



Public Sector Reform in Estonia: Views and Experiences from Senior Executives

Country Report as part of the COCOPS Research Project

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Coordination for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future (COCOPS): www.cocops.eu

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-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).

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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 in ten European countries, exploring executives' opinions and experiences with regards to public sector reforms in general government, as well as more particularly in the health and employment policy sectors.

Scholars within the public administration discipline have long underlined the need for more quantitative and rigorous comparative research, going beyond single-country and single-organization 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 to create 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 (New Public Management, 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

¹ This introduction is based on Hammerschmid, Görnitz, Oprisor and Stimac (2013), and appears in the same form in all WP3 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

look at the policy fields employment and health. The survey aims to explore public sector executives' perceptions, experiences and opinions with regards to their work context and administrative reforms, but also on 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 (I) General information; (II) Management and Work Practice of Your Organization; (III) Public Sector Reform and the Fiscal Crisis; (IV) 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 universities from other European countries were included as strategic partners to replicate the survey in these countries.⁴

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 on a maximum of 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 organizational 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 Læg Reid 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 organization. As these individuals are relatively disconnected from processes at lower levels in the organizations, and also due to issues of desirability, such an approach is bound to provide a biased image of the respective organization(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 and especially in the case of employment and health. 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 audit courts were

⁴ 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

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 centers).

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, organization 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 organizations 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 standardized 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 a thorough data cleaning and harmonization 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.⁵

The survey 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 personalized 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. In the beginning of November 2012, all surveys were closed, and all datasets were cleaned, checked and harmonized 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% (for details see **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**). 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.

The current country report summarizes the findings for **Estonia** 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. A more systematic comparative report based on these country reports will follow in summer 2013.

⁵ The details of the survey design and implementation process can be found in the survey Research Report (see Hammerschmid, Oprisor, Stimac, 2013).

Table 1. Number of invitations and response rates of the COCOPS survey (by end of December 2012)

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
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
Total	20307	4814	23.71

*The invitations sent represent the final number of invitations that has reached respondents, after the exclusion of any failure deliveries, wrong addresses etc.

2. Context and Status Quo of Public Administration Reform in Estonia

Estonia is a small country with an area of 45,227 km² and a population of 1.29 million. Estonia is a parliamentary democracy (unicameral parliament), where the executive power of the state – the Government – is accountable to the *Riigikogu* (Parliament). The Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, represents the political leadership of the country making decisions on behalf of the whole executive power. The Prime Minister is appointed and the Cabinet is withdrawn by the *Riigikogu*. The President of Estonia has mostly symbolic (and very limited executive) tasks. Estonia has a multi-party system and since regaining independence in 1991, both majority and minority governments have been in power, typically with 2-4 political parties in the governing coalition. The Prime Minister nominates the ministers, appointed later by the President. A typical feature of the Estonian administrative system is its reliance on ministerial responsibility resulting in a pillarized public administration (Sarapuu 2010). Estonia is a unitary state with one-tier local government and is divided into 15 counties and into 226 local government units (towns and municipalities).

Since regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 Estonia has pursued a radical reform strategy for building up a democratic state as the state structures inherited from the soviet time were neither adequate nor appropriate for democratic governance. From the early 1990s rapid and fundamental reforms in legal, political, social and economic orders have been carried out to overcome the legacy of the previous system. From the very beginning, the reforms have had a strong market-oriented focus, as the underlying theme for the neo-liberal governments in power has been to decrease the role of the state. For example, during the 1990s large-scale privatization was carried out leading to selling off strategic enterprises (e.g. the railway) and crucial service provision (e.g. emergency medical aid). It is important to note that the early transition coincided with the NPM fashion in the west which contributed to the popularity of several NPM-related management tools. (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008)

In general it is possible to distinguish between three main phases of public sector reforms in Estonia – the initial transformation (1990-1996), EU accession period (1996-2004) and post EU accession period (from 2004).

The early transition (1990-1996). The first period falls into the first half of the 1990s, when broad-based structural and administrative reforms were carried out. The priority was to put in place democratic decision-making processes via establishing proper legislative and institutional framework (e.g. central bank, diplomatic service, border guard) basically from the scratch. In the first years of transition the regulative change and institutional reform went often hand-in-hand (Sarapuu 2012, 813). Another important goal set forth by the government in this period was to optimize the functions of the public sector through privatization, regulation and abolishment of monopolies in order to find a balance between the public and private sector. Also the division of functions between local and central government by enhancing the autonomy and financial independence of the local governments was on the agenda. Lastly, introducing a modern legal and administrative framework for the civil service was among the major reforms in the first period. (Sarapuu 2012; Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008, 97)

Accession to the EU (1996 -2004). The late nineties witnessed the start of the second stream of reforms characterized by reform plans that were more detailed and elaborated, also the issue of local government autonomy remained strongly on the agenda. In the second period more attention was paid to the quality and accessibility of public services (e.g. introducing standards for public services, engaging citizens and interest groups in decision-making processes), furthermore the issues of public sector transparency, accountability and control gained more importance (e.g. regulating the politicization and fighting against corruption). In addition, cutting costs of the administrative system rose on the agenda and hence the productivity of functions, the quality and size of public service, freezing administrative costs etc. appeared to the forefront. (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008, 97) During this period the reform initiatives were impelled and strongly shaped by the EU “conditionality” and fulfilling the accession criteria set by the European Commission to prove that Estonia is able to apply the *acquis communautaire* (see also Sarapuu 2012). In terms of EU influence also the preparation of the National Development Plan for obtaining and using the EU structural funds influenced the country’s general strategic planning and coordination culture (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008).

During this period the Estonian Government devised two complex strategies for administrative reform (in 1999 and in 2001). The first plan focused on creating an efficient, citizen-oriented civil service, but was dismissed after the new government ceased the power. The second reform program emphasized five key areas in need of change (developing local government and regional administration; optimizing the division of functions and co-operation of public institutions; strengthening financial management, internal control and internal audit; developing citizen-oriented public administration and developing civil service). A central theme in numerous reform plans has been the development of an information society and e-government. (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008, 103-104) All in all, despite of the many PA reform announcements little coordinated results occurred due to the lack of central steering (Drechsler 2004).

Attempts to apply different NPM tools are common in the Estonian public sector. For example contracting out services, using performance-based tools and service standards, putting to use public-private-partnerships etc. have been influenced by the NPM ideology. As a common characteristic of the reforms has been their ad hoc basis and the lack of central guidance, these initiatives have remained piecemeal and have led to heterogeneity of solutions in individual organizations. Actually, the most tangible ideas for reforms have been developed by individual public organizations. (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008)

Post EU accession (from 2004). Starting from 2002 the coordination of different reform activities have been delegated down to several individual ministries and the Government Office. Rivalry and lack of consensus at the political level has led to constant changes in the public management reform agenda and also to inconsistency in the strategies chosen to pursue public administration reform. (Tönnisson and Randma-Liiv 2008, 101) Due to frequent changes of government and low administrative capacity, similarly to the previous phase the implementation and the changes have been neither thorough nor consistent, but often put in place at organizational level without considerable effect on the public administration as a whole. (Ibid, 105-6)

The Civil Service reform is one exception in this realm, as it has recently brought about large and fundamental changes horizontally (reflecting NPM values) such as homogenizing public and private sector working conditions, pension systems and criteria for laying off personnel. An important part of the PA reforms in Estonia has long been and still is the organizational restructuring of ministries and in particular the government agencies. The latter is illustrated by the fact that in the period from 2008 to 2011, in the areas of government of 7 out of 11 ministries the mergers of inspectorates and boards took place (Estonian Ministry of Finance 2009; 2010; 2011). As a result more than twenty governmental organizations were abolished and seven new multifunctional agencies were established. These were complex reorganizations aimed at integrating the functions of the organizations. It is important to notice that the reforms that have taken place can be characterized as de-agencification and consolidation of the structure. This means that they have been different from the classical NPM-type structural reforms breaking down inflexible and inert bureaucracies into smaller, task-specific performance-based units with clear goals and accountability mechanisms. (Sarapuu 2012)

The current phase of public management reforms can be described as continuous “fine-tuning” of the existing system. Estonia has not yet experienced any systematic large scale public management reforms. Instead, ad hoc reforms with decentralized approach mainly aimed at bigger cost-efficiency remain individual aspirations for changing management patterns in single public sector institutions.

3. Data and Method

3.1 Sampling and Access Strategy and Survey Implementation

The Estonian COCOPS survey was conducted by a team of four researchers at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance at Tallinn University of Technology. The Estonian sample followed the survey's general sampling principles and population definition. According to the sampling strategy the survey invitations were sent out to the first three levels of public sector executives in all eleven Estonian ministries. Where applicable (depending on the organizational setup and structure), in ministries the survey invitations were also sent to the fourth administrative level. In addition, the Government Office was included as it is engaged in exercising central administrative tasks and policy coordination and is directly subordinated to the Prime Minister.

Agencies that are directly subordinated to ministries play an important role in the Estonian administrative system. The previous is most explicitly characterized by the fact that agencies employ the majority of all public sector employees and are responsible for spending the majority of the state budget (Sarapuu 2011). The survey invitations were sent out to the first two levels of agency executives. In addition, the heads and members of boards and heads of divisions/units of five implementation agencies of the European Union Structural Funds were addressed. Though these agencies are bodies of private law, they were included in the sample, because these implementation agencies have very recent and substantive experience of administrative reforms concerning the establishment and restructuring of agencies.

For the employment sector, the departmental heads responsible for employment policy in the Ministry of Social Affairs were included in the survey from the ministerial level. The survey invitations were also sent to the top executive level and the heads of the four regional inspectorates at the Labour Inspectorate which is a government agency performing state supervision and policy implementation. At the service delivery level, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund was targeted - the survey invitations were sent to the members of management board, the heads of administrative departments as well as the heads of the 15 regional units.

The health sector in Estonia falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Social Affairs, which also governs the fields of employment and social policy. The survey invitations were sent to the heads of respective departments in the ministry. In addition, the main actors in the field of health policy - the Health Board, the State Agency of Medicines, the National Institute for Health Development, and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund were included in the sample. All the referred agencies were targeted at the first two hierarchical levels and where applicable the survey invitations were sent to the heads of regional units. As an exception to the general sampling strategy, the members of management boards of the Tartu University Hospital and the North Estonian Medical Centre Foundation were included, as these hospitals (in the legal form of state foundations) are relevant actors in the health policy landscape by being the biggest hospitals and largest providers of medical care in Estonia.

With regards to access strategy, a highly personalized approach was undertaken by the Estonian COCOPS team. The survey invitations were distributed via personal emails (the invitations included a link to the online survey) to achieve high response rates. When looking back, no complications in accessing the target groups directly via email occurred.

The Estonian survey was kept very close to the core questionnaire, with only two optional questions added. To account for the country specific context, country specific titles were inserted to question 4 to avoid misunderstandings and question 1 was modified to fit the national administrative structure.

The email invitations for the Estonian survey were distributed to respondents in three stages. The invitations were sent out firstly on 30 May 2012 and secondly on 14 June 2012 with the deadline for answering on 22 June. An additional (third) round of invitations were distributed on 31 August when the survey invitation was sent to additional 14 persons (this group did not receive the email due to technical complications with the first round of invitations). Concerning the reminders, the first reminder was sent to the full sample on 19 June by email. Also, numerous rounds of phone calls to approach people in a more personal manner were made – firstly on 11 July and 30-31 August.

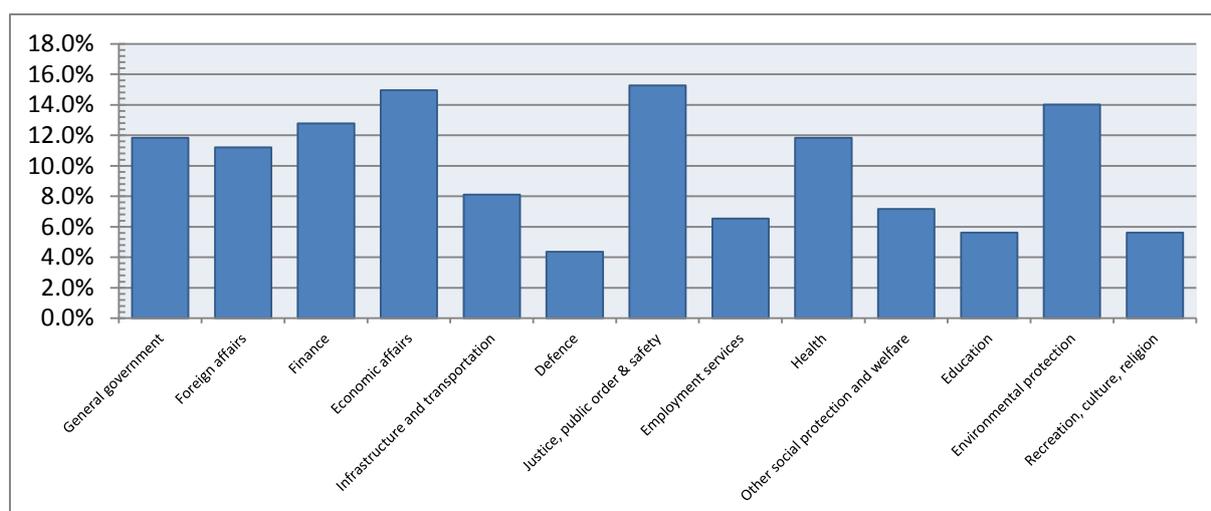
Overall, a total of 913 invitations were sent out: 809 to central government executives, 52 to health sector executives and 52 to executives in the employment sector. In total the survey received 329 partially or fully filled out answers, which leads to an overall response rate of 35%, as shown in Table 2 below. In the Estonian case the total response rate, as well as the response rates by individual policy sectors, are higher than the overall average response rates of the COCOPS survey. At central government and employment sector level and the overall total response rate are ca 10% higher (33% vs. 21%; 40% vs. 26% and 35% vs. 23% respectively in Estonia vs. the overall COCOPS sample). For the health sector the response rate in Estonia is more than two times higher than on the overall COCOPS sample (73% vs. 30%).

Table 2. Sample size and response rates

	Central Government	Health Sector	Employment Sector	Estonia Total	Total COCOPS Sample
Invitations sent	809	52	52	913	20307
Completed surveys	270	38	21	329	4814
Response rate (total COCOPS sample)	33% (21%)	73% (30%)	40% (26%)	35%	23%

Looking at the survey results and their distribution across policy fields (see Figure 1) it can be seen that a rather equal share of the answers are from the fields of justice, public order and safety (15.3%), economic affairs (15%), environmental protection (14%) and finance policy (12.8%) followed by health policy and central government (both 11.8%) and foreign affairs (11.2%). Less than one tenth of the respondents are from the field of other social protection and welfare (7.2%), infrastructure and transportation (8.1%). The lowest response rates are from the fields of defense (4.6%) and education, as well as from recreation, culture and religion (both 5.6%).

Figure 1. Policy field sample shares



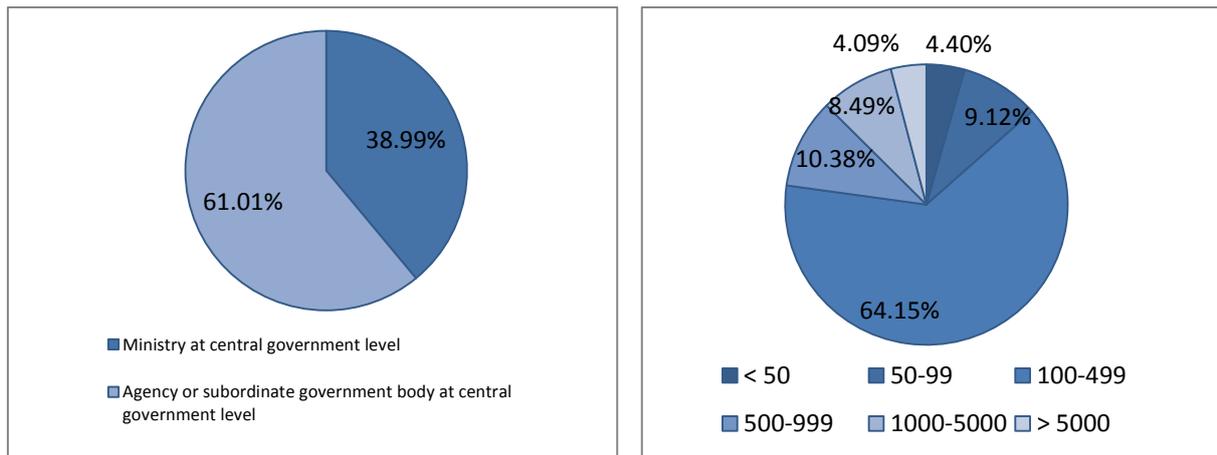
3.2 Organizational Context of Respondents

Before turning to the respondents' attitudes and opinions towards their role, work and the recent developments in public administration, the key contextual information about the organizational and personal background of the respondents is given.

Organization type (see Figure 2). The respondents are divided between two categories – ministries and agencies or other subordinate government bodies at central governmental level as these institutions, exercising a central role in policy-making and carrying out the executive power, make up the core of the public administration in Estonia. Based on the type of organization 39% of the respondents come from ministries at the central government level (vs. ca 35% for the overall COCOPS sample). More than half of the answers (61%) have been given at the level of agencies or subordinate government bodies, which is almost twice as high when compared to the overall COCOPS sample (ca 32%).

Organization size (see Figure 2). The biggest share of the respondents (77.7%) work in organizations with up to 500 employees, thereby strongly exceeding the overall average of COCOPS sample (50.9%). This is a particularity of Estonia as a small state, where only a handful of very big organizations exist. For example the average size of a ministry in terms of number of employees is ca 220, with only five out of 11 ministries employing more than 200 employees. Similarly, most of the government agencies employ less than 300 people. (Estonian Ministry of Finance 2012) Another 19% of the respondents work in larger organizations of 500-5000 employees (vs. 32% in the overall COCOPS sample). At the same time only 4% of the respondents are from organizations with more than 5000 employees (vs. 16.9% in the overall COCOPS sample).

Figure 2. Organization type and size shares

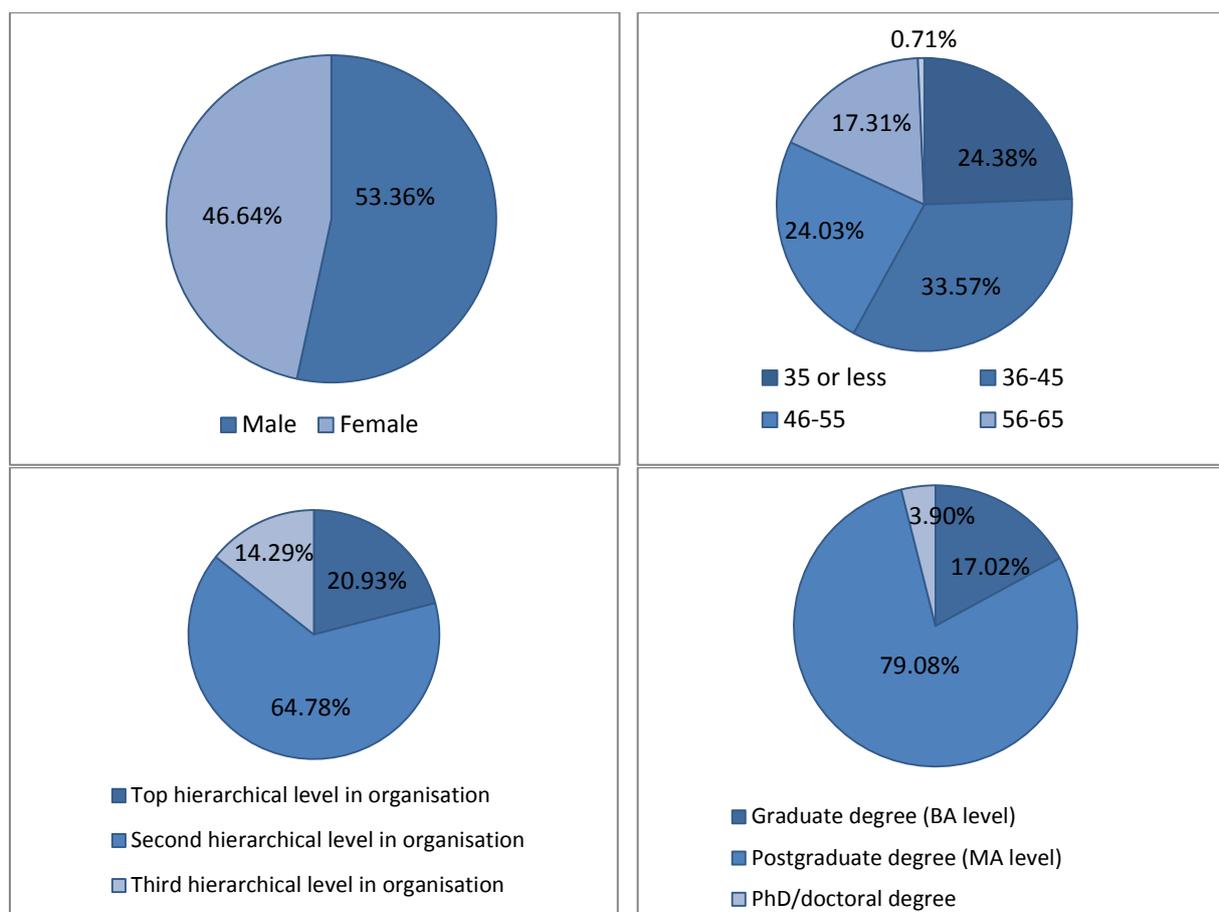


3.3 Socio-demographic Background of Respondents

Gender (see Figure 3). The distribution between men and women among the respondents is fairly equal as 53.4% of the respondents are men and 46.6% are women. It portrays a rather strong representation of women in public sector managerial positions when compared to the overall COCOPS sample, where slightly over a third of the respondents are women. This is in line with the general trend in The Estonian public service at the central governmental level (ministries and agencies excl. special services), where the proportion of female is even higher – in 2011 ca 70% of the public officials were female (Estonian Ministry of Finance 2012).

Age (see Figure 3). The majority of the respondents (ca 58%) fall in the age group of 36-55 years, with another 17% being aged between 56-65 years. A remarkably big share (24.4%) of the respondents are of an age 35 years or younger. This is a striking difference when compared to the 5.8% representation of this age group in the overall COCOPS sample. The latter is probably a reflection of a relatively young public service population in Estonia in general. The young executive population mirrors the transitional legacy, because a vast share of the civil servants (with communist background) was replaced with young officials after regaining independence. In addition, the open position-based civil service system requires no tenure to enter the public service at managerial level.

Figure 3. Socio-demographic shares (f.l.t.r.) Gender, Age, Hierarchy in organization, Educational background



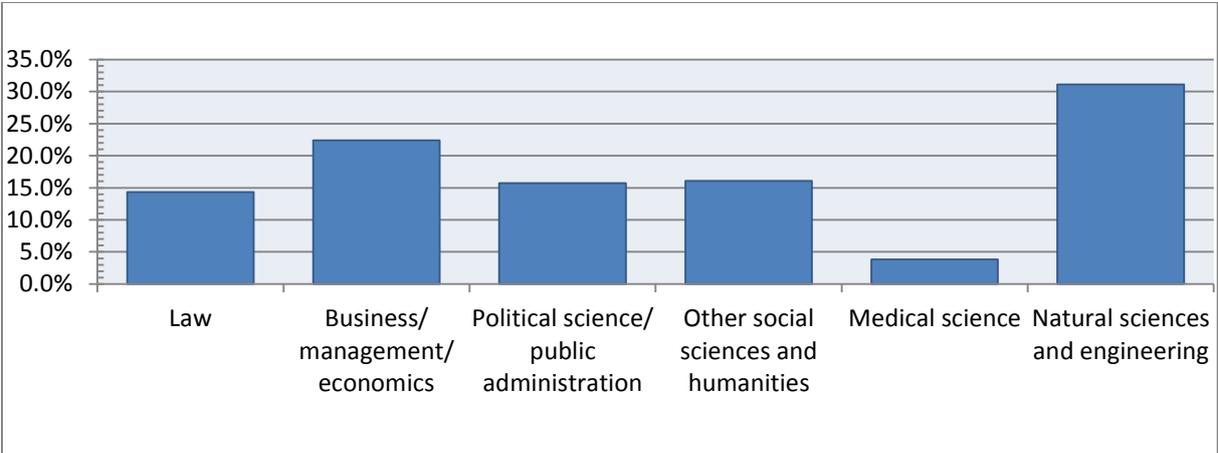
Hierarchical level (see Figure 3). With regards to their position in the hierarchy most respondents (64.7%) are executives at the second hierarchical level of the organization (Head of Department, Head of Unit, Head of Division), which exceeds the overall COCOPS sample (40%). 20.9% of the respondents are at the top hierarchical level in organization (Secretary General, State Secretary, Director General, Deputy Director General), being roughly comparable to the overall COCOPS sample (24%). The remaining 14.2% represent the third hierarchical level in organization (vs. 35% in the overall COCOPS sample).

Education (see Figure 3). An overwhelming share of all the respondents (79.1%) has a postgraduate degree at Master level, which is higher than the COCOPS overall sample (69%). On the other hand the share of the respondents with a doctoral degree (3.9%) is below the overall COCOPS sample (16%). All in all, the share of the respondents with a post-graduate degree is rather equal when compared to the COCOPS sample. Similarly to the overall COCOPS sample (16%), 17% of the respondents have a graduate degree at Bachelor level.

Disciplinary field of education (see Figure 4). The highest proportion of the respondents (31%) come from the field of natural sciences and engineering, followed by the representatives from the field of business, management and economics (22.4%), other social sciences and humanities (16.1%), political science and public administration (15.7%), law (14.3%) and medical science (3.8%). These patterns are rather similar to the overall COCOPS sample with the exception of smaller representation

of civil servants with a background in law in case of Estonia (COCOPS average 22.7%) and the much bigger representation of executives coming from the field of natural sciences and engineering.

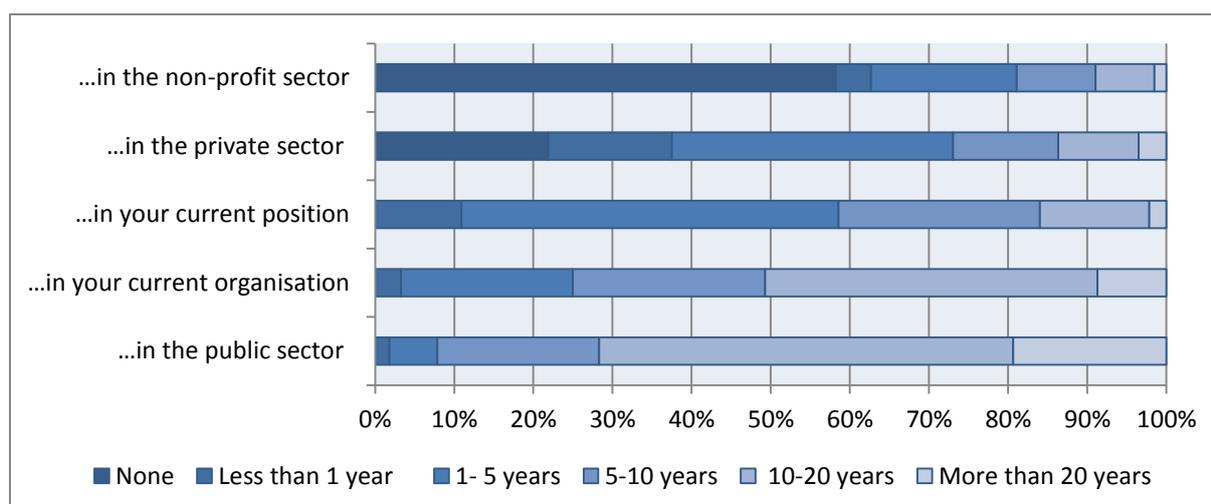
Figure 4. Educational fields (respondents could check more than one field)



Tenure (see Figure 5). More than half of the respondents (52%) have worked in the public sector for 10-20 years. 19% of the respondents have worked in public sector more than twenty years, which compared to the overall COCOPS sample (58%) is considerably low. This is explained firstly by the short history of The Estonian public service (re)established only in 1996 and in the fact that in the preceding years a big share of the former officials were dismissed. In addition this trend refers also to the open civil service system of the Estonian public administration. Slightly more than half of the respondents (51%) have been working in the current organization for more than 10 years, whereas a fourth of the respondents have been loyal to the same organization for less than five years. 58.8% of the respondents have worked on the current position less than five years whereas only 16% has kept the same position for more than 10 years. The latter points to rather high workforce mobility both within and beyond the public service in Estonia, that is confirmed also by the fact that at the central government level the workforce mobility in 2011 was 12% (Estonian Ministry of Finance 2012). This might result from the fact that public service is predominantly perceived as any other employer in Estonia.

A relatively high share of Estonian public sector executives has had at least some private sector experience - 36% of the respondents have worked in private sector from one to five years. At the same time, 22% of the respondents have no previous private sector experience at all. Previous experience in the non-profit sector is less common, with 58% of the respondents declaring no experience in the non-profit sector, which is similar to the overall COCOPS sample (56%). Working experience both in private and non-profit sectors has as a rule remained rather short - more than 50% of the respondents declared less than five years of experience in both cases.

Figure 5. Tenure of respondents



4. Values and Attitudes of Public Sector Executives

In the following section data is provided on how the Estonian public sector executives perceive their identity and role, how they explain their motivation, social values and preferences⁶.

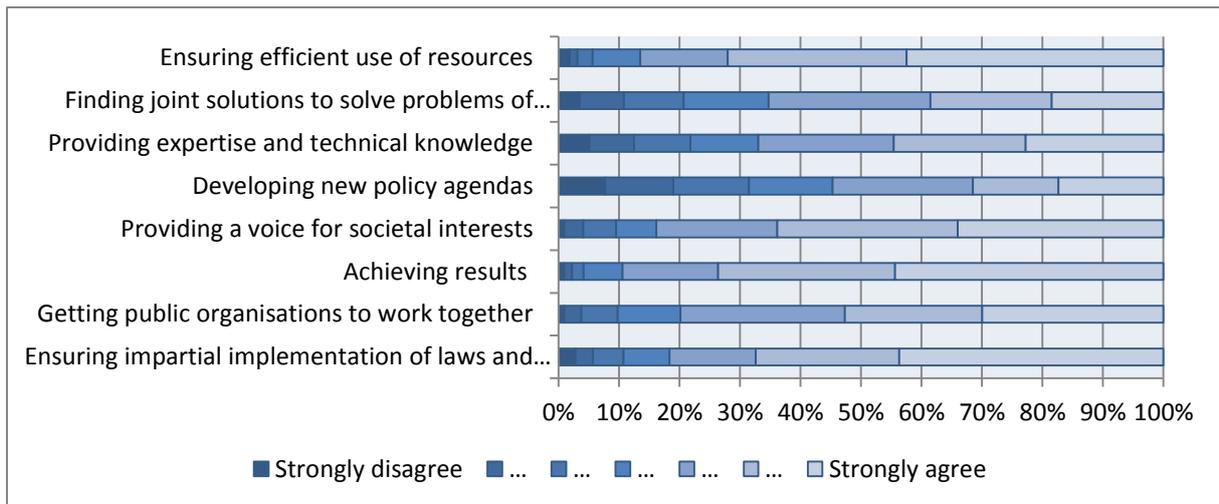
Identity and role perception as executive (see Figure 6)

When expressing their self-perception as public sector executives a clear majority of the respondents claim achieving results (73.6%), ensuring efficient use of resources (72%), ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules (67.4%) and providing a voice for societal interests (63.8%) to be central in their role. Also getting public organizations to work together (52.7%), providing expertise and technical knowledge (44.6%) is acknowledged as an important part of their role. To a smaller extent public executives in Estonia agree that finding joint solutions to solve problems of public concern (38.5%) and developing new policy agendas (31.5%) is essential in terms of their everyday work. The answers given speak for a dominance of managerial self-understanding (in terms of achieving results and ensuring efficient use of resources). At the same time the top level civil servants also emphasize roles in line with a Weberian bureaucrat (e.g. ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules and providing expertise and technical knowledge).

Interestingly the answers from the Estonian public sector executives are in line with some of the results from the overall COCOPS sample, but differ from the other. We find higher agreement in the overall COCOPS sample for finding joint solutions to public concerns as an important role of an executive (63.2% agreement vs. 38.5%), similarly in the overall sample 71% of the respondents see their role as providing expertise and technical knowledge, whereas only 44.6% agree with this in Estonia. Also 63.8% of the respondents among the Estonian executives claim that providing a voice for societal interest is an important part of their work, whereas only 29.6% of the executives share this opinion according to the overall COCOPS sample.

⁶ From this chapter on the results given on 7 digit scales are interpreted as follows – answers marked 1-3 on 7 digit scale are summarized and 5-7 are summarized and interpreted as the either end value of the scale.

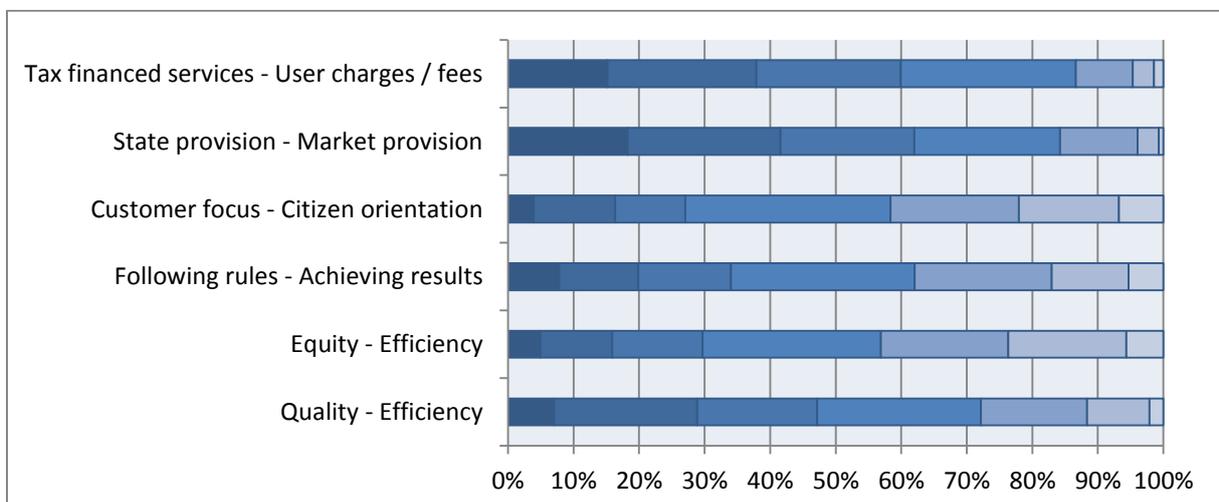
Figure 6. Identity and self-understanding (Q: I mainly understand my role as public executive as)



Value preferences for public sector priorities (see Figure 7). The public sector officials were also asked to express their general preferences with regards to public sector priorities set as polarized values. With regard to values there is a preference in Estonia for traditional civil service values such as state provision (41.6%) vs. market provision (3.9%) and tax financed services (37.9%) vs. user charges and fees (4.7%). With regards to traditional citizen focus (22.1%) vs. a more managerial customer focus (16.4%) and following the rules and achieving the results (19.9% vs. 17%) outcomes are more mixed as a rather similar share of the respondents claims both of the (conflicting) values to be relevant. According to the executives quality is seen more important than efficiency (28.9% vs. 11.6%) but efficiency weighs up equity (23.7% vs. 15.9%). As can be seen, the results speak for a mixture of NPM and Weberian values as there is no clear pattern or consistency of the priorities. It could be stated that in Estonia the trade-off between these conflicting priorities is not always fully acknowledged.

When compared to the overall COCOPS sample the results are more or less in line, but in terms of the balance between equity and efficiency the preferences are contrary (agreement on efficiency 23.7% vs. on equity 15.9% in the Estonian sample and 14.6% vs. 30.6% respectively in the COCOPS sample).

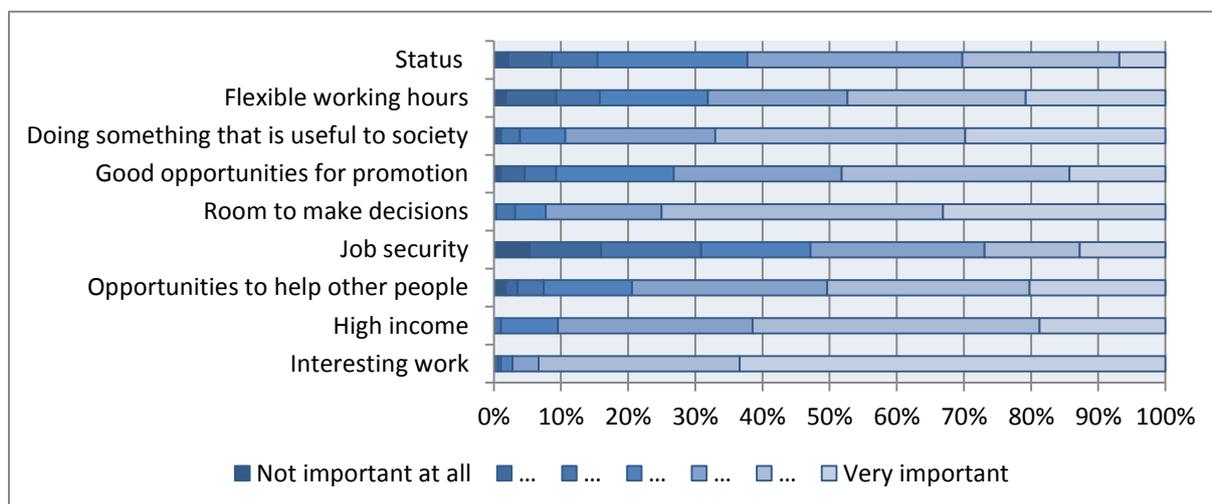
Figure 7. Priorities as public servants (Q: Public services often need to balance different priorities. Where would you place your own position?)



Motivation (see Figure 8). As follows light is shed on the motivational aspects of public sector executives. The overwhelming source of motivation is seen in an interesting work (agreement of 93.3% vs. disagreement of 0.7%) and room to make decisions (75% vs. 0.4%). Also doing something that is useful to society (67% vs. 1.1%) and earning high income (61.5% vs. 0%) are considered crucial motivational factors, followed by opportunities to help other people (50.4% vs. 3.5%), good opportunities for promotion (48.2% vs. 7.4%) and flexible working hours (47.3% vs. 9.3%). The lowest motivation is seen in status (30% vs. 8.6%) and job security (27% vs. 16%). The previous shows that intrinsic motivation factors are prevailing among the Estonian public sector executives followed by a mix of extrinsic and altruistic factors.

When compared to the overall COCOPS sample some differences worth noting appear. Namely, high income is considered an important motivational factor by a remarkably bigger share of the Estonian public sector executives (61.5% vs. 37.6% in the overall sample) and job security is seen as a less important source of motivation (27% vs. 43.4% respectively). The latter can be explained by the relatively low job security in the Estonian public sector (the civil service act does not provide strong guarantees to the civil servants).

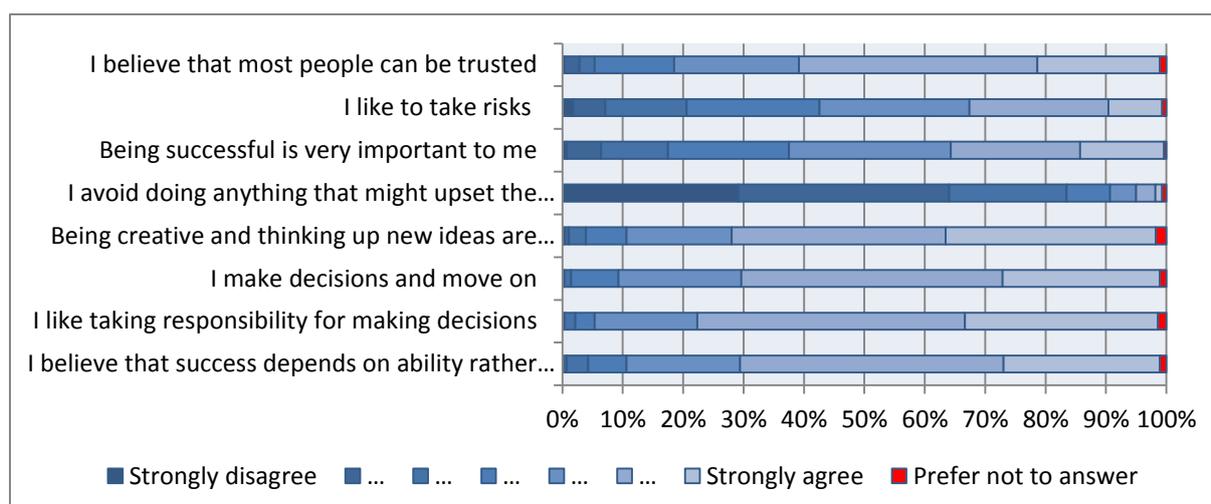
Figure 8. Motivation (Q: How important do you personally think it is in a job to have)



Social values (see Figure 9). With regard to social values the respondents confirm rather similar value preferences. An overwhelming share of the respondents agree that they like taking responsibility for making decisions (93.3%), they make decisions and move on (89.6%) and believe that success depends on ability rather than luck (88.3%). Also being creative and thinking up new ideas are considered important (87.6%), whereas concentrating on keeping the status quo is not seen as important (8.6%). Then again, only a bit more than half of the respondents claim they like to take risks (56.7%). Also being successful is considered as an important aspect to a rather big share of the respondents (62.1%). 80.4% of the top civil servants that answered are rather trustworthy by confirming that most people can be trusted.

When compared to the overall COCOPS sample, the Estonian public sector executives' value preferences are rather in line, but in Estonia the means are at least slightly higher in most categories. The biggest difference occurs in terms of trusting the other - the Estonians seem more trustworthy to each other (80.4% agreement vs. 65.2% agreement respectively).

Figure 9. Social value preferences (Q: Please indicate how far you agree or disagree with the following statements)



5. Characteristics of the Work Context in Public Administration

The following chapter takes a look at how the Estonian public executives perceive their work context and their position in terms of goals, management autonomy, interaction frequency inside and outside their organization, related quality of coordination and degree of politicization.

Goals (see Figure 10). Based on the responses, 84.6% of the top civil servants seem to agree that public sector goals are clearly stated with only 7.9% rather disagreeing. The executives are also optimistic towards communicating the goals to the staff, with 80.1% agreeing that goals are communicated to all and only 10.8% being skeptical in this realm. Though to a lesser extent, there is also an agreement on the existence on high number of goals (68.8% agree vs. 14.6% disagree). Regarding the traceability and measurability of the tasks, the opinion of the top executives seems to clash as 41% rather disagree and 36% rather agree that this can be done easily. These results are generally in line with the overall COCOPS sample.

Based on the proportion of the respondents either agreeing or disagreeing, the executives at the agency level agree relatively more that it is easy to observe and measure activities than the executives at the ministerial level. Then again, the ministerial level executives seem to agree more that the goals are communicated to all the staff. Top officials at the agency lever claim more strongly to measure outputs and outcomes than executives at the ministerial level.

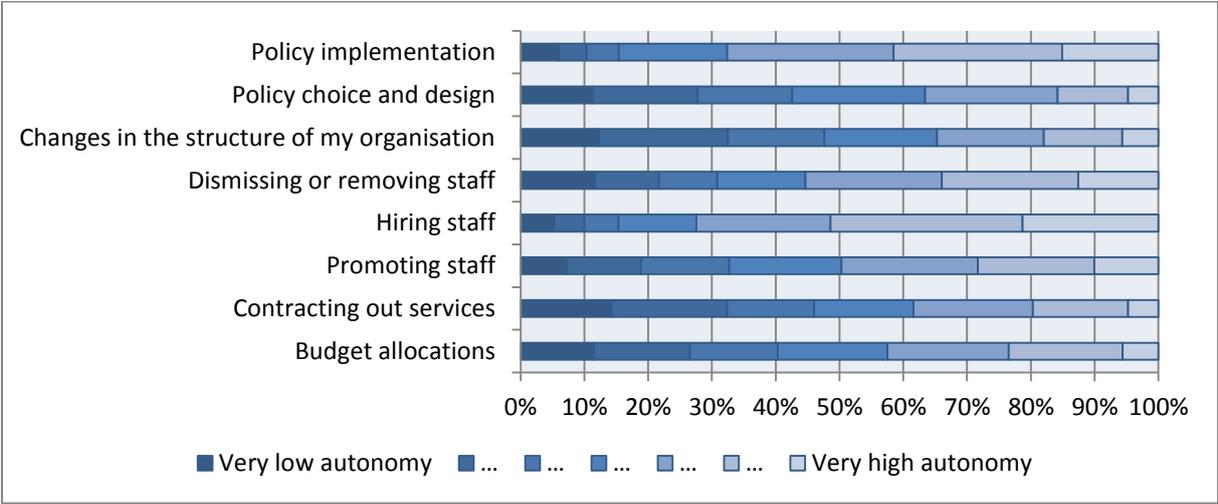
Figure 10. Goal ambiguity (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization?)



Management autonomy (see Figure 11) refers to the degree of independence but also to accountability when managing the organization. The results indicate that the respondents perceive a remarkable autonomy in personnel decisions, especially in terms of hiring staff (72.4%) and to a lesser extent in dismissing (55.3%) and promoting (49.7%) staff. Autonomy perceived in policy implementation is rather high (67.6%), whereas autonomy in deciding upon and designing policies is estimated to be remarkably lower (36.6%). A relatively lower managerial autonomy is perceived with regards to the changes in the structure of organization (47.6%) and in contracting out the services (46%). We see mixed results in terms of making budget allocations, as the autonomy is considered relatively high by 42.5% of the respondents, whereas 40.3% perceive it as rather low.

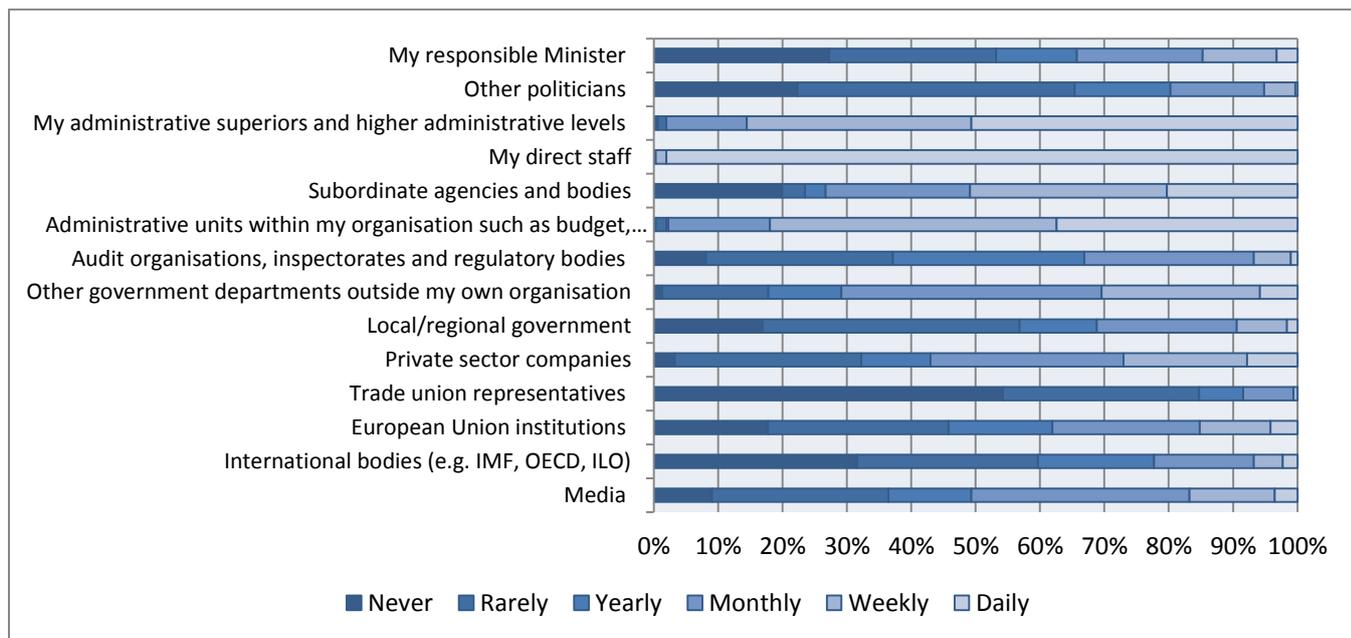
Based on the proportion of the respondents agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, executives working in ministries (as opposed to agencies) perceive having more autonomy in terms of budget allocations, policy choice and design, but less autonomy concerning hiring, promoting and dismissing staff.

Figure 11. Degree of management autonomy (Q: In my position, I have the following degree of autonomy with regard to)



Interaction frequency (see Figure 12) is intended to measure the intensity of coordination of public sector executives. Based on the responses, the Estonian public sector executives interact most often, on a daily basis, with their direct staff (98.1%) and administrative superiors and higher administrative levels (50.6%). Also frequent interaction takes place with the other administrative units within their organizations, either on daily (37.4%) or weekly (44.5%) basis. Interaction with subordinate agencies and bodies and other government departments outside the own organization is also rather frequent (more than 70% interact with both actors at least monthly), whereas private sector companies and media are targeted to a lesser extent - monthly by 57% and 50.6% of the respondents respectively. According to the responses, among the outside policy actors a rather low (at least once a year) communication takes place with audit organizations, inspectorates and regulatory bodies (62.8%) and EU institutions (54.2%). When looking to interaction with other policy actors very modest communication materializing either never or very rarely takes place with politicians (65.4%), representatives from local and regional government (56.8%), trade union representatives (84.7%), representatives of international bodies (59.7%) and also with responsible Minister (53.2%). These results are in line with the general patterns in the Estonian public policy landscape characterized by weak unions, low inclusion of social partners and the overall weak organization of the civil society.

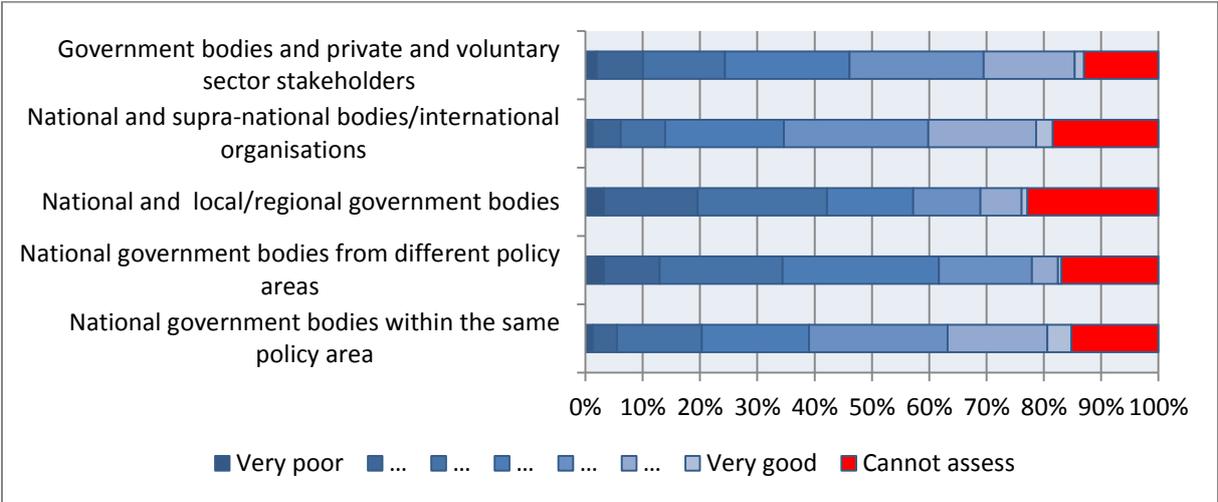
Figure 12. Interaction frequency (Q: Please indicate how frequently you typically interact with the following actors or bodies)



In the overall COCOPS sample public service executives similarly claim to interact most often with actors within their organization. An interesting difference is in how often the respondents interact with politicians: in Estonia 65.4% of the respondents interact with other politicians never or rarely compared to the interaction at least once a year (50.9%) in the overall COCOPS sample. The Estonian officials have somewhat more contact with the media, as 50.6% of the respondents claim to have at least monthly interaction (compared to 39.9% in the COCOPS sample) and with EU institutions - 38.1% of the respondents say they interact with the EU institutions at least monthly (compared to 23% in the COCOPS sample).

Quality of coordination (see Figure 13). To begin with, a relatively big share of the respondents (13%-22.9%) claimed they cannot assess the quality of coordination at some levels. This can result from many factors, but it is also referring to a low level or at least deficient communication. Among those who answered, the quality of collaboration was considered highest between national government bodies within the same policy area (46.9%), followed by national and supra-national bodies and international organizations (45.8%) and government bodies and private and voluntary sector stakeholders (40.9%). A substantially lower quality of collaboration was estimated between the national government bodies from different policy areas (21.4%) and between national and local/regional government bodies (19.9%). These results point to rather low quality of coordination in between Estonian public sector organizations.

Figure 13. Coordination quality (Q: How would you characterize collaboration in your own policy field between)



Based on the proportion of the respondents estimating the communication either as poor or good, executives working in ministries (as opposed to agencies) perceive a better coordination quality between national government bodies within the same policy area and also from different policy areas, whereas agencies claim to communicate more with national and local/regional government bodies.

When compared to other countries’ public sector executives’ assessment on coordination quality, there biggest difference occurs in estimating the collaboration with national and supra-national bodies and international organizations - 45.8% of the Estonians assess it as rather good compared to the 35.8% of COCOPS sample.

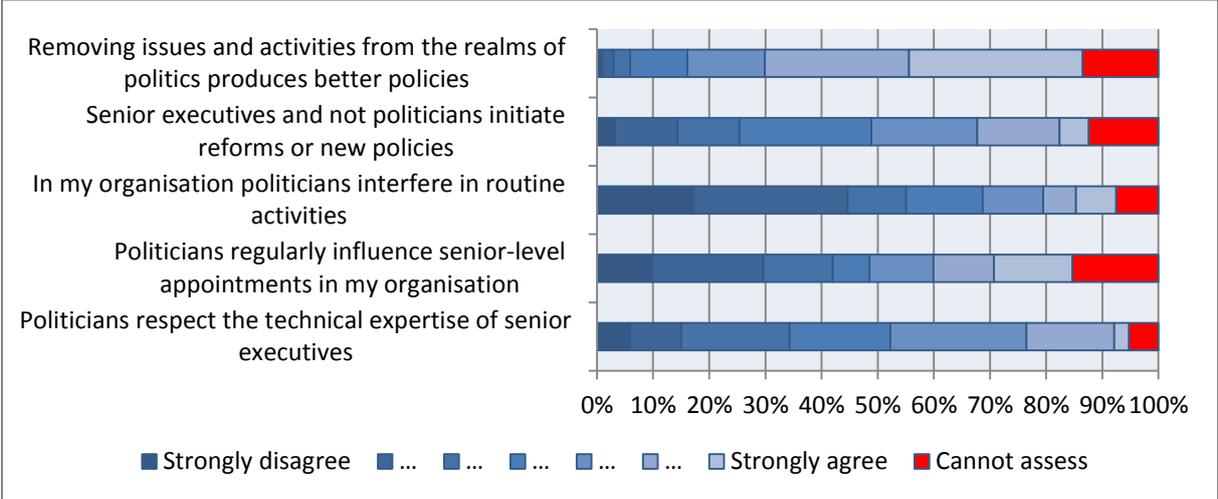
The degree of politicization (see Figure 14) most commonly refers to the proportion of the civil service participation in policy making and indicates to what extent the decisions are taken based on technical vs. political criteria. Interestingly, also here a noteworthy share of answers “cannot assess” occur (according to questions ranging from 5.5% to 18.1% of the respondents). With regards the answers given, an overwhelming share of the respondents (81.4%) rather believes that removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies. Only 25.7% of the respondents claim to feel in reality that in their organization politicians interfere in routine activities. Similarly, only 22.2% of the respondents rather agree that politicians (but not senior executives)

initiate reforms or new policies. Also a rather big proportion of the respondents disagree (49.6%) that politicians regularly influence senior-level appointments in their organization. Then again, less than half of the senior executives (44.8%) expressed that politicians respect their technical expertise, which of course does not speak for their real disengagement.

When looking at the ministry-agency level differences based on the proportion of the respondents agreeing or disagreeing with the statements, the understanding that politicians respect technical expertise of senior executives is shared more strongly among the top executives in ministries than in agencies. Top-level executives also perceive the politicization differently than the lower-level executives – they feel that their expertise is more respected by politicians.

The previous refers to rather low level of politicization in Estonia and hence is in line with the results of Meyer-Sahling (2011) who claims the Estonian civil service to be one of the least politicized among the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Still, in Estonia civil service is the main expertise and advisory resource for government. A high reliance on civil service expertise can be explained by two unique factors characteristic to Estonia. Firstly, as a new democracy, its political parties have not yet developed full-fledged expertise to steer the executive. Secondly, as a small country, its limited human and financial resources cannot afford developing “overlapping capacities” on political and administrative levels, which is why the executive is more likely than in the large states to have a monopoly of expertise. (Randma-Liiv 2002)

Figure 14. Degree of politicization (Q: What is your view on the following statements)



6. Relevance of NPM and post NPM Reforms

The following chapter provides information on public sector executives' perception of the implementation of NPM and post NPM reforms which are characterized by a stronger emphasis on coordination and networked forms of governance. The respondents have been asked to assess the type and character of reform trends in their policy field (6.1), their organization (6.2) and in their own work (6.3).

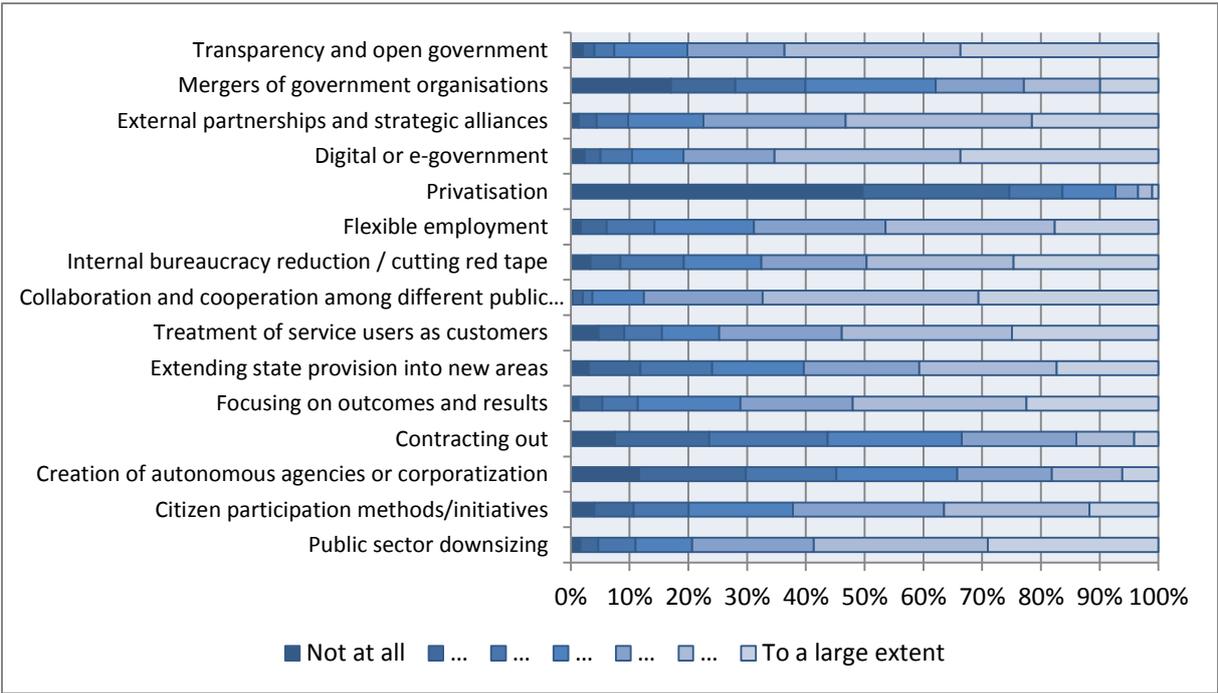
6.1 Policy field level

With regard to the **reform trends at the policy field level** (see Figure 15) 83.7% of the respondents estimate privatization to be not important in recent developments, 45.2% claim the same in terms of creation of autonomous agencies or corporatization and 43.7% in terms of contracting out. At the same time collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors (87.5%), digital or e-government (80.8%), transparency and open government (80.1%) and public sector downsizing (79.3%) are seen as the most important reform trends in one's own policy area. A relatively high prominence is also given to external partnerships and strategic alliances (77.4%), treatment of service users as customers (74.7%), focusing on outcomes and results (71.1%), flexible employment (68.8%) and cutting internal bureaucracy (67.6%). A bit less relevant, but still remarkable importance is given to citizen participation methods/initiatives (62.2%) and extending state provision into new areas (60.3%).

In terms of mergers of government organizations rather equal proportion of respondent share contradictory opinion (39.9% see it as a very important trend, whereas 37.9% consider it not important at all).

Based on the respondents estimations, executives working in agencies (as opposed to ministries) perceive reform trends such as focusing on outcomes and results, extending state provision into new areas and treatment of service users as customers to be more important.

Figure 15. Importance of reform trends (Q: How important are the following reform trends in your policy area?)



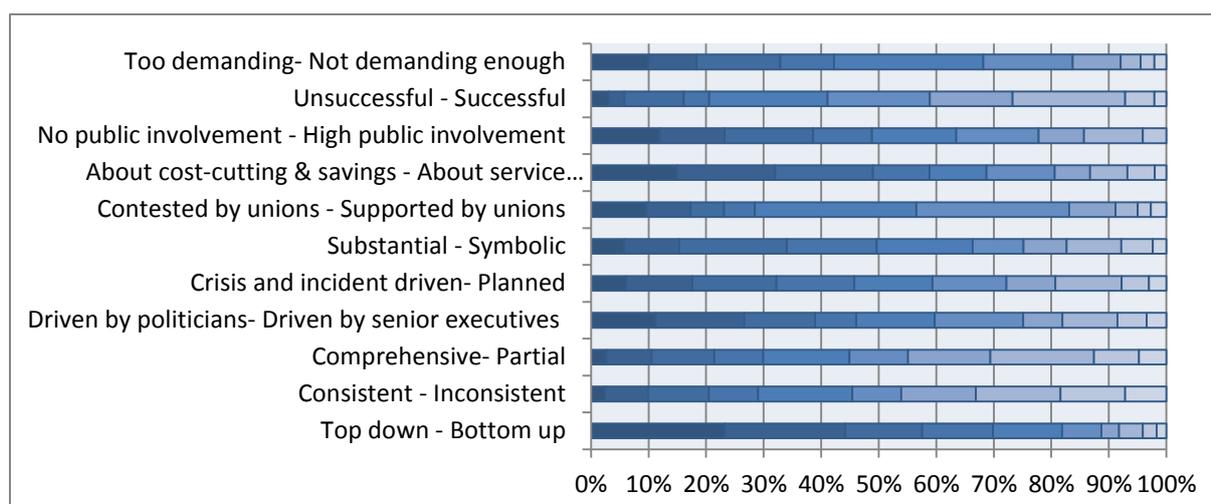
When looking at the perception on the success of the reforms carried out so far 34% of the respondents claim that reforms have been substantial, whereas 17.3% perceive the past reforms as symbolic. The remainder of the results do not show very clear patterns. Namely, 26.7% of the executives tend to assess reforms as successful and 16.1% perceive them as unsuccessful; similarly, 30.6% of the respondents see the implemented reforms as rather comprehensive, whereas 21.4% as partial;

With regard to the drivers of the public sector reforms, the prevalent belief is that they have been top-down (57.5%), driven rather by politicians than by senior executives (38.9% vs. 18.1% respectively) and rather contested by unions (23.1%) than supported by them (8.8%). The reforms are seen more as crisis and incident driven (32.2%) rather than planned (19.3%). Also, more executives are of an opinion that the reforms have been carried out with no planned public involvement (38.6%) rather than with high public involvement (14.3%).

The executives at the agency level seem to believe more in the cost-cutting character of the reforms and claim more strongly that there have been too many reforms (vs. not enough) when compared to executives at the ministry level.

All in all the results are more or less in line with the COCOPS overall sample, but some irregularities can be seen. Namely, only a small share of public sector executives in Estonia (8%) believes that the public sector reforms have been not demanding enough, whereas in the overall COCOPS sample twice as much respondents (16.5%) share this opinion. In the overall sample 42.5% of the respondents agree that reforms have been contested by the unions, whereas in Estonia this is claimed by 23.1% of the respondents only. This clearly reflects the weak position of unions in Estonian public policy landscape (low unionization and marginal role of the unions in the policy process).

Figure 16. Dynamics of public sector reform (Q: Public sector reforms in my policy area tend to be)



6.2 Organizational level

The results of the survey reveal that at the organizational level two **management instruments** (see Figure 17) are used systematically according to the executives of the Estonian public sector - appraisal interviews (85.3%) and business or strategic planning (81.2%). Though to a much lesser extent, but still considered relevant by more than half of the respondents codes of conduct (67.6%), benchmarking (63.1%), cost accounting systems (63.1%), customer surveys (55.8%), risk management (53.1%) and quality management systems (50.3%) are applied rather often. On the contrary 61.8% of the respondents claim that performance related pay is an instrument not used at all. Also internal steering by contract is seen as an unpopular measure by more than half of the executives (66.4%).

Concerning some management instruments, such as decentralization of staffing decisions and management by objectives the results are mixed, as in both cases more or less the same proportion either refute or confirm the use of the instruments (43.4% vs. 38.7% and 37.7% vs. 46.7% respectively). Also in terms of service points for customers the results are contradictory, as 38.9% of the executives state they are used very rarely, whereas 48.1% confirm using them to a large extent.

It is interesting to notice that with regards to many categories a rather notable share of the respondents claimed they cannot assess to what extent the instrument is used in their organizations. Nearly 20% of the top officials could not assess the intensity of relying on cost accounting systems, but from those who answered 63.1% confirmed it is a management instrument used to a rather large extent. In addition, the usage of internal steering by contract, service points for customers, decentralization of financial decisions and risk management could not be assessed by more than 9% of the respondents.

In general, the executives in the overall COCOPS sample claim using the different management instruments less often than their Estonian colleagues. The biggest differences can be seen in using cost accounting systems (63.1% vs. 44.3% in the overall COCOPS sample) and benchmarking (63.1% vs. 46.1% in the overall COCOPS sample). On the other hand, management by objectives is said to be

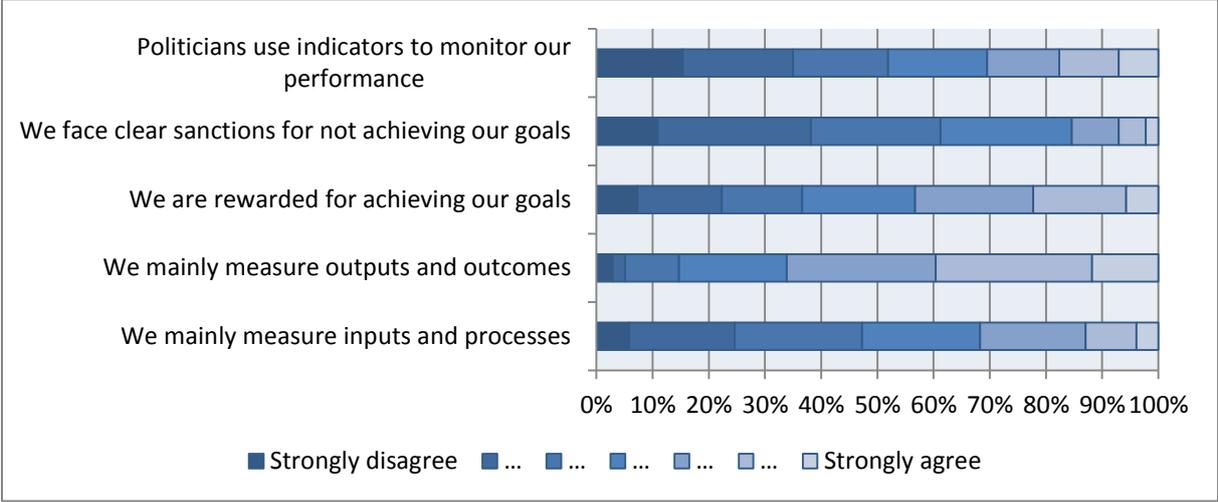
applied much more intensely (70.8%) by the overall COCOPS sample than by the Estonian executives (only 46.7% claim using it).

Figure 17. Relevance of different management instruments (Q: To what extent are the following instruments used in your organization?)



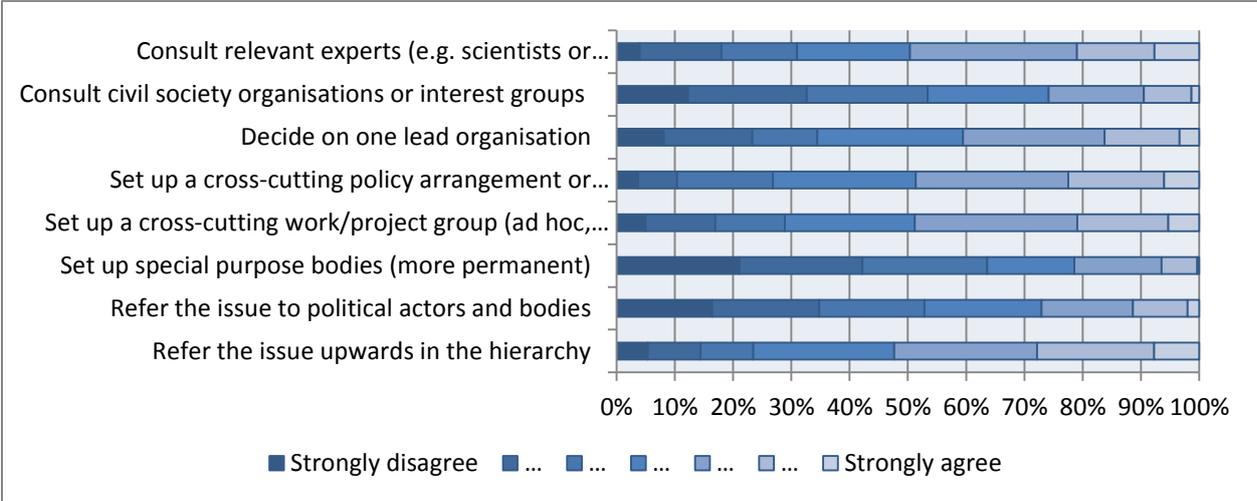
With regards to the **relevance of performance management** (see Figure 18) the perceptions of public sector top officials in Estonia are hard to describe, as many mixed results occur. Slightly more than half of the public sector executives (51.9%) believe that politicians use indicators to monitor their performance. A rather big share of the respondents assure measuring mainly outputs and outcomes (66.1%), at the same time only 47.2% claim not to measure mainly inputs and processes, whereas 31.7% confirm the contrary (mainly measuring inputs and processes). It can be seen that more than half of the respondents deny facing clear sanctions for not achieving their goals (66.2%) and less than half (43.3%) agree that they are rewarded for achieving their goals (at the same time 36.6% disagree).

Figure 18. Relevance of performance management (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization?)



Coordination solutions (see Figure 19) that are perceived as common at the central governmental level in Estonia are rather hierarchy-based. Namely, more than half of the respondents (63.6%) would not opt for setting up special purpose bodies, consulting civil society organizations or interest groups (53.4%) or set up a cross-cutting work group or policy arrangement (48.8% for both). On the other hand, referring the issue to political actors and bodies (52.8%) when coordination problems occur is also not popular. Instead, in response to coordination problems issues are claimed to be referred upwards in the hierarchy (52.3%), relevant experts (e.g. scientists or consultants) are consulted (49.7%) and a more temporary cross-cutting work/project groups are set up (48.8%). There seems to be an inconsistency among public executives whether deciding on one lead organization is useful to solve coordination problems or not (40.5% agree vs. 34.5% disagree with the statement).

Figure 19. Coordination solutions (Q: To resolve coordination problems when working with other organizations, we typically)



6.3 Individual level

When looking at the **use of performance indicators at the individual level** (see Figure 20), a relatively big share of the respondents confirm using numerous indicators. More than half claim they apply performance indicators rather extensively to monitor the performance of their colleagues (72.8%), to identify problems that need attention (71.9%), to assess whether they reach own targets (71.8%), to foster learning and improvement (65.5%) and to satisfy the requirements set by line manager (49%). In terms of external use of performance indicators more than half of the executives claim to apply indicators to manage the image of their organization (58.8%) and to communicate what their organization does to citizens and service users (50.2%). There are contradictory perceptions in terms of using the indicators to engage with external stakeholders (e.g. interest groups) - 40.2% assert they don't do it at all, whereas 41.2% claim to use it rather actively.

In general the use of performance indicators is less common by the executives at the ministerial level when compared to the executives at the agency level, especially in terms of communicating organizational activities to citizens and service users.

Figure 20. Use of performance indicators (Q: In my work I use performance indicators to)



7. Impact of the Fiscal Crisis on Public Administration

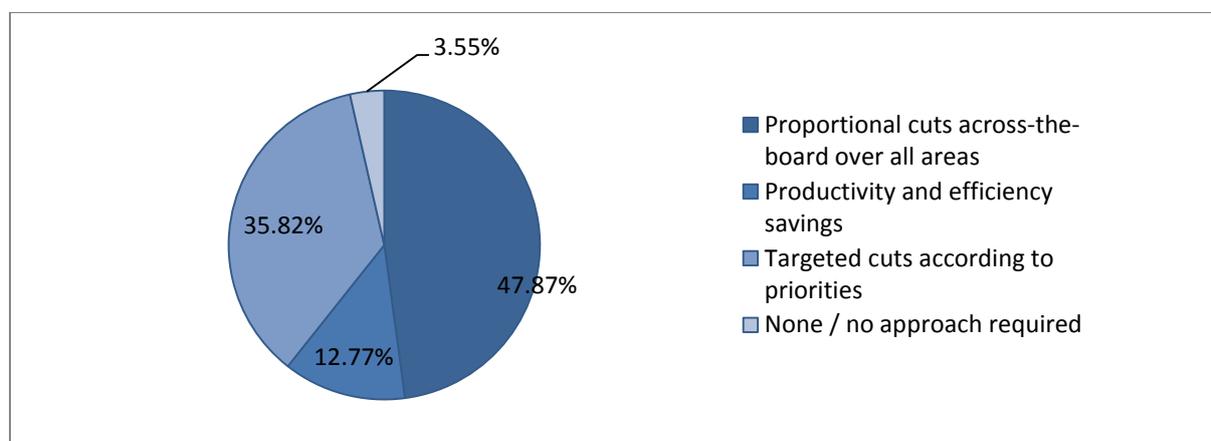
In the following chapter the perceptions and estimations of the public sector executives related to the impact of fiscal crisis on public administration are explored.

Main saving strategies (see Figure 21). Concerning the savings in specific policy areas nearly half of respondents (47.9%) declare that in response to the fiscal crisis proportional across-the-board cuts were applied. This is followed by targeted cuts based on set priorities (38.8%) and cuts based on productivity and efficiency savings (12.8%). It is interesting to see, that ca 3.6% of the respondents find that none of the proposed strategies have been applied.

There are differences in the perceptions of top vs. second and third hierarchical level executives in terms of the prevalence of cutbacks based on productivity and efficiency. When at the first hierarchical level 21% of the respondents believe that cutbacks were savings in productivity and efficiency, at the lower levels only 9.5% and 7.8% of the respondents respectively share this view.

When compared to the overall COCOPS sample the patterns of main saving strategies appear to be different for Estonia. According to the respondents the prevailing cuts at international level have been targeted (40.6%), followed by much smaller share of proportional cuts (30.5%) and bigger proportion of efficiency savings (18.7%) or no cuts at all (10.3%).

Figure 21. Overall saving strategy (Q: *In response to the fiscal crisis how would you describe the broader approach to realizing savings in your policy area?*)

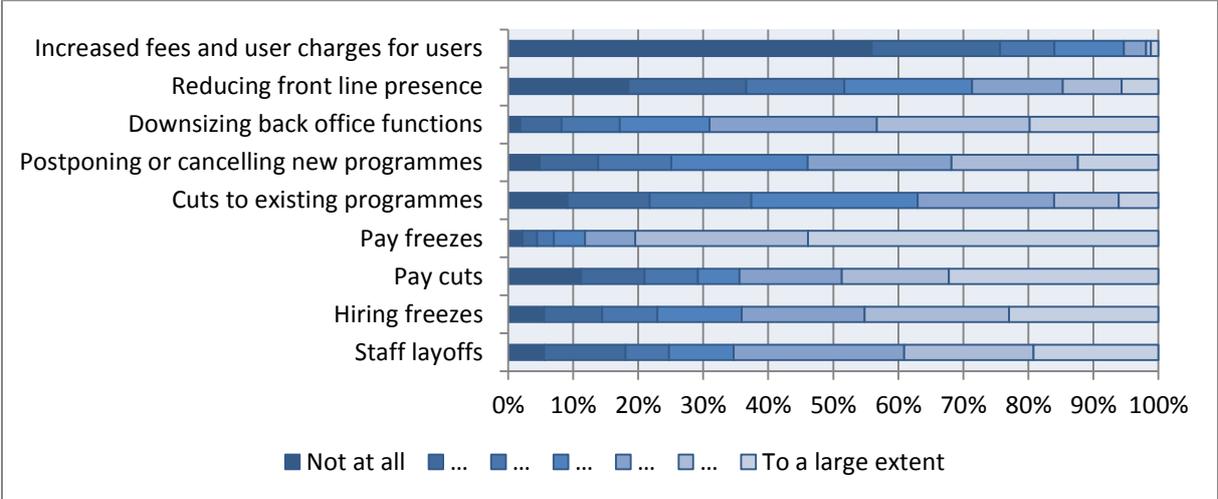


Cutback measures at organizational level (see Figure 22). According to the public sector executives the most prominent measures for cutting expenditure applied at the organizational level in Estonia were pay freezes (88.2%), downsizing back office functions (69%), staff layoffs (65.3%), pay cuts (64.4%) and hiring freezes (64.1%). Based on the answers given by the participants, to a lesser extent postponing or cancelling new programs (53.9%), cuts to existing programs (37%) and reducing front line presence (28.7%) was applied. The top civil servants express that during retrenchment increase in fees and user charges were applied only marginally (5.2%).

The previous responses show that a great share of the cutback measures in Estonia seem to have addressed personnel costs. This is in line with the landscape of Estonian general employment regulations (low unionization and weak central wage-setting) and civil service laws (and guarantees against salary cuts or layoffs). In the Estonian case, the civil service act does not provide strong

guarantees, hence it facilitates cuts in public sector salaries and laying off civil servants. Based on the responses from the overall COCOPS sample, Estonia stands out for the share of cutback measures targeted at the personnel costs through pay freezes, pay cuts and staff layoffs. Only hiring freeze has been applied to a comparable and even larger share (72%) in the COCOPS overall sample (vs. 64% in Estonia). Differences occur in terms of applying cuts to existing programs, as in the overall COCOPS sample 55.6% of the respondents claim these formed a large part of the cutbacks, whereas in Estonia the responsive stake is 37%. Lastly, according to the Estonian top officials only a marginal increase in fees and user charges was applied in response to crisis (5.2%), at the same time in the overall COCOPS sample the proportion was relatively higher (18.5%).

Figure 22. Cutback measures at organizational level (Q: In response to the fiscal crisis, to what extent has your organization applied the following cutback measures?)



8. Outcomes of Public Administration Performance

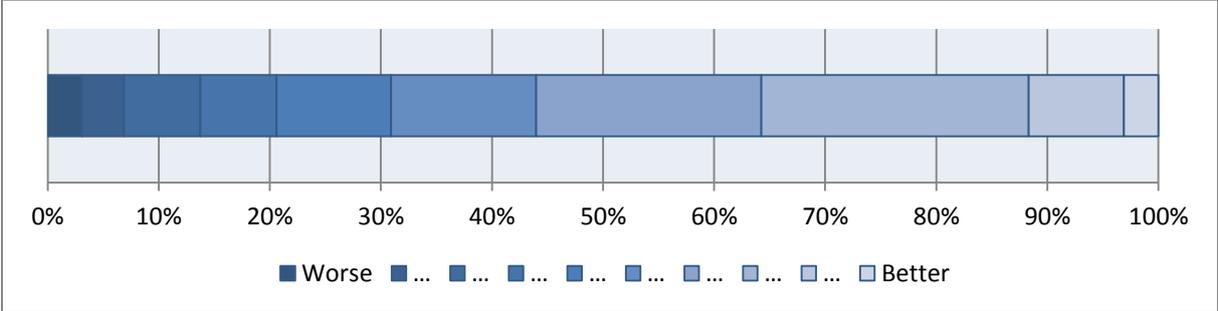
In the following chapter the public sector executives’ estimations about the impact of various managerial reforms at organizational level and broader public sector reform on a policy level (8.2) and individual level (8.3) are presented. Thereby this part of the report provides information for one of the main goals of the questionnaire at hand.

8.1 Overall assessment of PA reforms

What concerns an **overall assessment of public administration** (see Figure 23), a relatively big share of the respondents state that the way public administration runs in Estonia has clearly improved over the last five years (35.7% marked 8-10 on a 10 digit scale). Most respondents seem to believe that the situation has remained more or less the same (50.5% marked 4-7 on a 10 digit scale), whereas a considerable share of the respondents even observes a clear deterioration of public administration in Estonia over the last five years (13.7% marked 1-3 on a 10 digit scale).

Compared to the executives from the other European countries, Estonia shows a more positive assessment on overall improvement of public administration (35.7% vs. 21.9% in the overall COCOPS sample).

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?)



8.2 Development of PA in Policy Field

When looking at **developments in public administration** more specifically by addressing individual policy areas and different nuances of performance dimensions (as set forth in public management literature) (see Figure 24). The Estonian executives claim to see strong improvement in the managerial side of the public administration - service quality (68.7%), innovation (62%), cost and efficiency (59.4%) and external transparency and openness (50.2%) have improved rather well according to more than half of the respondents. Also a clear majority of the Estonian public sector executives perceive improvement in fair treatment of citizens (68.6%), equal access to services (62%) and citizen participation and involvement (45.6%) over the last five years, thereby assuring the dimension of equity to be increasingly important in public sector.

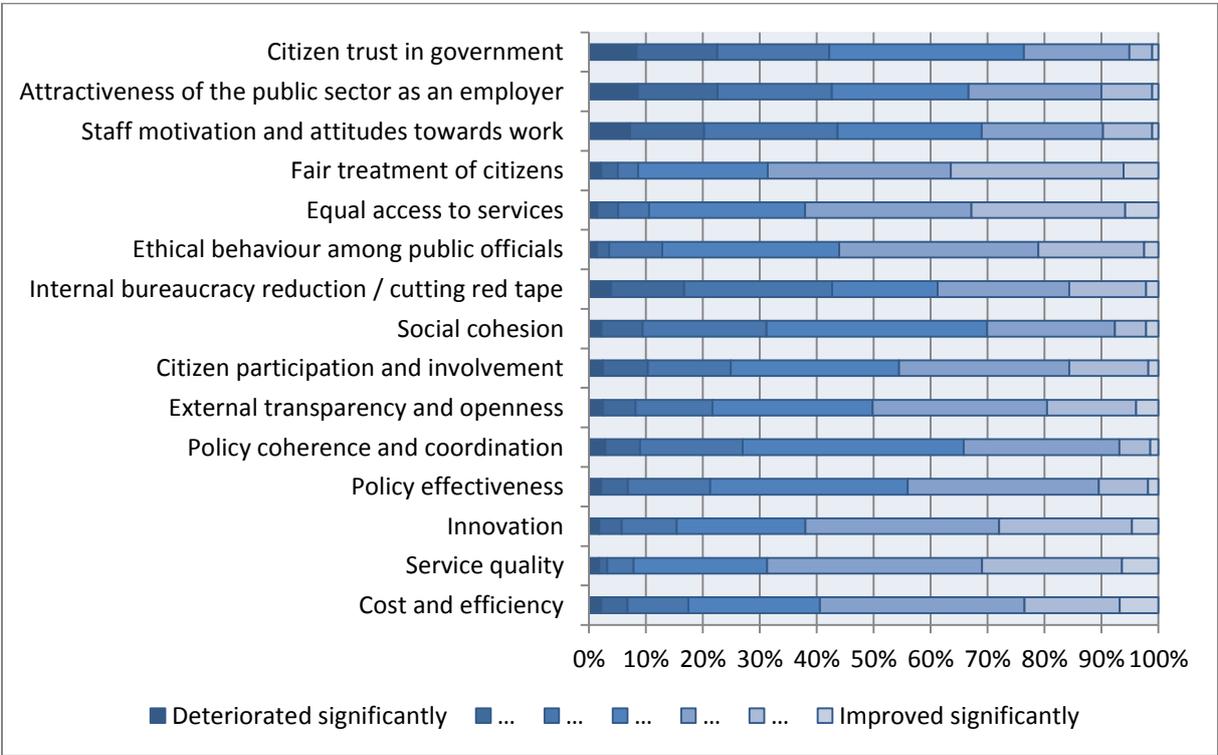
Public administration performance is seen to have increased in terms of policy effectiveness (44%) and rather deteriorated with regard to citizen trust in government (42.2%). Concerning the other policy-relevant categories such as policy coherence and coordination and social cohesion, the respondents have diverse perceptions as rather similar shares of improvement and deterioration have been observed (34.2% vs.27 and 30.1% vs. 31.2% respectively).

In terms of internal administrative factors only ethical behavior among public officials (56.1%) is seen to have improved, whereas bureaucracy reduction (cutting the red tape) has been perceived as deteriorating and improving concurrently. Staff motivation and attitudes towards work and the attractiveness of the public sector as an employer are seen to have deteriorated during the last five years (claimed by 43.7% and 42.7% of the respondents respectively).

Executives’ assessment on the developments in the different performance dimensions differ across organizations. For example at the ministerial level the executives perceive a higher degree of policy effectiveness and policy coherence and coordination. On the other hand at the agency level the executives perceive developments in equal access to services and fair treatment of citizens more positively than the executives at the ministerial level.

The results for the overall, cross-national sample are somewhat different. Fair treatment of the citizens, equal access to services and social cohesion are perceived to have improved more in Estonia than in the other European countries.

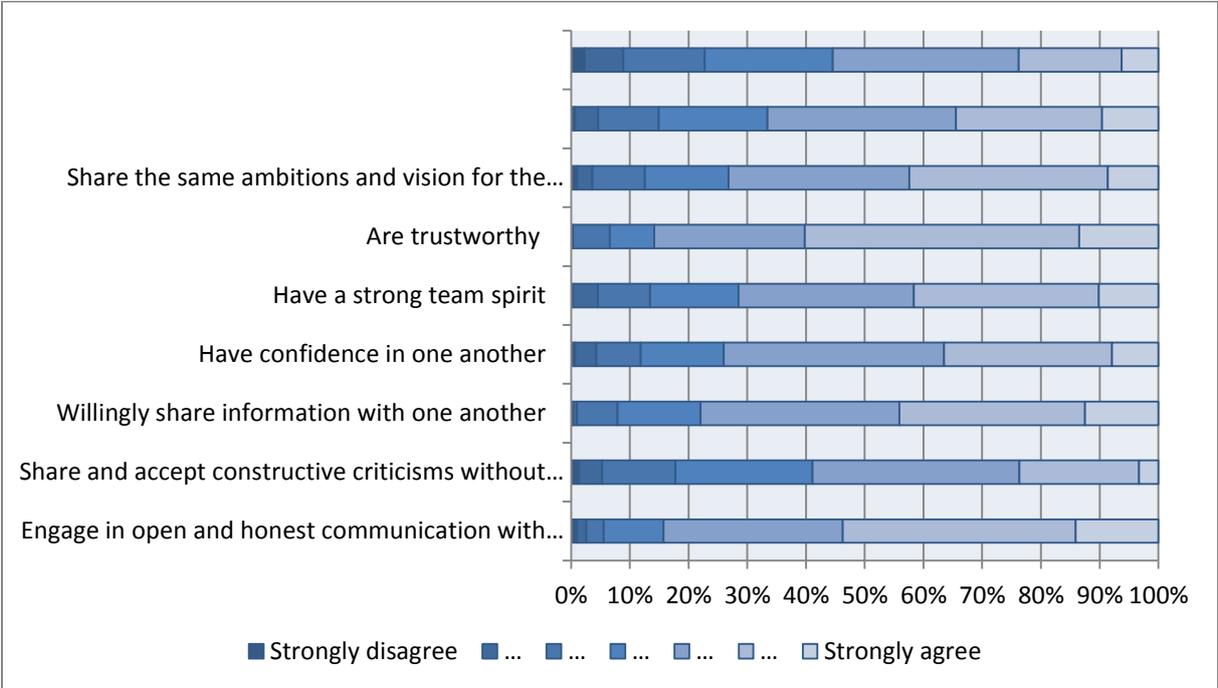
Figure 24. Different performance dimensions (Q: Thinking about your policy area over the last five years how would you rate the way public administration has performed on the following dimensions?)



When looking at the perceptions of top civil servants in terms of **social capital and trust** (see Figure 25) among people in their organizations, the results are overwhelmingly positive. This holds especially with regards to trustworthiness of colleagues (85.9%), engaging in open and honest communication with one another (84.3%), sharing information (78%), having confidence in one another (74%), sharing the same ambitions and vision for the organization (73.2%) and having a strong team spirit (71.5%). To a somewhat lesser extent, according to the results, public sector officials in Estonia believe in pursuing collective goals and mission (66.6%), sharing and accepting constructive criticisms without making it personal (58.9%) and viewing themselves as partners in charting the organization’s direction (55.4%).

The results reflect the decentralized nature of the personnel selection in the Estonian public sector, where managers are rather flexible in setting up their own teams.

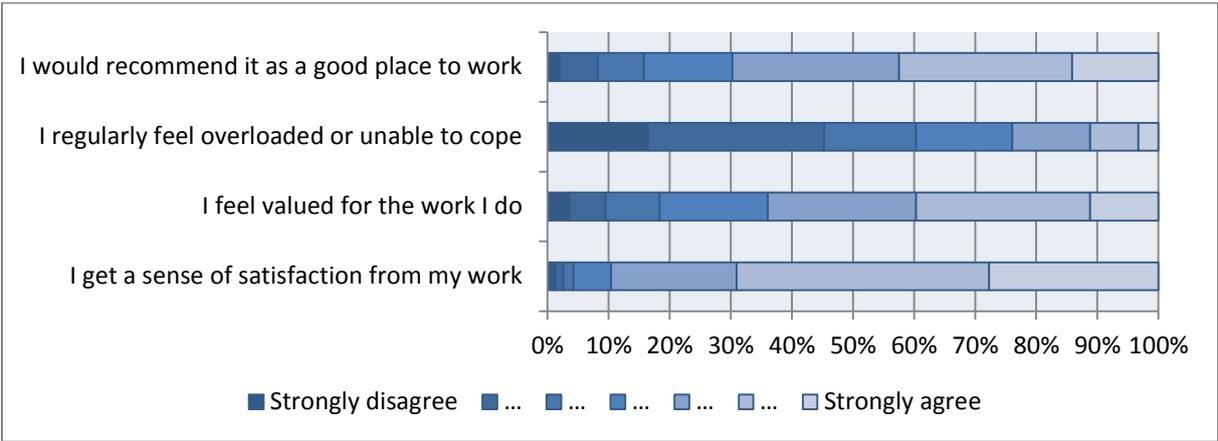
Figure 25. Social capital and trust (Q: People in my organization)



8.3 Individual Level

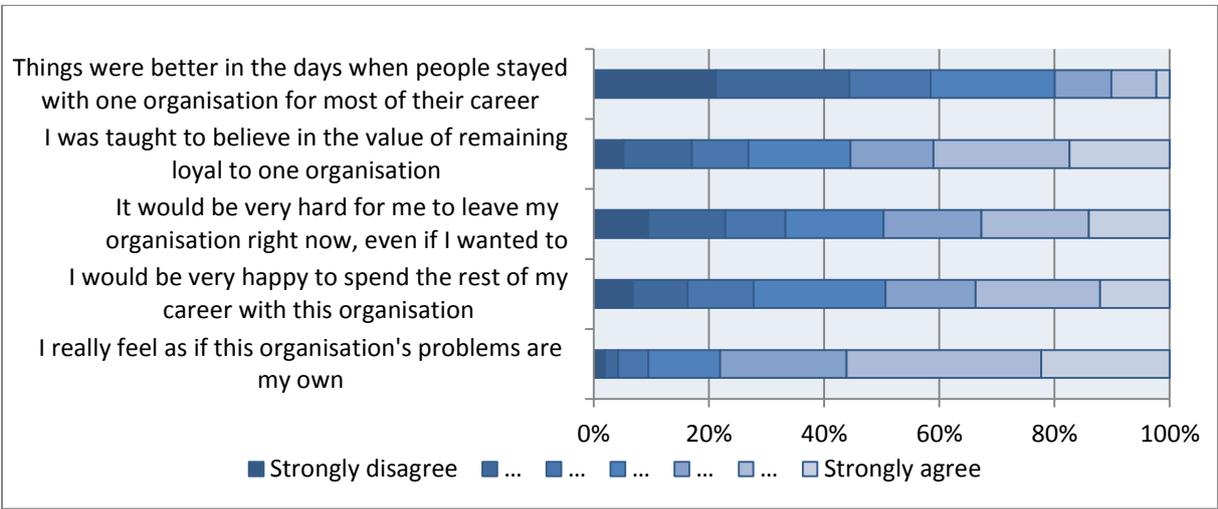
The results at hand speak of very high level of **job satisfaction** (see Figure 26) among the Estonian top civil servants. This is expressed by 89.6% of the respondents claiming that they get a sense of satisfaction from the work (vs. only 4.2% disagreeing). In addition 63% of the respondents feel valued for the work they do and even bigger share of the respondents (69.7%) would recommend their organization as a good place to work to other people. Then again 23.9% of the respondents feel regularly overloaded or unable to cope with the work.

Figure 26. Job satisfaction (Q: When thinking about my work and the organization I work for)



In terms of **organizational commitment** (see Figure 27) an overwhelming share of the respondents (78%) claim to really feel as if the organization’s problems are her/his own (vs. only 9.5% disagreeing). A considerably smaller proportion, but still almost half of the respondents would be very happy to spend the rest of their career within the same organization (49.3%) and a similar amount of the executives (49.7%) find leaving the organization right now very hard, even if she/he wanted to. Most of the respondents share the view that things were not better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their career (58.5%), though more than half of them (55.4%) state to have been taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization. These results refer to rather medium level organizational commitment.

Figure 27. Organizational commitment (Q: When thinking about my work and the organization I work for)



When compared to the COCOPS overall sample, the results are more or less in line, with the exception of the share of the Estonian executives claiming to identify themselves to the organizational problems being somewhat bigger (78% vs. 61%). The latter refers to a fact that Estonians identify themselves more with a particular organization than the civil service in general.

9. Findings from the Employment and Health sector

The analysis of the employment and health sector are both based on very small samples – 21 and 38 answers respectively, but as also the number of executives addressed in both sectors was small the response rates were actually rather high (73.1% and 40.4% respectively). Still, the results have to be considered very carefully. In the current chapter the mean values of results from employment and health sector are compared to the mean values of the respective results in the overall sample.

When looking at the profile of the respondents, it can be seen that both for employment and health sector the share of female respondents is bigger than in the overall Estonian sample (77.7% and 65.6% respectively).

Values and attitudes

With regard to self-understanding and identity patterns we find differences in both fields when compared to the overall Estonian sample. In terms of employment filed the executives claim developing new policy agendas (a mean value of 6.1 vs. 5.5), getting public organizations to work together (a mean value of 5.2 vs. 4.4), finding joint solutions to solve problems of public concern (mean of 5.4 vs. 4.9), and ensuring efficient use of resources (a mean value of 6.3 vs. 5.9) as more relevant. Also in the health sector finding joint solutions to public problems (a mean value of 5.3 vs. 4.9) and ensuring efficient use of resources (a mean value of 6.2 vs. 5.8) are seen more important when compared to the overall example. In addition providing expertise and technical knowledge (a mean value of 5.3 vs. 4.9) and providing a voice for societal interests (a mean value of 6.0 vs. 5.6) are considered more important by the top managers in the health policy field.

In terms of motivation the executives in health sector consider flexible working hours less important when compared to the overall sample (a mean value of 4.6 vs. 5.1). In both health and employment sector the opportunity to help others is seen more important (a mean value of 5.7 and 6.1 vs. 5.2 respectively). In employment sector also doing something that is useful for the society is held more relevant (a mean value of 6.3 vs. 5.7) and job security less relevant (a mean value of 3.5 vs. 4.4).

Work context

Executives working in health and employment sector seem to be more positive in terms of believing to have goals that are clearly stated (a mean value of 6.1 and 6.4 vs. 5.6 respectively) and communicated to all staff (a mean value of 6.0 and 6.6 vs. 5.4 respectively) and also perceiving that their activities are easier to observe and measure (a mean value of 4.3 and 4.5 vs. 3.8 respectively) when compared to the overall sample. With regards the autonomy the responses from health sector representatives are rather in line with the overall sample. In employment field the executives perceive higher autonomy in all set categories with the exception of policy implementation and changing the structure of organization; in terms of policy choice and design the respondents in employment sector express to have less autonomy.

Interaction frequency is in general terms rather similar to the overall sample with the exception of employment sector executives interacting more frequently with media (a mean value of 3.7 vs. 3.2) and trade unions (a mean value of 2.2 vs. 1.7). Employment sector representatives claim to

communicate more (a mean value of 3.1 vs. 2.6) and health sector representatives to communicate less (a mean value of 2.0 vs. 2.6) with local government counterparts. Coordination quality is perceived better in both cases with national and local government bodies (a mean value of 3.9 and 4.2 vs. 3.3 respectively). In health sector coordination with national government bodies from different policy areas (a mean value of 4.0 vs. 3.5) and in employment sector with government bodies and private sector stakeholders (a mean value of 4.6 vs. 4.2) is seen as more positive when compared to the overall sample.

In general politicization is perceived as less problematic in both sectors, with the exception of employment sector executives claiming politicians to influence senior-level appointments more strongly (a mean value of 4.3 vs. 3.8) when compared to the overall sample. In health sector top officials feel being less respected for their technical expertise from politicians (a mean value of 4.5 vs. 4.0).

Relevance of NPM reforms

With the exception of mergers of government organizations and privatization, all other reform trends are considered more relevant in employment sector than in the overall sample, especially in terms of establishing external partnerships and strategic alliances (a mean value of 6.3 vs. 5.3) and extending state provision into new areas (a mean value of 5.7 vs. 4.7). In terms of health sector the results are more or less in line with the overall sample with the exception of health sector executives perceiving the creation of autonomous agencies in health sector as more relevant (a mean value of 4.2 vs. 3.6). In terms of the reform dynamics the responses at health and employment field level are in general less critical. Only with regards to the extent of reforms driven by crisis (a mean value of 3.6 in employment sector vs. 5.0 in the overall sample) and reforms being not demanding enough the perception is more critical (a mean value in health sector of 5.4 vs. 4.4 in the overall sample).

Management instruments tend to be far more used by the employment sector executives, especially in terms of quality management systems (a mean value of 5.5 vs. 4.3), management by objectives (a mean value of 5.2 vs. 4.1) and performance related pay (a mean value of 4.5 vs. 3.0) when compared to the overall sample. According to the responses executives both in the employment and health sector use also more performance indicators, with only minor exceptions in both cases. In employment sector the executives confirm significantly bigger use of performance indicators to identify problems (a mean value of 6.0 vs. 5.1), foster learning and improvement (a mean value of 5.8 vs. 4.8) and engage with external stakeholders (a mean value of 4.9 vs. 3.8). In terms of coordination practices the health sectors is more or less in line with the results in the overall sample, but both hierarchical and non-hierarchical practices are claimed to be used more intensively by employment sector officials.

Impact of PA reform

The overall assessment of public administration reform over the last five years is perceived slightly more positively by the health sector executives (37.5%) and slightly less positive by the employment sector executives (31.5%) when compared to the overall sample, where 35.7% of the respondents stated the situation has clearly improved. In terms of the specific dimensions of public administration reform, again the executives of employment sector tend to be more positive when compared to the overall sample, especially in terms of the development of innovation (a mean value of 5.6 vs. 4.6), service quality (a mean value of 5.6 vs. 4.8) and external transparency and openness (a mean value of

5.0 vs. 4.3). In health sector the responses on developments in specific PA instruments are similar to the overall sample. The results for organizational commitment are different in both subsectors, namely, in the health sector the respondents show higher means for all categories and in employment sector in terms of leaving the organization and belief in the value of remaining loyal to one organization (mean values of 4.7 vs. 4.2 and 5.1 vs. 4.6 respectively). Social trust and capital are evaluated higher by health sector executives in terms of engaging in open and honest communication (a mean value of 5.9 vs. 5.3), having a strong team spirit (a mean value of 5.4 vs. 4.9) and viewing themselves as partners in charting the organization's direction (a mean value of 4.8 vs. 4.4). In employment sector all the categories of social trust and capital are perceived significantly stronger.

10. Conclusion

The profile of the Estonian respondents of the current study very clearly mirrors the main features of the Estonian civil service and sheds light on the main differences of the Estonian responses when compared to the overall COCOPS sample. Namely the transitional heritage, short history of the Estonian public service ((re)established only in 1996) and open civil service system of the Estonian public administration provide explanation for the young age of the public sector executives (ca 24% of the respondents are of an age 35 years or younger) and high mobility within and beyond the public service. Also the peculiarities of Estonia as a small state (e.g. a small number of very big organizations) cannot be overseen.

The results of the current study speak of a mixture of NPM and Weberian values in terms of public executives' **role perception** as there is no clear pattern or consistency of the identity among the public sector executives, though they seem to share rather strong managerial self-understanding. It could be stated that in Estonia the trade-off between traditional and NPM related priorities and values are not always fully acknowledged as the results are mixed. Concerning the **motivation** intrinsic motivation factors seem to be prevailing among the Estonian public sector executives. When compared to the overall COCOPS sample, high income is considered an important motivational factor by a remarkably bigger share of the Estonian executives and job security is seen as a less important source of motivation (the Estonian Civil Service Act does not provide strong guarantees to the civil servants). With regard to **social values** the Estonian executives seem more trustworthy towards each other when compared to the overall sample.

The executives' perception of **work context** confirms having a high number of rather clearly stated goals. The **interaction frequency** with actors outside the organization is estimated to be rather low by the executives - that is in line with the general patterns in the Estonian public policy landscape characterized by weak unions, weak inclusion of social partners and the overall weak organization of the civil society. The survey results also point to rather low estimation on the **quality of coordination** in between Estonian public sector organizations. Also, the answers given by the public sector top officials refer to rather low level of **politicization** in Estonia, confirming the results of Meyer-Sahling (2011) who claims the Estonian civil service to be one of the least politicized among the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

With regards to the **recent reform trends** in specific policy areas the respondents estimate privatization, creation of autonomous agencies or corporatization, as well as contracting out to be not important in recent developments. At the same time collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors, digital or e-government, transparency and open government and public sector downsizing are seen as the most important reform trends in one's own policy area. Concerning the more general dynamics of the public sector reform, the prevailing belief seems to be that reforms have been aimed at cost-cutting and savings and that the reforms undertaken have been top-down and too demanding, at the same time when according to the overall COCOPS sample the reforms have been perceived rather not demanding.

With regards to **management instruments**, the executives in Estonia claim using different management instruments more often than their colleagues in the overall COCOPS sample, especially in terms of cost accounting systems and benchmarking. According to the results of the questionnaire,

the **coordination solutions** perceived as common at the central governmental level in Estonia are rather hierarchy-based.

When looking at **the impact of recent economic crisis on public administration**, the responses show that a great share of the cutback measures in Estonia seem to have addressed personnel costs. This is in line with the landscape of Estonian general employment regulations (low unionization and weak central wage-setting) and civil service laws (and guarantees against salary cuts or layoffs). In the Estonian case, the civil service act does not provide strong guarantees, hence it facilitates cuts in public sector salaries and laying off civil servants. Based on the responses from the overall COCOPS sample, Estonia stands out for the share of cutback measures targeted at the personnel costs through pay freezes, pay cuts and staff layoffs.

Turning to **the overall assessment of public administration**, most respondents seem to believe that the way public administration runs in Estonia has remained more or less the same over the last five years or has improved - compared to the COCOPS overall sample this is a more positive assessment. The Estonian executives claim to see strong improvement in the managerial side of the public administration - service quality, innovation, cost and efficiency and external transparency and openness. Also a clear majority of the Estonian public sector executives perceive improvement also in fair treatment of citizens and equal access to services. The results for the overall, cross-national sample are somewhat different. Fair treatment of the citizens, equal access to services and social cohesion are perceived to have improved more in Estonia than in the other European countries.

The perceptions of top civil servants in Estonia in terms of **social capital and trust** among people in their organizations are overwhelmingly positive. In addition, the results at hand speak of very high level of job satisfaction among the Estonian top civil servants. In terms of **organizational commitment** the Estonian executives claiming to identify themselves to the organizational problems is somewhat bigger. The latter refers to a fact that the Estonians identify themselves more with a particular organization than the civil service in general.

Findings from **the employment and health sector** have to be considered with caution, as both are based in very small samples (21 and 38 answers respectively). The results show that executives working in health and employment sector seem to be more positive in terms of believing to have goals that are clearly stated and communicated to all staff and also that their activities are easier to observe and measure when compared to the overall sample. There are sector based differences in communication patterns - employment sector executives claim to interact more frequently with media, local government and trade unions. In general politicization is perceived as less problematic in both sectors.

NPM reform trends are considered more relevant in employment sector than in the overall sample. In terms of the reform dynamics the responses at health and employment policy field are in general less critical when compared to the overall sample. According to the responses executives both in the employment and health sector claim to use also more performance indicators, whereas management instruments tend to be far more used by the employment sector executives.

The overall assessment of public administration reform over the last five years is perceived slightly more positively by the health sector executives and slightly less positive by the employment sector

executives when compared to the overall sample. In terms of the specific dimensions of public administration reform, again the executives of employment sector tend to be more positive when compared to the overall sample. The results for organizational commitment are higher for both sectors and in terms of social capital and trust the results in employment sector for all the categories are perceived significantly stronger, for health sector the results are more or less in line, but with stronger importance put on engaging in open and honest communication, having a strong team spirit and viewing themselves as partners in charting the organization's direction.

The perceptions of the Estonian public sector executives on the recent developments and public sector reforms are hard to evaluate and sum up in one sentence. It seems that in terms of recent developments the public sector officials tend to be more positive in Estonia when compared to the overall sample. They also seem to apply either a similar or a larger extent of the main performance indicators, especially at the organizational level. In terms of main values and priorities mixed perceptions were forwarded by the respondents of the study. Due to a decentralized human resource management and the absence of systematic, centrally steered public management reforms in Estonia this pattern (of inconsistency) is probably not going to change in the foreseeable future. Instead, based on the current experience, ad hoc reforms with decentralized approach mainly aimed at bigger cost-efficiency will continue and remain individual aspirations for changing management patterns in single public sector institutions.

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