Government 2020 – An Irish perspective

Modernising the Irish public sector for the global economy

Our worldwide analysis identified six drivers outside the realm of government control – globalisation, technology, demographics, environmental concerns, societal relationships and social stability – that are shaping the future of nations across the world. A key dimension of an effective Irish Government response will be to enable a new level of broader and deeper collaboration, including expanding the scale and expediting the pace of organisational changes in the public sector, developing more personalised and interactive services, cultivating partnerships, and prioritising education and innovation. In today’s challenging economic environment, more than ever before, the Irish Government must lead by example.

Six drivers demand customised strategies by the Irish Government

Six inescapable forces are now underway, over which governments and societies have limited control (See Figure). These six drivers share a striking commonality, in that each will touch virtually all nations in one way or another.

How well Ireland can respond to the positive and negative effects of the six global drivers will determine future economic prosperity. Ireland must develop strategies that address the impact of the six global drivers within the context of its own unique aspirations and constraints. Effective strategies will also hinge on leveraging the lessons learned from other countries that have successfully tackled public sector reform.

From our work with governments around the world, the common underlying theme of these strategies is collaboration – in the sense of enhanced communication and connectedness among all types of organisations, including governments, agencies, private sector entities and individuals. The Irish Government must effectively implement and operationalise the appropriate strategy, given existing constraints, to achieve the diverse objectives of the National Development Plan 2007-2013. This will require broader and faster organisational change, making education and innovation a priority, and learning from the experience of other countries.

Perpetual collaboration: Modernising the Irish public sector

The Irish public sector needs to expand the scale and expedite the pace of organisational changes to secure productivity and efficiency improvements. While Ireland is tackling organisational and governance changes through modernisation, the full benefits from public sector reform will not be realised without stepping up the extent of collaboration between and within government departments.

While Ireland is ranked 14th globally in the World Bank’s Knowledge Economy Index, its position has remained relatively static since 1995, when it was
ranked 15th. Enabling the successful transformation of the Irish economy to a world leading knowledge-based economy will require a comprehensive innovation strategy and a new approach to education, as well as an acceleration of “e-Government” to deliver more personalised interaction and services.

Ireland’s public sector has made progress in delivering personalised interaction and services to its citizens, but continues to lag behind leaders. Achieving more extensive horizontal and vertical connections among government, local government, citizens and stakeholders requires a comprehensive national government strategy.

While partnerships and networking have become more pervasive within the Irish public sector, current attitudinal and structural barriers must be removed to strengthen organizational performance, increase customer satisfaction and promote higher levels of public confidence.

It is now time for Ireland to leverage the valuable lessons learned by others. From the experience of governments worldwide, there are several dimensions of good practice in public sector reform that can bring significant benefits in efficiency and cost effectiveness. Good practices relevant to Ireland include promoting flexibility and mobility between the Civil and Public Service, and implementing measurement systems based on a combination of resources, budgets, outputs and benefits.

Ireland currently faces an opportunity to implement bold changes that can bring significant and measurable benefits. By fully leveraging the valuable advantage of relatively small size to develop and implement innovative and rapid solutions for public sector reform, Ireland can substantially improve the chances of economic success and prosperity. The Irish Government must seize this opportunity now and lead by example.

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Reference