



# **Public Sector Reform in the UK: 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](http://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. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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 countries<sup>2</sup> and is funded as part of the European Union's 7th Framework Programme between January 2011 and June 2014.<sup>3</sup> 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 look at the policy fields employment and health. The survey aims to explore public sector executives'

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction is based on Hammerschmid, Görnitz, Oprisor and Stimac (2013), and appears in the same form in all WP3 COCOPS country reports.

<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> More information on the project is available at [www.cocops.eu](http://www.cocops.eu)

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.<sup>4</sup>

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 Lægreid, 1999; Ridder et al., 2006). A major critique raised against elite surveys however (see in particular Enticott et al., 2008) is that they usually focus on a limited selection of individuals at the top of the 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 not included due to their different task repertoire. In the fields of employment and health, as special

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<sup>4</sup> 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

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.<sup>5</sup>

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 Table 1). These answers are the basis for the respective country reports. The data in both the national and the integrated datasets are subject to strict anonymity regulations, to protect individual respondents, whereas aggregate data will be published according to a set of rules commonly agreed upon by the research teams involved.

The current country report summarizes the findings for the **UK** 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.

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<sup>5</sup> 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>20307</b>	<b>4814</b>	<b>23.71</b>

\*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 the UK

Restructuring and reform in the public sector is a persistent theme in the history of British government, and one that has become a perennial topic of political debate in the UK (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Although the pace of reorganization in the British state has reached dizzying proportions in recent years (see, for example, Pollitt, 2007), the intensity with which large-scale public administration reforms have been undertaken has actually varied considerably during the past fifty years. A comparatively quiet period of gradual reform and consolidation following the establishment of the welfare state in the 1950s was accompanied by a general deepening of the professionalisation of the public services. Within central government, this process culminated in the establishment of a Civil Service Department and the Civil Service College following the publication of the Fulton Report of 1968, which sought improved management and a reversal of the elitist exclusionary culture of the senior civil service (Silver and Manning, 2000). Beyond Whitehall, these developments were paralleled, and sometimes prefigured, in the professional development activities and equal opportunities initiatives undertaken by local governments, in particular. However, this period of incremental evolution and professionalization in the management of the public sector in the UK was to change during the 1970s, as concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of government came to transcend all else.

From the 1960s, concerns had begun to grow that the British welfare state was taking on too many responsibilities and that it was simply unable to meet the demands that were being placed upon it, resulting in a condition of “overload” (King, 1975). On the one hand, this generated increasing demand for efficiency gains to be made as the remit of the public sector expanded. On the other hand, there were wider calls for the radical restructuring of the state and for government in general to be scaled-back. For example, the concerns about the efficiency of the public sector prompted a wide-ranging review of the structure of the local government system that led to a radical reorganization in 1974, when almost a thousand local governments across England and Wales were abolished. The pace of change in the UK public sector was then given further impetus at the end of a turbulent decade by the election of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

In the wake of the economic crises of the 1970s, Thatcher’s government determined that, amongst other things, an administrative revolution was required to address the perceived failings of the state, principally by reducing the size of the public sector, and making public services more business-like and open to market forces. Inspired by neo-liberal economics and public choice theory, the New Right ideology pioneered by the Conservative governments in the 1980s paved the way for the rise of the New Public Management in the UK. However, the reform initiatives piloted during the 1980s did not mark an entirely clean break with the past. For instance, the executive agencies set up by the Thatcher government, were originally tabled as a means for improving the management of the civil service in the Fulton Report of 1968. Still, the Conservative governments’ comprehensive attempt to “hollow-out” the British state (Rhodes, 1994) clearly signalled the arrival of radical public management reform as a central feature of contemporary public policy in the UK.

The public management reforms undertaken by the Thatcher governments were managerialist in intent. In this respect, they drew some inspiration from the on-going critique of the senior civil service as a cosy elitist club that was hostile to “management”, but were also tied firmly to the cost-cutting agenda. The Civil Service Department was abolished in 1981 and the Treasury assumed



control over Whitehall through the Management and Personnel Office (Lynn, 2006). This helped smooth the passage of some of the more “innovative” managerial reforms at the centre, such as business planning, targets and, in some cases, pay-for-performance. At the local level, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering established contestability as a principle of public services management. Although the tone softened and the pace of reform slowed somewhat under the Conservative government led by John Major, there were several areas in which the managerialist approach was further deepened. In particular, the rise of consumerism in the UK public sector was prompted by the launch of the Citizen’s Charter in 1991 and the subsequent introduction of performance indicators for public services. The further extension of competition within public services (e.g. purchaser/provider split in health and local government) during the early 1990s marked the high water mark for NPM in the UK. The election of a Labour government in 1997, however, would see a turn away from a “pure” NPM approach to management reform in the public sector.

Although the managerialism of the Conservative reforms continued to influence Tony Blair’s government’s approach to public management, there was also a shift in emphasis away from market forces towards a mixed economy of public service provision. The pursuit of a “Third Way” between the state, market and civil society was also reflected in the discourse around the ways in which the public sector should be managed (Giddens, 1997). The “hard” private sector management tools of contracting-out and performance monitoring were still retained, but were made subordinate to top-down hierarchical models of continuous improvement with often elaborate target-based incentive systems. At the same time, these more conventional modes of governing and managing were supplemented with a greater emphasis on the need to strengthen the relationships between the different stakeholders involved in public service design and delivery.

The turn to “partnership” and more networked forms of governing arrangements during the 2000s was not unique to the UK. However, the blending of an emphasis on stakeholder management with market and hierarchical modes of control did give rise to a distinctive “New Labour” oeuvre of public management reform, especially when coupled with the predilection for constant structural change within the public sector (Pollitt, 2007). In fact, since the development and use of partnership forms of organizing was centrally steered and the roles and responsibilities of the state were extended, it has been suggested that the state under Labour became “congested” by the sheer number of different organizations, policy agendas and prescriptions (Skelcher, 2000). The supposed “control freakery” of the Labour government’s efforts to steer this increasingly complex system was a target for the opposition parties prior to the formation of the Conservative-led coalition government in 2010.

The current administration is very much focused on delivering cuts in the public sector, and is in some senses the inheritor of the neo-liberal inspiration behind the Thatcher era reforms. However, at the moment, it is not clear whether the government is guided by an overarching programme for administrative change or just a series of ad hoc recommendations for shrinking the state. One thing that is certain is that there is much less emphasis on central control of public management and that many of the tools of that control which were developed since the 1980s have been abandoned as expensive or unnecessary hindrances to cost-savings. Thus, during the past fifty years the British state has gone from being overloaded in the 1960s/1970s, to being “hollowed-out” in the 1980s/early 1990s, to “congested” in the late 1990s/2000s (Skelcher, 2000), and is now undergoing a period of serious retrenchment in all areas apart from perhaps the health sector, which despite attempts to “sell” partial privatisation remains something of a “sacred cow” for the British electorate.

The radical nature of many of the administrative changes during the past fifty years made the UK both a kind of poster-child for NPM and a negative advertisement for its worst excesses. Although the uniqueness of the British experience can be overdone when compared with other European countries (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), there is little doubt that the UK along with the other Anglo-Saxon countries, especially the Westminster-style democracies in Australia and New Zealand, have seen more radical and rapid changes, turnarounds and renewals in the reform of the public sector than other developed countries. The reasons for this are now discussed in terms of: state structure; executive government; minister/mandarin relations; administrative culture; and diversity of policy advice (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

The UK is in essence a unitary state, with the powers of central government being pretty much unreserved on all matters – though this situation has changed a little in terms of the constitutional status of the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales (Mitchell, 2006). Local government, in particular, has no guaranteed constitutional status and, as such, has been subject to far-reaching structural and managerial reforms during the past 100 years that would not have been possible in countries with more decentralized political systems. Another important feature of the British state is the absence of a written constitution, which when coupled with the common law tradition within the UK has had the effect of facilitating policy developments that are made on a more ad-hoc and on-going basis than would be the case in countries with a much stronger civil law tradition or a formal constitution (Lynn, 2006). In fact, given the considerable power that is wielded at the centre of the British state, the constitutional and legal flexibility within the system offers the ruling political party in Westminster considerable scope for developing and implementing comprehensive and far-reaching policy programmes – and, indeed, for terminating programmes deemed to be unpopular or unsuccessful.

The executive branch of government is of course very powerful in a unitary state, since it is, in effect, the body ultimately responsible for managing the state. The degree of power exerted by the executive within the British state is extremely great; the more so, because of the legislative role played by the executive within the UK parliamentary system. Not only is the political party in government the principal progenitor of the legislation that is debated in the Houses of Parliament, it can also implement significant policy changes without the need to involve other branches of government, or, indeed, parliament itself. So, for example, it has been suggested that the introduction of Next Steps Agencies was “conducted without any formal basis (legislation, secondary legislation, or even a simple policy statement) on which to judge it. Mrs Thatcher made a short statement to Parliament which endorsed the conclusions of the [Next Steps report] and announced a decision to go ahead” (Talbot, 2004: 105).

The status of the career civil servant free from political influence and patronage is still the normative ideal for UK public service. However, relations between ministers of state and senior civil servants in the UK have undergone some change during the past thirty years. Although the basic principle underpinning the civil service remains the provision of impartial advice, there has been a growing trend for appointments to be politicised at least in public if not private, and certainly, more so for executive agencies and other non-departmental bodies. Typically, though, the party in government has used various forms of managerialist strategy to attempt to influence the ways in which civil servants carry out their tasks, rather than loading the recruitment process. The invocation of a duty to deliver under the Labour government, for example, was intended to promote an entrepreneurial

“can do” attitude towards realising the government’s objectives (see Barber, 2008), rather than objective critique, analysis or debate about their merits or otherwise. The current government, rather like its predecessor, also appears to dislike impartiality, seeing it, in the words of Francis Maude the current Minister for the Cabinet Office, as “a kind of indifference”. How minister-*mandarin* relations continue to evolve in the face of budget cuts will therefore be of great interest.

The administrative culture of the British state is conventionally understood to be guided by the notion of the “public interest”, in which government is regarded as a necessary evil that should be hedged in and held to account as much as possible (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Within such a culture, civil servants are regarded as people who work for the public, and who are, at the most senior levels, charged with upholding the public interest above narrow sectional interests. To do this effectively, public sector executives in the UK are expected to be flexible in their approach to managing the policy and politics of the country. Thus, rather than being experts in administrative law they are required to be “generalists” able to appreciate issues from many sides. The pragmatism that this culture produces makes it more open to reforms, in part, because British civil servants are trained to be responsive to such change, but also because there may be greater acceptance or understanding of the need for change. Again, a central orientating frame for understanding the nature of this culture would be the idea that ultimately results matter more than procedures.

Finally, the array of sources of policy advice on which the British government can draw has undoubtedly become increasingly diverse during the past fifty years. Once, policy emerged from tightly bounded technocratic communities that drew in interest groups with a stake in a specific sector. However, during the 1980s these policy silos were broken down as social actors concerned with broader issues began to develop networks of influence that cut across sectoral boundaries (Smith, 1991). Initially, this shift in the nature of policy-making in the UK incorporated influential pressure groups and civil society organizations, but was eventually supplemented by the work of professional policy researchers located within “Think Tanks” (Denham and Garnett, 1999). In the case of public management reforms, much of the advice garnered by government came not from within government departments, but from think tanks and independent consulting firms. Under the Conservative government these policy actors were largely concerned with making government more efficient and business like (e.g. Adam Smith Institute, McKinsey Group). Under Labour, they sought to promote innovative approaches to social policy or continuous improvement (e.g. Institute for Public Policy Research, Price Waterhouse Coopers). Currently, the Coalition Government appears to be taking heed of the Reform Group led by Andrew Haldenby, which has a distinctive small state message - though it does still work closely with other groups of a less partisan disposition (e.g. the Institute for Government).

### 3. Data and Method

#### 3.1 Sampling and Access Strategy and Survey Implementation

The UK COCOPS survey was conducted by a team of researchers at the Cardiff Business School, who worked closely with Hertie School of Governance in designing the survey. The survey was piloted with a group of civil servants in the Welsh Government who were asked to comment on their general understanding of the survey (language issues, concepts etc) and its functioning (technical and software related issues).

We used the established grading structure for the UK civil service to assign hierarchical level to possible respondents. We decided not to send the survey to the first level of approximately 50 principal secretaries, as we assumed, given their responsibilities, that they were unlikely to participate. The survey invitations were sent to senior public sector executives in a range of central government departments including health and employment and agencies. In order to increase the relatively small sample size covering employment, invitations were also sent out to executives who managed Jobcentre Plus centres across the UK. At the time of the survey, Jobcentre Plus was still part of the Department for Work and Pensions and provided services that support people of working age from welfare into work – it has since been re-integrated within the central ministry. The sample did not include those that worked at the lower service delivery levels (such as hospitals in health or local government).

Given the experience in the pilot and our success in using on-line surveys in other research projects, we sent a personalised link to the on-line survey to all possible respondents by email. The civil service are comparatively under-researched in the UK as an institutional grouping. As a result, we considered requesting endorsement for the survey from the civil service but decided against this due to concerns about the likelihood of receiving support allied with an understanding of the current political climate which is hostile to anything that might be perceived as wasting the time of bureaucrats. The UK civil service are currently experiencing severe staffing cuts as a result of austerity measures and recently started a series of strikes over pay and pensions.

As the length of a survey can help to determine rates of participation, we omitted part 1 of the core survey which included four questions with 31 items requiring information about the organisation and its size, policy area and the position of the respondent. All of this information is available from public sources and the team provided this missing information separately. Unlike other countries in the project, we did not add any additional questions which were specific to the UK.

The UK survey was launched on 11 June 2012 which was slightly later than other countries as we didn't want to send the survey out over a holiday period. Three reminders were issued by email at weekly intervals. The surveys were addressed to named senior executives. We did not use a forwarding strategy where they could pass the survey on to colleagues as we were concerned about who would complete the survey.

We received a much lower response rate to the initial invitation and reminders than expected. A total of 197 accessed the survey using the link but only 68 completed the whole survey. An examination of the statistics showed that executives tended to exit the survey at the welcome page where they are

informed that the questionnaire will take 20 minutes to complete. In a bid to encourage people to respond and approximately one month after the initial launch of the survey, we sent a personalised letter and a hard copy of the survey by post to all those respondents that had not already completed the survey (a total of 2,891 reminders). The letter emphasised the importance of receiving a good response from the UK to compare findings across the EU and a promise to keep them informed about the outcomes of the research. We shortened the length of the survey by deleting questions 12 and 13 (which our pilot respondents did not like), question 22 and the attitudes questions in section IV. We re-inserted questions from part 1 so that we would know what type of organisation the response came from. We heard from some civil servants that they didn't receive the original e-mails and reminders. While we checked our approach to sending out the e-mails in the pilot, it is likely that our e-mails may have filtered out by some government departments.

Overall, a total of 3,100 invitations were sent out: 2,120 to central government executives, 164 to health sector executives, and 816 to executives in the employment sector. In total, the survey received 484 responses, but the cleaning procedure which involved dropping all respondents who failed to answer more than 75% of survey items, meant that the total was reduced to 353 (11.4%) as shown in Table 2 below. The UK tends to have one of the lowest response rates to European population surveys and the response rates for this survey are lower than the average for the whole COCOPS survey. The response rate in the employment sector is comparatively much lower (6.1% vs. 26.9%) but this reflects the decision to widen the sample to Jobcentre Plus staff.

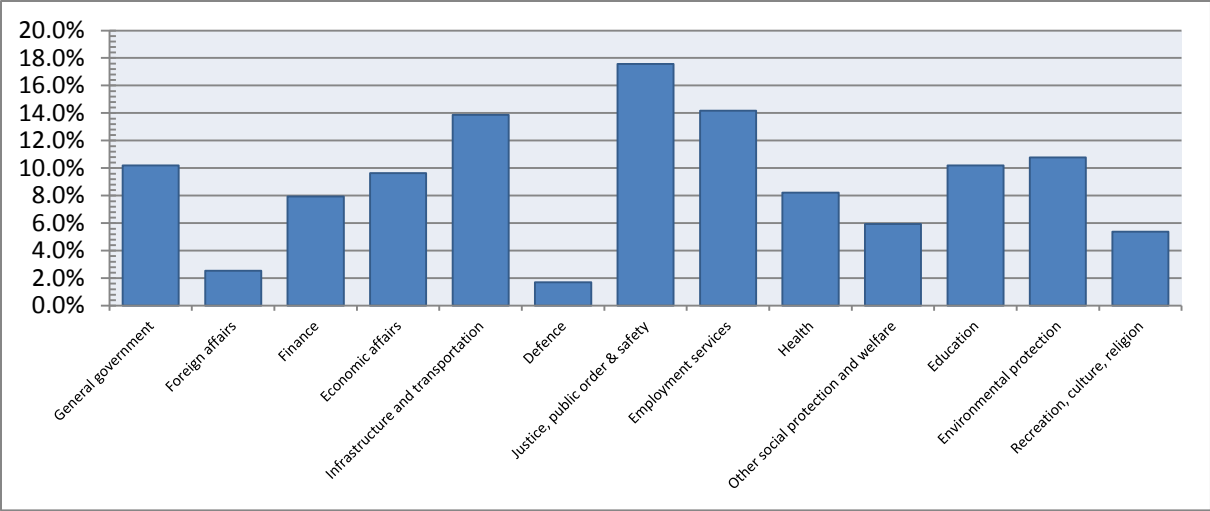
**Table 2. Sample size and response rates**

	Central Government	Health Sector	Employment Sector	UK Total	Total COCOPS Sample
<b>Invitations sent</b>	<b>2,120</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>3,100</b>	<b>20,307</b>
<b>Completed surveys</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>4814</b>
<b>Response rate (total COCOPS sample)</b>	<b>13.1% (21.4%)</b>	<b>17.7% (30.7%)</b>	<b>6.1% (26.9%)</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>

We received a fairly even distribution of responses across the policy fields with six areas providing at least 10% of the total sample (17.6% from justice, public order and safety, 14.2% from the employment sector, 13.9% from the area of infrastructure and transportation, 10.8% from environmental protection and 10.2% from both education and general government (see Figure 1 – respondents were allowed to select more than one policy area). The lowest response rates are found in the fields of defence (1.7%) and foreign affairs (2.5%) which closely match the respective response shares for the overall COCOPS sample.

In terms of statistical methodology all references to a difference in averages between sub-populations imply that the differences are statistically significant at 5% assuming unequal variances. Similarly, any references to a correlation between ordinal variables imply that this (Spearman rank) correlation is statistically significant, again at 5% significance. To indicate significance levels, the following designation is used: (\*\*\*) denotes a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ , (\*\*) denotes a significance level of  $p < 0.01$  and (\*) denotes a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

Figure 1. Respondents' background: Policy field



Unless otherwise indicated, the following categories are used to interpret the results: if a scale ranging from 1 to 7 is used, 1 meaning 'Strongly disagree' and 7 meaning 'Strongly agree', the percentage shares for scale numbers 1, 2 and 3 (vs. 5, 6 and 7) are added and interpreted as 'Rather disagree' (vs. 'Rather agree'). In some cases, the percentage shares for scale numbers 1 and 2 vs. 6 and 7 are calculated and interpreted as 'Agree' vs. 'Disagree'.

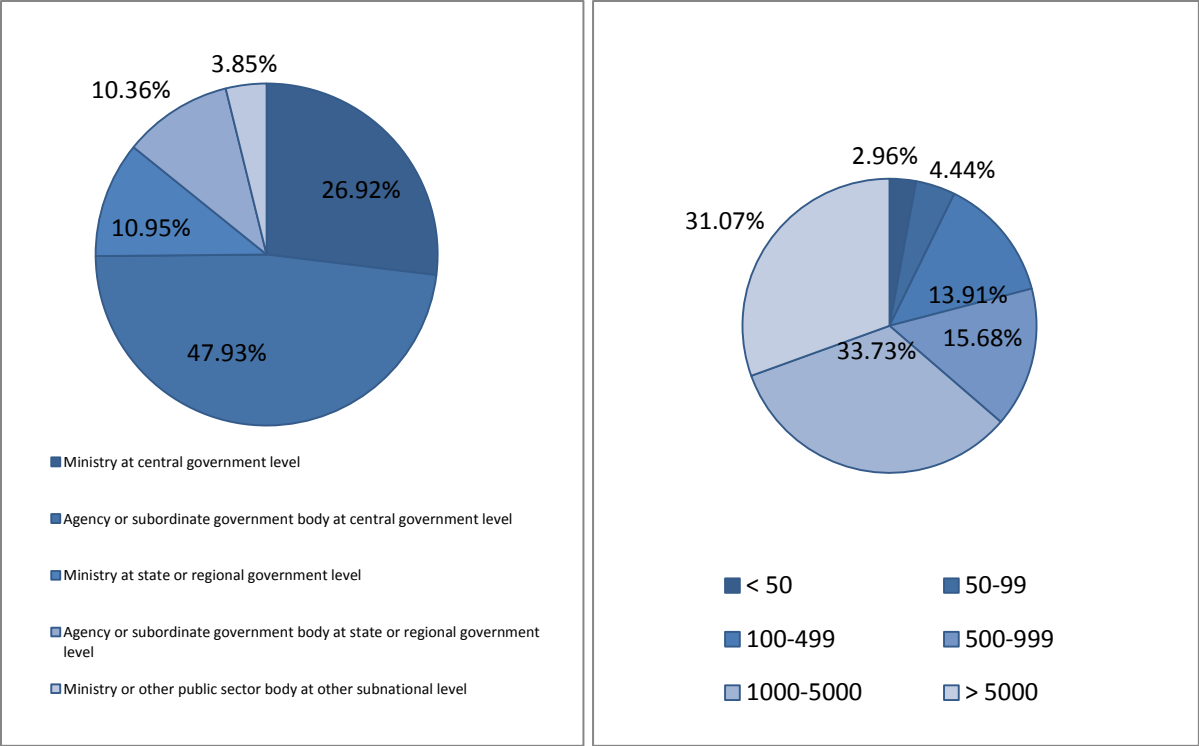
### 3.2 Organizational Context of Respondents

Before exploring respondents' opinions and attitudes towards their role and work in public administration, it is important to establish some of the key contextual features that set the organizational and personal background of the respondents as described in chapters 4 to 8.

**Organization type** (see Figure 2). The greatest proportion of UK respondents (47.9%) came from agencies or subordinate government bodies at the central government level. More than a quarter of responses (26.9%) came from ministries at the central government level which is lower than the figure for the overall COCOPS sample (34.8%). Around 10% of responses each came from ministry at state or regional government level and agencies or subordinate government body at state or regional government level. A very low proportion of responses come from executives at the sub-national level (3.8%).

**Organization size** (see Figure 2). Nearly half the sample (49.4%) work in organisations of between 500-5000 employees (vs. only 32.2% in the overall COCOPS sample). An additional 31.1% of respondents come from organizations with over 5,000 employees (vs. 16.9% in the overall COCOPS sample). Only just over a fifth of respondents (21.3%) work in organizations with up to 500 employees, which is much lower than the overall COCOPS sample (where 50.9% come from such organizations). These results clearly reflect the differences in scale in the size of government departments in the UK which are considerably bigger compared to most other European countries.

Figure 2. Respondents' background: Organization type and organization size



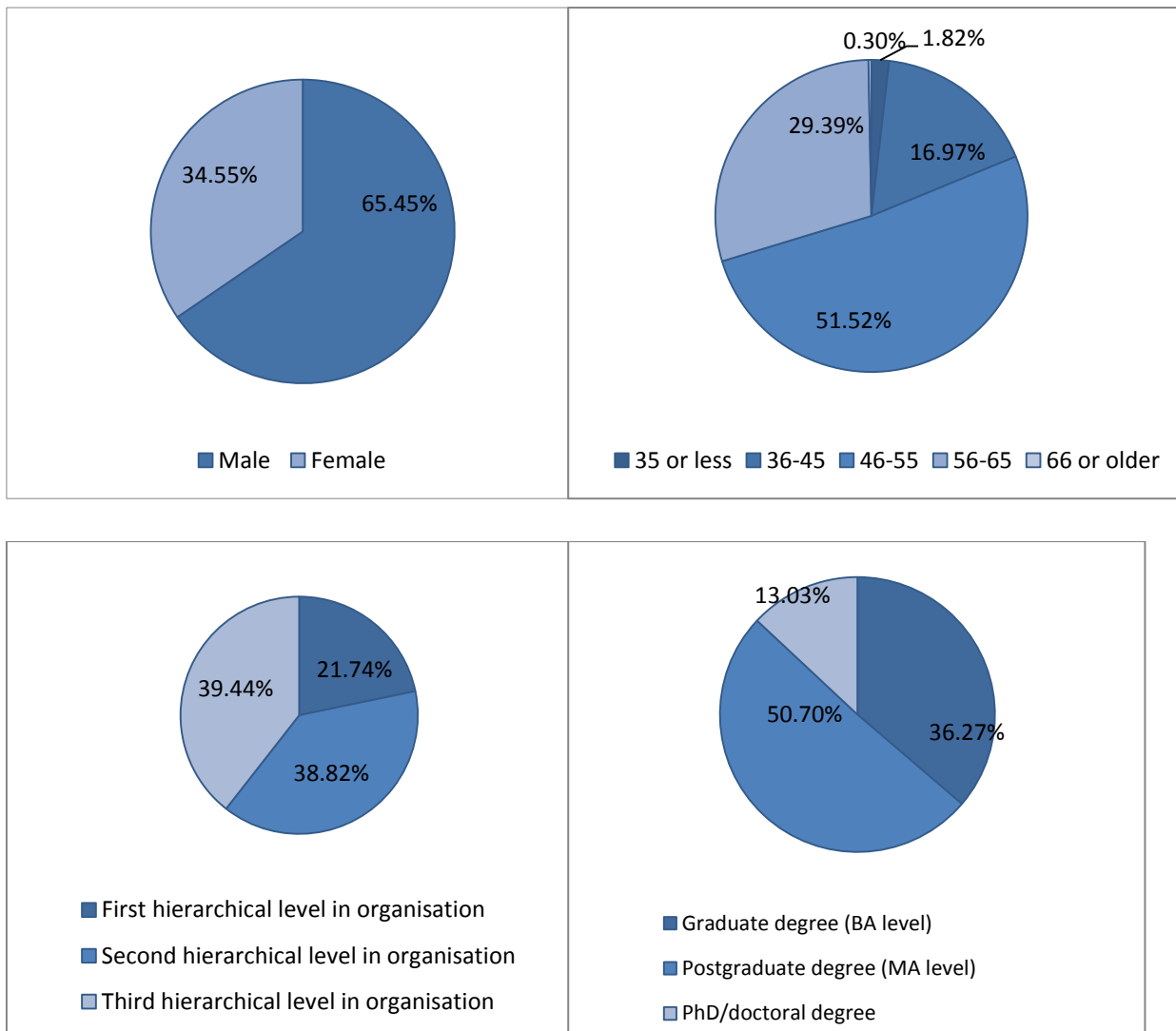
### 3.3 Socio-demographic Background of Respondents

**Gender** (see Figure 3). Approximately two-thirds of respondents are men (65.5%) which means that female representation in the UK is slightly higher at 34.5% than the overall COCOPS sample of 32.1%.

**Age** (see Figure 3). The majority of respondents (68.5%) are aged between 36-55 years (vs. 61.6% in the overall COCOPS sample), with another 29.4% being in the 56-65 years category (here the share among the overall COCOPS sample is similar at 31.8%). There are a total of only seven respondents which don't fit into these age categories – six are aged under 35 and one is aged 66 or older (past the official UK retirement age).

**Hierarchical level** (see Figure 3). As explained above, we did not send the survey out to the top level of civil servants according to the UK's grading structure. However, when asked to perceive their level within the organisation, 21.7% of respondents assigned themselves to the top hierarchical level. Roughly four in ten respondents (38.8%) perceive themselves to be in the second level (vs 40.4% for the whole sample) with the remaining four tenth (39.4%) belonging to the third level. These figures are very similar to the overall COCOPS sample which had 24.2% belonging to the top level and 40.4% to the second level. While it is important for reasons of consistency to use self-reported data and not to recode answers, we need to be alert to the fact that these perceptions about their position within the organisation do not correspond to levels or grades as defined by the senior civil service.

Figure 3. Respondents' background: Gender, age, hierarchy in organization, education

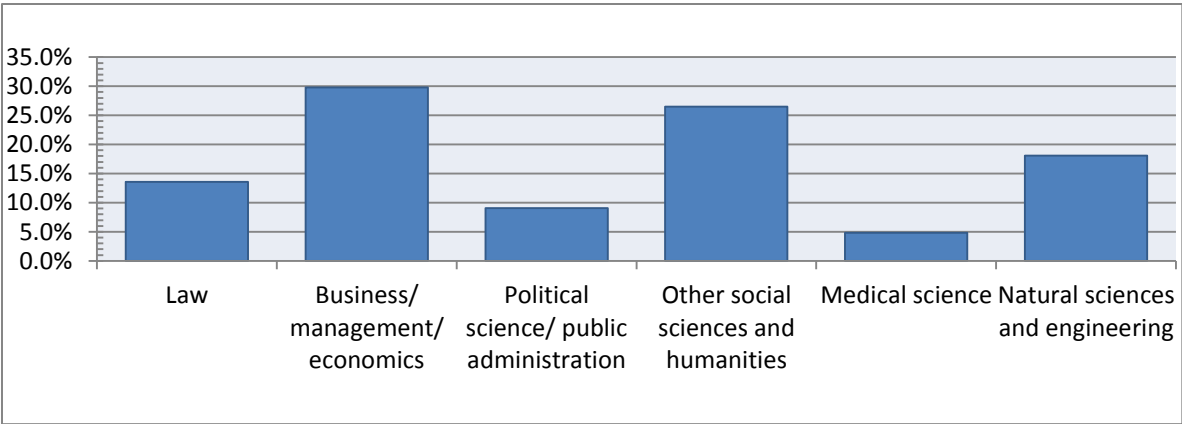


**Education** (see Figure 3). Around half of all respondents (50.7%) have a postgraduate degree, which is considerably less than the figure for the overall COCOPS sample (68.8%). An additional 13% of respondents have a PhD which is slightly less than the 15.5% in the overall sample). 36.3% of respondents have a graduate degree as their highest level of educational qualification.

As to the **disciplinary field of education** (see Figure 4), the most popular categories are business, management and economics (29.8%) and other social sciences and humanities (26.5%) which are more highly represented than in the overall COCOPS sample (22.8% and 15.2% respectively). 18.1% of respondents have a natural sciences and engineering disciplinary background. There are interesting comparisons between countries. In Germany, 47% of respondents come from the field of law which is more than three times the number of those in the UK with this background (only 13.6% compared to the overall COCOPS sample of 27.7%).



Figure 4. Respondents' background: Educational fields (respondents could click more than one option)

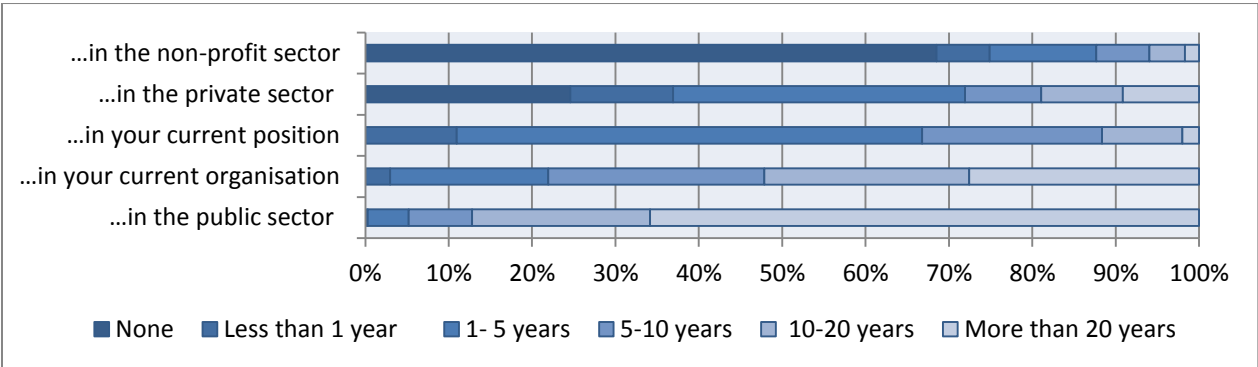


**Tenure** (see Figure 5). Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.9%) have worked in the public sector for more than twenty years (vs. 58.2% in the overall COCOPS sample) and only 4.9% have a public sector experience of less than five years (vs. 13.8% in the overall COCOPS sample). The rather low mobility within the sector is indicated by a share of 52.2% of respondents who have been working in the current organisation for 10 years or more (vs. 47.8% in the overall sample), but there is some movement within positions over time as only 11.6% of respondents have been in the same position for more than 10 years (vs. 16% in the overall sample). The majority of respondents have been in the same position for between 1-5 years.

When looking at the respondents' experience outside the public sector, we see that a relatively high share of public sector executives have at least some private sector experience. 35% of respondents have between 1-5 years experience of working in the private sector and 18.9% have ten or more years experience. Only 24.6% of the respondents have no previous private sector experience (similar figure to the overall COCOPS sample (26.8%).

Previous experience in the non-profit sector is less common, with 68.5% of respondents declaring no experience in the non-profit sector (which is much higher than the 55.9% in the overall COCOPS sample). 12.8% of respondents have between 1-5 years experience of working in the non-profit sector and just 6% have ten or more years experience – both of these figures are significantly lower than similar experiences in the private sector.

Figure 5. Respondents' background: Tenure and other sector experience (excluding employment) (Q. How many years of work experience do you have ...?)



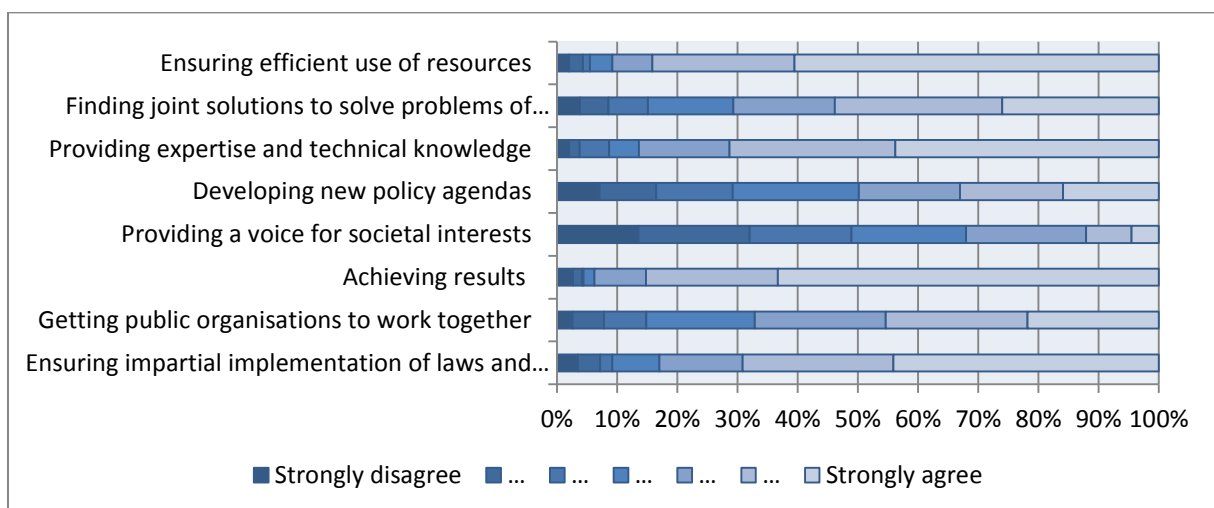
## 4. Values and Attitudes of Public Sector Executives

After describing the respondents with regard to their organizational and socio-demographic background, the following section will present some data on how public sector executives in the UK perceive their role as executives, their motivation and social values and preferences.

**Identity and role perception as executive** (see Figure 6). Public sector executives were asked about how they understood their role. The most important part of their role is perceived to be achieving results (93.8% agreement with 63.3% strongly agreeing), closely followed up by ensuring an efficient use of resources (90.8% agreement with 60.5% strongly agreeing). Executives also perceived their role to include providing expertise and technical knowledge (86.4%), and ensuring impartial implementation of laws and rules (83%). Other aspects such as finding joint solutions to solve problems of public concern (70%), getting public organizations to work together (67%) and developing new public agendas (49.9%) were also considered to be important parts of the role but to lesser degrees. Providing a voice for societal interests was not perceived by the majority of executives as being part of their role (48.9% disagreeing vs 32% agreeing).

The results from the UK are largely in line with the results from the overall COCOPS sample. There are only three roles which are more than a couple of percentage points away from the whole sample average. These roles are all outward facing roles which are more allied to a more networked-governance reform model. So, on average, UK public sector executives see their role in finding joint solutions to solve problems of public concern (70% vs 79.9% for the whole sample) and getting public organizations to work together (67% vs 76.1% for the whole sample) as being less important than executives in other countries. More significantly, UK executives do not see their role as providing a voice for societal interests (32% agreeing vs. 50.1% for the whole sample).

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

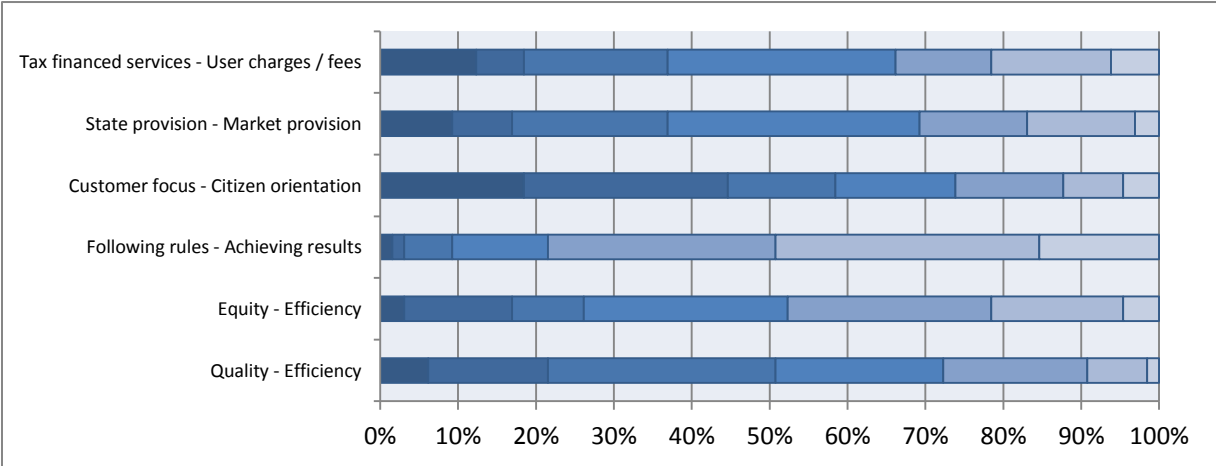


**Value preferences for public sector priorities** (see Figure 7). The survey asked for more general preferences with regard to public sector priorities based on polarizing options. The results show clear preferences for priorities which match the New Public Management agenda. There is a clear preference for efficiency over equity (47.7% vs 26.2%), achieving results rather than following rules (78.5% vs 9.2%) and a more managerial customer focus rather than a more traditional citizen orientation (58.5% vs 26.2%). There is also a clear preference for quality over efficiency (50.8% vs

27.7%). The results are ambiguous on preferences on state or market provision (36.9% placing their position at the state end of the continuum vs 30.8% at the market end with another third (32.3%) selecting the middle category).

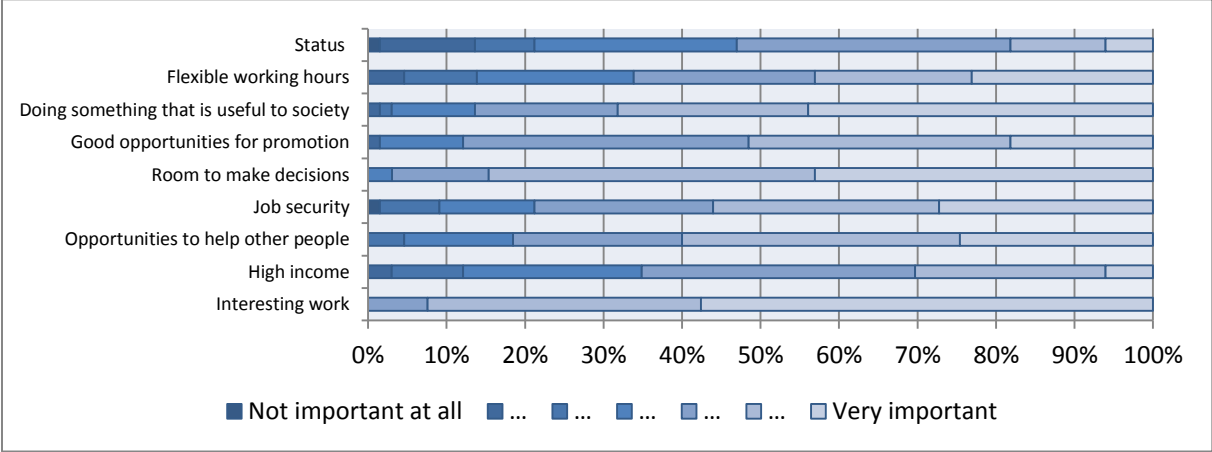
There are clear differences between the UK and the overall COCOPS sample on this question. Public sector executives in the UK place a much greater personal emphasis on the market, user charges, customer focus, and efficiency rather than equity. The most striking difference is the preference for achieving results (78.5% vs 49.2% for the whole sample) rather than following rules.

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



A common research theme is the question about the motivation in the public sector (Figure 8). Following the general distinction of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, our results show a mixed picture. All respondents thought that it was important to have interesting work (100% agreement) which was closely followed by having room to make decisions (96.9% agreement). There was also a strong altruistic motivation as executives were motivated by doing something useful for society (86.4% vs 3%) and to have opportunities to help other people (87.9% vs 4.6%). Extrinsic factors such as having good opportunities for promotion (87.9% vs 1.5%) and job security (78.8% vs 9.1%) were also deemed to be important motivating factors. Flexible working hours (66.2% vs 13.8%), high income (65.2% vs 12.1%) and status (53% vs 21.2%) were the least important factors. All four of these extrinsic factors were though higher in the UK than for the overall COCOPS sample. This finding needs to be balanced by the fact that a much higher proportion of executives thought that it was important that their job to have opportunities to help other people (87.9% vs 73.5% for the whole sample).

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

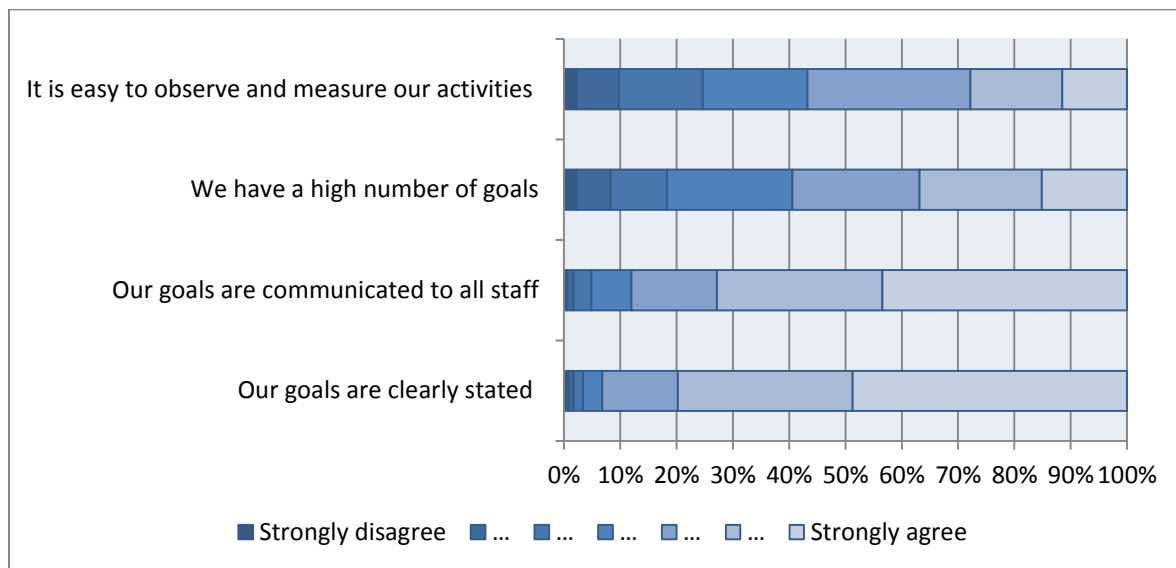


## 5. Characteristics of the Public Administration Work Context

The success of introducing management practices like performance management to the public sector depends on the extent to which the specific work context in public administration resonates with the logic behind the NPM paradigm. This chapter analyses how senior civil servants in the UK perceive their work context and evaluates the extent to which the results indicate that management practices can be transferred successfully to Public Administration.

Debates about goal ambiguity state that performance management is best implemented when goals are limited, clearly stated and communicated, and activities are easily observed and monitored. The sample of senior civil servants in the UK (Figure 9) shows that 93% agree that their goals are clearly stated and 88% agree that they are well communicated to all staff. Lower levels of agreement were obtained in having high number of goals (60%) and in activities being easy to observe and measure (57%). For each of these measures, the UK scores higher than the COCOPS sample. These last two results portray an ambiguous picture of performance since according to the literature it is better to have low number of goals whilst activities are being easily measured.

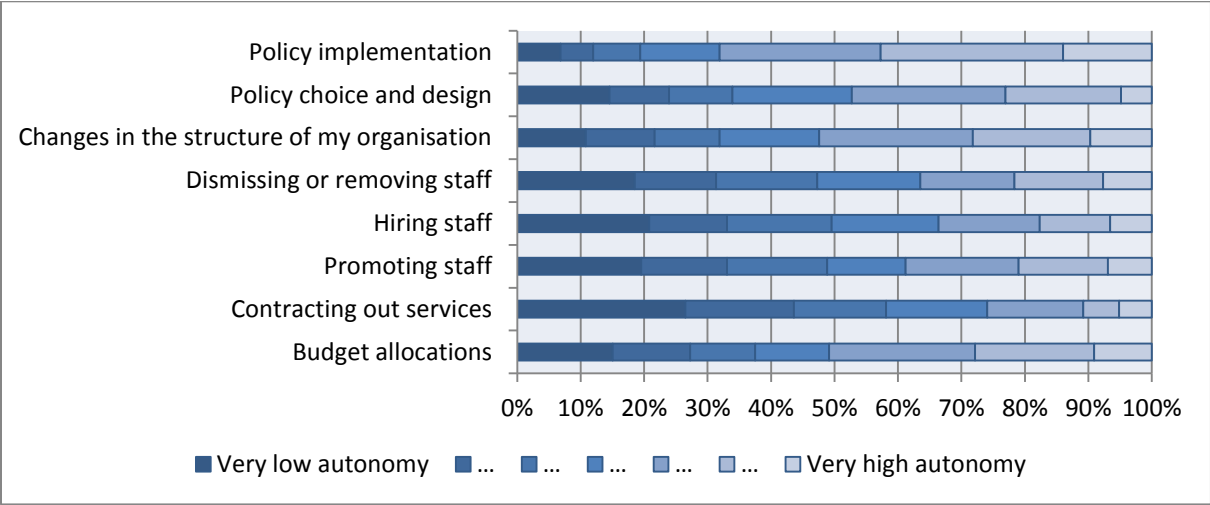
Figure 9. Goal ambiguity and measurability (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization?) (n=369-374)



When compared to the responses in the overall sample, UK respondents tended to agree more with the statement about their organisations having goals clearly stated and communicated to all staff.

Degree of management autonomy is a variable influencing the transferability of private management practices to the public sector. The results in Figure 10 show that 58% of UK senior civil servants believed themselves to have limited autonomy in contracting out services. Over half of them believed themselves to have low autonomy with regards to hiring and promoting staff. In contrast, over half of civil servants believed they have a greater degree of autonomy when allocating budgets and changing structures of their organizations. Policy implementation was the element in which the greatest majority (68%) agreed they had a high level of autonomy. Again, all of the scores on these measures were higher in the UK than in the whole COCOPS sample.

Figure 10. Degree of management autonomy (Q: *In my position, I have the following degree of autonomy with regard to*) (n=365-373)



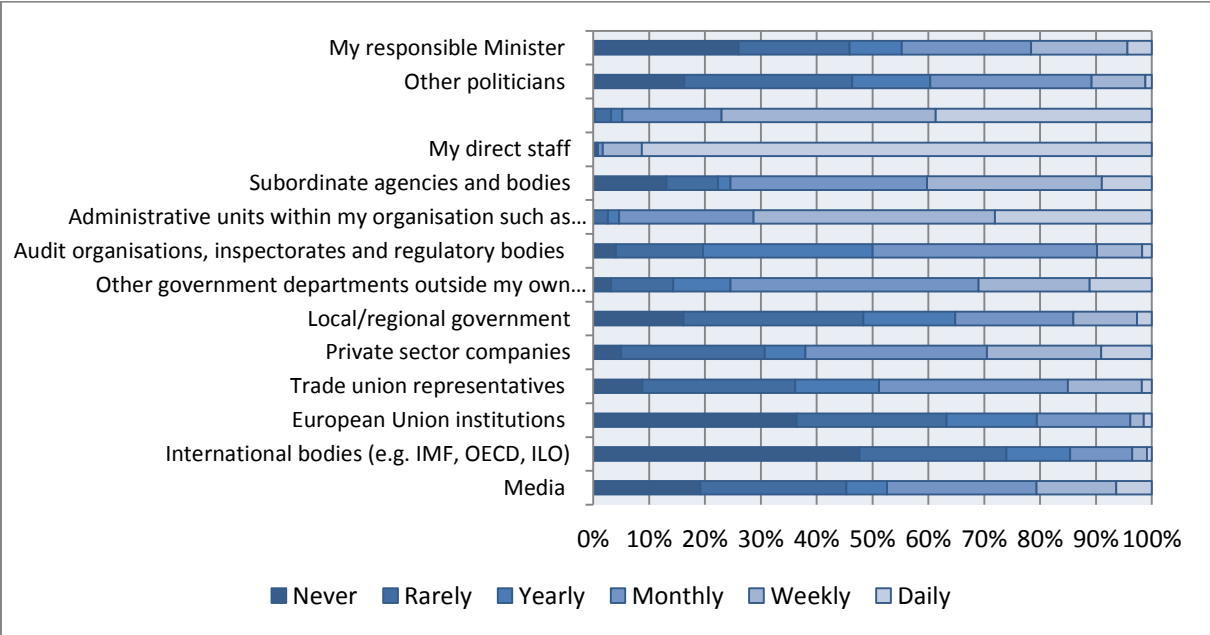
Respondents working in ministries/agencies at a central government level perceived themselves to have more autonomy in promoting staff than respondents from ministries/agencies at regional government level (\*\*). Unsurprisingly, civil servants at the second hierarchical level believed they have more autonomy than third level colleagues in allocating budgets (\*\*\*) and changing structures in their organizations (\*\*\*)

Interaction frequency is a way to measure the coordination intensity amongst senior civil servants. It can work as an indicator of the challenges encountered by organizational fragmentation derived from New Public Management. As Figure 11 illustrates, between 95% and 99% of UK civil servants replied that the highest frequency of interaction (on a daily, weekly and monthly basis) happened with their direct staff, their administrative superiors and other administrative units. The bodies and actors with which a majority of civil servants interacted the least (rarely or yearly) are local/regional governments (49%), trade unions (42%) and European Union institutions (43%). Mixed views were found in the interaction with other government departments outside the respondents' organizations.

Interestingly, a higher percentage of civil servants claimed to have more frequent interaction with the private sector (62%) than with local/regional government (35%). In particular, respondents of regional ministries and agencies tended to have more regular interaction with local government (\*\*\*) and trade unions (\*\*\*) than civil servants at central government level. Third tier civil servants also tended to have more regular interaction with different stakeholders than the ones in the second tier, in particular with the media (\*\*).

A second indicator that helps to assess levels of fragmentation is the quality of collaboration (Figure 12). Collaboration with national government bodies within the same policy areas to which civil servants belonged was considered to have been good by 56% of respondents; 50% believed to there to be good levels of collaboration between government bodies in their policy field and private and voluntary sector stakeholders. Collaboration was most likely to be regarded as poor with national government bodies from different policy areas (33%) and national and supra-national bodies (30%). In particular, the latter statement shows a large share of respondents (24%) who could not assess this statement. But, interestingly, respondents in small organisations tended to have a better collaboration with national and supra-national bodies (\*\*) than the ones in large organizations.

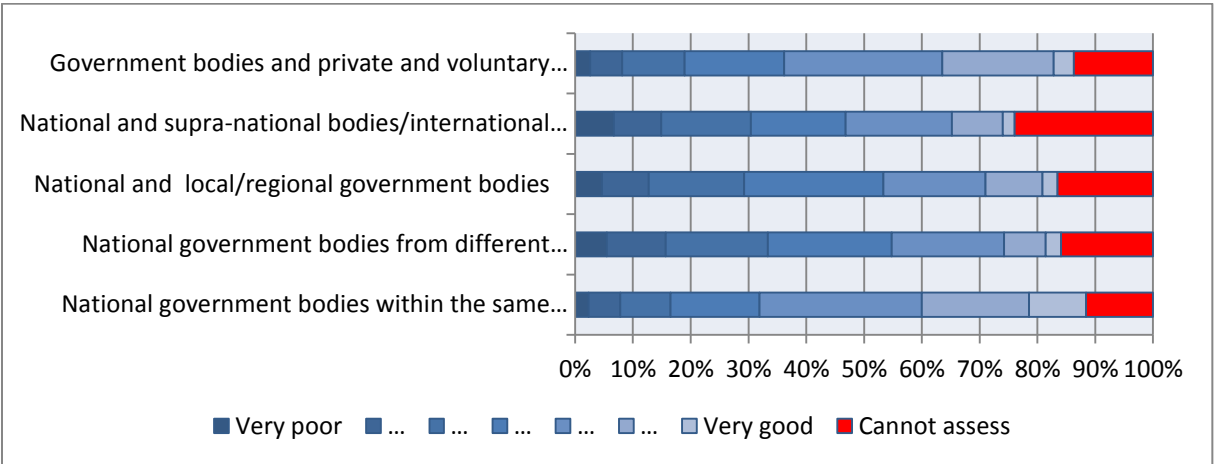
Figure 11. Interaction frequency (Q: Please indicate how frequently you typically interact with the following actors or bodies) (n=318-372)



Both, interaction frequency and quality of coordination, indicate that although civil servants in the UK are not very good at collaborating with other actors in different policy fields, they do seem to be positive about their efforts at collaborating with other non-public sector actors.

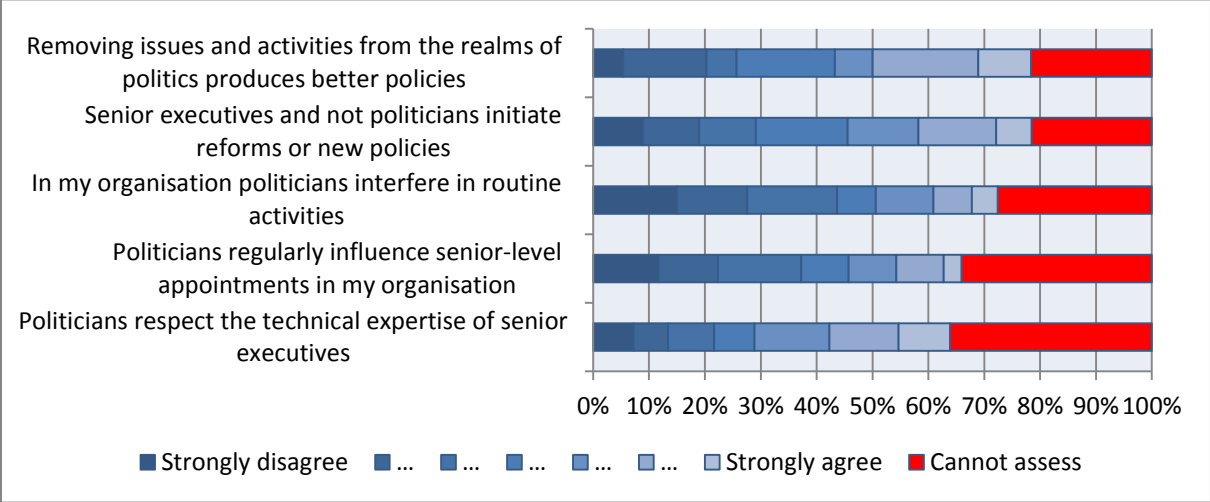
The degree of politicization indicates the extent to which public sector institutions can make decisions based on technical criteria as opposed to being influenced by political processes. Figure 13 shows that about half of respondents were positive in believing that politicians kept their distance: 55% believed that politicians respect the technical expertise of senior executives, 60% disagreed about politicians interfering in routine activities within their organizations and 56% disagreed that politicians regularly influence senior-level appointments. A lower percentage of respondents (45%) agreed that removing issues and activities from the realm of politics produced better policies. This share is lower than the result of 55% for the overall sample.

Figure 12. Coordination quality (Q: How would you characterize collaboration in your own policy field between) (n=271-313)



It is worth noticing that in this question, the percentage of respondents not being able to assess the statements posed was higher than in other questions in the survey. In particular, politicians respecting technical expertise (56%) and influencing senior-level appointments (52%) were the categories with the highest levels of ambiguity.

Figure 13. Degree of politicization (Q: What is your view on the following statements) (n=58-62)



## 6. Relevance of NPM and post NPM Reforms

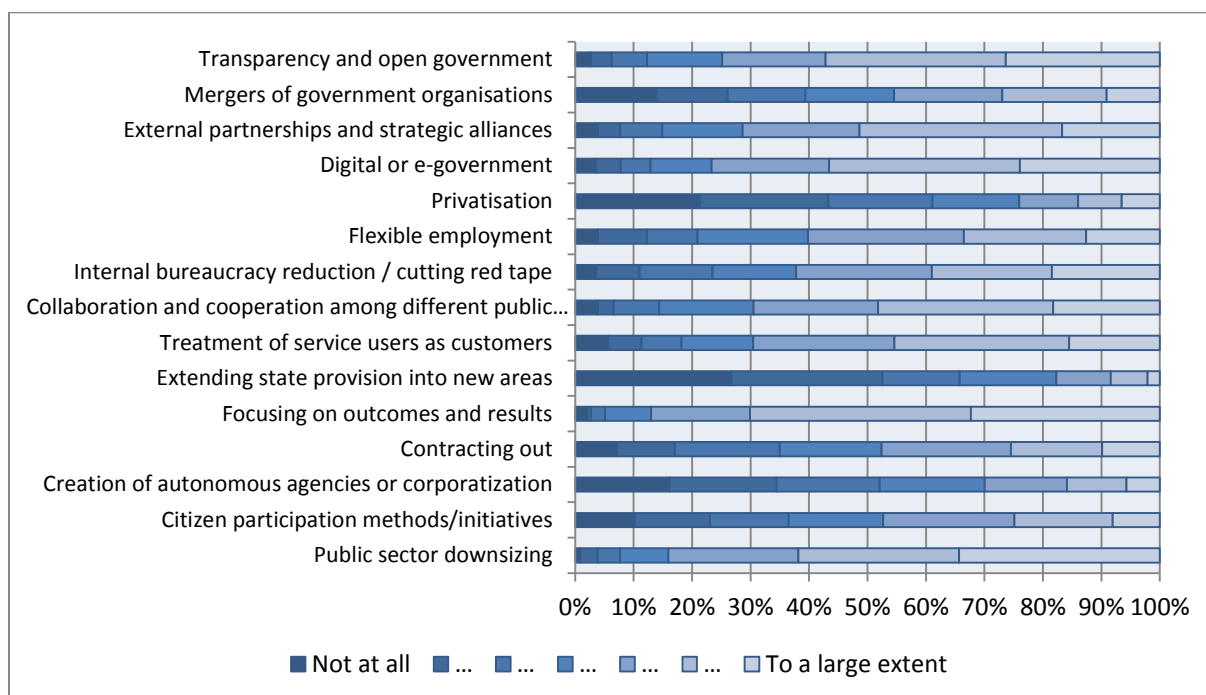
This chapter provides information on the perceptions of senior civil servants with regards to the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) and post NPM, the latter being characterized by a stronger emphasis on collaboration and network forms of governance. The respondents have been asked to assess the type and character of reform trends in their policy field, their organization and their own working practices.

### 6.1. Policy field level

Public sector reform trends can have very different characteristics. While classical NPM reforms include measures like performance management, contracting out, privatization or the flexibilization of employment, post NPM reforms aim at enhancing transparency, partnership working, citizen participation or reducing bureaucracy. Figure 14 shows that overall, 87% of UK civil servants believed that focusing on outcomes and results is one of the most important reforms in their policies areas; 84% believed that public sector downsizing is another important reform. E-government, transparency and external partnerships were other three important reforms to 77%, 74% and 71% of respondents, respectively. The extension of state provision into other areas, privatization and creation of autonomous agencies were the reforms that over half of respondents thought they were not important at all. The relevance of public sector downsizing could well be a result from the public sector budget cuts experienced at the time in which the survey was distributed.



Figure 14. Importance of reform trends (Q: How important are the following reform trends in your policy area?) (n=350-364)

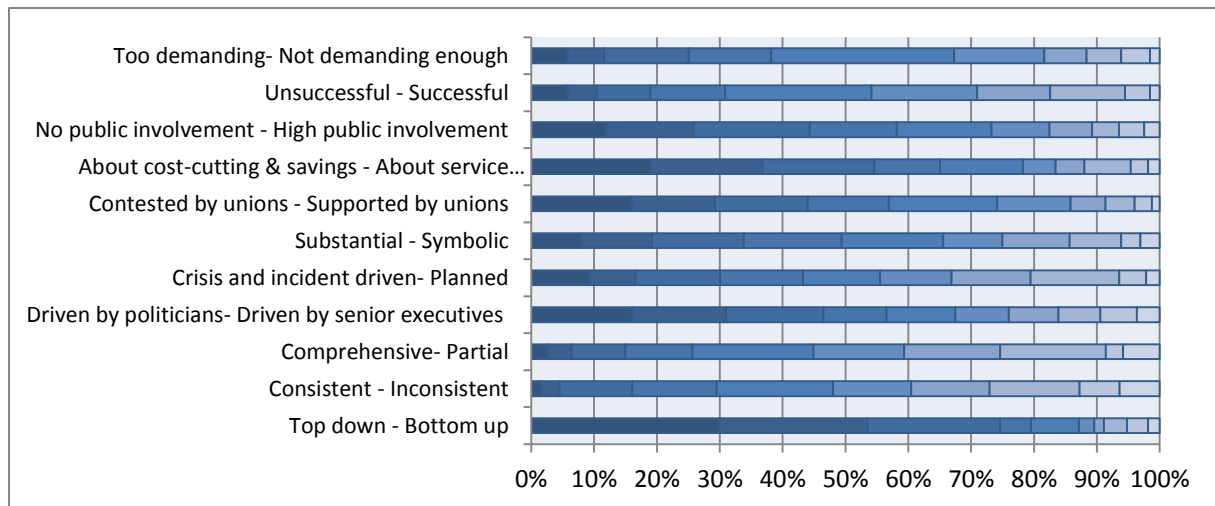


Civil servants in ministries or agencies at central government level thought that internal bureaucracy reduction was more important (\*\*) than respondents in regional ministries or agencies. Respondents in large organizations believed that public sector downsizing was more important (\*\*) than civil servants in small organizations.

When compared to the average results from the overall COCOPS sample, civil servants in the UK believed that external partnerships/alliances and transparency and open government are important to a larger extent than their European counterparts. UK civil servants also believed that the extension of state provision in other areas was less important than the overall COCOPS average.

Figure 15, on the dynamics of the public sector, shows how senior civil servants assess the reforms that have been implemented in the UK. Taking into account the left hand side of the scale (points 1-10), 80% believed that reforms were top-down; 65% about cost-cutting and savings; 58% believed reforms had no public involvement, 57% perceived they were contested by unions and 56% thought they were driven by politicians. Despite the fact that financial austerity measures were being experienced by the civil service in the UK at the time of distributing the survey, the number of respondents choosing 'crisis and incident driven' (43%) was not as large as the other statements mentioned above. A small share of respondents believed that reforms tended to be inconsistent and partial, 27% and 25%, respectively (points 8-10 on right hand side of scale).

Figure 15. Dynamics of public sector reform (Q: Public sector reforms in my policy area tend to be) (n=340-364)



Civil servants in regional ministries and agencies thought that public sector reforms had a higher public involvement (\*\*\*) than civil servants in ministries or agencies at central government level. Respondents in small organizations thought that types of reforms were more symbolic as opposed to substantive (\*\*) when compared to respondents in large organizations.

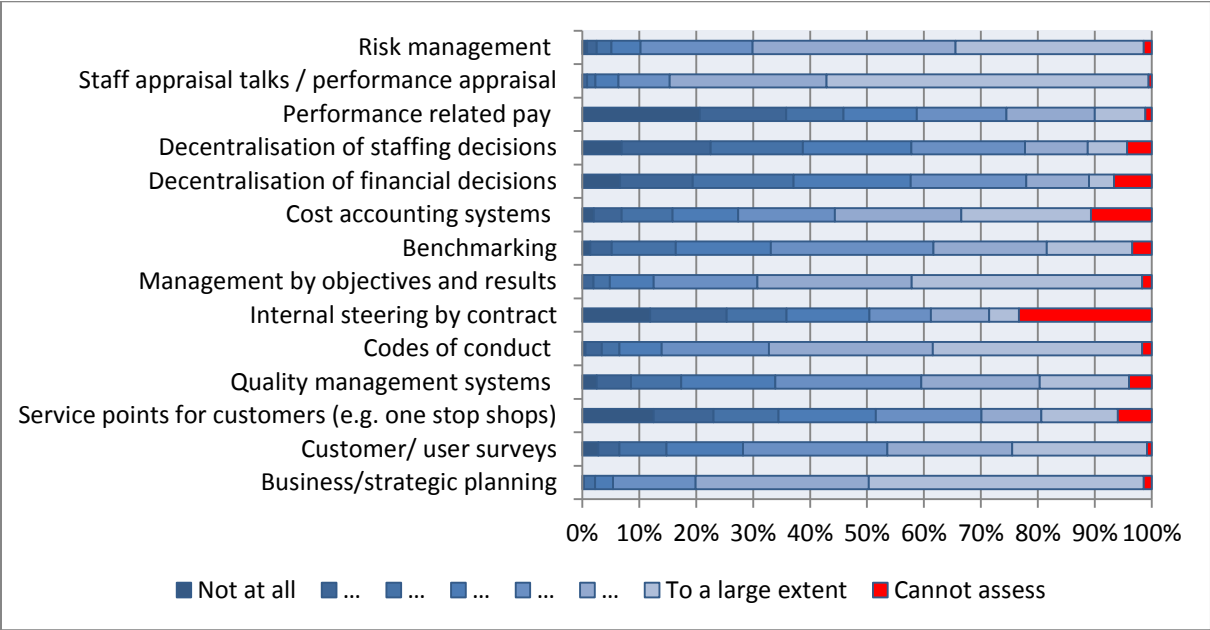
## 6.2. Organizational level

The use of several management instruments was relevant to UK civil servants (see Figure 16). In particular, business plans (94%), staff appraisals (94%), risk management (90%), management by objectives (87%) and codes of conduct (86%). Also 71% of respondents used customer surveys on a regular basis. The relevance of management by objectives is consistent with respondents' perceptions on reforms focusing on outcomes and results (see Figure 15). A smaller share of respondents (between 38% and 40%), used instruments such as performance related pay and decentralization of financial and staffing decisions on a regular basis. In particular, 30% of respondents could not assess the relevance of the 'internal steering by contract'.

Civil servants in ministries or agencies at central government level used to a larger extent performance related pay instruments (\*\*\*) than respondents in regional ministries or agencies. Large organizations tended to use more management instruments than small organizations, in particular codes of conduct (\*\*) and management by objectives (\*\*).

When compared to the overall COCOPS sample, it is observed that civil servants in the UK tend to use management instruments to a larger extent than their counterparts in other European countries, in particular: business planning, performance appraisals, risk management and management by objectives.

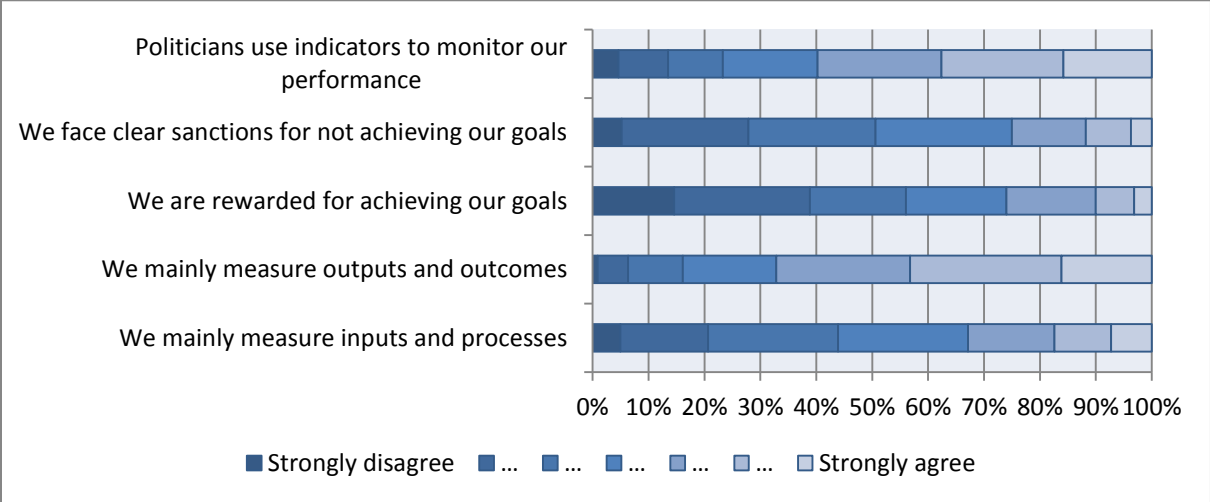
Figure 16. Relevance of different management instruments (Q: To what extent are the following instruments used in your organization?) (n=349-371)



With regard to the relevance of performance management at the organizational level (Figure 18), 67% of senior civil servants believed that outputs and outcomes are measured in their organizations and 60% thought that politicians use indicators to monitor their performance. However, half of respondents perceived that their efforts towards achieving goals are not rewarded and that they face sanctions for not achieving their goals.

In contrast to the overall COCOPS sample, civil servants in the UK believed there to be greater use of output and outcome measures, and that politicians used indicators to measure their performance.

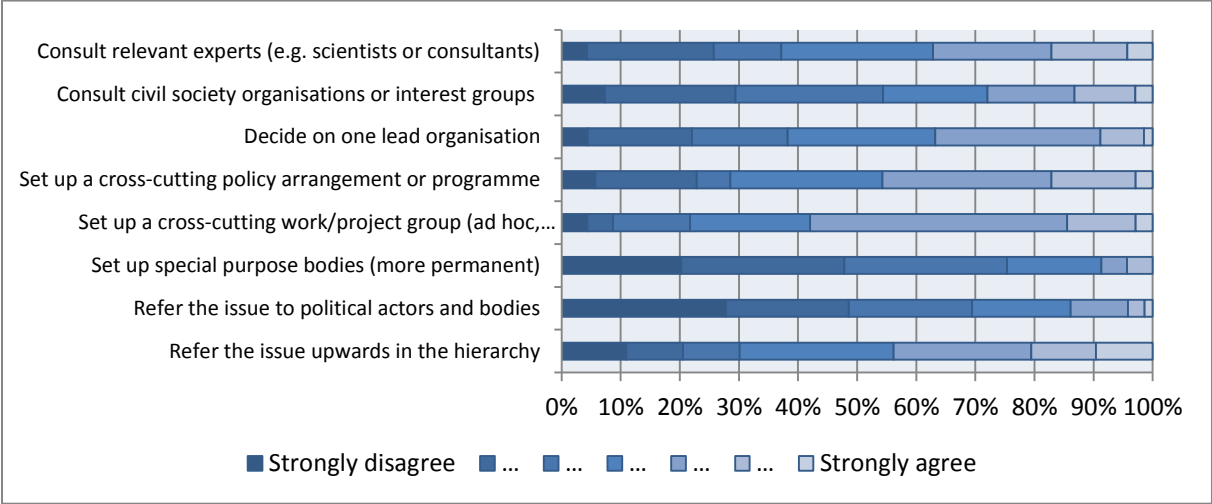
Figure 17. Relevance of performance management (Q: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization?) (n=369-374)



The question on coordination solutions captures the extent to which post NPM reforms, in the form of new coordination mechanisms and measures to counter fragmentation, have been implemented. Overall, senior civil servants in the UK tended to disagree with the set of statements under coordination solutions (Figure 18). The largest shares of disagreement were found in: setting up

special purpose bodies (75%); issues referred to political actors and bodies (70%) and consulting civil society or interest groups (54%). A clear majority (68%) agreed with setting up cross-cutting work groups.

**Figure 18. Coordination solutions (Q: To resolve coordination problems when working with other organizations, we typically) (n=68-73)**



The results presented at the policy and organizational level show a tendency towards a work culture that is fragmented in the UK civil service as opposed to one promoting more coordination and policy integration. But variation across responses throughout the response scales left room for ambiguity. What is clearer from these results is that senior civil servants are consistent in reporting how policy and organizational reforms are output and outcome oriented.

### 6.3. Individual level

The use of performance indicators at an individual level (Figure 19) aims to identify the practices in which senior civil servants are most likely to carry them out. At an organizational level, results show that there is a tendency to use management by objectives to monitor the performance of civil servants' work. At the individual level, a great majority of respondents indicated that they use performance indicators to assess a wide range of activities. These are mainly used to identify problems that need attention (84%), assess if respondents reach their targets (80%) and monitor the performance of colleagues (75%). These results indicate the predominance of performance management in senior civil servants' routines and practices.

Senior civil servants in the UK tended to use to a larger extent the broad range of performance indicators stated in Figure 19 than the average of the overall COCOPS sample.

Figure 19. Use of performance indicators (Q: In my work I use performance indicators to) (n=356-363)



## 7. Impact of the Fiscal Crisis on Public Administration

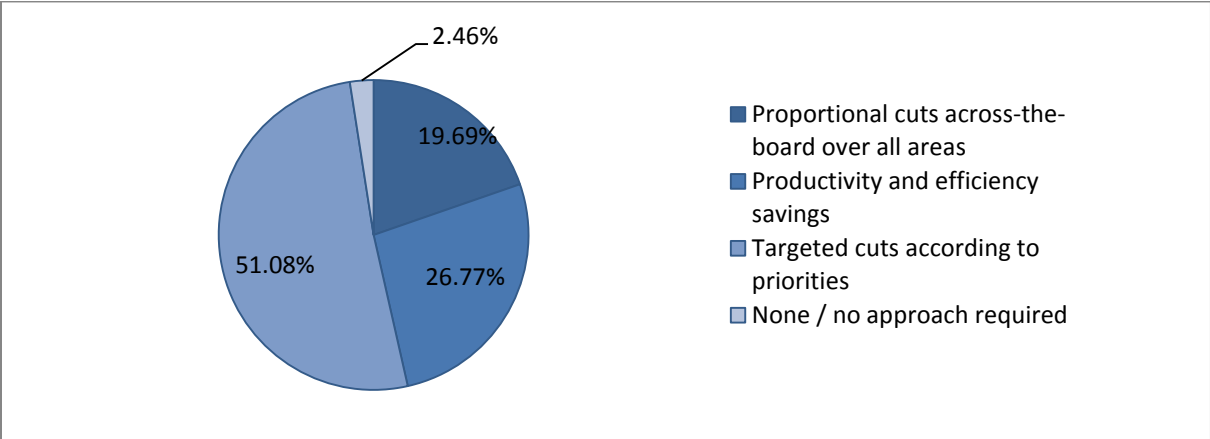
The financial crisis has impacted strongly on the UK which has experienced a 'double-dip' recession for the first time since the economic turmoil of the mid-1970's. The government has made various efforts to slow spending, stimulate growth and reduce public debt, but with mixed results. For example, between 2009 and 2010, the government used a programme of 'quantitative easing' whereby £375bn has been injected into the economy. Evidence suggests that this increased the UK's annual economic output by up to 2%, but there are complaints that this has not translated into increased lending by banks to businesses and individuals. In February 2013, a credit ratings agency downgraded the UK government's credit status from AAA.

The Coalition Government has embarked on a campaign of significant public sector spending cuts in an attempt to reduce the level of debt. For example, central government funding for local government was cut from £29.7bn in 2010/11 to £24.2bn in 2014/15 (LGA, 2012) and the most recent government budget outlined that a 1% pay rise cap for public sector workers will be extended to 2015-16. The UK has one of the worst budget deficits in the EU and debt as a share of GDP is forecast to increase from 75.9% this year to 85.6% in 2016-17.

The need for measures to reduce expenditure at the organisational level is recognised by the large majority of public sector executives in the UK. Only 2.5% of respondents suggested that their organisation has not applied any cutback measures (see Figure 20). According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011: 75), cutbacks can be either of a 'cheese-slicing' (i.e. incremental) nature, be targeted according to priorities mandated by the political executive or involve a more performance-oriented approach. Just over a half of respondents suggested that their organisation has targeted cuts according to priorities (51.1%), while 26.8% say that they have observed productivity and efficiency savings. Around one in five respondents (19.7%) state that their organization has implemented 'classic' incremental-type cuts across the board.

These strategies for reducing costs in the UK civil service largely correspond to the approach taken in other countries within the EU with two main differences. First, more than 10% of the overall COCOPS have not taken any measures to cut costs (compared to 2.5% in the UK) and making proportional cuts across all areas is a more common approach in the overall sample (30.5%) than in the UK (19.7%).

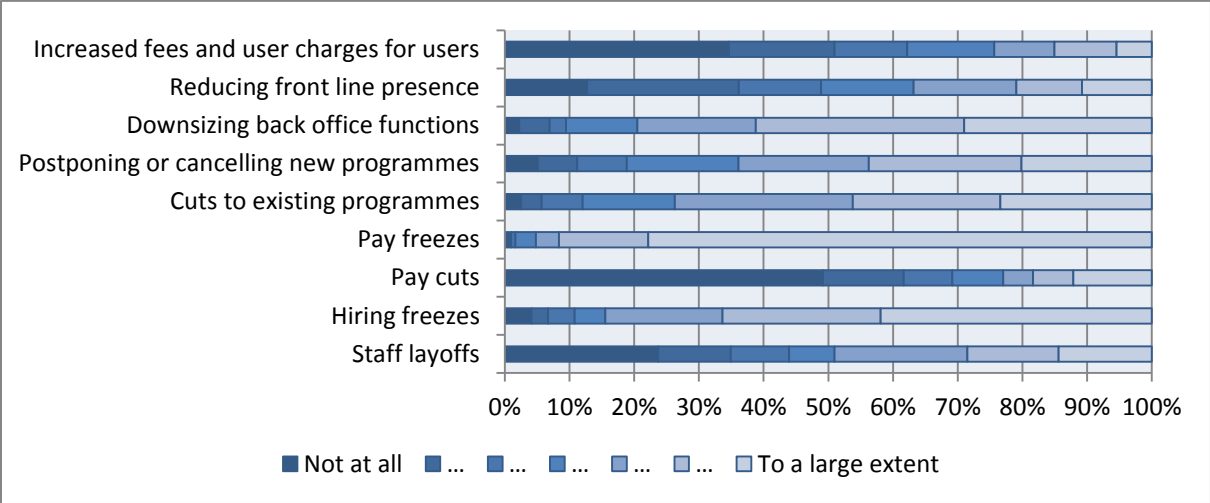
Figure 20. Cutback measures at organizational level (Q: In response to the fiscal crisis, to what extent has your organization applied the following cutback measures?)



With regard to the more specific approaches to implementing cutbacks (see Figure 21), the results show that the most commonly used approach to realise savings are pay freezes (95.2%) and hiring freezes (84.4%). Around three-quarters of respondents also indicate that their organisation are downsizing back office functions (79.5%) and making cuts to existing programmes (73.7%). A slightly smaller proportion of executives suggested that they are postponing or cancelling new programmes (63.9%). The least common responses to the fiscal crisis are pay cuts (23%), increased fees and users charges (24.4%), reduced front line presence (36.8%) and staff layoffs (49%).

Countries are likely to take different approaches to making savings according to many factors such as the extent of the financial crisis, experience in following a particular cutback strategy and party ideology. In the UK, all of the approaches to making savings in Figure 21 are higher than the overall COCOPS sample. The freezing of pay and laying off staff are much more prevalent in the UK at the moment than the picture for the EU as a whole.

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?)

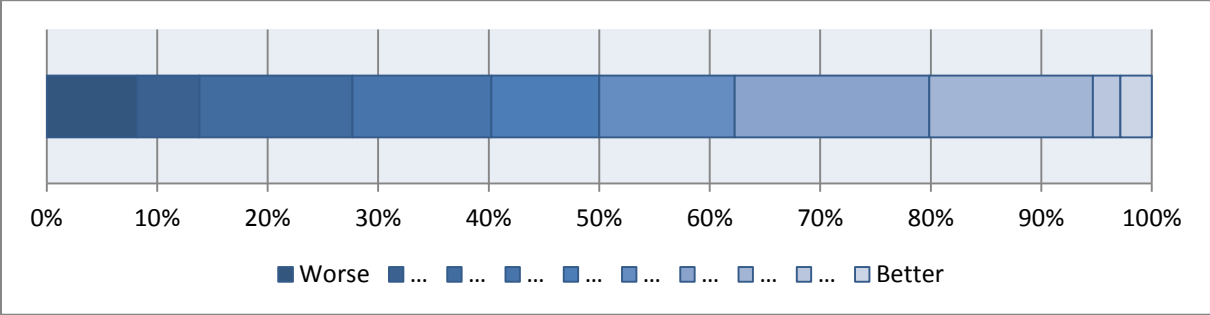


## 8. Impact of Public Administration Reform

One of the main goals of the study is to obtain systematic information on how senior civil servants assess the impact of the various managerial reforms at a policy, organizational and individual levels. In this chapter, we present the results with regard to these themes.

An overall assessment of public administration (Figure 22) shows clearly that 20% of senior civil servants believed that it has improved over the last five years; in contrast 28% thought it has deteriorated. A majority (52%) tended to perceive that public administration has not changed substantially over this period.

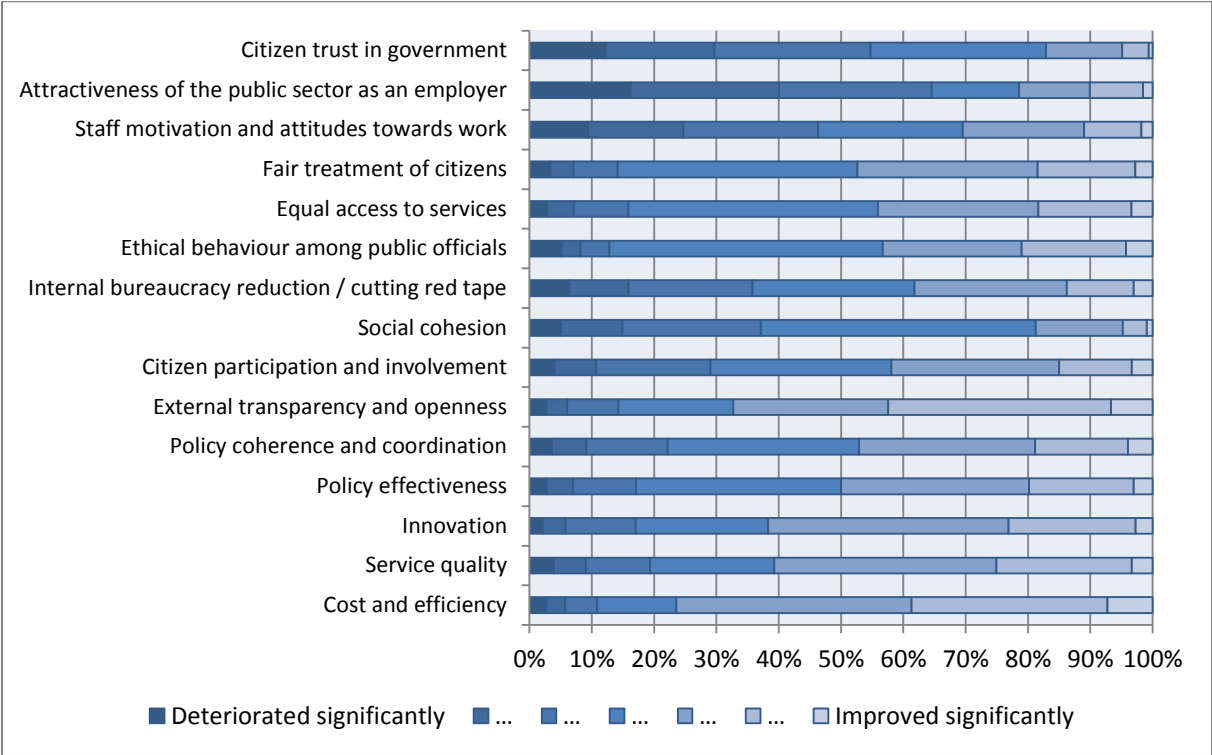
Figure 22. Overall PA assessment (Q: *Compared with five years ago, how would you say things have developed when it comes to the way public administration runs in your country?*) (n=324)



To complement the previous results, a more nuanced question was asked addressing a spectrum of different performance dimensions (Figure 23). The dimensions in which a great majority of respondents perceived improvement over the last five years were on managerial aspects of public administration: cost efficiency (76%), innovation (62%), service quality (61%) and policy effectiveness (50%). Deterioration was perceived by a great majority in finding attractive the public sector as an employer (64%) and citizens trusting government (55%). Dimensions such as equal access to services (44%) and fair treatment to citizens (47%) were not areas where the largest share of respondents believed to have improved. It was in cost and efficiency that UK civil servants scored higher than the average of their European counterparts.

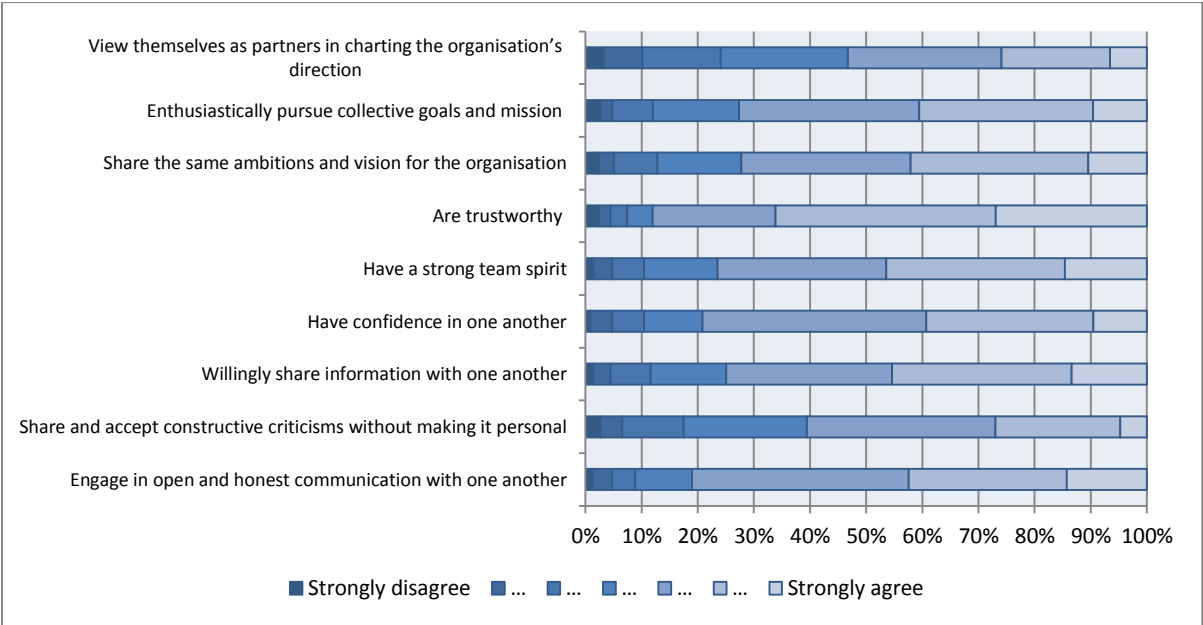


Figure 23. Different performance dimensions (Q: Thinking about your policy area over the last five years how would you rate the way public administration has performed on the following dimensions?) (n=342-359)



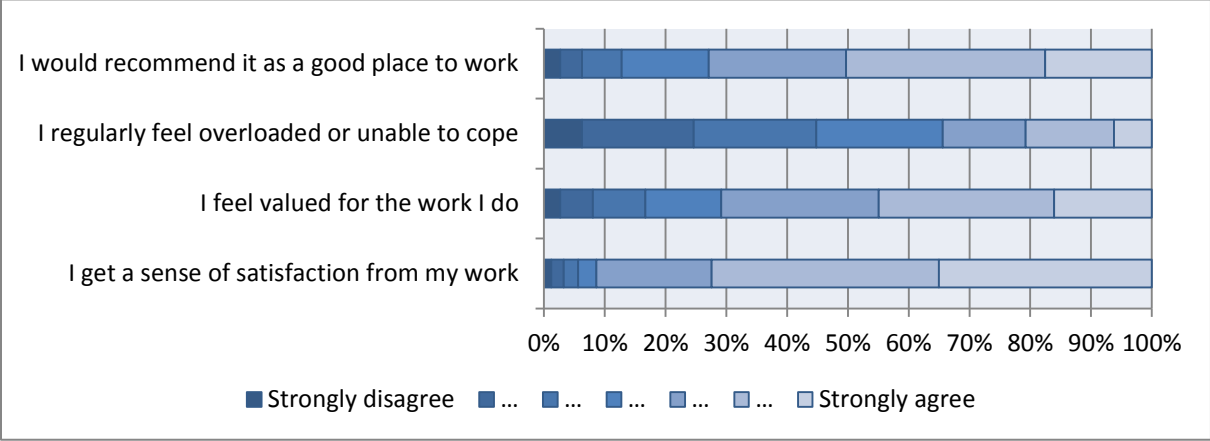
The survey aimed to assess the type of impact that NPM reforms had upon social capital and trust within the respondents’ organizations. Overall, UK civil servants tended to agree with almost all statements listed in Figure 24. The largest share of respondents agreeing were found in people engaging in open and honest communication (81%), being trustworthy (88%) and having confidence with one another (80%). Although positive, but to a lesser extent, was the share of respondents agreeing with people having a strong team spirit (76%) and sharing information (74%).

Figure 24. Social capital and trust (Q: People in my organization) (n=366-369)



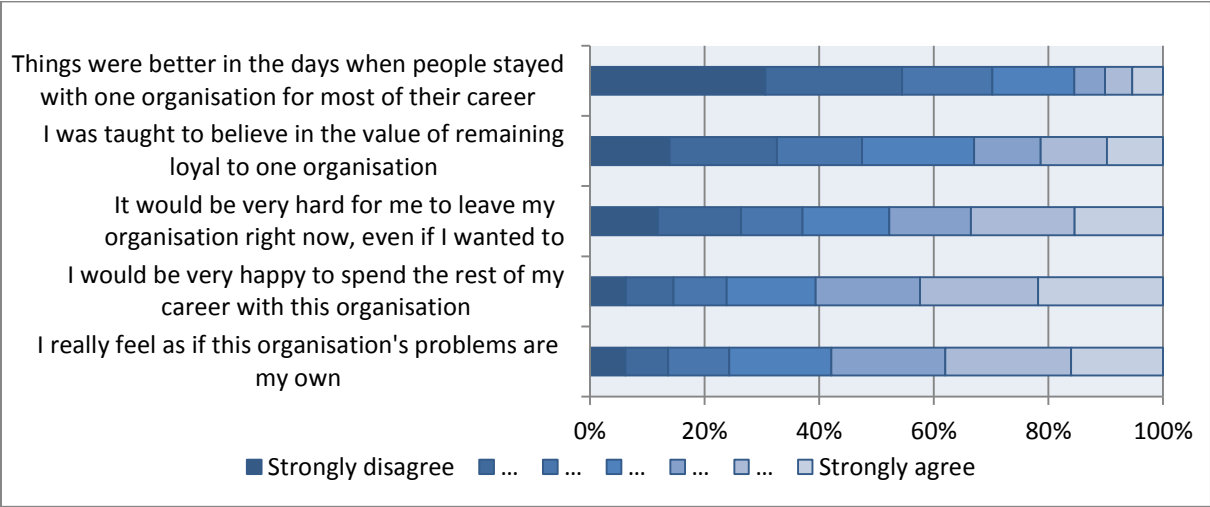
Another question asked about job satisfaction (Figure 25). Overall, results were very positive. A very large proportion (91%) of respondents stated that they received some level of satisfaction from their work. Results also show that senior civil servants do not particularly believe themselves to be overloaded with work.

Figure 25. Job satisfaction (Q: When thinking about my work and the organization I work for) (n=359-366)



A second set of questions aimed to assess the level of organizational commitment by senior civil servants (Figure 26). Organizational commitment is considered in the academic debates as an important proxy of organizational performance (Moon, 2000). Using a classification on organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1991) some degree of ‘continuance’ was found in the responses of senior civil servants. On the one hand, 61% of respondents agreed that they would be happy to stay the rest of their careers within their organizations. But on the other hand, respondents appreciated the freedom they could have in moving across organizations - 70% disagreed in thinking that things were better in the days that people stayed in one organization. However, respondents in regional ministries or agencies agreed more (\*\*\*) than their counterparts in central government bodies with things being better when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers. ‘Affective’ commitment, a second classification of commitment, was also identified by 58% of respondents, who felt that their organizations’ problems were also their own.

Figure 26. Organizational commitment (Q: When thinking about my work and the organization I work for) (n=359-366)



## 9. Findings from the Employment and Health sectors

### 9.1 Employment Sector

As for much of the UK public sector, employment policy (incorporating jobs, pensions, job-related benefits and allowances) is largely the responsibility of central government. Unusually amongst the major UK policy fields that touches the lives of ordinary citizens on a daily basis, employment policy for all four constituent countries of the UK is managed centrally from a single UK department: Work and Pensions (DWP). Moreover, the highly centralised nature of the employment policy field is not restricted to the formulation of policy at the central level, but also extends to its implementation. Although the devolved administrations, and to a lesser extent local governments, retain competences in the area of economic development and inward investment, the actual provision of employment services, welfare benefits and pensions is entirely managed by the DWP. In particular until recently, much of that work was carried out by the agencies within DWP, with general employment services falling under the responsibility of Job Centre Plus.

At the time of the survey, JobCentre Plus was the biggest UK central government agency, with 81,850 employees altogether in 2011 (Civil Service Statistics 2011). It emerged from the amalgamation of two agencies (the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency), and responded directly to the DWP. Like other agencies, it had its own budget and an important autonomy in relation to financial and personnel management matters. Unlike those agencies, it dealt directly with policy implementation at the local level, often working in partnership with other public agencies at that level. However, subsequent to the COCOPS survey, the Coalition government abolished the agency bringing its services back under the direct central control of DWP in 2012. Still, while the implementation of employment policy is no longer decentralised within central government, the provision of employment services remains a unique example of the extreme levels of centralization of policy formulation and implementation that can be achieved within the UK public sector.

To explore the employment sector in as much relevant detail as possible, as well as executives in the Senior Civil Services, we chose to survey the managers of the JobCentre Plus centres across the UK, since these individuals have considerable autonomy over the implementation of employment services, if not the broader contours of policy. Our analysis is based on 50 answers and yields the following results.

#### **Values and attitudes**

The executives we surveyed who worked in the employment sector had a different self-understanding and identity pattern from their colleagues in other policy fields. In particular, although they were marginally more likely to see their role as the impartial implementation of laws and rules (the mean for the employment sector is 5.82, compared to 5.76 overall), they had a much weaker role orientation than the sample as a whole, especially in terms of: developing new policy agendas (employment mean of 3.57, compared to 4.46 overall); providing expertise (employment mean of 5.12, compared to 5.87 overall); and finding joint solutions (employment mean of 4.53, compared to 5.23 overall).

## **Work context**

Executives working in the employment sector generally perceived their goals in a similar way to their colleagues working in other policy fields, barring a perception that politicians were more prone to use indicators to monitor their performance (employment mean of 5.29, overall mean of 4.72). However, they did tend to feel far less autonomous than their colleagues outside of the employment field. This was across the board for these measures, which were, on average, just over 1 point lower than for the overall sample ranging from a minimum difference of 0.55 less than the sample for dismissing or removing staff to a maximum of 1.9 less than the sample for autonomy over budget allocations.

Interaction frequency was generally lower amongst employment respondents than the overall sample for all stakeholders, but for many key groups it was much lower. In particular, interaction with: the responsible minister (employment mean of 1.90, overall 2.99); other politicians (employment 2.08, 2.89 overall); auditors (employment 2.55, overall 3.38); other government departments (employment 3.08, overall 4.00); private companies (employment 3.00, overall 3.65); EU institutions (employment 1.43, overall 2.26); international bodies (employment 1.26, overall 1.97); and the media (employment 1.80, overall 3.10). However, interaction with trade union representatives was actually higher (employment, 3.76, overall 3.26).

Coordination quality was generally perceived to be worse amongst employment executives. In particular, they rated coordination with bodies within their own policy area badly (employment mean of 3.73, overall mean of 4.77), as well as coordination with bodies in different policy areas (employment 2.77, overall 3.85) and national/supra-national bodies (employment 2.63, overall 3.87).

## **Relevance of NPM reforms**

The relevance of NPM reform trends in the employment sector was in many cases marginally lower compared to the overall sample, but in some cases was markedly so. In particular, the ratings of intra-sectoral collaboration (employment 4.35, overall 5.11) and transparency and open government (employment 4.38, overall 5.37). However, it was also apparent that some reforms were more prevalent within the employment sector, especially extending state provision into new areas (employment 3.64, overall 2.83) and privatization (employment 3.79, overall 3.19).

Employment sector executives tended to have a similar view of the dynamics of reform to the overall sample. However, they did differ noticeably in terms of how much influence they felt senior executives had on reforms (3.29 v 4.36), the extent to which reforms were planned (4.69 v 5.08) and on whether there had been enough reform (4.32 v 4.90).

The use of management instruments in the UK employment sector varied in many ways as compared to the overall sample. Service points for customers (4.63 v 4.10), codes of conduct (6.12 v 5.79), MbO (6.21 v 5.90), benchmarking (5.29 v 4.93) were all utilised to a greater extent. However, internal steering by contract (3.19 v 3.66), cost accounting systems (4.72 v 5.17), decentralisation of financial decisions (3.25 v 3.92), decentralisation of staffing decision (3.59 v 3.94) and risk management (5.23 v 5.84) were utilised less. In general, the use of performance indicators was similar in employment to the overall sample, except for a greater propensity for using them to satisfy the requirements of line

managers (5.50 v 4.97), and weaker propensity to use indicators to engage with external stakeholders (4.18 v 4.52).

### **Impact of public administration reform**

As concerns the overall assessment of the performance of public administration, employment executives had a similar view to that which is observed in the overall sample. However, across the range of different dimensions of performance, the executives in the employment sector give a more negative evaluation of the sector's achievements. In particular, cost and efficiency (4.41 v 5.03), service quality (3.96 v 4.57), policy effectiveness (4.00 v 4.46), external transparency (3.74 v 4.93), and citizen participation (3.59 v 4.17) are all regarded as being much weaker in the employment sector than across the whole sample.

These kinds of differences were observed for the levels of social capital within employment organizations, which were, on average, just over 0.5 points lower than for the overall sample ranging from a minimum difference of 0.42 less than the sample for having a strong team spirit to a maximum of 0.71 less than the sample for staff viewing themselves as partners in charting the organization's direction. These differences were also reflected in the work satisfaction experienced by employment executives, which were on average about 0.5 points lower, with feeling valued (4.19 v 5.04), and a commitment to recommending the organization as a good place to work (4.31 v 5.19) noticeably lower. However, although affective commitment was worse than the overall sample (employment 3.75, overall 4.68), lower levels of team social capital and job satisfaction within the employment sector appeared not have influenced other aspects of organizational commitment, which was on average higher than that observed for the sample. In particular, loyalty to the organization (4.17 v 3.70) and a preference for remaining with a single organization for one's career (3.72 v 2.76).

In sum, the perceived relevance of public sector reforms and management instruments in the employment sector varies greatly depending upon the type of reform and instrument. The work context is generally perceived as less suitable for management reforms; the executives feel less autonomous, interact less frequently with key stakeholders and perceive a lower quality of coordination across organizational boundaries. On the whole, the values of our employment respondents are apparently felt much less strongly than in the other sectors of UK government, though they do exhibit a slightly stronger adherence to the impartial implementation of laws and rules. Finally, they assess the impact of public sector reforms as more negative in most ways than the overall UK sample, and perceive themselves to work in less cohesive workgroups and indicate that they have lower job satisfaction.

## **9.2 Health Sector**

Amongst the policy fields dealing with the provision of public services to UK citizens, the health sector in the UK is distinctive in several ways. Firstly, the responsibility for the formulation of health policy is almost completely separate from its implementation. In England, policy is designed and managed from the Department of Health, whilst in the other countries in the UK departments of

health within the devolved administrations in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff are responsible for policy formulation. Thus, there is considerable central control over policy. Second, the implementation of policy is undertaken almost exclusively through the organizations and institutions that make up the National Health Service (NHS), which has distinctive local and regional governance structures in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The NHS is not a department of state nor is it a branch of local government, like many other public services, such as education, police, fire, and social care. The delivery of acute health care services is mostly undertaken by large urban hospital trusts, whereas primary care is provided at the local level through general practices and community hospitals managed largely by area boards of one type or another.

Healthcare provision in the UK public sector is an enormous government undertaking and is carried out through a highly centralised system of policy design, resource allocation and performance management. However, decisions about the distribution and allocation of resources to one part of the NHS rather than another are taken entirely within central government, whilst how those resources are utilised is then at the discretion of the trusts and area boards which do not come directly under the rubric of the central executive. Since the COCOPS survey was aimed at individuals working in units and agencies that were a part of central government, we did not send the survey to senior executives within the many large hospital trusts that make up the NHS nor the local bodies responsible for managing primary care. For that reason, our data for health executives are very much restricted to senior people within Whitehall, Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

The analysis for the health sector – albeit based on a very small sample of 26-29 answers – yields the following results.

### **Values and attitudes**

On the whole, executives working in the health sector have a fairly similar self-understanding and similar identity patterns like their colleagues in other policy fields. However, there is a stark difference in the extent to which they believed themselves to be developing new policy agendas (the mean for the health sector is 5.15, compared to 4.46 overall) and finding joint solutions (5.81 mean for health, 5.23 mean overall).

### **Work context**

Executives working in the health sector perceive their goals to be pretty much as easy to observe and measure as their colleagues working in other policy fields. However, they did tend to feel more autonomous than their colleagues outside health. This is especially the case for autonomy in policy choice and design (health mean of 4.83, compared to 4.03 overall), and for policy implementation (health mean of 5.52, compared to 4.87 overall).

Interaction frequency is relatively similar to the overall sample, besides that executives in the health sector interact somewhat more frequently with the responsible minister (here a mean value of 3.97 is observed, compared to a value of 2.99 for the overall sample), and the media (health mean of 3.93, compared with overall mean of 3.10). Coordination quality is generally perceived to be better amongst health executives. In particular, they rate coordination with local/regional (health mean of

4.58, overall mean of 3.98) and national/supra-national bodies (health mean of 4.30, one of 3.87 overall) much higher than colleagues in other policy fields.

### **Relevance of NPM reforms**

The relevance of NPM reform trends in the health sector was for the most part higher compared to the overall sample. In particular, citizen participation (health 4.81, overall 4.10), outcome focus (health 6.22, overall 5.79), extending state provision (health 3.42, overall 2.83), treating users as customers (health 5.33, overall 4.95), intra-sectoral collaboration (health 5.52, overall 5.11), and transparency (health 5.70, overall 5.37) were all more in evidence as trends according to our health respondents. However, it was noticeable that contracting out was much less in evidence (health 3.73, overall 4.24), though seemingly downsizing was (health 6.15, overall 5.68).

Health sector executives tended to be less critical of the dynamics of reform in their policy field. In particular, they were less likely to regard reforms as: inconsistent (5.00 v 5.86), partial (5.31 v 5.86), and symbolic (3.65 v 4.73). At the same time, they were more likely to regard reforms as: planned (6.00 v 5.08), supported by unions (4.96 v 4.08), and successful (6.04 v 5.33).

Management instruments are used in the UK health sector in much the same ways as in the overall sample. However, there are important exceptions. Internal steering by contract is regarded as less prevalent by our health respondents (2.90 v 3.66), whereas decentralization of financial (4.62 v 3.92) and staffing (4.42 v 3.94) decisions is regarded as more in evidence. In general, performance management including performance indicators is very much similar in Health as in the other policy fields.

### **Impact of public administration reform**

As concerns the overall assessment of the performance of public administration, health executives have a much more positive view than is observed in overall sample (6.38 v 5.26). In fact, across the range of different dimensions of performance, the executives in the health sector give a more positive evaluation of the sector's achievements. In particular, service quality (5.19 v 4.57), innovation (4.96 v 4.63), policy effectiveness (4.96 v 4.46), policy coherence (4.96 v 4.35), external transparency (5.52 v 4.93), citizen participation (4.70 v 4.17), social cohesion 4.15 v 3.67), and citizen trust (4.07 v 3.26) are all regarded as being much stronger in the health sector than across the whole sample.

These kinds of differences were not observed for the levels of social capital within health organizations, but there were differences in the work satisfaction experienced by health executives. Typically, this took the form of a higher level of satisfaction, especially in terms of: feeling valued (5.61 v 5.04) and spending the rest of their career in the organization (5.32 v 4.80).

In sum, public sector reforms and especially management ideas are perceived as much more relevant in the health sector. The work context is perceived as more suitable for management reforms; the executives feel more autonomous and perceive a higher quality of coordination across the spatial scales at which healthcare is organized. Their values lean more towards a proactive engagement with policy than is the case for their colleagues in other policy fields. Finally, they assess the public sector reforms as more positive overall, and have higher job satisfaction.

## 10. Conclusion

British public administration is commonly regarded as having a strong separation between politics and administration typical of common law traditions, which underpins a more results-orientated administrative culture. The British state is also characterized as permitting an unparalleled level of freedom for the government of the day to see through radical management reforms due to its executive powers (see Lynn 2006, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). The results of the COCOPS executive survey confirm these characterizations to a large extent, but also bring out the ways in which the archetypical NPM reforms introduced and implemented in the UK are being supplemented with ideas associated with the New Public Governance. Moreover, they show interesting differences at policy sector level, and, in particular, a significantly higher NPM-orientation and stronger reform intensity in the health sector along with a significantly more positive assessment of these reforms; whereas the opposite seems to be true in the employment sector.

The results for the UK sample confirm that British public administration has been shaped by the reforms of the recent past, which generally indicates the growth of managerialism (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011): business studies and other related social sciences dominate the educational backgrounds of the respondents, and the executives are comparatively younger than those in the overall COCOPS sample, and more likely to be female. Even so, British respondents show a comparatively low job mobility, with large shares of the executives having worked in the same organization for a considerable time; though, there is more career mobility within the UK civil service than in the COCOPS sample as a whole. The data also indicate that though British executives are likely to have some private sector work experience, they are extremely unlikely to have gained nonprofit sector work experience.

With regards to the **self-perception of their roles** as executives we see a preference for managerial values associated with improving organizational performance and results, which is consistent with the impact of managerialism in the UK public service. However, lower levels of commitment to inter-organizational roles seem to suggest that the emergence of a joined-up approach to coordinating government is taking longer to embed within British public administration than in many other parts of Europe. Consistent with the managerialist perception of their role was also a greater ascription to extrinsic motivational factors than elsewhere.

A major focus of this report is the executives' perception of their **work context**. We find that goal ambiguity is perceived as relatively low within the UK civil service and goal measurability comparatively high when compared to other countries – findings that no doubt reflect the long-standing experience with managerialist techniques, such as target setting and performance monitoring, in the UK public sector. Adding further weight to the picture of a results-orientated managerialist culture, is the finding that senior UK executives feel more autonomous with regards to almost all aspects of their work than most of their counterparts in other European countries.

British public administration experienced the most substantial wave of different public management reforms initiatives during the 1970s and 1980s, and we find clear evidence that many of the **management instruments** associated with the NPM-style reforms of that time are more prevalent within the UK public service than elsewhere, especially business planning, performance appraisals and management by objectives. However, arguably the most far-reaching NPM types of reform, such



as privatization, contracting out or agencification, appear to be of no more relevance, on average, in the UK than elsewhere in Europe. However, it does seem as if there may be a growing trend towards the use of external partnerships as well as a greater emphasis on transparency and open government in the UK – indeed the latter has been one of the watchwords of the Coalition government. A comparison with the overall sample confirms that reforms in the UK have been more top-down, contested by the unions and driven by politicians than the average across the COCOPS sample. Even so, the overall assessment among public sector executives seems to be quite similar and mixed with a similar share of positive and negative assessments of the success of the reforms.

One key goal of the present study is to obtain systematic information on how public sector executives assess the **impact of the various public sector reforms** on an organizational but also policy level. In an overall assessment of public administration, just over half of the respondents state that the way public administration runs the UK has clearly improved, with less than a third believing it had got worse. This is similar to the perceptions of executives from the other European countries. Asked for a more differentiated assessment of various performance dimensions the clearest and most positive results can be found for managerial aspects of public administration such as cost and efficiency, innovation and service quality. Cost efficiency, in particular, gets a higher rating in the UK than in the overall COCOPS sample. The more policy orientated dimensions of performance, such as citizen trust in government, policy coherence and coordination, social cohesion as well as policy effectiveness, are rated less strongly, as for the overall sample.

At the organizational level we find high levels of social capital amongst UK civil servants, higher on each measure than in the overall COCOPS sample, pointing perhaps to the on-going strength and coherence of the administrative culture within the British state. The survey also confirms a very high level of job satisfaction among British executives, higher, on average, than their counterparts in other European countries. Although other aspects of job satisfaction amongst the UK respondents are similar to the overall sample, a greater number of British executives feel regularly overloaded or unable to cope. Compared to the overall COCOPS sample, UK public sector executives show a significantly higher continuance commitment in terms of how happy they would be to spend the rest of their career in the organization combined with a lower ascription to having been taught to believe in such loyalty. The British respondents offer a similar assessment of the other aspects of organizational commitment to their colleagues elsewhere.

Apart from central government, the survey also targeted more specifically the health and employment sectors. With regards to health, results differed substantially from the rest of the British sample in a number of important ways. **Health sector** respondents appear to have confronted more reforms, which are perceived more positively in terms of implementation (i.e. being consistent, substantial and planned) and in terms of their success. Coordination is seen as better within the health sector than in the overall sample, and there is a perception of higher autonomy and proactive engagement with policy. Overall, executives from this sector are more open towards managerial ideas and administrative reforms than the rest of the UK sample. This openness to managerialism differs particularly greatly from their colleagues in the employment sector.

Managerialist reforms have not been implemented with the same vigour or to the same degree in the **employment sector** as in the health sector, which is reflected in the perceptions of the respondents from this sector: they perceive that their sector has been subject to enough, poorly-planned reform and that this was largely driven by politicians. In particular, employment executives

regarded the use of performance management instruments as much more prevalent within their sector. The work context in the employment sector seems to be less suited for implementing management reforms: autonomy is perceived as lower, the organizations in this field collaborate less with actors outside public administration, and the executives perceive higher politicization. Significant improvements were not on several management dimensions, such as cost, efficiency, and quality, and also with regard to transparency and citizen participation. Moreover, in the eyes of the executives, organizational social capital, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are all lower, painting, overall, a somewhat dismal picture of work in the sector compared to other parts of UK government.

Overall, the results do not indicate a substantial change in the managerialist character of British public administration that evolved from the 1980s onwards. However, there are ways in which the clear dominance of the NPM-type reform dynamic has been reconfigured, especially in terms of greater openness to a NPG reform agenda as described by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011). The strength of the social capital within the teams in which UK civil servants work is striking, and suggestive of the strength of the administrative culture of the British state even at a time of crisis. We also find a different perception of reforms within UK public administration, with the health sector being more receptive to NPM and NPG reforms, while the employment sector exhibits openness to performance management instruments, and a less receptive attitude towards outward-facing reforms.

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