

# The Implementation of Performance Management in European Central Governments: More a North-South than an East-West Divide

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## Abstract

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This article presents the first country-comparative evidence on the importance and use of performance management in European central governments, based on an executive survey conducted in 17 countries. The data confirm that performance management has made its way into European central governments and continues to constitute a major reform trend. At the organizational level of ministries and agencies we find a consistently strong use of strategic planning, performance appraisal and management objectives, along with only a partial institutionalization of a performance-management logic. Scepticism towards measurement and the difficulty of acting upon performance information are persistent challenges. We also find that performance-management implementation is significantly stronger in agencies and larger organizations, and that it varies strongly between different countries. Implementation is substantially higher in Scandinavian countries and Anglo-Saxon countries than in Continental and Southern European countries, with a rather varied pattern for Central and Eastern European countries. The findings thereby confirm the need for a more context-sensitive understanding of performance management, along with the need for more extensive research and evidence to further develop this cross-comparative European perspective.

## Key words:

performance management, Europe, comparative public administration, management instrument, performance-indicator use

## 1. Introduction

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Over the last few decades performance management has become a key reform trend in public administration around the globe. Scholars describe this phenomenon varyingly as “performance movement” (Talbot 2005), “the age of performance” (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008), an “era of governance by performance management” (Moynihan 2008) or an emerging “mantra” (Radin 2006). Although the issue of performance management is not new and has a long history (e.g. Van Dooren et al. 2010), the intensity and broadness of this trend attained a new quality under the umbrella of New Public Management (NPM), which began its victory as a global paradigm in the early 1980s. Similar to NPM itself, performance management is also used with numerous meanings, comes in different forms, and covers a range of instruments. At its core is the idea of “acting upon performance information” (Bouckaert and van Dooren 2009, 156). The OECD (2005, 59) defines performance management as a “management cycle under which performance objectives and targets are determined, managers have flexibility to achieve, actual performance is measured and reported, and this information feeds into decisions about finding, design, operations, and rewards or sanctions.” For practitioners, performance management mostly comes in the form of specific instruments used to incorporate performance information into the management and policy system, such as target systems, performance indicators, controlling, balanced scorecards, reporting systems, performance contracts, performance budgeting or, at an individual level, as target agreements, performance appraisals and performance-related pay.

Over the past decade, we have also witnessed a booming interest in research on the practical importance and use of performance management (e.g. Bouckaert and Halligan 2008) and especially its effect on performance and the question how and why “management matters” (e.g. Ingraham et al. 2003; Boyne et al. 2006; Walker et al. 2010; Andrews and Boyne 2010). There is increasing evidence of the positive impact of performance management on public-sector performance (e.g. Moynihan and Pandey 2005; Moynihan 2008; Van Dooren et al. 2010; Walker et al. 2010) but also of possible dysfunctional behavioral effects of such systems and only partial or reluctant implementation, along with observable gaps between rhetoric and practice. A growing body of research has explored how public managers and politicians use performance information and has started to identify antecedents of such use (e.g. Moynihan and Pandey 2010; Van Dooren and Van de Walle 2008; Taylor 2011; Hammerschmid et al. 2013a; for a systematic overview, see Kroll 2015). A striking feature of most of this research on performance management is a strong reliance on evidence from Anglo-Saxon countries, Scandinavia and a few other countries, such as the Netherlands, and an absence of empirical research evidence from other countries (for an overview see Boyne 2010b). It has been argued that in Continental Europe, performance management is less institutionalized than in the Anglo-Saxon world and that there are considerable country variations (Bouckaert and Halligan

2008; Van Dooren et al. 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Despite an increasing European integration and claims of an emerging “European administrative space” (e.g. Olsen 2003), it seems that historical traditions in state and administration have a conserving influence on current developments. “Current administrative reforms are dependent on the historical path that led to the present state and administration” (Kickert 2011, 98), and public-administration scholars often refer to certain distinguishable patterns or “administrative traditions” in Europe to better understand such developments (e.g. Painter and Peters 2010; Kickert 2011; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014).

Our article presents new empirical evidence to systematically compare the importance and use of performance management in European central governments based on a large-scale executive survey conducted in 17 European countries. We are especially interested in the kinds of variations or commonalities we find between different European countries and what specific factors have an influence on the use of performance management and information in Europe. The article follows an exploratory design and aims to capture the current status quo of performance management across European central governments. After briefly presenting data and method in Chapter 2, we especially address the following questions in Chapter 3 by presenting the findings of our analysis. How do executives perceive the importance of performance management as a reform trend in European central governments, compared to other reform trends (Chapter 3.1)? To what extent are different management instruments used within European ministries and agencies (Chapter 3.2)? To what extent do we see a performance-management logic – based on target setting, measurement and reacting upon target (non)achievement – already institutionalized in European central governments (Chapter 3.3)? And finally, how are performance indicators used by executives both for internal and external purposes (Chapter 3.4)? In Chapter 4 we take a closer look at factors which influence the degree of the use of performance management, before we present some first conclusions and perspectives for further research based on our analyses in Chapter 5.

In order to analyze these questions from a comparative perspective, we look at both country similarities and differences but also follow scholarly debates on administrative traditions (e.g. Meyer and Hammerschmid 2010; Kickert 2011; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014) and differentiate five country groups: Scandinavian (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), Anglo-Saxon (Ireland, UK), Napoleonic (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain), Continental European (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands) and Central and Eastern European countries (Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Serbia).

Thereby we want to provide systematic current empirical evidence on a topic of high relevance both in research and administrative practice, which often lacks empirical evidence from a broader range of European countries, including countries such as Lithuania, Serbia or Portugal, which have only rarely been covered

by comparative public-administration research. Our data will contribute to current discussions on whether performance management as an NPM idea is still alive and kicking or already being replaced by other approaches. It follows earlier calls for cross-country studies with a uniform methodology (e.g. Nemec 2010). Our data also allow us to develop a more comprehensive picture by combining an organizational-level perspective (the use of management instruments within ministries and agencies) and an individual-level perspective linking up to a more established and theoretically grounded stream of research on the use of performance information by public managers. We are, however, well aware of the limitations of such an approach of executive-survey data, which will be outlined in the final chapter.

## 2. Data and method: A European-wide executive survey

The results of this article are based on a large-scale survey of top executives in central governments (n=6,701) and thus provide what can be understood as an “end-users’ perspective” (Van Dooren and Van de Walle 2008, 2). The survey is part of the COCOPS research project<sup>1</sup>, which seeks to comparatively and quantitatively assess the impact of New Public Management-style reforms in European countries. Key to this research is a public-sector executive survey which systematically surveyed experiences and perceptions from top executives in European central governments. Between 2012 and 2014, a team of European public-administration scholars from eleven universities participating in the COCOPS research project – in cooperation with research teams and institutions from other countries – conducted this survey based on a common questionnaire.<sup>2</sup> Our analyses are based on a 17-country sample covering central governments in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

On the basis of a common sample strategy, the questionnaire was sent (via mail or email) to executives from the top two hierarchical levels in central government ministries and agencies. In some exceptional cases, and in accordance with the population definition, third levels were targeted, e.g. in small administrations.

1 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement No. 266887 (Project COCOPS), Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities.

2 We want to express our thanks to all researchers from the following institutions for contributing to this joint research project: Erasmus University Rotterdam (NL), Tallinn University of Technology (EE), University of Cantabria (ES), National Center for Scientific Research and University Panthéon-Assas/Paris II (FR), Corvinus University (HU), Bocconi University (IT), University of Bergen (NO), Cardiff University (GB), Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (AT), Copenhagen Business School (DK), University of Helsinki (FI), Institute for Public Administration (IE), Kaunas University of Technology and University of Vilnius (LT), Administração pública e políticas públicas de Administração (PT), Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (RS) and Statskontoret (SE).

Furthermore, for Germany and Spain the sample was expanded to *Länder* and regional-level ministries, respectively, because of their share and relevance in the overall government (central government accounts for only 20 % of general government employment in both countries). Although elite surveys are common in public-administration research and political studies (e.g. Aberbach et al. 1981), there has been an intensive debate about the pros and cons of such an approach (e.g. Enticott et al. 2009). On the one hand, executives are the central actors for the implementation of performance management and have the “best vantage point for viewing the entire organizational system” (Enticott 2004, 320). On the other hand, elite surveys can nonetheless introduce significant sources of bias. Top executives may have a vested interest in presenting a positive and successful image and can be expected to have different interests, needs and experiences than frontline bureaucrats (Frazier and Swiss 2008). We tackled the concerns of elite studies by including additional levels of hierarchy to detect differences and did not address one exponent but the whole group of departmental heads. Also, executives were not asked to evaluate their organization, but rather to share their personal experiences and perceptions. Naturally, full anonymity and no publication of organization-specific findings were guaranteed. Finally, we discussed both the design and results of this study in various groups of academics and practitioners (e.g. the EUPAN meetings) to allow more robust findings (for more details, see Hammerschmid et al. 2013b).

Table 1 provides an overview of the sample as well as the response rates for all 17 countries covered in this article. The overall response rate of 27.9 % is rather satisfying and well in line with other public-sector executive surveys. We do not claim representativeness for our findings, but with close to 7,000 observations in 17 European central governments, they can be seen as a reliable proxy for European central governments. For the overall results presented, countries are equally weighted to avoid any distortions due to different country sample sizes.

The survey is based on an original 231-item questionnaire developed jointly by the COCOPS research team which includes several questions on performance and performance management. Performance (and thereby also its management) is a contested and multidimensional concept (e.g. Boyne 2002) in need of some clarification. Overall the COCOPS survey followed a rather broad conceptualization of performance covering the full “span of performance” (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008), including objectives, inputs, activities but also outputs and outcomes. Only in the first question presented in Chapter 3.1 did we explicitly ask for “focusing on outcomes and results”, as this is often considered the core of introducing performance management in government contexts (OECD 2005).

**Table 1**  
COCOPS central government sample size

Country	Invitations Sent	Responses	Response Rates
Austria	1,407	493	35.0%
Denmark	758	147	19.4%
Estonia	913	318	34.8%
Finland	1,742	703	40.4%
France	3,403	587	17.2%
Germany	1,955	445	22.8%
Hungary	924	250	27.1%
Ireland	980	375	38.3%
Italy	971	172	17.7%
Lithuania	1,098	432	39.3%
Netherlands	670	196	29.3%
Norway	1,197	334	27.9%
Portugal	1,038	296	28.5%
Serbia	1,644	880	53.5%
Spain	1,684	297	17.6%
Sweden	1,293	523	40.4%
UK	2,325	253	10.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,002</b>	<b>6,701</b>	<b>27.9%</b>

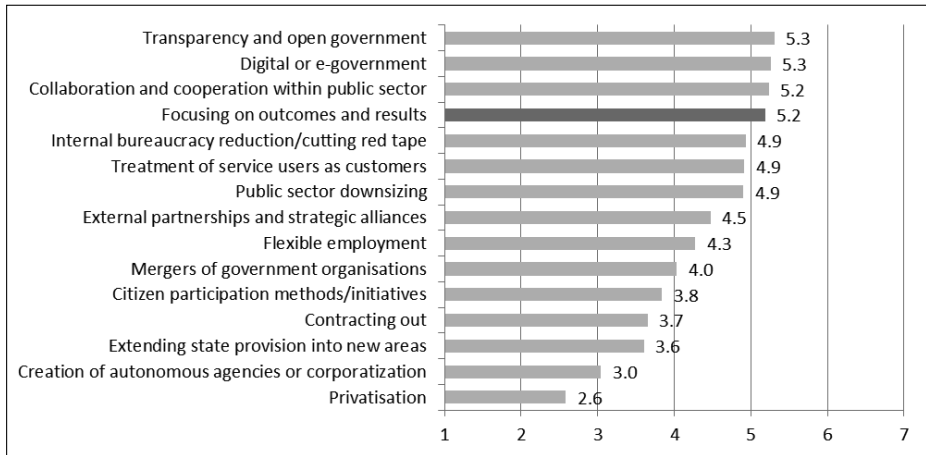
### 3. Implementation of performance management in European central governments

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#### 3.1 Performance management as a major reform trend in European central governments

Over the last two decades, most European countries have experienced an influx of various public-administration reform trends which can be linked to different reform paradigms such as Neo-Weberian reforms, NPM reforms and public-governance reforms (e.g. Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). The findings of our survey confirm that performance management (operationalized as “focusing on outcomes and results”) still constitutes a key reform trend in European central governments, despite its long history (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
Importance of major reform trends in European public administrations<sup>3</sup>



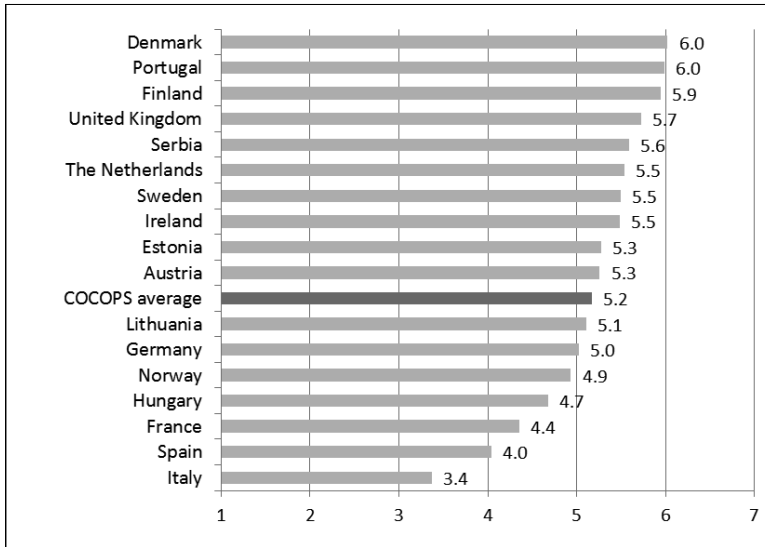
It is also striking that, while executives perceive performance management as high on the agenda, other reform trends linked to NPM (i.e. privatization, agencification, contracting-out) are assigned much lower importance. Such key NPM reforms seem to be increasingly superseded by a new agenda of partnership- and network-oriented government arrangements and reforms, such as transparency and open government, digital government, as well as collaboration and cooperation between public-sector organizations.

However, shifting the perspective to the country level reveals clear variations in the importance given by the surveyed executives to performance management as a reform trajectory (see Figure 2). We find a uniformly high importance of performance management in what has been described by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) as “modernizer” countries: Denmark, Finland, the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden clearly belong to this category. But the importance is also perceived as similarly high in countries which were strongly affected by the financial crisis and were undergoing severe cut-back policies, such as Portugal, Ireland and Estonia. However, countries with a Napoleonic tradition (France, Italy and Spain) and to a lesser degree the Continental European countries (Austria and Germany) as well as Hungary seem to be less receptive towards performance management as a reform trend. The rather high importance of performance management in Serbia can probably be explained by the EU pre-accession status of this country with a great deal of external assistance and support programs (e.g. by SIGMA) aiming to promote performance and professionalism in the public service (Meyer-Sahling 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Question: How important are the following reform trends in your policy area? (1 = not at all; 7 = to a large extent).

**Figure 2**

Country variations in the importance of outcome and result-orientation as reform trend (country means)

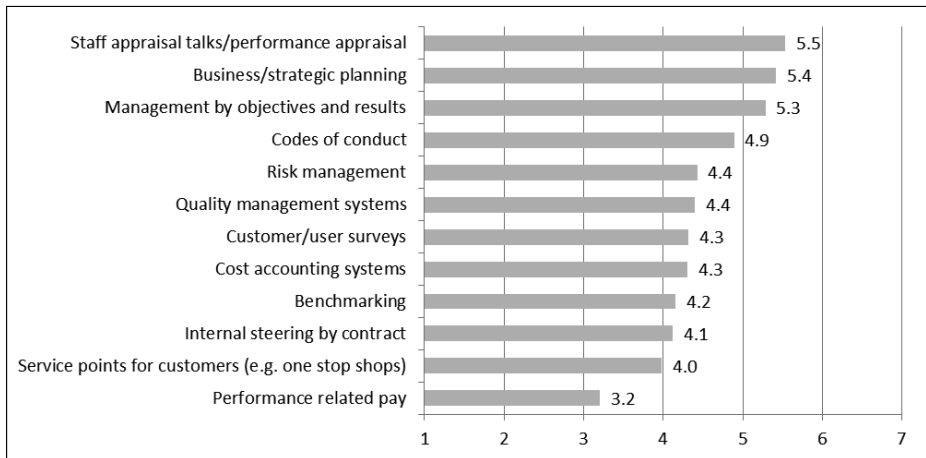


### 3.2 Use of management instruments at the organizational level

At the organizational level of ministries and agencies, performance management mostly comes in the form of specific instruments used to incorporate performance information into the management and policy system (e.g. Van Dooren et al. 2010, 96ff). In our survey we differentiated between twelve instruments and asked the executives to what extent they are used in their organizations (1 = not at all; 7 = to a large extent). We find that only three management instruments can be regarded as widely used throughout Europe: staff appraisal talks/performance appraisal, business/strategic planning and management by objectives and results (see Figure 3). Most of the other instruments are only used to a moderate degree, with performance-related pay standing out as being the least used instrument (with only 18.8 % of respondents reporting a clear use in their organization). The only countries where this instrument is used broadly are Denmark and Sweden.



**Figure 3**  
Implementation of different management instruments in European central governments



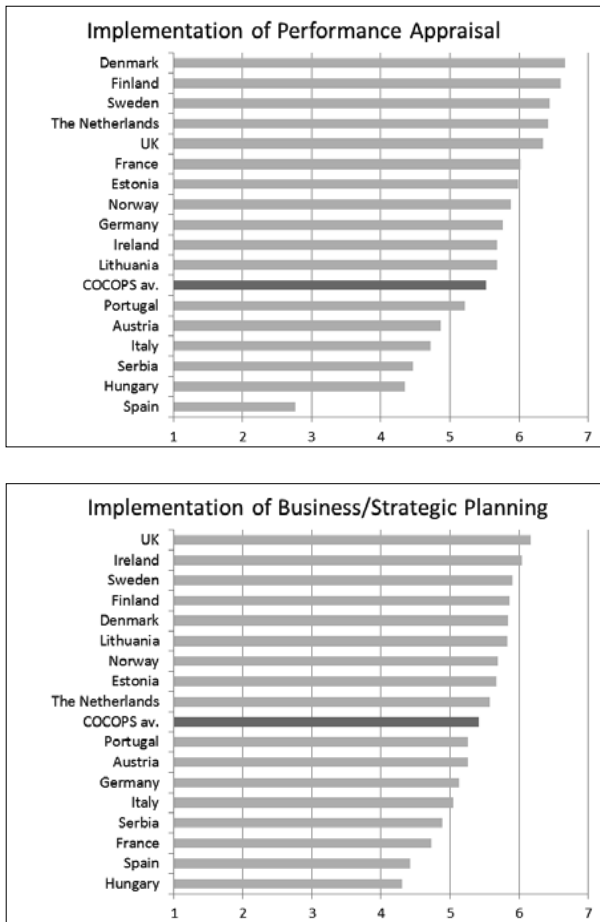
Again, we find clear country variations in the use of the various instruments. The country variation<sup>4</sup> is highest for performance-related pay (SD: 1.14) and performance appraisal (SD: .99), and much lower for instruments such as quality management (SD: 0.33), benchmarking (SD: .50) or business/strategic planning (SD: .55). A closer look at the two most commonly used instruments, for instance, shows that especially in the Scandinavian (Norway to a lesser degree) and Anglo-Saxon countries as well as in the Netherlands, these management instruments are consistently used to a higher degree, whereas central governments in Napoleonic (France, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and Continental European countries (such as Austria and Germany but also Hungary) are much more hesitant in the application of these instruments. This pattern can also be found for most of the other instruments and therefore seems to be rather stable.<sup>5</sup> Serbia is an interesting case where performance management is very important as a reform trend, combined with a strikingly low use of specific instruments, which can be interpreted as evidence for a rather early implementation stage. More detailed regression analyses not presented here confirm a significantly higher use of management instruments in agencies (compared to ministries) and larger organizations, as well.

4 Standard deviations based on a distribution of all country means (N=17).

5 Using multivariate regression analyses with various organizational and individual factors as independent variables did confirm these overall patterns.

**Figure 4**

Implementation of different management instruments: Clear country variations

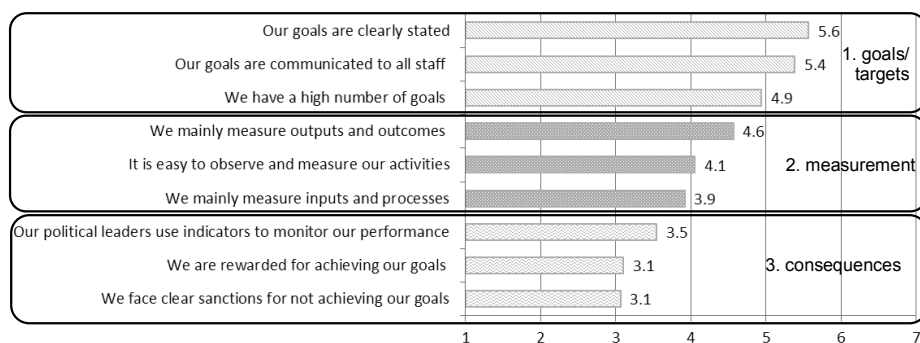


### 3.3 Institutionalization of a performance management logic

The introduction and implementation of performance management is based on a specific logic of systematically linking the following activities in the form of a management cycle (OECD 2005; Pollitt 2013): (1) organizations and individuals are given goals or objectives as part of a planning phase; (2) the achievement of these plans and goals is measured on a regular basis, and (3) this performance information is then deployed with authority and incentives to encourage managers and staff to achieve plans and objectives. Christopher Pollitt (2013) speaks of an “underlying logic of performance measurement”, which can diverge with other alternative

logics embedded in administrative practice. From a neo-institutional perspective (March and Olsen 1989), a clear contrast between a traditionally strong embedded “logic of appropriateness” in many European public administrations and a “logic of consequentiality” as assumed by performance management can be observed. The findings from our survey clearly show that at the organizational level, the assumed logic of performance management is only partially institutionalized in most European central governments and mostly in a rather “soft” form (see Figure 5). Whereas plans and objectives are already rather common in most countries and also communicated to staff, we find a considerable scepticism towards measurement (20.7 % of executives regard measurement as very difficult) and a weak linkage between goal (non)achievement and “hard” consequences. Only about 10 % of the respondents perceive rewards or sanctions linked to their goal achievement that can be interpreted as an overall dominance of what has been described as “soft” performance-management systems (Van Dooren et al. 2010, 101ff). The data also confirm a limited use of performance indicators by politicians for European central governments, as found in previous research (e.g. Askim 2009).

**Figure 5**  
Institutionalization of a performance management logic<sup>6</sup>



Goal orientation is rather consistent, with a high institutionalization in most countries and only limited country variations (SD based on a distribution of all country means between 0.36 and 0.45). Scepticism towards measurement is especially high in the Continental European countries (Austria, Germany and the Netherlands) but also in France and Italy. Surprisingly, both a low scepticism towards measurement and rather strong consequences can be found among executives in Lithuania and Serbia. Again, an integrated look at these three types of variables points to both Napoleonic and Continental European countries as having a sig-

<sup>6</sup> Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization? (1 = not at all; 7 = to a large extent).

nificantly lower institutionalized performance-management logic in contrast to the UK, where executives score rather high on all these variables.

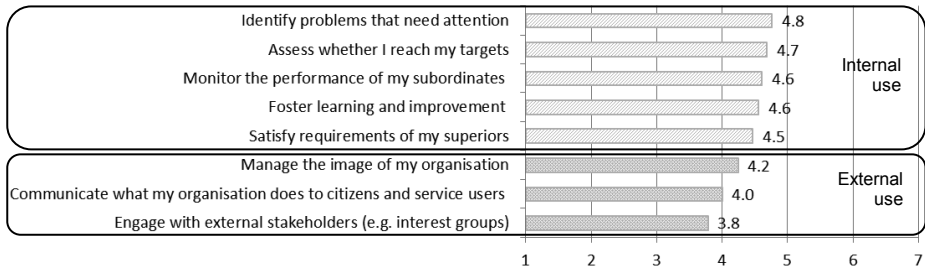
### 3.4 Performance-information use

Performance-information use is a topic that has become increasingly attractive for public-administration researchers. The understanding that public managers should make use of performance-measurement information to improve performance and strengthen accountability has become part of public-administration orthodoxy (e.g. Behn 2003). A rapidly increasing body of research has resulted from the observation that many public-sector organizations have invested substantially in the development of performance-measurement systems, but have not yet given equivalent attention to the integration of this performance information with decision-making. Research has repeatedly found that the actual use of or demand for performance information lags behind the production of such information (e.g. Van Dooren and Van de Walle 2008). Use of performance information has shown to be relatively low by both public managers (e.g. Moynihan and Ingraham 2004; Moynihan and Pandey 2010; Taylor 2011; Kroll 2012) and politicians (e.g. Askim 2009). Performance-information use is a multifaceted concept, and such information can be used for a variety of purposes. For instance, Behn (2003) identified eight distinct uses of performance information. For the COCOPS research we distinguished between two broad types of performance information use: internal and external, a common distinction in current research on performance information use (see also Moynihan and Pandey 2010; Taylor 2011). Factor analyses published earlier (Hammerschmidt et al. 2013a) proved the robustness of distinguishing these two dimensions based on the eight items used in the COCOPS survey (see Figure 6).

Our data show that executives in European central governments primarily (albeit to a rather moderate degree) use performance indicators to identify problems that need attention, to assess whether they have reached their targets, but also to monitor staff and to foster learning and improvements. They are less likely to use performance indicators to engage with external stakeholders or to communicate what the organization does for citizens and service users. The shown higher internal than external use of performance information is in line with limited research from other contexts (e.g. Van Dooren and Van de Walle 2008; Taylor 2011). Overall, roughly 35 % of the respondents report a high internal use of performance information (6 and 7 on a 7-point Likert scale), in contrast to approximately 15 % who do not use performance information at all or to a very limited degree (scores 1 and 2). Our analyses also indicate a rather high consistency between internal and external use. Again, the use of performance information varies considerably between the various countries and country clusters. Surprisingly, executives from Lithuania and Serbia report the highest use of performance indicators, followed by the UK, Ireland, Estonia and Portugal. The lowest use is found in most Napoleonic countries

and the Continental European countries, as well as in Hungary, which is in line with the findings from the previous questions.

**Figure 6**  
Performance information use by public-sector executives in Europe  
(COCOPS average)<sup>7</sup>



#### 4. Factors driving performance management

A central question in performance-management research is: what factors or antecedents influence the implementation of performance management and especially the use of performance information? Previous research has identified a number of external, organizational and personal determinants of performance-information use. On an individual level, public managers' beliefs, attitudes and social norms are important factors (e.g. Moynihan and Pandey 2010; Taylor 2011; Kroll 2012; Moynihan et al. 2012), whereas age, education, position or job experience are of much lesser relevance. But also organizational and environmental factors seem to have an impact on the use of performance information. Based on a systematic review of previous research, Kroll (2015) has identified the following factors as major drivers of performance information use: measurement maturity, stakeholder involvement, leadership support, goal clarity and an innovative culture are factors fostering performance management.

In a recently presented paper (Hammerschmid et al. 2014), the COCOPS survey data were used to take a closer look at the contextual, organizational and person-related antecedents of the executives' reported use of performance information (excluding Finland, where the result was not ready). Using seemingly unrelated regressions to analyze the data (with both external and internal use of performance indicators as dependent variable), we were able to confirm for our European country sample a positive relationship between contextual factors, such as goal clarity and task complexity. The data also confirm a significantly higher use of performance information in agencies (compared to ministries) and large organizations,

<sup>7</sup> Question: In my work I use performance indicators to... (1 = not at all; 7 = to a large extent).

whereas socio-demographic variables generally seem to have a lower impact, with two exceptions: higher-educated executives tend to use performance information to a lesser degree, whereas previous private-sector experience has a significant positive impact on the use of performance information. Furthermore, it was found that the executives' role identity held an especially important relevance. Hence, we find that top officials with a managerial identity show a significantly higher internal use of performance information, whereas top officials who see themselves as networkers and facilitators make more external use of performance information. In contrast, a bureaucratic role identity does not have a significant impact on the extent of performance-information use.

Budgetary pressure or austerity, which has become a central feature of European public administration in the aftermath of the financial crisis, can also be an important environmental factor (Lodge and Hood 2012). However, the impact of austerity on performance is not clear. On the one hand, it can be argued that the need to cut back government expenditures calls for an increased use of performance information to eliminate waste and to increase efficiency (Randma-Liiv and Savi, forthcoming). An alternative hypothesis is that austerity may actually lead to a reduction of performance measurement in order to remove slack from the system (Pollitt 2013). The findings from our survey (executives were asked to what extent the relevance of performance information has increased due to the financial crisis) indicate a moderately positive effect of austerity on the use of performance information (overall mean of 4.5 on a 7-point scale; 31.2 % of respondents clearly agreeing vs. 16.6 % clearly disagreeing). An increase in the relevance of performance information is perceived as highest in Finland (5.5) and Denmark (5.2), in comparison to Portugal (3.4) and Hungary (3.8), where a slight decrease of relevance based on the financial crisis is perceived.

## 5. Conclusion and Perspectives

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Our article analyzes the reception and implementation of performance management and specific management instruments in European central governments from a country-comparative perspective. Based on a unique dataset from a large-scale executive survey, it contributes new systematic evidence on the current status of performance management in 17 countries, covering all European regions and administrative traditions. It represents the most systematic evidence up to this point on how public-sector executives perceive public-administrative reforms and public management and contributes a stronger and more balanced European perspective to the topic. The results presented offer a number of first interesting findings but also show the need for more in-depth analyses. We find a continuously high relevance of performance management as a reform trend in most European central governments, and especially in countries which have already been described as "modernizers" (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). The financial crisis and austerity pressures (e.g.

for Finland and Denmark) as well as EU pre-accession policies (for Serbia) seem to be environmental factors which reinforce the relevance. At the organizational level of ministries and agencies, we find that strategic planning, management by objectives and results as well as performance appraisals have found widespread and uniform adoption and seem to represent the core repertoire of management tools used in European central governments. We can also see that the assumed performance-management logic of integrating objectives, measurement and consequential action is only partially institutionalized. Whereas objectives nowadays are well anchored in administrative practice, the challenges of measurement and taking consequences or making use of the available performance information are persistent and well in line with research findings from non-European contexts.

Our results allow interesting insights for a more context-sensitive and differentiated perception and implementation of performance management because they confirm substantial country variations but also variations along certain organizational variables. We can observe that size, legal status (ministry vs. agency) or type of task are of importance and serve as a clear warning against the “one size fits all” approaches of performance management.

Performance management consistently plays a much stronger role in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, whereas the implementation and use is significantly lower in Southern European (esp. Spain and to a lesser degree Italy and Portugal) but also in Continental European countries, such as Austria and Germany. At the same time, we find a rather varied pattern for Central and Eastern European countries: whereas Hungary strongly resembles Germany and Austria, we see stronger similarities for the Baltic countries Estonia and, to a lesser degree, Lithuania with the Scandinavian countries. An interesting case is Serbia which – along with its EU-accession efforts – seems to be intensively exposed to performance-management ideas and an early implementation stage. These findings confirm that after 1990, the transformation of these countries varied in speed against the background of country-specific political-institutional conditions and pre-communist administrative traditions, but were also strongly influenced by EU-accession processes (e.g. Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014, 19f; Bouckaert et al. 2011). Our findings also point to the need for a more nuanced understanding of administrative traditions along differences found between countries belonging to the same tradition: Norway, being less receptive for performance management than the other Scandinavian countries, or the Netherlands, being clearly more receptive than its Continental European counterparts. The overall picture gained is more one of a North-South divide (significant higher implementation in the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries) than of an East-West divide. Our findings correlate with earlier research showing different reform trajectories of CEE countries with a stronger implementation of NPM and performance management, specifically in Estonia and Lithuania as compared to Hungary (Bouckaert et al. 2011).

These results should be seen primarily as an impetus for more extensive and empirically founded research on the spread and reception of performance management in European public administrations. The need to extend our research by including further factors and more complex analyses is apparent. We are also fully aware of the methodological limitations of such cross-comparative research based on an executive survey (e.g. executive bias, response rate, self-assessment, no evidence about real implementation); as such, the results presented here should be interpreted with appropriate caution. A main criticism of such research is that over-reliance on the opinions of a limited number of individuals at the top comes at the cost of alternative, more diverse voices from frontline bureaucrats or middle managers (Enticott et al. 2009). We must realize that respondents at the top level of organizations generally tend to be more favorable toward the performance of their organization and that managers might be positively biased towards the organizations they themselves lead (Frazier and Swiss 2008). The COCOPS survey approached these challenges by ensuring that a diversity of opinions within the relevant organizations would be targeted (i.e. to include lower-level executives). In addition, other measures were taken to assure a high quality dataset based on the challenges of international comparative research (see Hammerschmid et al. 2013a). This, however, also had its limitations due to the anonymity guaranteed to the respondents. An important aspect, which sets the COCOPS survey apart from most other executive surveys in public administration, is that it represents a full census of the target population defined, and that there has been no sampling process. We cannot claim full representativeness for the data, and the results cannot be generalized to the entire target population of senior public-sector executives in European administrations. However, the response rates correspond with other public-sector executive surveys and cover a substantial part of the targeted population and the distribution of respondents with regard to policy field, hierarchical level and organization type. It also closely matches the distribution in the full target population and can be regarded not only as a good proxy but also as the most representative dataset for European public administrations collected up to now.

Further evaluation and data from other countries and government levels is clearly needed. The COCOPS survey is an important step towards increasing our knowledge on administrative reforms in Europe, based on the experiences of senior executives. As we can assume that the importance of performance management in the European public sector will remain high, we see a strong need for further research on this topic. Debates are often based on rather general assumptions of the transferability or non-transferability of private-sector concepts and instruments, and the impact of performance management on behavior, attitudes and performance is in need of a more robust empirical foundation, especially for the multitude of European countries. We can conclude that performance management over the last few decades has clearly made its way into European central governments (e.g.



Pollitt 2013), albeit with significant country variations, enduring implementation challenges and a clear need for further research.

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