴

With regard 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 Lægveid 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. It covers all high level public sector executives who in their respective positions can be expected to be involved in public administration reform processes. 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. In Ireland, the survey was carried out in September and October 2013. For the civil service, 228 valid responses were received out of a total of 760 invitations sent, giving a response rate of 30 per cent.

The report giving the results of the survey for central government as a whole (civil service and state agency managers combined) and a separate report on local government, can be downloaded from www.ipa.ie/research, as can a working paper on the views of state agency managers⁵

⁴ 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

⁵ Richard Boyle (2014): *Public Sector Reform in Ireland: Views and Experiences from Senior Executives; Public Sector Reform in Ireland: Views and Experiences from Local Government Senior Executives, and Public Sector Reform in Ireland: Views and Experiences from State Agency Senior Executives*

2. Background: public administration reform in Ireland

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, 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 (ed.), 2008), including the limited political underpinning of public service reform, with the reform process seen as driven primarily by public servants.

2.3 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 €5 billion of financial support to Ireland by member

states of the European Union through the European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF) 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 (EFF), 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 288,000 in 2013, a drop of 10 per cent. In the civil service specifically, numbers have reduced from 39,000 to 36,000 in the same period, a drop of 8 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 €8.7bn to €6.6bn in 2013 (the cost of the pay bill alone fell from €7.5 billion in 2009 to €4.1 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 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. 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.

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. Specifically with regard to the civil service, a taskforce of civil servants from across government departments and offices is working on producing a civil service renewal programme. This programme is aimed at clarifying the role of the civil service, ensuring effective whole-of-government working, building capacity and strengthening organisational performance.

3. Organisational and socio-demographic background of respondents

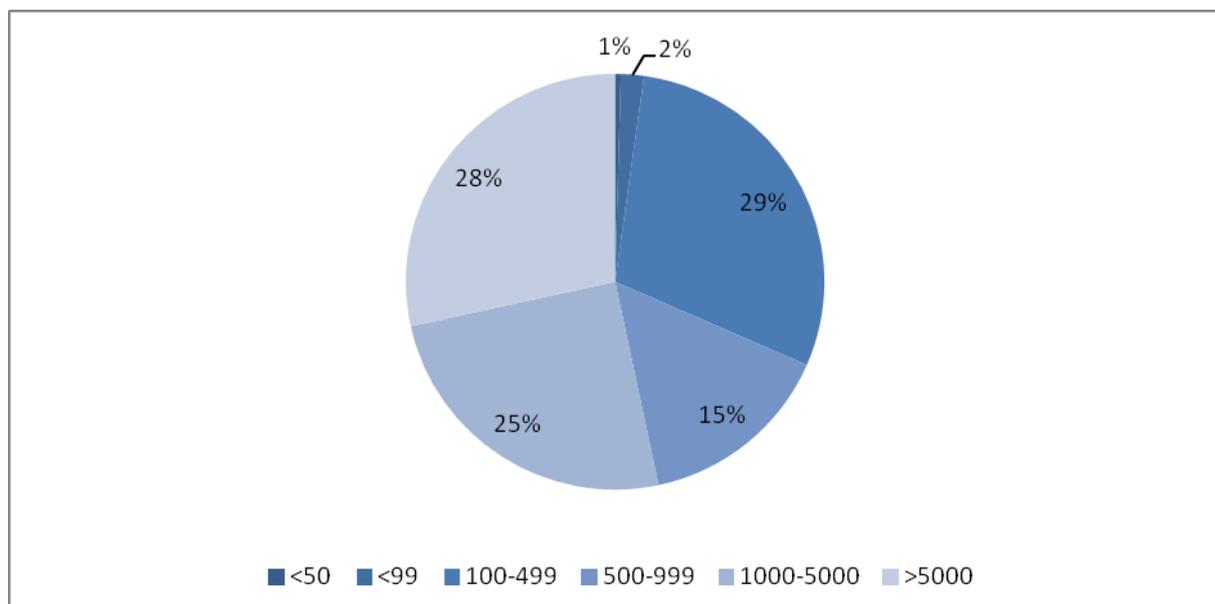
Before exploring respondents' opinions and attitudes towards their role and work in public administration, it is important to establish some of the key contextual features that set the organisational and socio-demographic background of the respondents.

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'.

Comparison is made throughout this paper to the COCOPS sample of 10 European countries and to the responses of senior Irish civil servants. The COCOPS sample details can be accessed at <http://www.cocops.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/WP3-Comparative-Report.pdf> and the Irish civil service results can be found at www.ipa.ie/research (see footnote 5).

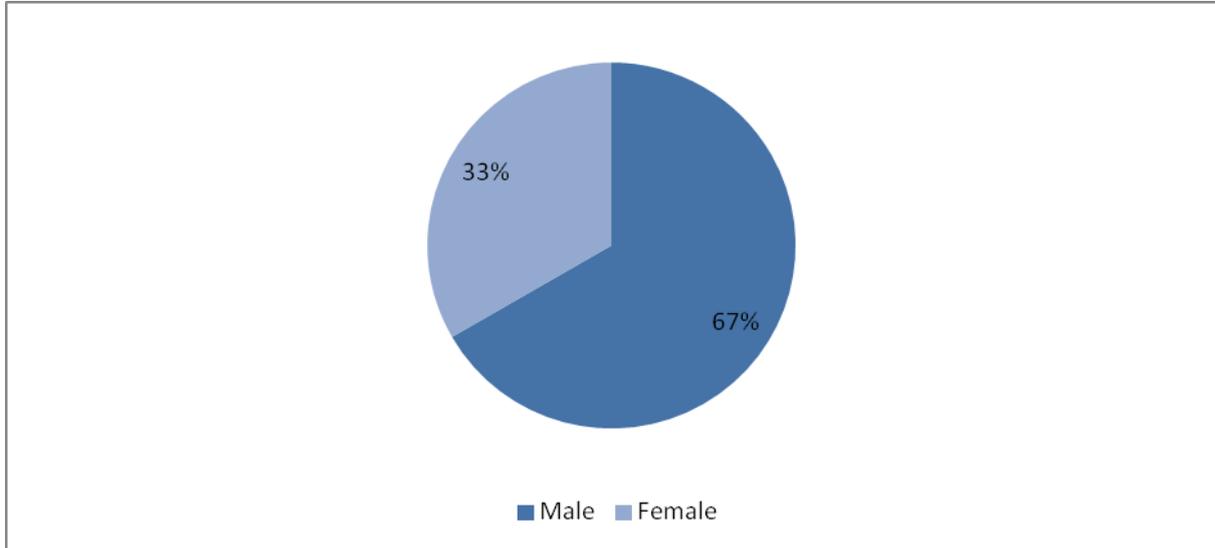
Organisation size (Figure 1). There is a wide spread of organisation sizes amongst senior civil service respondents. The largest share of respondents (29 per cent) work in departments or offices of 100-499 people. 28 per cent work in departments or offices of over 5000 people. A further quarter work in organisations with between 1000 and 5000 employees.

Figure 1: Respondents background: organisation size



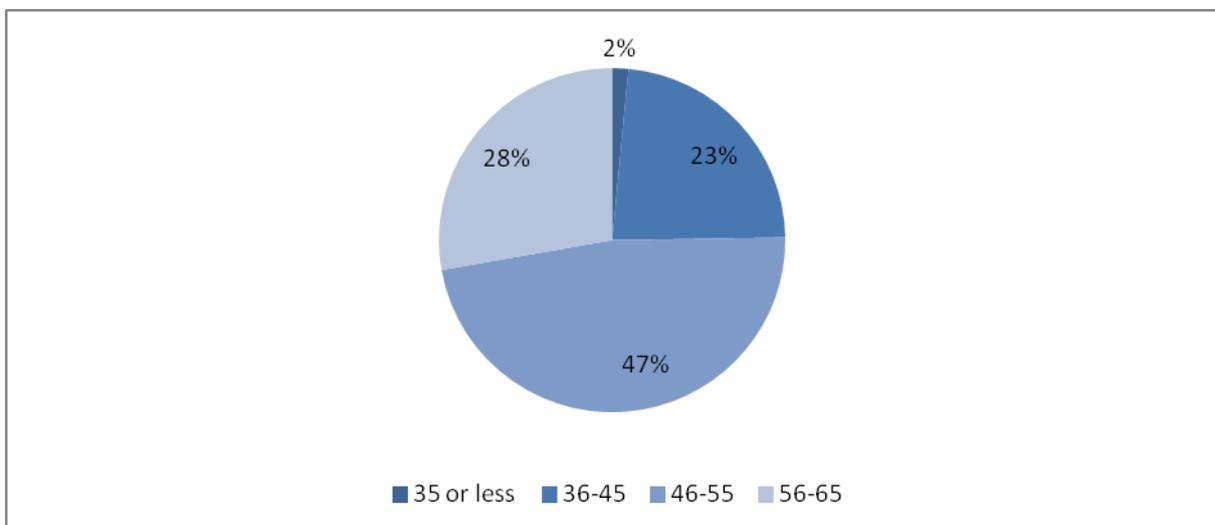
Gender (Figure 2). Two-thirds of senior civil service respondents are male and one-third female. This is in line with the COCOPS sample and with the general picture in the civil service at senior levels.

Figure 2: Respondents background: gender



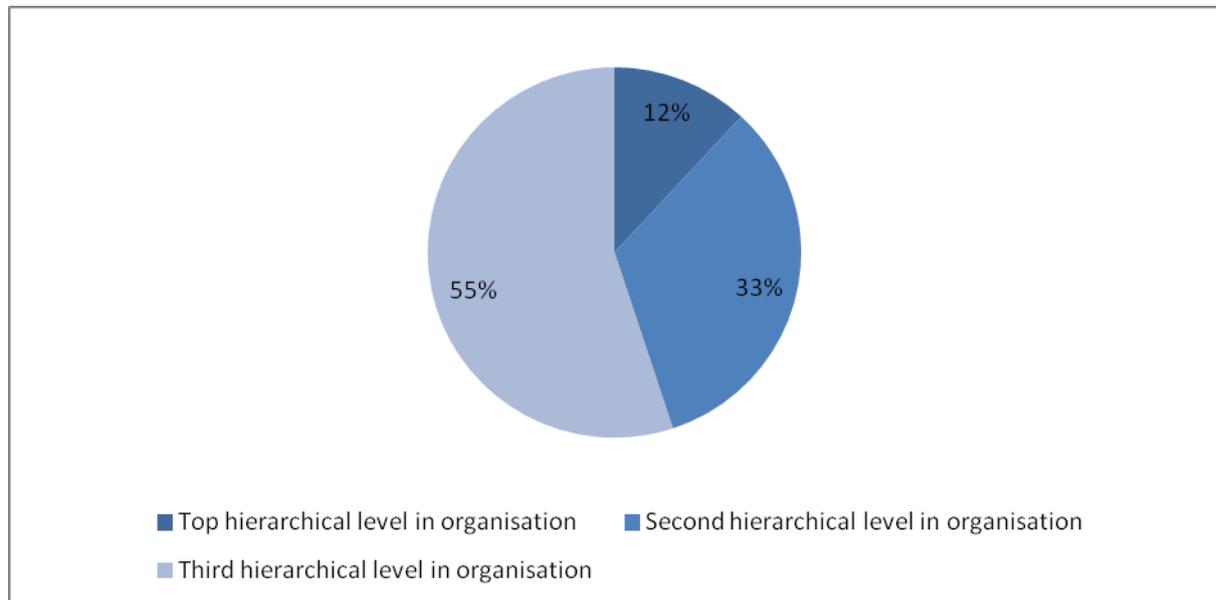
Age (Figure 3). Almost half of the senior civil service respondents (47 per cent) are in the 46 to 55 age range. Just over a quarter of respondents are between 56 and 65, just under a quarter between 36 and 45, and only 2 per cent under 35. In comparison to the COCOPS sample, there are fewer under the 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 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.

Figure 3: Respondents background: age



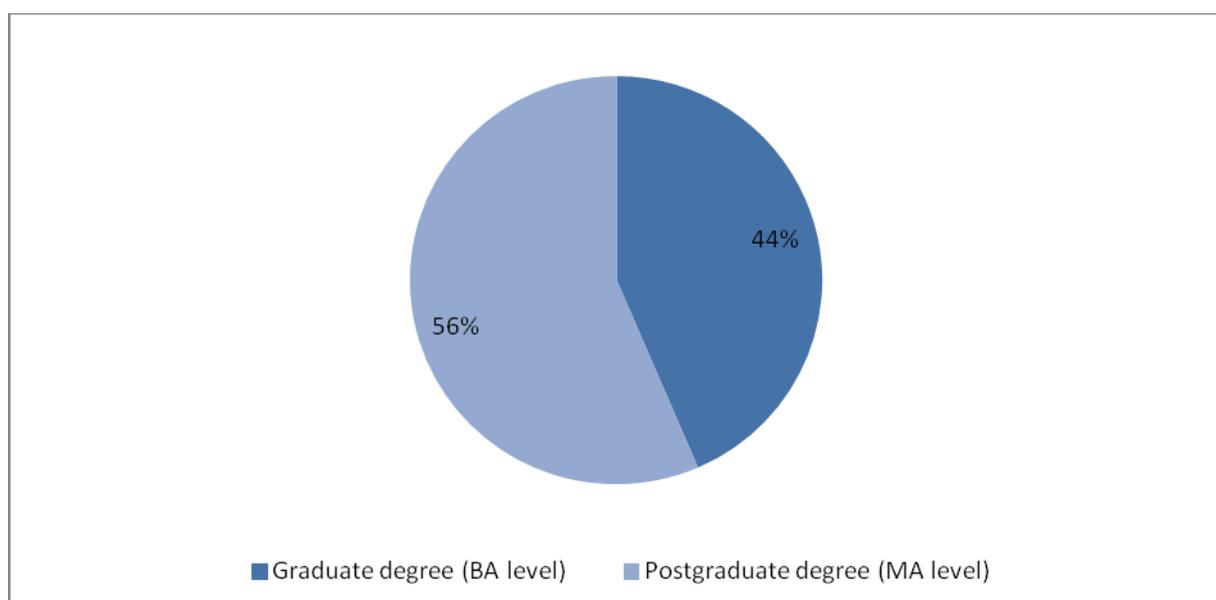
Hierarchical level (Figure 4). 12 per cent of senior civil service respondents described themselves as at the top level of their organisation, a third describe themselves as at the second level, and just over a half describe themselves as at the third hierarchical level in the organisation.

Figure 4: Respondents background: hierarchical level



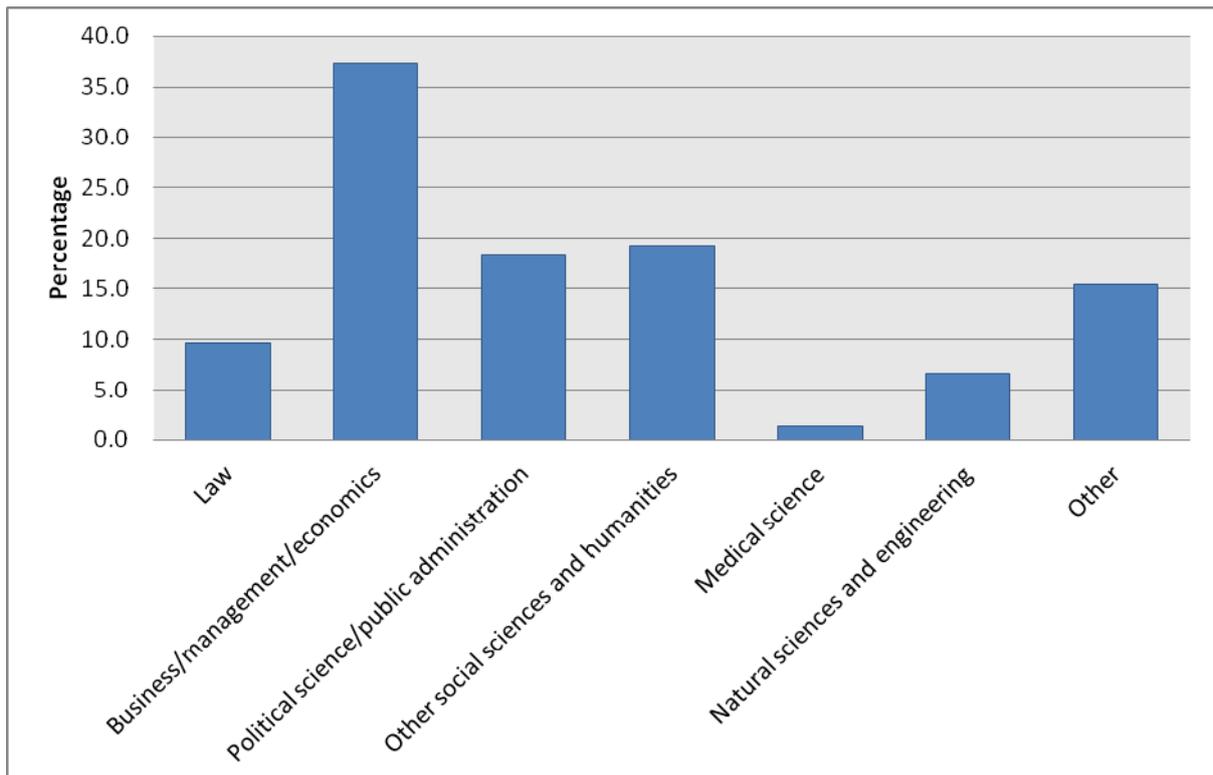
Education (Figure 5). 56 per cent of senior civil service respondents have a postgraduate degree at masters level and 44 per cent have a graduate degree as their highest educational qualification. A significant difference with the COCOPS sample is the absence of any respondents with a doctoral degree, who make up around 15 per cent of the COCOPS sample.

Figure 5: Respondents background: education



Disciplinary field of education (Figure 6). The highest proportion of senior civil service respondents (37 per cent) has an educational background in the field of business/management/economics. Other social sciences and humanities is next at 19 per cent, followed by political science/public administration at 18 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).

Figure 6: Educational fields (respondents could check more than one field)



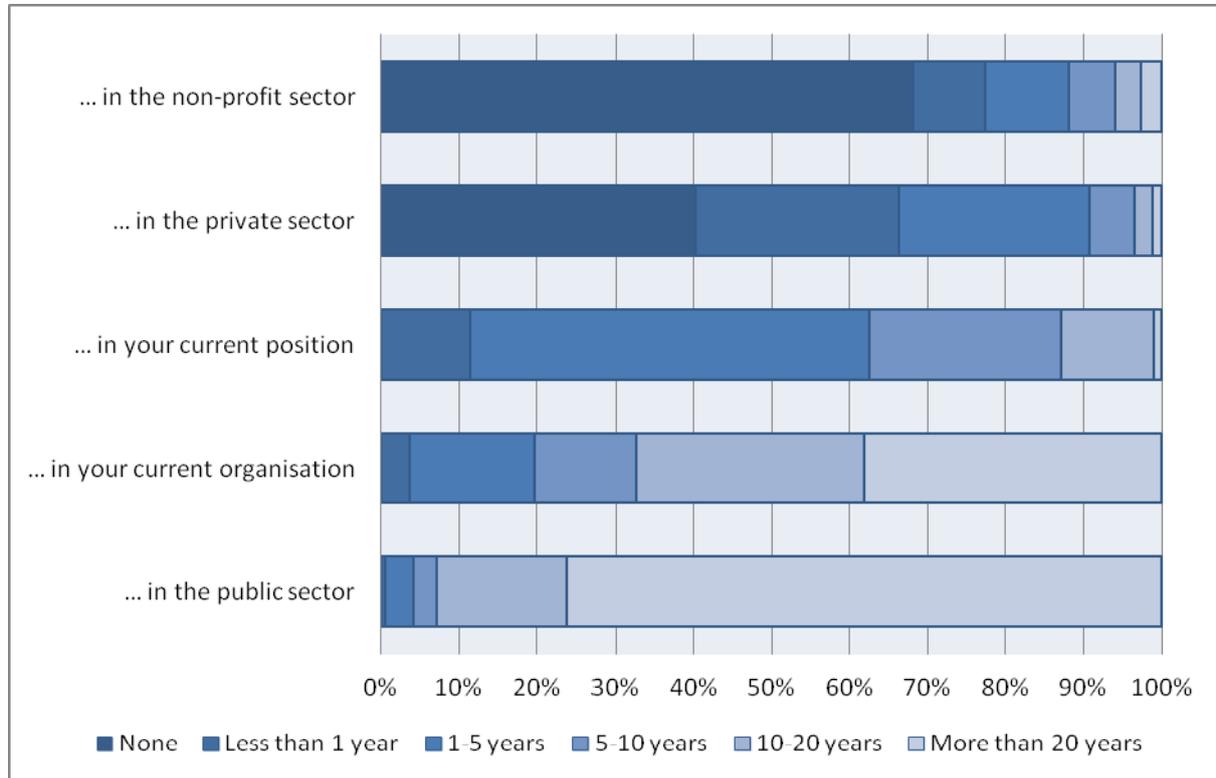
Tenure (Figure 7). The responses show that the majority of senior civil service respondents have spent a long time working in the public sector. Nearly all (93 per cent) of respondents have worked in the public sector for over 10 years, with three-quarters having worked in the public sector over 20 years. This is a little higher than the COCOPS sample, where 58 per cent have worked over 20 years in the public sector. Only 5 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 two-thirds of respondents have worked in their current organisation for over 10 years. There has been more movement in position over time. 62 per cent have been in their current position less than 5 years.

With regard to respondents experience outside the public sector, quite a high proportion has some private sector experience. 60 per cent 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. 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. 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).

Figure 7: Tenure of respondents

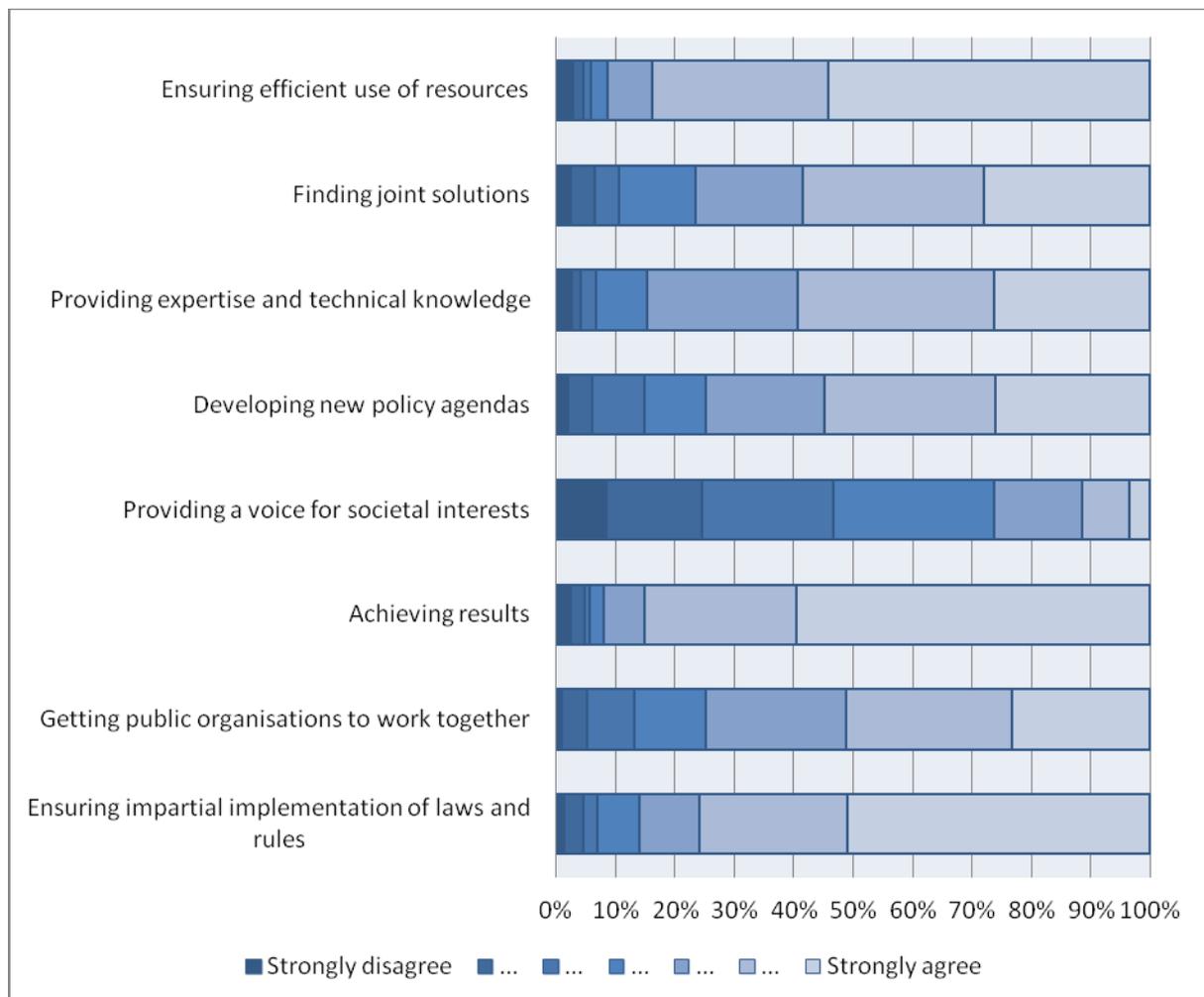


4. Values and attitudes of public sector executives

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

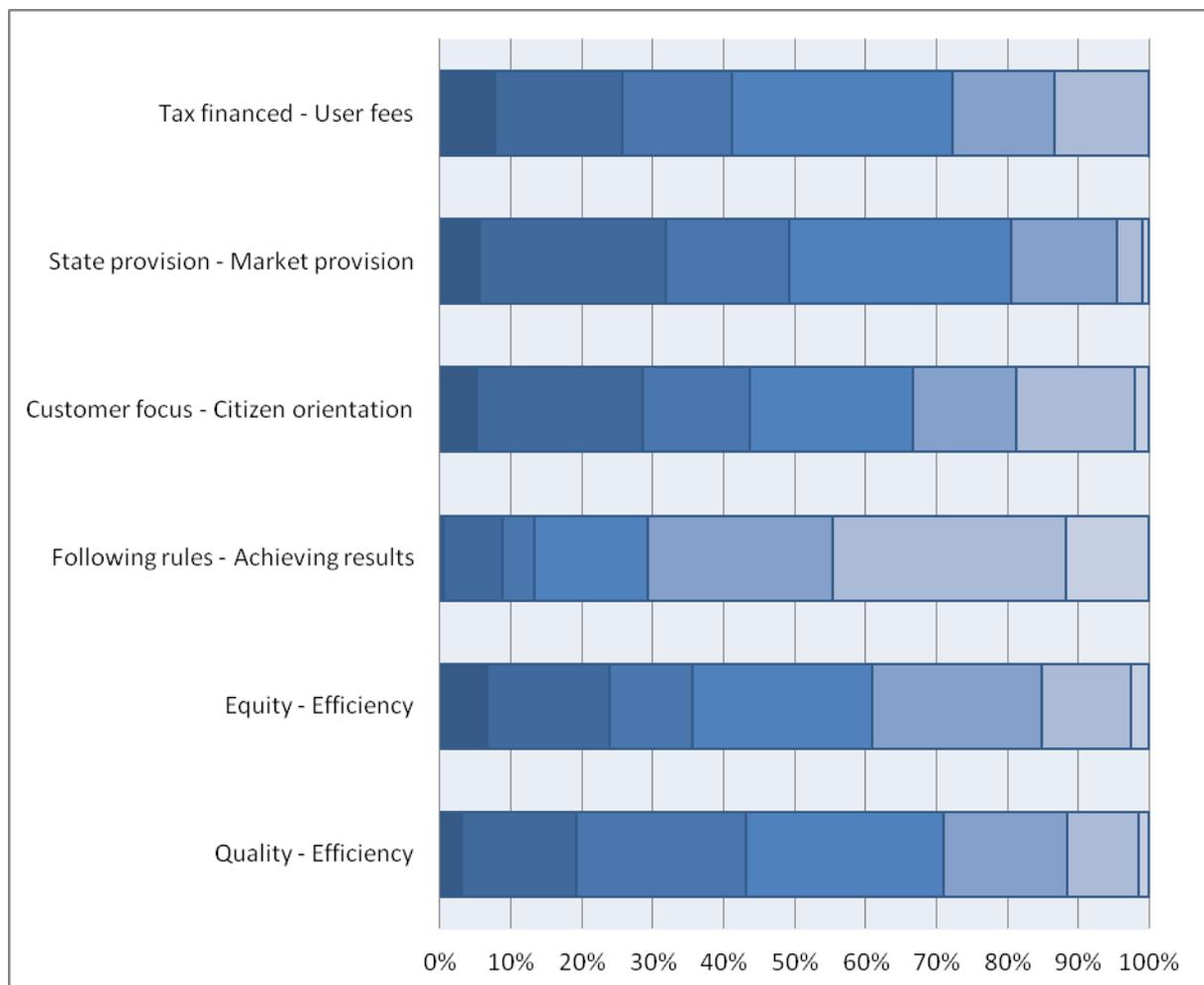
Identity and role perception (Figure 8). When asked about their self-understanding as public sector executives, a clear majority of the respondents agree that ensuring efficient use of resources (92 per cent), achieving results (92 per cent), ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules (86 per cent), providing expertise and technical knowledge (85 per cent) and developing new policy agendas (74 per cent) are central to their role. More rather disagree that it is their role to provide a voice for societal interests than agree that they see this as part of their role. The answers from senior civil servants are broadly in line with the results from the COCOPS sample.

Figure 8: Role and self-understanding (Q: I mainly understand my role as a public sector executive as ...) (n=215-224)



Value preferences for public sector priorities (Figure 9). 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 (71 per cent rather agreeing they favour achieving results). The remaining preferences are more evenly divided, though more prioritise quality than efficiency (43 per cent versus 29 per cent). Compared to the COCOPS sample, respondents show a higher preference for a customer focus (44 per cent rather agree versus 28 per cent).

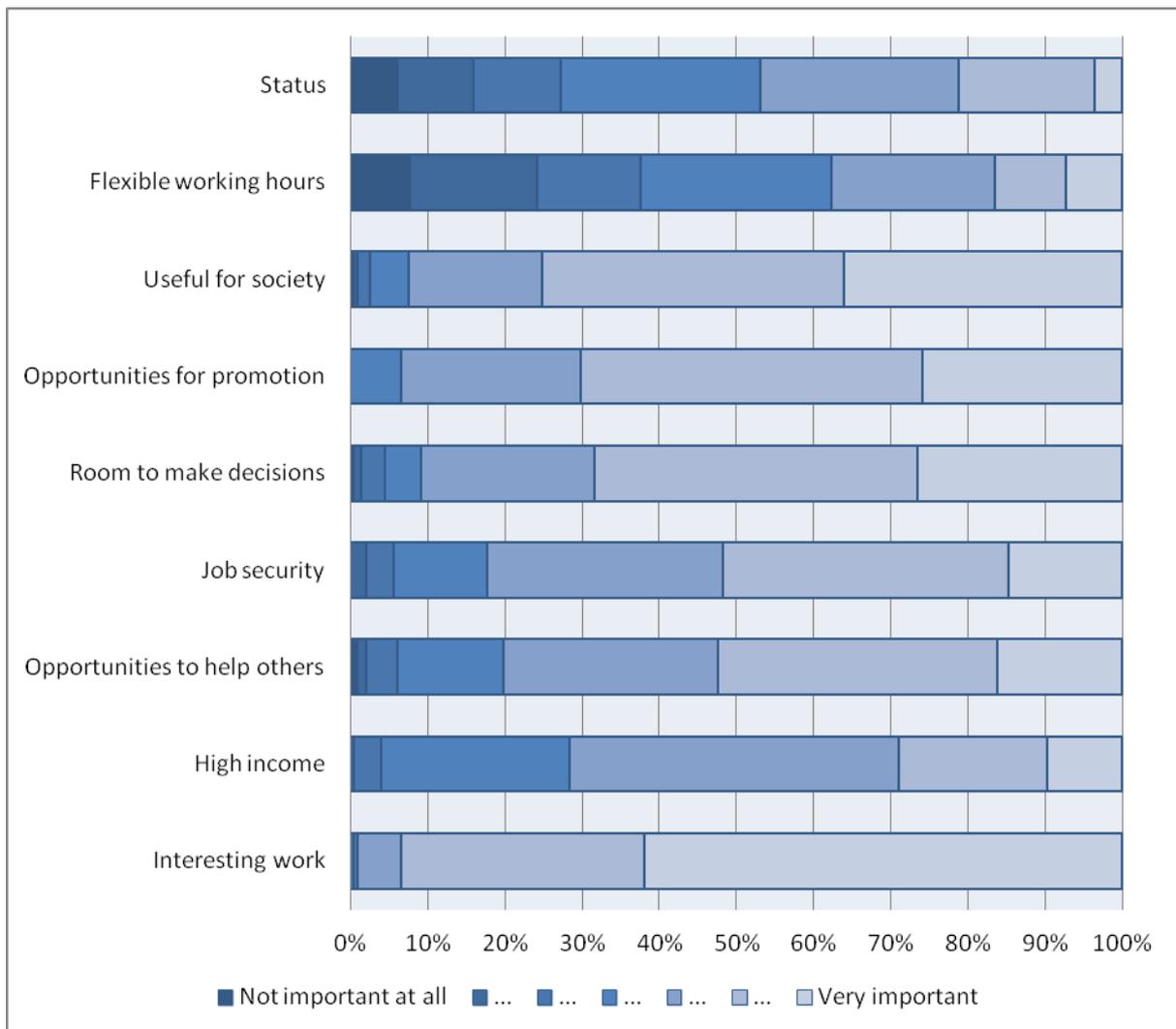
Figure 9: Priorities as public servants (Q: Public services often need to balance different priorities. Where would you place your own position?) (n=192-197)



Motivation (Figure 10). In response to being questioned about what motivates them personally, all senior civil servants rather agree that interesting work is a motivating factor. Similarly very high percentages note opportunities for promotion (93 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 given are status (44 per cent rather agree it is an important motivator) and having flexible working hours (39 per cent).

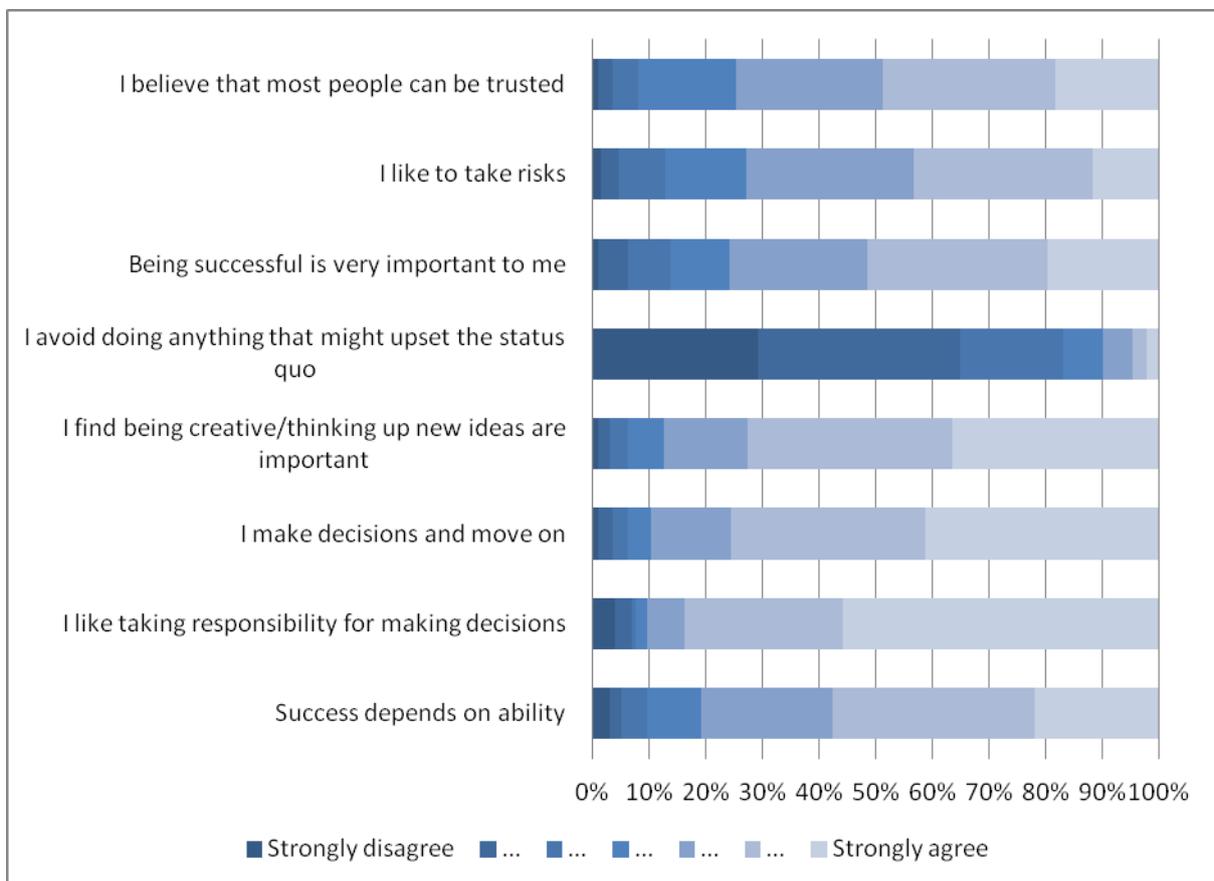
In terms of differences with the COCOPS sample, opportunities for promotion is seen as of higher importance by senior civil service respondents (93 per cent rather agree versus 74 per cent), as is job security (82 per cent versus 69 per cent). This is probably a result of the job losses and extremely limited promotion opportunities in recent years. Senior civil service 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 senior civil servants.

Figure 10: Motivation (Q: How important do you personally think it is in a job to have ...) (n=194-197)



Social value preferences (Figure 11). 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. Senior civil servants 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 preferences are in response to the statements ‘I like taking responsibility for making decisions’ (90 per cent rather agreeing and 56 per cent strongly agreeing with this statement) and ‘I make decisions and move on’ (90 per cent rather agreeing). 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 11: Social value preferences (Q: Please indicate how far you agree or disagree with the following statements) (n=187-197)

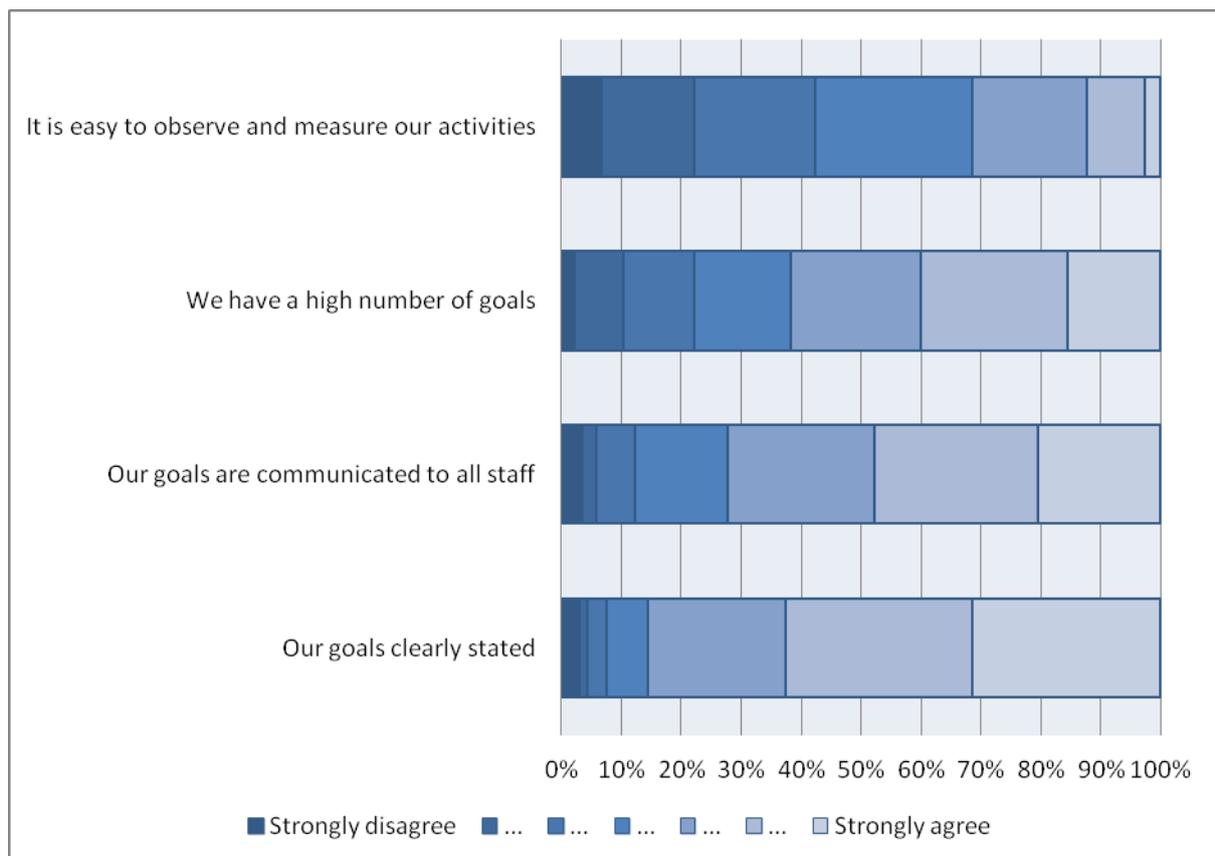


5. Characteristics of the work context in public administration

This chapter analyses how senior civil servants 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 12). Debates in the literature 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. Senior civil service respondents overall agree that their organisational goals are clearly stated and communicated to all staff (86 per cent and 72 per cent rather agree respectively). Most respondents (62 per cent) rather agree they have a high number of goals though 22 per cent rather disagree. The majority disagree with the statement that it is easy to observe and measure their activities (32 per cent rather agree versus 42 per cent rather disagree). The results are broadly in line with views expressed in the COCOPS sample, though senior civil service respondents are somewhat more likely to believe that their goals are clearly stated (86 per cent versus 78 per cent in the COCOPS sample).

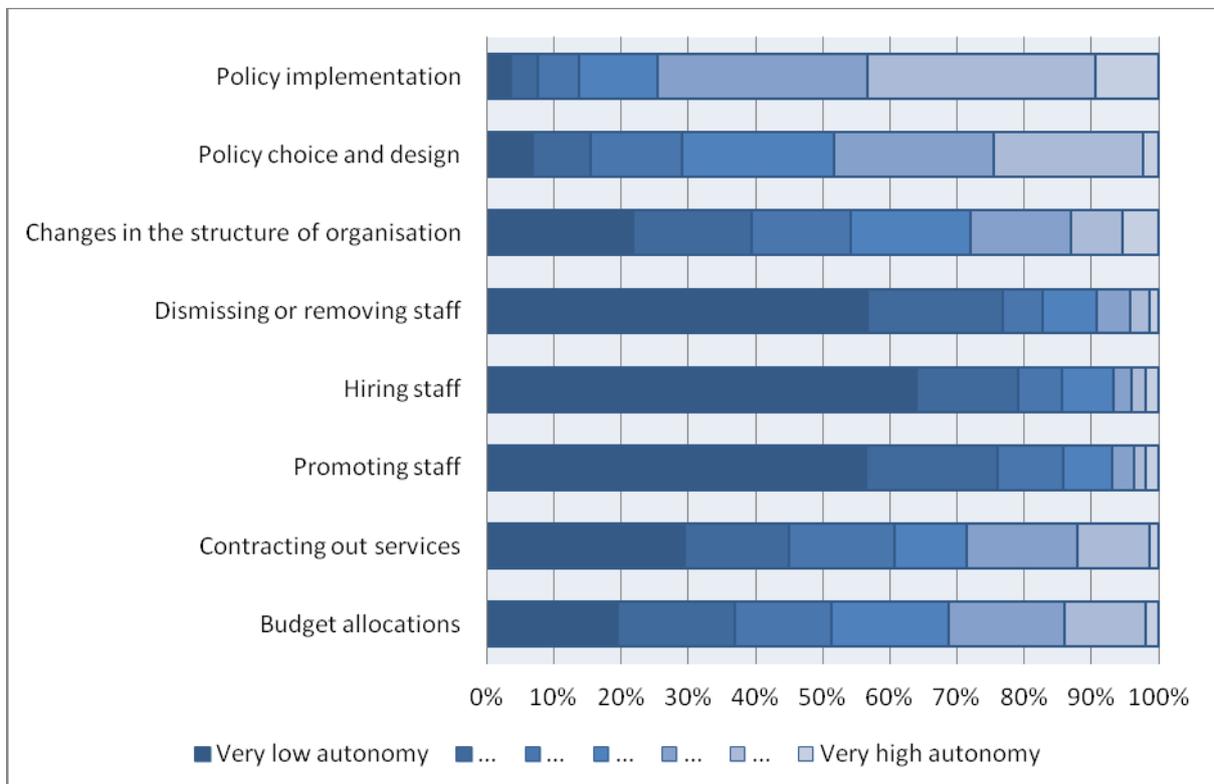
Figure 12: Goal ambiguity (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organisation?) (n=225-228)



Management autonomy (Figure 13). The lowest degree of management autonomy is expressed with regard to hiring staff (86 per cent rather low autonomy), promoting staff (86 per cent rather low autonomy) and dismissing or removing staff (83 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, though again tending towards low autonomy. 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 they have high autonomy versus 14 per cent rather disagree) and policy choice and design (48 per cent rather agree versus 29 per cent rather disagree).

These levels of management autonomy are generally much lower than those expressed in the COCOPS sample. For example only 6 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 (7 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 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.

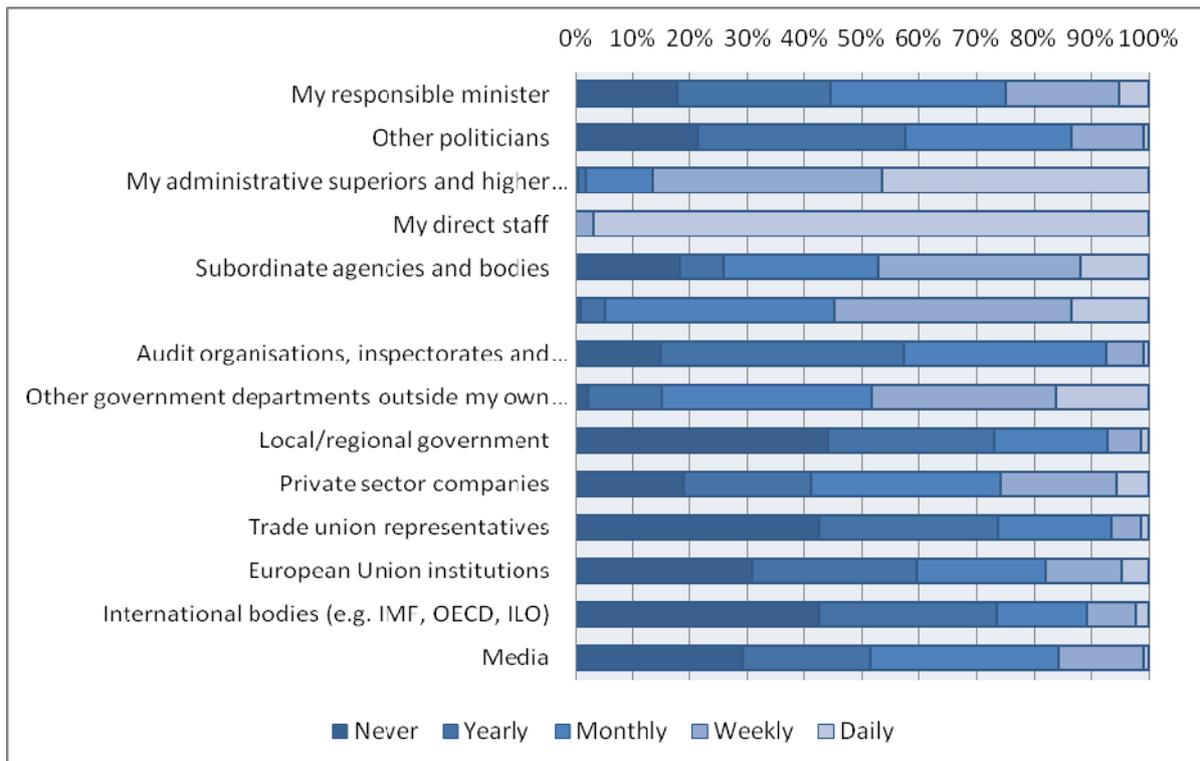
Figure 13: Degree of management autonomy (Q: In my position, I have the following degree of decision autonomy with regard to ...) (n=220-225)



Interaction frequency (Figure 14). This question explores the degree to which senior public executives interact with different stakeholders. By far the highest level of interaction of respondents, as might be expected, is with their direct staff (97 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 (87 per cent at least weekly), and administrative support units (55 per cent at least weekly). There is a reasonable high degree of contact with other departments, with 48 per cent interacting with other departments at least weekly and a further 36 per cent interacting on a monthly basis.

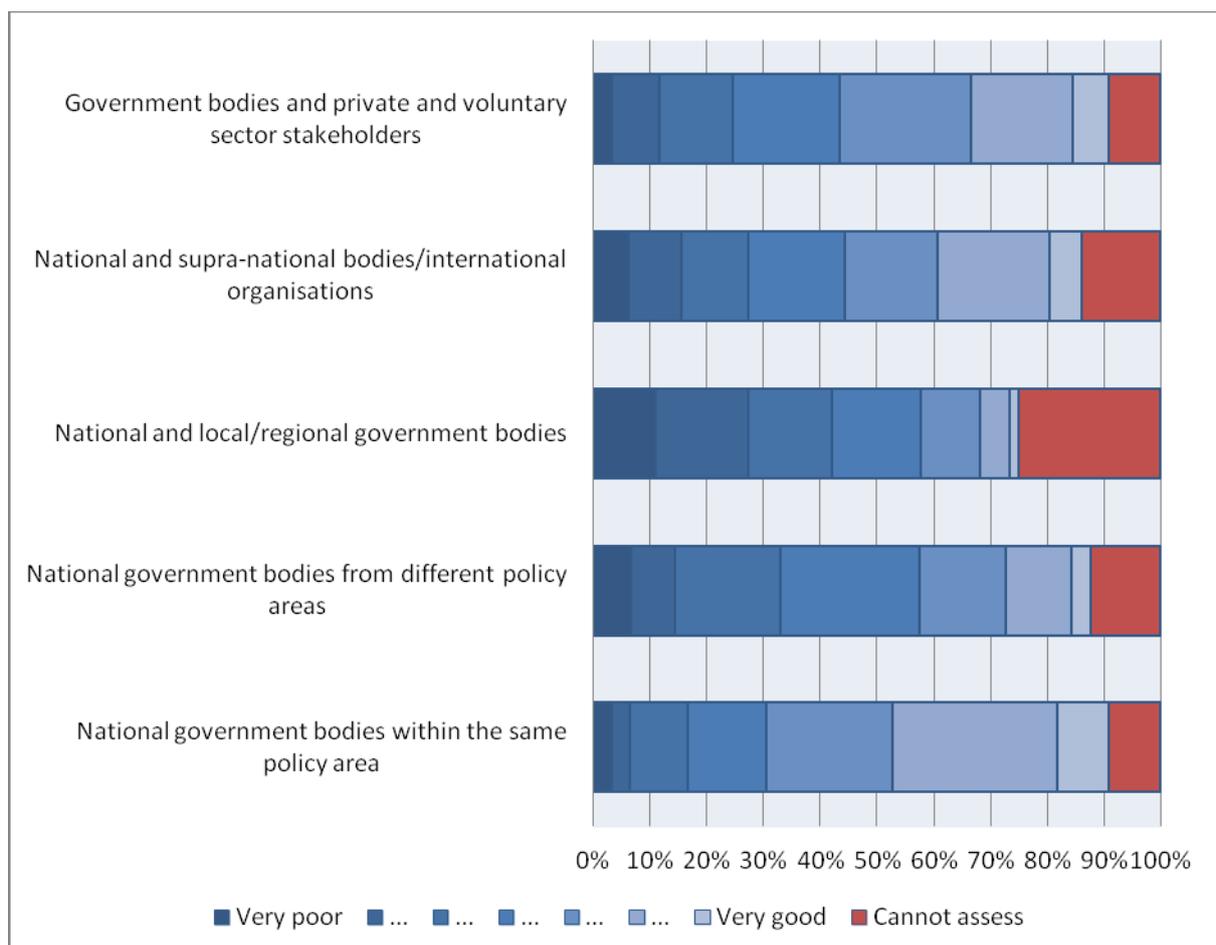
There is a relatively limited degree of direct political interaction given the sample is of senior officials. Almost a fifth (18 per cent) state that they never interact with their responsible minister, with a further 27 per cent stating they only interact with him/her yearly. Contact with other politicians is even less frequent, with 58 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 18 per cent interacting on a weekly or daily basis but 31 per cent never interacting and 29 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 (44 per cent) never interacting with local and regional government and a further 29 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 14: Interaction frequency (Q: Please indicate how frequently you typically interact with the following actors or bodies) (n=186-220)



Coordination quality (Figure 15). It should first be noted that a significant proportion of respondents (between 10 and 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 (67 per cent feel coordination is rather good), and with the private and voluntary sector (52 per cent feel coordination is rather good). The lowest level of coordination is seen as between national and local/regional government (56 per cent feel coordination is rather poor) and with national government bodies in different policy areas (38 per cent feel coordination is rather poor). This perception of poor coordination has implications for the management of cross-cutting issues. There are more mixed views on the quality of coordination with supra-national and international bodies, with 49 per cent viewing coordination as rather good and 32 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 (23 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.

Figure 15: Coordination quality (Q: How would you characterise the coordination in your own policy field between ...) (n=157-197)

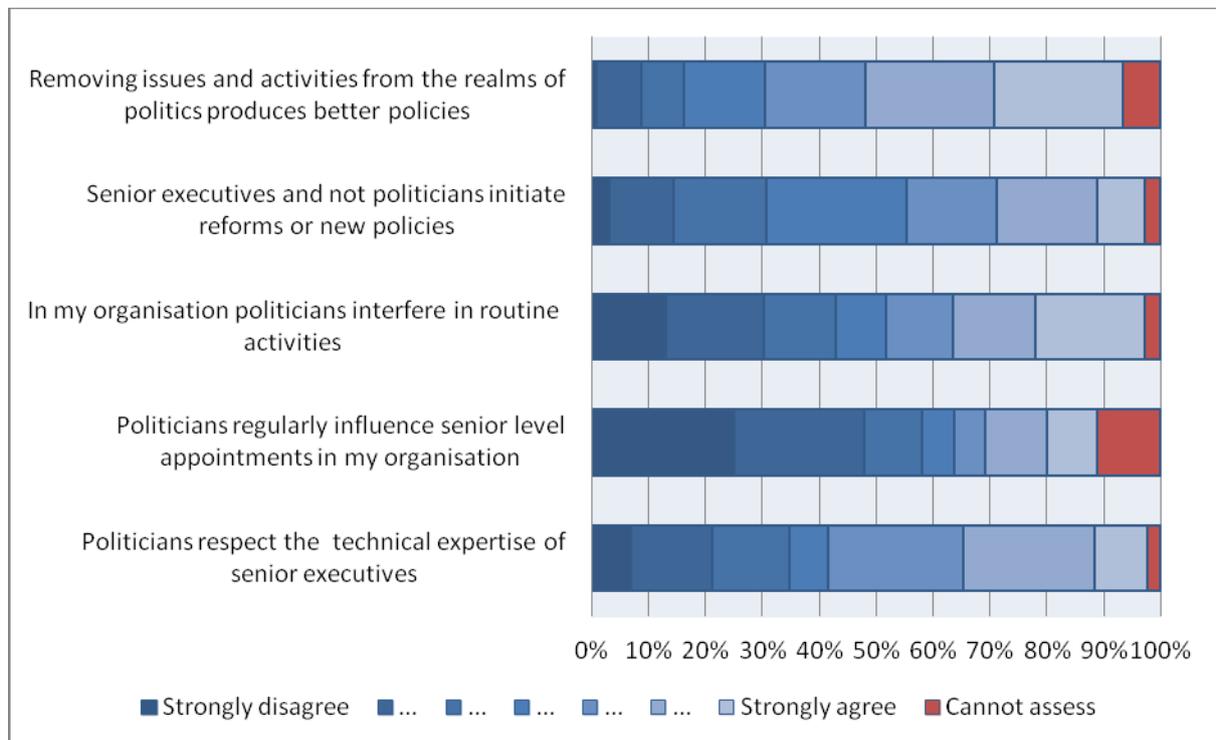


Degree of politicisation (Figure 16). Senior civil servants were asked about the degree of politicisation in their work, and the degree to which decisions are based on technical or political criteria. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents rather agree with the statement that removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies. At the same time, 57 per cent feel that politicians respect the technical expertise of the administration (as opposed to 35 per cent who rather disagree with this statement). Slightly more feel that the administration and not the political level initiate reforms or new policies (43 per cent rather agree with this statement versus 32 per cent who rather disagree).

Half of the respondents feel that politicians interfere with routine activities (52 per cent rather disagree with the statement that in their organisation politicians do not interfere with routine activities). But the majority view is that politicians do not influence senior level appointments (66 per cent rather disagree with the statement that politicians regularly influence senior level appointments in my organisation, as opposed to 28 per cent who rather disagree).

Compared to the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants are much more likely to see the appointments process as independent of politicians (66 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, respondents are more likely to agree that politicians interfere in routine activities (38 per cent rather agree versus 22 per cent). Senior civil servants are also somewhat more likely to agree that the administration rather than the political level initiates reforms or new policies.

Figure 16: Degree of politicisation (Q: What is your view on the following statements ...) (n=191-211)



6. Relevance of New Public Management and post New Public Management reforms

This section provides information on the perceptions of local government 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.

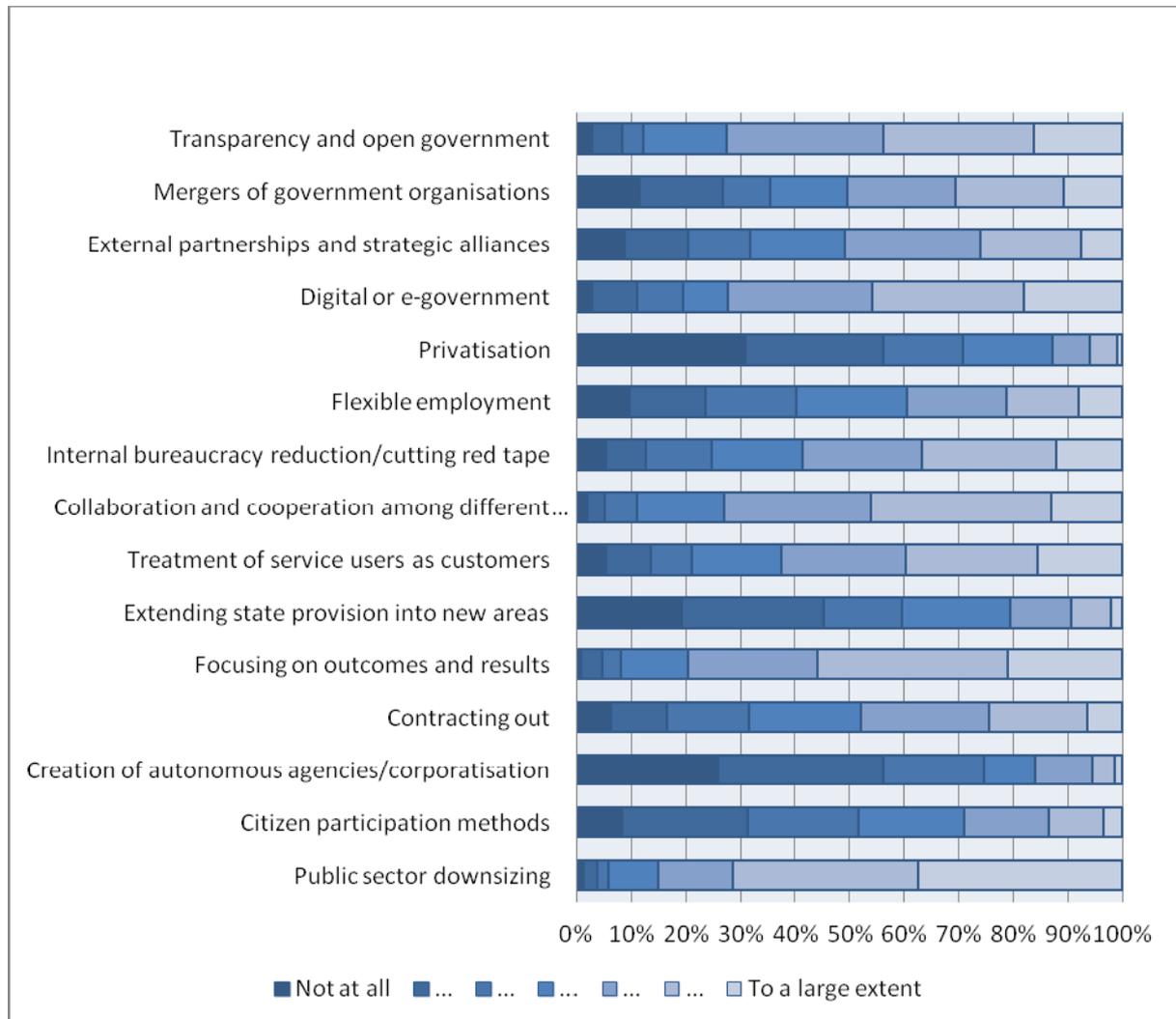
6.1 Policy field level

Reform trends (Figure 17). 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, 85 per cent of senior civil servants believe that public sector downsizing has been a rather important reform, while a similarly high percentage, 80 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 (73 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 the creation of autonomous agencies (75 per cent regard this as not at all or only of limited importance), privatisation (71 per cent), and extending state provision into new areas (60 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 given to coordination in Figure 15. It suggests possibly a gap between the rhetoric and practice of reform in this area.

When compared to the average results from the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants rate contracting out, a focus on outcomes and results and transparency and open government as more important reform trends. Respondents 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.

Figure 17: Importance of reform trends (Q: How important are the following reform trends in your policy area?) (n=197-206)

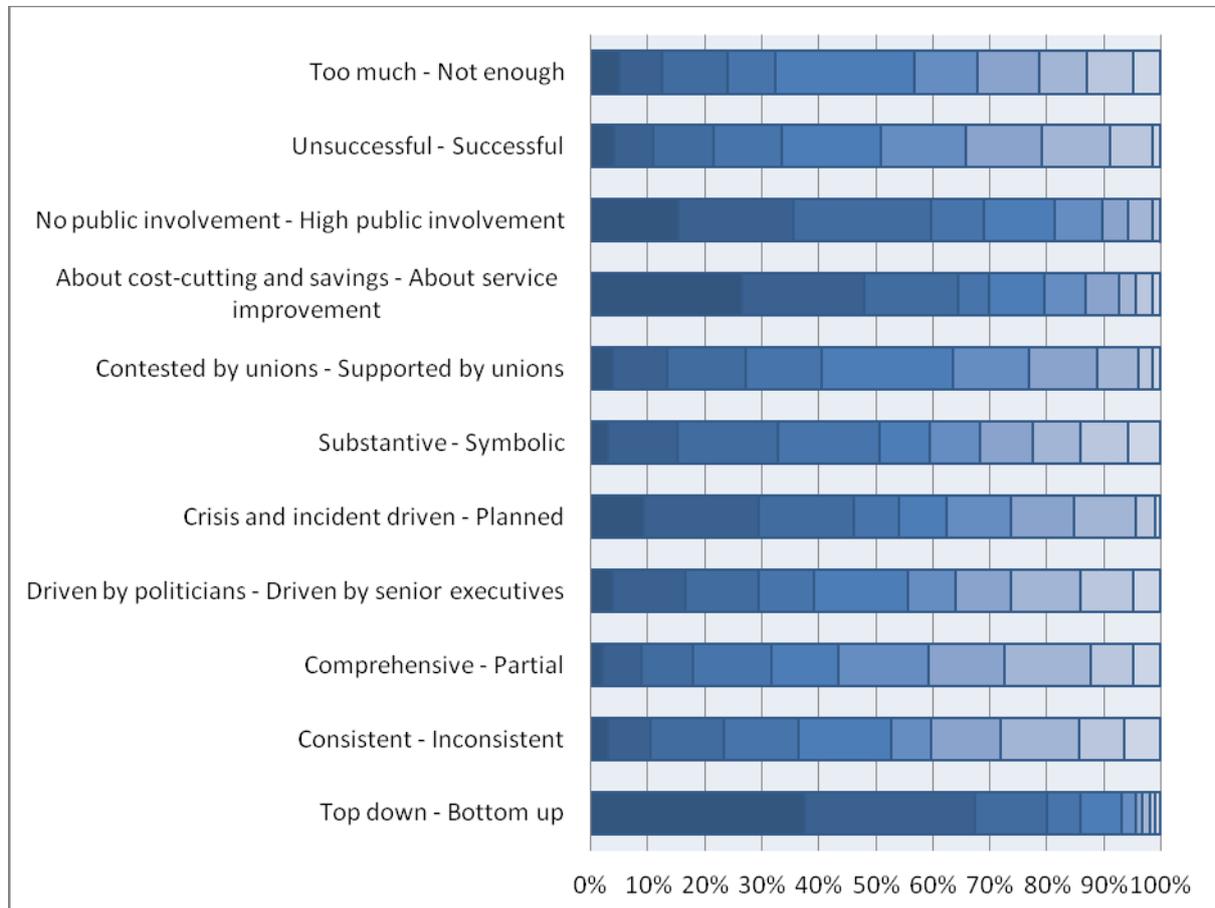


Dynamics of public sector reform (Figure 18). The vast majority of respondents (93 per cent registering points 1-5 on the ten point scale) feel that the reforms have been more top down than bottom up. A high percentage also feel that the reforms have been more about cost cutting and savings than about service improvement (80 per cent), and have had tended towards no public involvement rather than high public involvement (81 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 (56 per cent versus 44 per cent) feel that the reforms are more driven by politicians than by senior executives. Respondents are evenly split as to whether they see the reforms as more successful or unsuccessful.

The results are broadly in line with the COCOPS sample. Senior civil servants, 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.

Figure 18: Dynamics of public sector reform (Q: Public sector reforms in my policy area tend to be ...) (n=201-205)



6.2: Organisational level

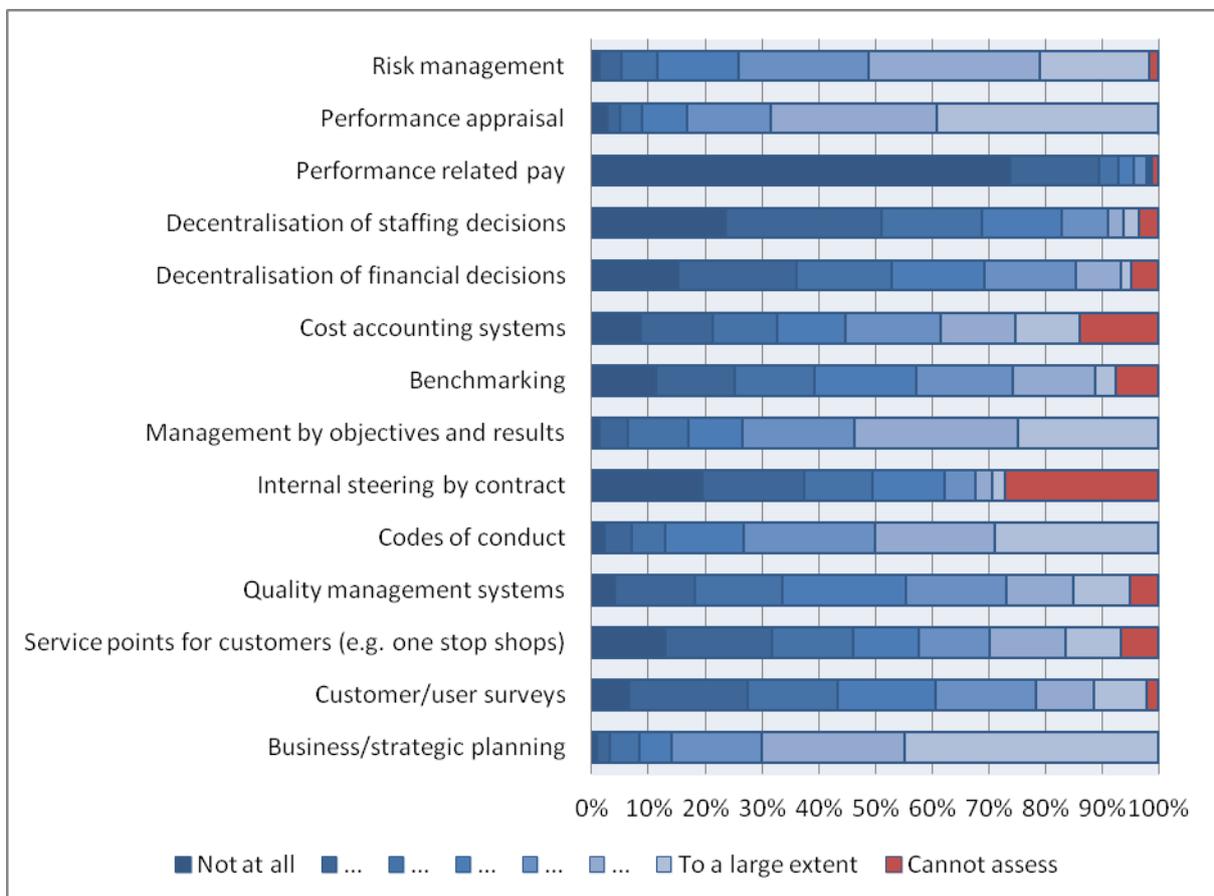
Management instruments (Figure 19). Moving on to the organisational level, respondents were asked about the extent to which different management instruments are used in their organisation. The most commonly used of the listed instruments are business/strategic planning, performance appraisal, risk management, codes of conduct, and management by objectives and results (the percentage that indicate they use these to a rather large extent being 86, 83, 74, 73, and 73, per cent respectively). Those management instruments less frequently used include decentralisation of staffing and financial decisions (71 per cent and 56 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 75 per cent of respondents indicating it is not used at all, and less than 1 per cent indicating it is used to a rather large extent).

The one instrument many respondents (26 per cent) indicate they could not assess is internal steering by contract, suggesting that the concept is not a familiar one in the civil service. Of

those that did respond to this question, the majority believe it is only used to a limited extent or not at all. 14 per cent of respondents did not feel they could assess the extent to which cost accounting systems are used in their policy area.

In comparison with the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants put a much greater emphasis on risk management as an important management instrument (74 per cent use it to a rather large extent compared to 50 per cent for the COCOPS sample). Respondents are also more likely to make use of business/strategic planning and codes of conduct. Conversely, respondents make less use of decentralisation of staffing decisions and performance related pay (71 per cent versus 54 per cent and 95 per cent versus 62 per cent respectively do not use these instruments at all or only use them to a limited extent).

Figure 19: Relevance of different management instruments (Q: To what extent are the following instruments used in your organisation?) (n=190-226)

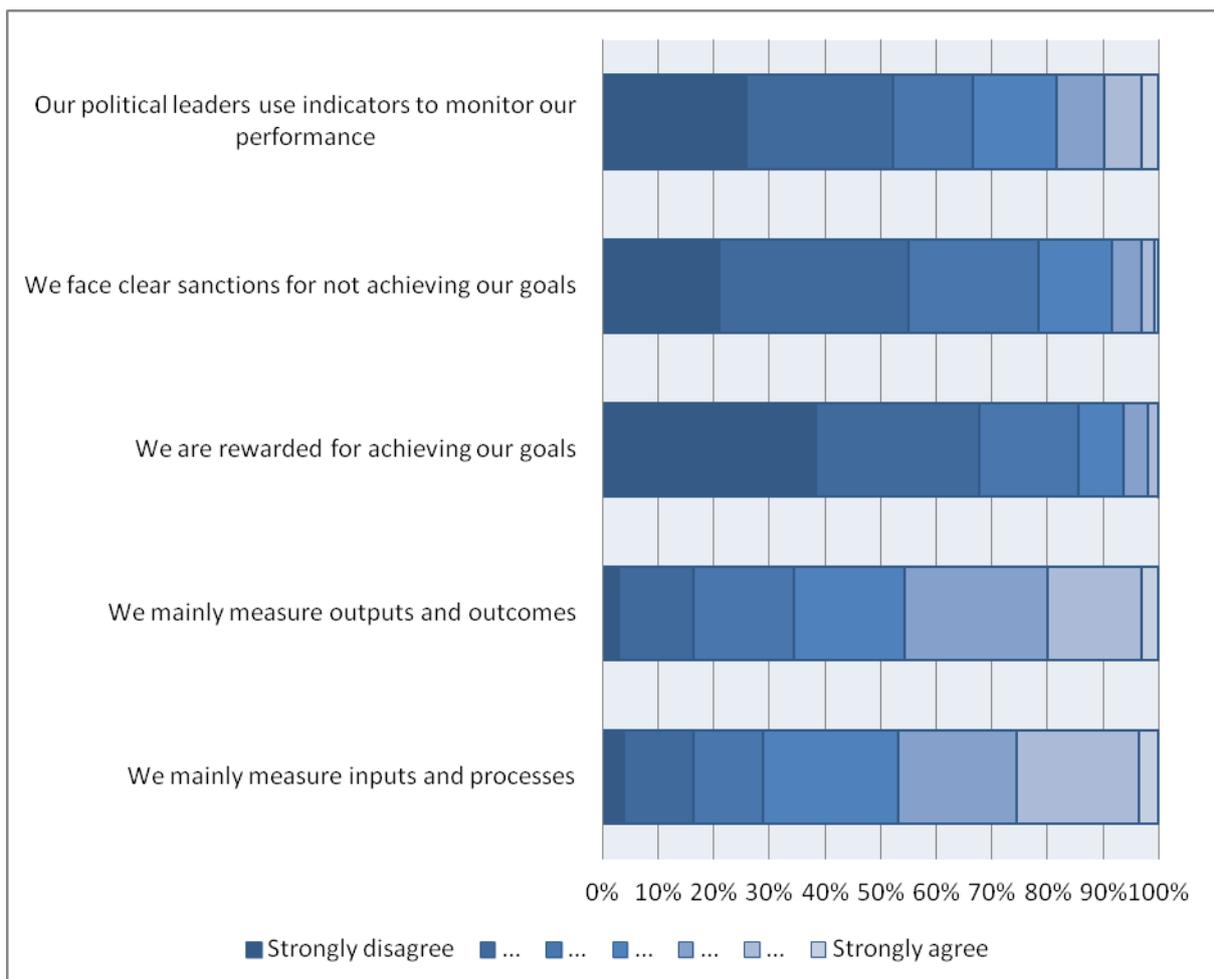


Relevance of performance management (Figure 20). Senior civil servants were asked to indicate the relevance of performance management in their organisation. The strongest expressed reaction was to the statement ‘we are rewarded for achieving our goals’. 39 per cent strongly disagree with this statement, and 86 per cent in all rather disagree. Respondents also feel that they would not face sanction for not achieving their goals (78 per cent rather disagree that they would face clear sanctions for not achieving their goals). The majority also disagree with the statement that political leaders use indicators to monitor executive

performance (66 per cent rather disagree with this statement). Views are more mixed as to whether they mainly measure inputs and processes or outputs and outcomes (47 per cent rather agree they mainly measure inputs and processes as opposed to 29 per cent who disagree with this statement; 46 per cent rather agree they mainly measure outputs and outcomes as opposed to 34 per cent who rather disagree).

The main difference with the COCOPS sample is that senior civil servants are much less likely to feel that they are rewarded for achieving their goals (only 6 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 respondents are less likely to agree that they will face sanctions for not achieving goals (8 per cent rather agree versus 17 per cent in the COCOPS sample). Senior civil servants are also less likely to agree that political leaders use indicators to monitor performance (18 per cent rather agree versus 37 per cent).

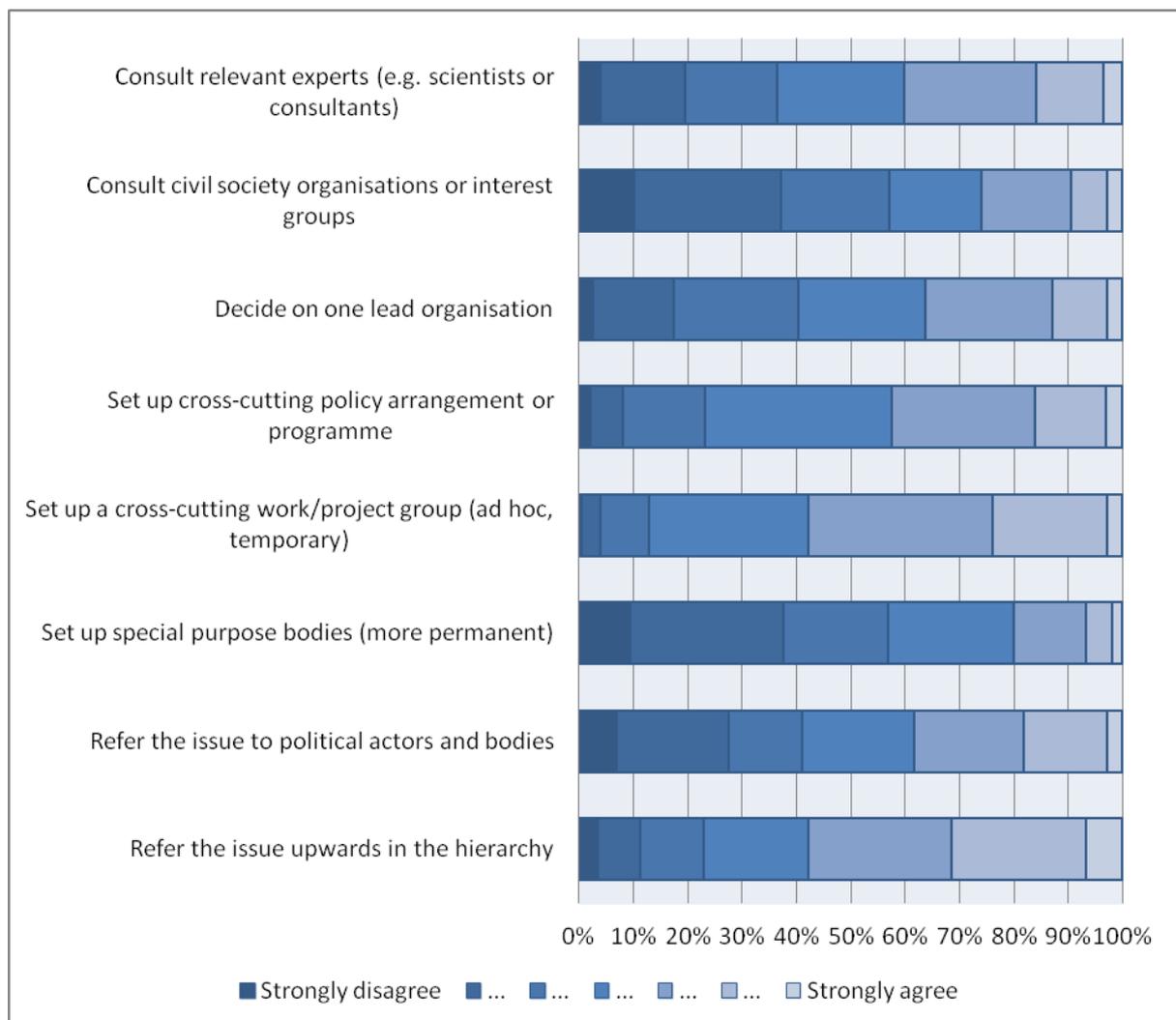
Figure 20: Relevance of performance management (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organisation?) (n=221-227)



Coordination solutions (Figure 21). 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, senior civil servants are most likely to set up a temporary cross-cutting work group or refer the issue up the hierarchy (58 per cent rather agree with both these statements). The least favoured option is setting up special purpose bodies.

Despite a majority of respondents agreeing that they would typically refer a coordination issue up the hierarchy, senior civil servants are somewhat less likely to favour this route than the COCOPS sample (58 per cent rather agree as opposed to 67 per cent rather agree in the COCOPS sample). Conversely, respondents are more likely to set up cross-cutting arrangements, either temporary work groups or specific policy arrangements or programmes (58 per cent versus 44 per cent and 42 per cent versus 29 per cent respectively rather agree to typically using these options).

Figure 21: Coordination solutions (Q: When my organisation's responsibility or interests conflict or overlap with that of other organisations, my organisation typically ...) (n=194-206)



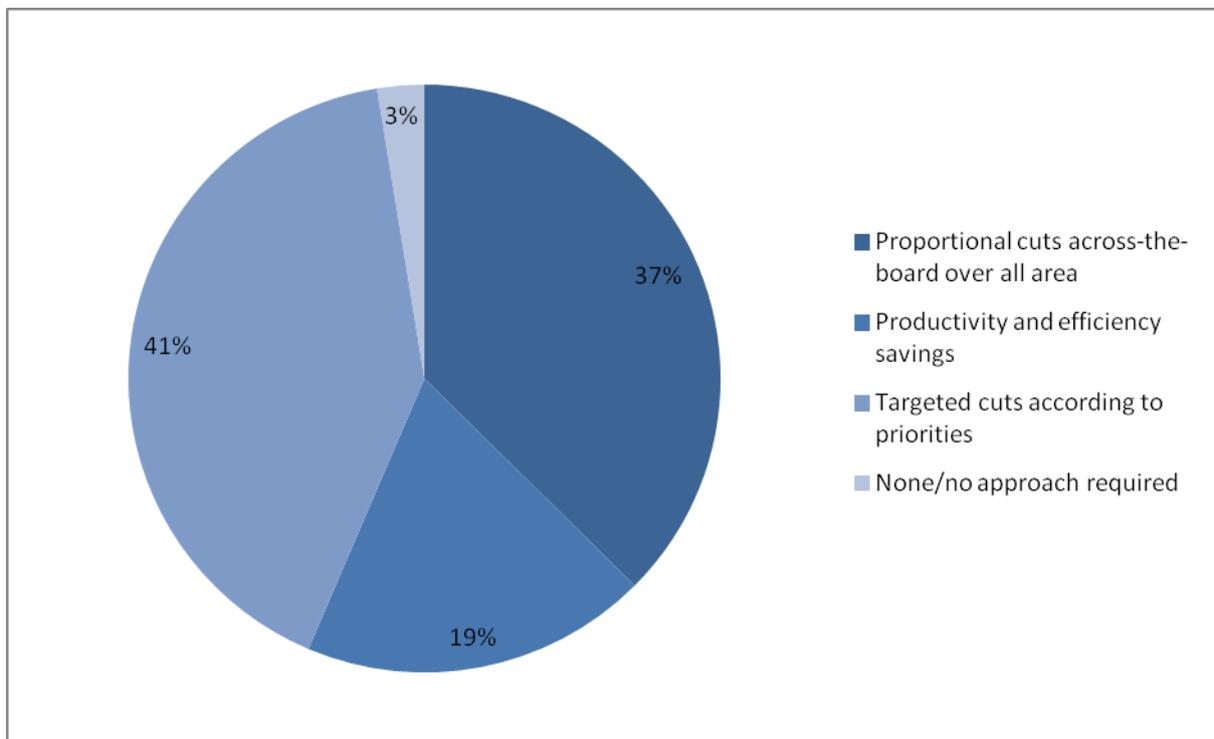
7. Impact of the fiscal crisis on public administration

The international fiscal crisis combined with domestic challenges and mistakes, 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 service 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 23). Concerning the savings in specific policy areas, the majority of senior civil servants (41 per cent) indicate that they feel the approach to achieving savings has primarily been through targeted cuts according to priorities. However, almost as many (37 per cent) believe that across the board cuts have been the main savings approach used. 19 per cent suggest that productivity and efficiency savings has been the main approach in their policy area.

These strategies for making savings are broadly similar to those noted in the COCOPS sample. But a smaller proportion (3 per cent versus 11 per cent) suggests that there were no cutbacks applied in their policy area.

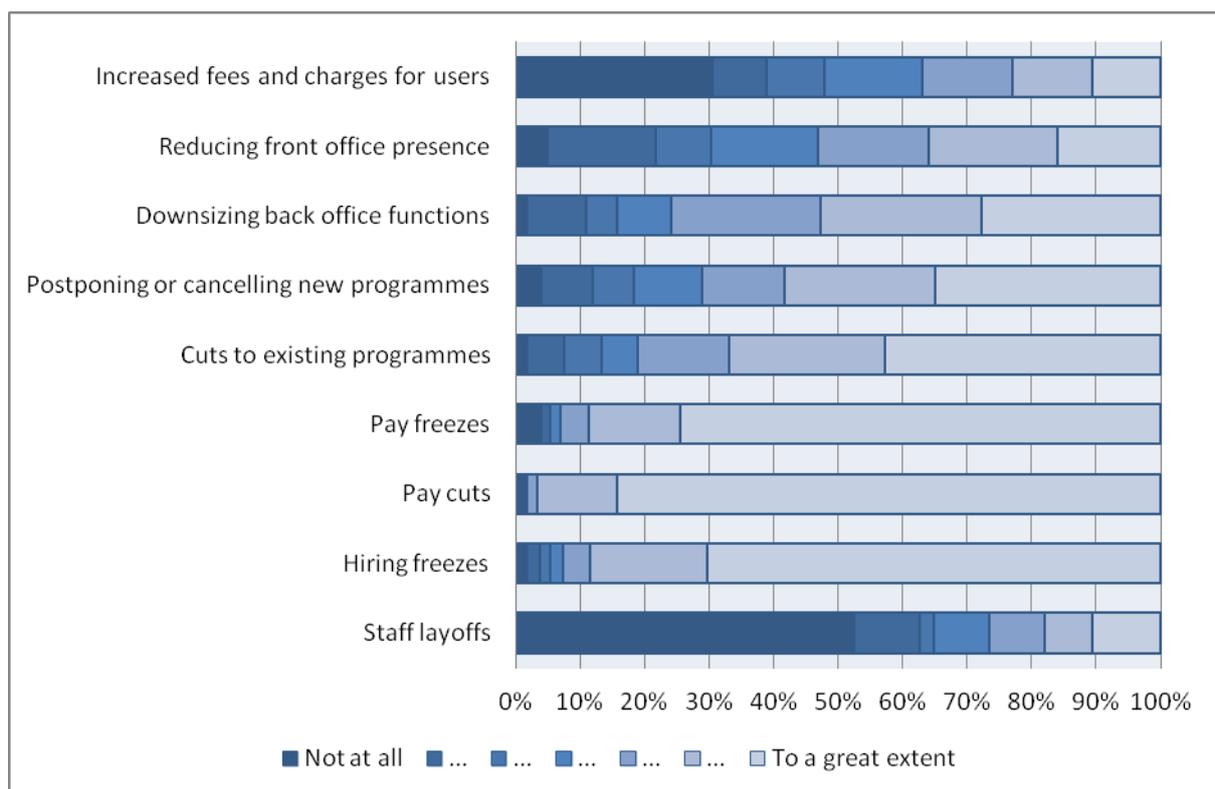
Figure 23: Cutback measures at organisational level (Q: In response to the fiscal crisis, how would you describe the broader approach to realising savings in your policy area?) (n=195)



Cutback measures at organisational level (Figure 24). In the view of senior civil servants, 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 respondents feel have been applied to a rather limited extent are staff layoffs and increased user fees and charges (65 per cent and 48 per cent respectively feel that these measures have been applied to a limited extent or not at all).

Compared to the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants 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 98 per cent of senior civil servants. 81 per cent of 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.

Figure 24: Cutback measures at organisational level (Q: In response to the fiscal crisis, to what extent has your organisation applied the following cutback measures?) (n=178-193)



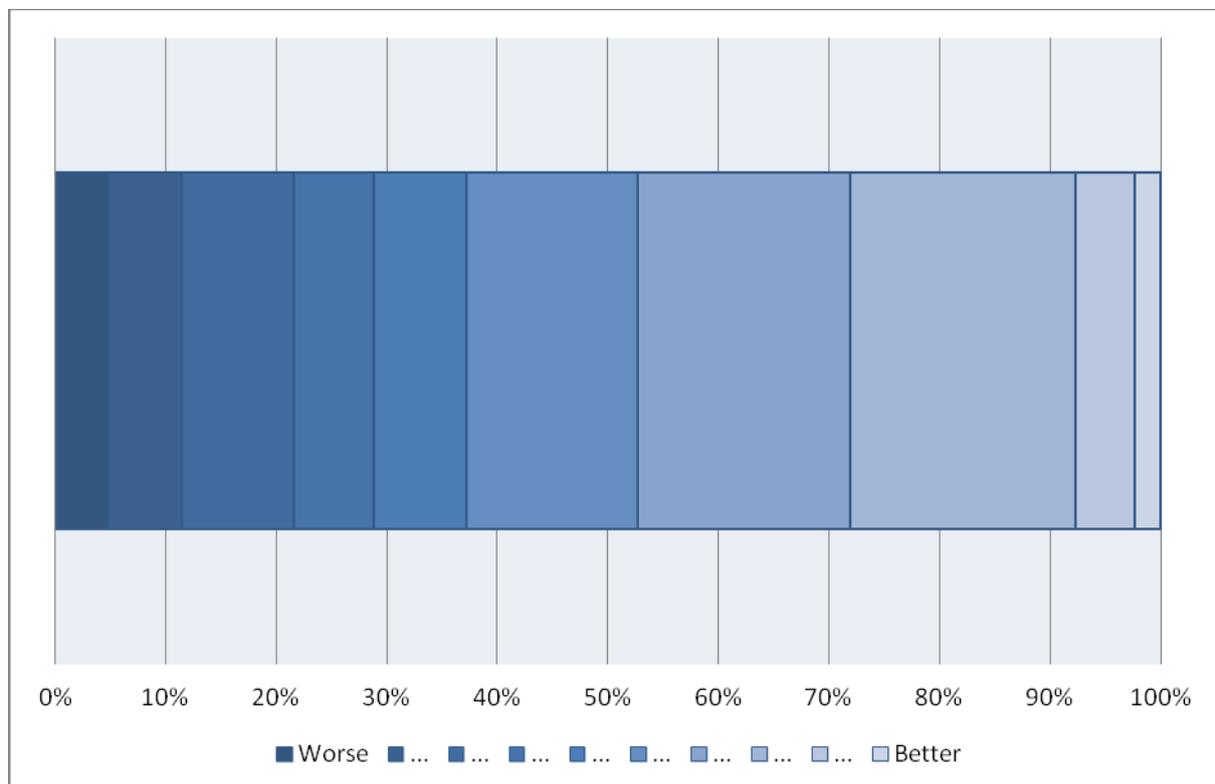
8. Impact of public administration reform

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 a 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 25). Senior civil servants on the whole feel that public administration has got better over the five years to the end of 2013: 63 per cent feel that it has got better, and 37 per cent feel that it has got worse. The majority of respondents (39 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 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 senior civil servants.

Figure 25: 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=167)

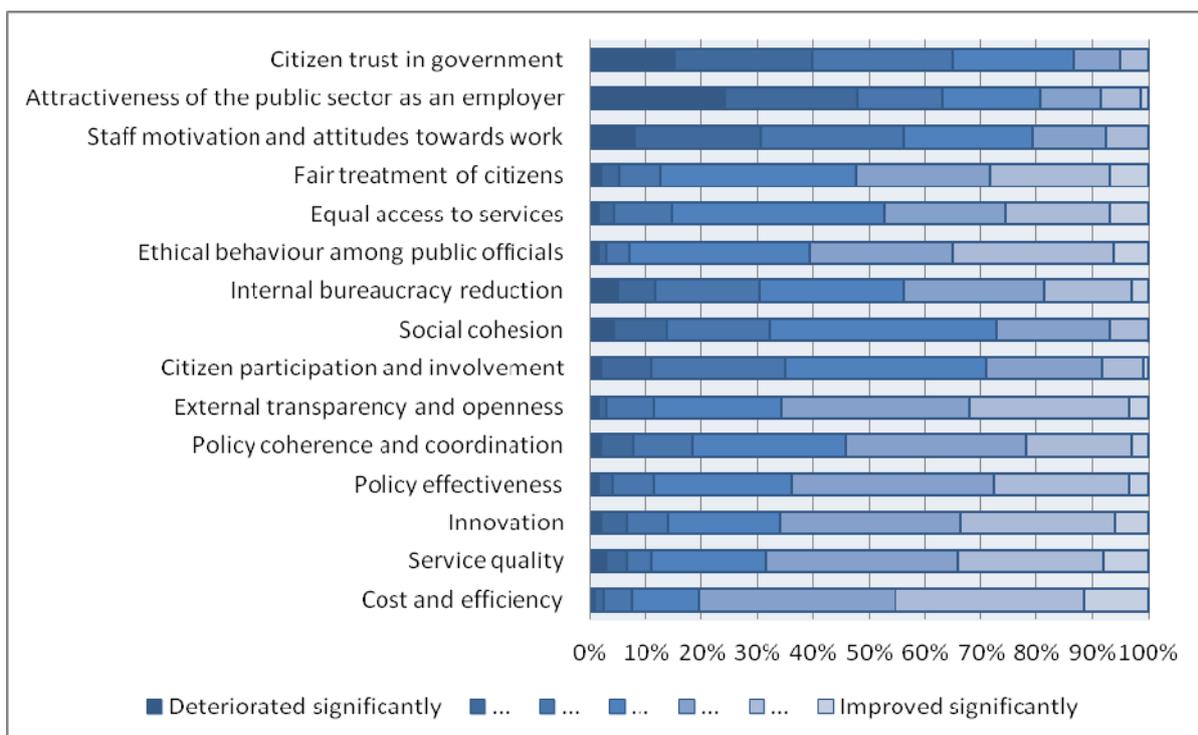


8.2 Impact within policy fields

Developments in public administration (Figure 26). To complement the overall results, a more nuanced question was asked addressing a spectrum of different performance dimensions. The dimensions where senior civil servants 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 (80, 69, 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 (65, 63 and 56 per cent respectively rather feel that things have deteriorated significantly).

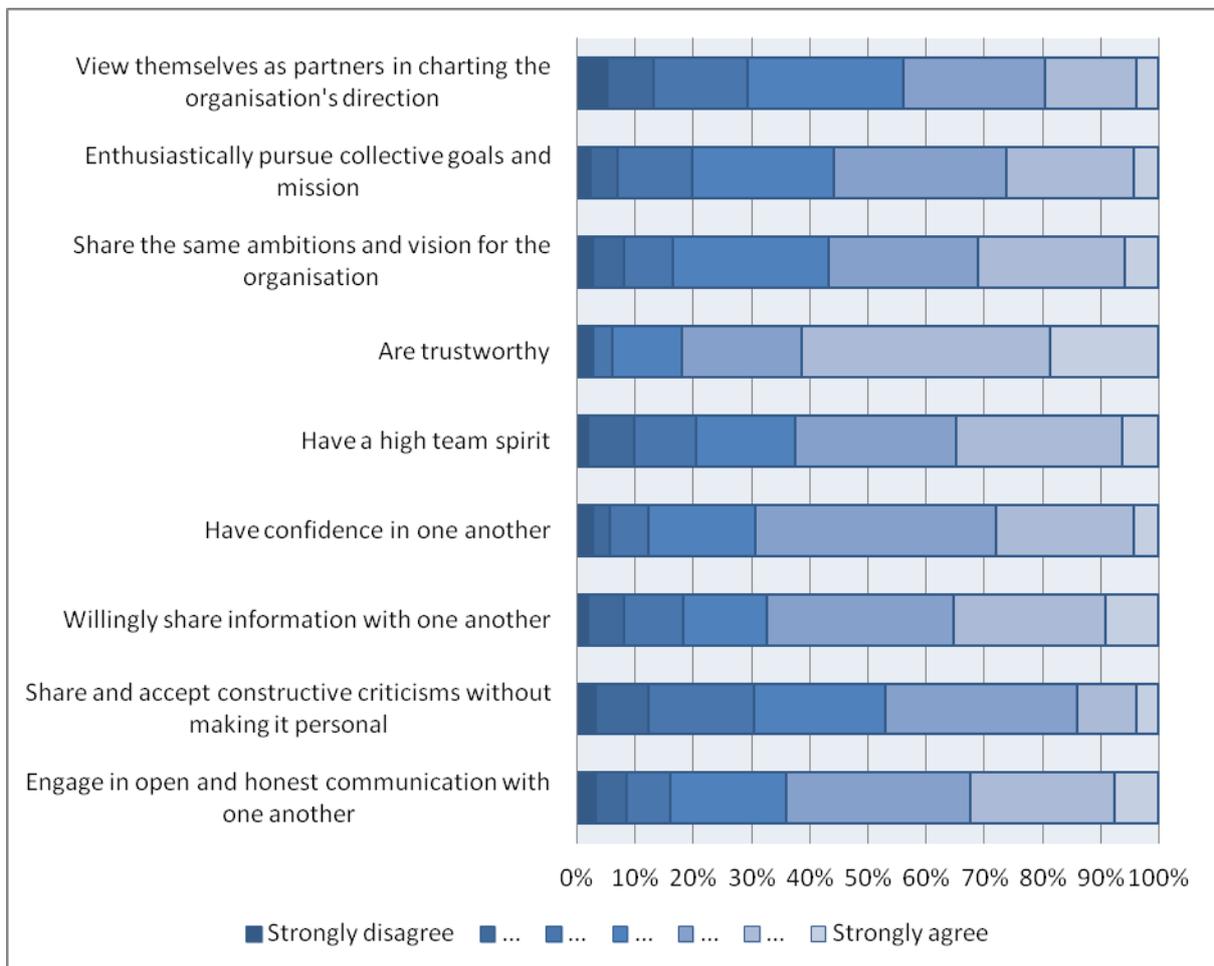
Compared to the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants tend to be somewhat more positive in their assessment of how public administration has performed over the last five years. Notably with regard to policy effectiveness, policy coherence and coordination, cost and efficiency, external transparency and openness and ethical behaviour, a larger share of respondents feel things have improved (64 per cent versus 41 per cent, 54 per cent versus 35 per cent, 80 per cent versus 64 per cent, 65 per cent versus 53 per cent, and 60 per cent versus 47 per cent respectively). Conversely, senior civil servants 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 (65 per cent versus 48 per cent, 63 per cent versus 45 per cent, and 56 per cent versus 41 per cent respectively).

Figure 26: 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=187-199)



Social capital and trust (Figure 27). 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, senior civil servants tend to agree with all the statements listed. The largest share of respondents agree that people in their organisation are trustworthy (82 per cent rather agree), have confidence in one another (69 per cent), and willingly share information with one another (67 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 (31 per cent and 30 per cent respectively 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.

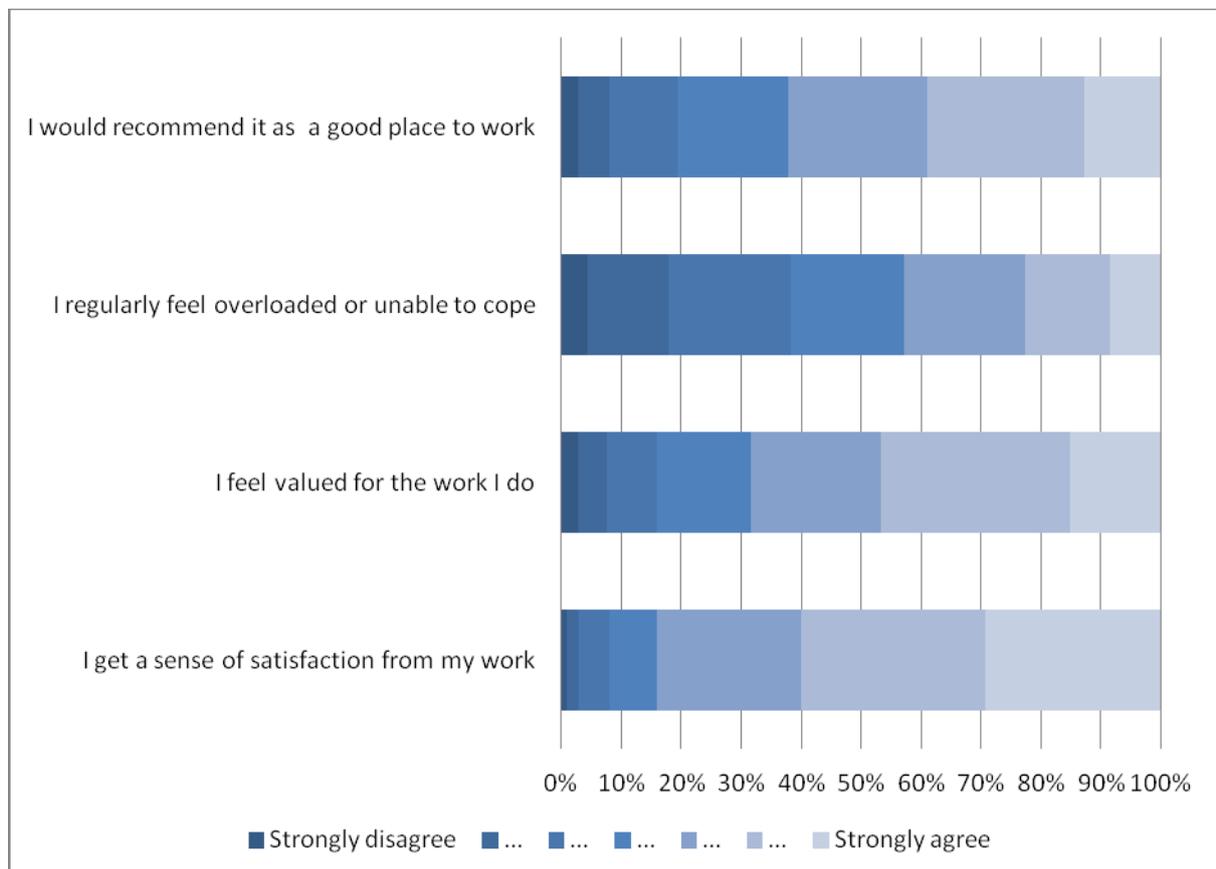
Figure 27: Social capital and trust (Q: People in my organisation ...) (n=208-211)



8.3 Impact at the individual level

Job satisfaction (Figure 28). Overall results are positive with regard to individual's perception of their job satisfaction. 84 per cent of senior civil servants rather agree that they get a sense of satisfaction from their work. 68 per cent feel valued for the work they do. And 62 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': 43 per cent rather agree with this statement and 38 per cent rather disagree. The response to this statement is 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 public service may have put additional workload pressures on senior civil servants which have affected their views on being able to cope with the workload.

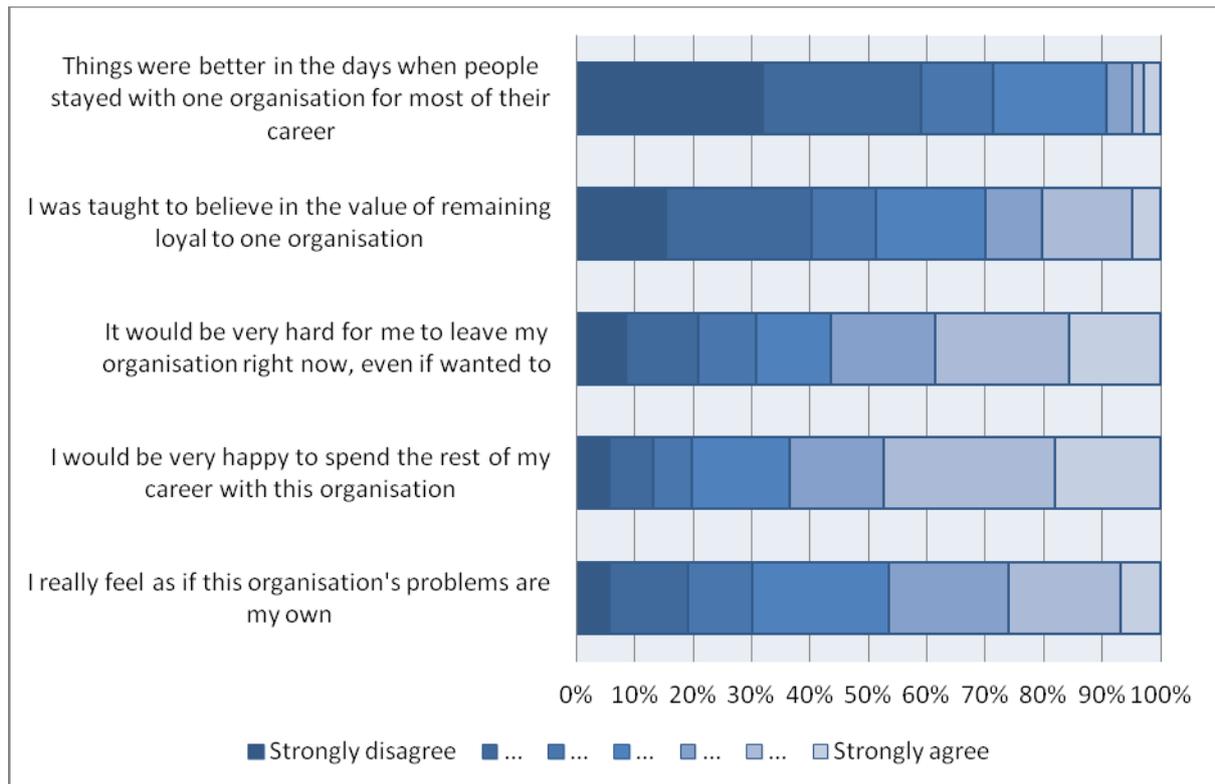
Figure 28: Job Satisfaction (Q: When thinking about my work and the organisation I work for ...) (n=211-212)



Organisational commitment (Figure 29). Respondents were asked to assess five statements with regard to the organisation they work for. Very few senior civil servants agree that things were better when people stayed with one organisation for most of their career (9 per cent rather agree). The respondents' loyalty to one organisation is not overly high (30 per cent rather agree they were taught to believe in the value of loyalty to one organisation). Though

64 per cent suggest they are rather happy to spend the rest of their career with the organisation they are in. 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 senior civil servants believe in the value of remaining with one organisation (30 per cent as opposed to 62 per cent in the COCOPS sample).

Figure 29: Organisational commitment (Q: When thinking about my work and the organisation I work for ...) (n=208-211)



9. Main findings

Profile of respondents

Two-thirds of senior civil service respondents are male and one-third female. This is in line with the COCOPS sample of respondents from ten European countries, and with the general picture in the public service at senior levels.

Almost half of the senior civil service respondents are in the 46 to 55 age range. Just over a quarter of respondents are between 56 and 65, just under a quarter between 36 and 45, and there are very few under 35. There are fewer under the age of 35 compared to the COCOPS sample.

Just over a half of senior civil service respondents have a postgraduate degree at masters level with just under a half having a graduate degree as their highest educational qualification. 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.

The majority of senior civil service respondents have spent a long time working in the public sector. Nearly all respondents have worked in the public sector for over 10 years, with three-quarters having worked in the public sector over 20 years. This is a little higher than the COCOPS sample average.

Two-thirds of respondents have worked in their current organisation for over 10 years. There has been more movement in position over time: roughly two-thirds have been in their current position less than 5 years.

Quite a high proportion of senior civil servants have some private sector experience, with 60 per cent of respondents having spent some time working in the private sector. Previous experience in the non-profit sector is less frequent, with two-thirds having no experience here.

Values and attitudes

A large majority of respondents agree that ensuring efficient use of resources, achieving results, ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules, providing expertise and technical knowledge, and developing new policy agendas are central to their role. More disagree that it is their role to provide a voice for societal interests than agree that they see this as part of their role.

The clearest value preference of options given in the survey is that senior civil servants see themselves as in favour of achieving results as against following rules.

In response to being questioned about what motivates them personally, all senior civil servants agree that interesting work is a motivating factor. Similarly very high percentages note opportunities for promotion, doing something useful for society, and having room to make decisions as important motivational factors. In terms of differences with the COCOPS

sample, opportunity for promotion is seen as of higher importance by senior civil service respondents, as is job security.

Officials were asked to what extent they agree, or disagree, with a number of statements that aims to assess their social value preferences. The strongest preferences are in response to the statements 'I like taking responsibility for making decisions' and 'I make decisions and move on'. A large majority disagree with the statement 'I avoid doing anything that might upset the status quo'.

Work characteristics

Most senior civil service respondents agree that their organisational goals are clearly stated and communicated to all staff. Most also tend to agree they have a high number of goals. The majority disagree with the statement that it is easy to observe and measure their activities.

Levels of management autonomy are generally viewed as much lower than those expressed in the COCOPS sample. The lowest degree of management autonomy is expressed with regard to hiring staff, promoting staff, and dismissing or removing staff. The only two areas where more feel they have high autonomy than low autonomy are the fields of policy implementation and policy choice and design.

By far the highest level of interaction of respondents is with their direct staff. The next highest levels of interaction are also internal to the organisation: with administrative superiors, and administrative support units.

There is a relatively limited degree of direct political interaction: almost a fifth state that they never interact with their responsible minister, with a further quarter stating they only interact with him/her yearly. Contact with other politicians is even less frequent. There are also low levels of interaction with EU institutions and with regional and local government. Compared to the COCOPS sample there is a particularly low level of interaction with local and regional government.

With regard to coordination, the highest perceived level of coordination is with national government bodies in the same policy area, and with the private and voluntary sector. The lowest level of coordination is seen as between national and local/regional government and with national government bodies in different policy areas. 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.

Two-thirds of respondents rather agree with the statement that removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies. At the same time, most feel that politicians respect the technical expertise of the administration. Just over half of respondents feel that politicians interfere with routine activities. But there is a majority view that politicians do not influence senior level appointments. Compared to the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants are much more likely to see the appointments process as independent of politicians.

Reform trends and the impact of the fiscal crisis

A significant majority of senior civil servants believe that public sector downsizing has been an important reform trend, as has focusing on outcomes and results. Collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors, transparency and open government, and digital or e-government are the next three most important ranked reforms. The reforms that respondents think least important are the creation of autonomous agencies, privatisation, and extending state provision into new areas. When compared to the average results from the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants rate contracting out, a focus on outcomes and results and transparency and open government as more important reform trends.

The vast majority of respondents 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, and have had tended towards no public involvement rather than high public involvement.

At the organisational level, the most commonly used management instruments are business/strategic planning, performance appraisal, risk management, codes of conduct, and management by objectives and results. Those management instruments less frequently used include performance related pay, and decentralisation of staffing and financial decisions. In comparison with the COCOPS sample, senior civil servants put a much greater emphasis on risk management, and are also more likely to make use of business/strategic planning and codes of conduct. Conversely, respondents make less use of decentralisation of staffing decisions and performance related pay.

Senior civil servants 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' with the vast majority disagreeing with this statement. Respondents also feel that they would not face sanction for not achieving their goals. The main difference with the COCOPS sample is that senior civil servants are much less likely to feel that they are rewarded for achieving their goals.

When faced with coordination problems, senior civil servants are most likely to set up a temporary cross-cutting work group or refer the issue up the hierarchy. The least favoured option is setting up special purpose bodies.

At the individual level, around three-quarters of senior civil servants 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 category where least respondents agree they use performance indicators is in communicating what their organisation does to citizens and service users. For all of the statements listed, senior civil servants say they use performance indicators to a rather large extent to a much higher degree than the COCOPS sample average.

Outcomes of public sector reform

Almost two-thirds of senior civil servants feel that public administration has got better over the five years to the end of 2013. This finding reflects more positive views on the reform process than the COCOPS sample.

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 senior civil servants 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, senior civil servants tend to be somewhat more positive in their assessment of how public administration has performed over the last five years. This is particularly notable with regard to policy effectiveness, policy coherence and coordination, cost and efficiency, external transparency and openness and ethical behaviour. Conversely, senior civil servants 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.

The survey aims to assess the type of impact that public administration reforms has had upon social capital, trust and social cohesion within organisations. Overall, senior civil servants agree that people in their organisation are trustworthy, have confidence in one another, and willingly share information with one another.

The vast majority of senior civil servants agree that they get a sense of satisfaction from their work, feel valued for the work they do, and 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'. The response to this statement is also the only notable difference with the COCOPS sample where most rather disagree they feel overloaded or unable to cope.

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