

**THE POLITICS OF HRM:  
WAITING FOR GODOT IN THE MOROCCAN CIVIL  
SERVICE**

**ABSTRACT**

*This study illustrates the fundamental importance of a political understanding in order to improve HRM in both public and private organizations. It complements studies that have found a statistical relationship between public staff management and economic growth by presenting a case study of Morocco, using the strategic human resource management (SHRM) model as a framework.*

*There are several reasons why HRM in the Moroccan civil service has stagnated, notably unfamiliarity with HRM models and the French administrative heritage. But the fundamental reason is Morocco's political system, where real power resides in the Palace, and where political actors are reluctant to take bold initiatives. Thus a focus on the management level is currently misplaced, and fundamental political action harnessing the authority of the Palace without disempowering other political actors is needed.*

*The study implies that a political analysis is sometimes a prerequisite for improving HRM in both public and private organizations.*

**Keywords**

Strategic HRM, international HRM, employee selection, performance management, Morocco, civil service, political will

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## INTRODUCTION: GROWTH, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Do governments help or hinder growth? Throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s, the IMF and World Bank appeared to believe it was the latter, exhorting their sovereign clients to abandon grandiose capital projects that crowded out private investment, stop wrapping investors up in red tape, and so on. It was a period where the dominant view was 'That no government or little government was better than big government' (Chaudhry, 1994: 199), as one of the World Bank's staff put it.<sup>i</sup>

The 1997 World Development Report (World Bank, 1997) was the first substantial manifestation of a more indulgent view, one that contradicted the 'minimal state' position by emphasizing positive actions like creating sound budgetary institutions. Emboldened by this policy sea change, researchers working under Bank auspices began to bring forward evidence of a positive connection between governance and growth. Evans and Rauch came first, with a 35-country study that uncovered a significant positive relationship between merit-based selection of civil servants (which *WDR 1997* had also emphasized) and rewarding, predictable career progression on the one hand, and growth on the other (Evans and Rauch, 1999; Rauch and Evans, 2000). A little later, Kaufmann and Kraay, using a new 175-country dataset and different definitions, agreed with Evans and Rauch (Kaufmann *et al.*, 1999), although they went on to qualify their view by developing an explanation of those economies which were growing but were governed badly

(Kaufmann and Kraay, 2002<sup>ii</sup>). There could, it seemed, be growth without good governance. Governments should not rely on the rising tide of prosperity to lift the governance boat but should take deliberate steps to improve governance.

Such studies have familiar methodological limitations. Their correlational, cross-sectional design means that their findings are broad rather than deep, identifying patterns across a range of countries but not explaining the character of any single country, even though we know that reform outcomes depend on complex combinations of many factors, almost none of which apply uniformly across countries (Campos and Esfahani, 2000: 222; Nelson, 1990; Whitehead, 1990). They stop short of understanding how the relationship they have uncovered actually operates, making it hard to extract policy prescriptions from them to offer to governments (though Kaufmann and Kraay do make suggestions about promoting mechanisms for external accountability, participatory voice and transparency as a way of dealing with the problem of 'state capture' by particular interest groups.) Both limitations are evident when we consider Morocco, our subject, for which Evans and Rauch's data is limited to a questionnaire filled in by two unidentified 'experts', while Kaufmann and Kraay's is based on pre-existing survey data from the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House and the like.

We point out these limitations not to rubbish these studies, but because we want to complement them. Where their studies are broad, shallow and quantitative, ours is narrow, deep and qualitative. Thus we hope that our study will give an insight into

how the relationship between effective government and economic development actually works.

## **STRATEGIC HRM**

We focus on just one of the deliberate steps that governments can take: improving human resource management. This is much the same as Evans and Rauch's focus, although narrower than Kaufmann and Kraay's, for whom government effectiveness was only one of five governance elements. Where Evans and Rauch went back to Weber (1968) for their model, implying that we have learnt nothing about staff management since Weber left us in 1920, we have preferred to derive ours from the body of work on human resource management (HRM) that has grown up in the last fifty years, and in particular from the development of the strategic HRM (SHRM) model. It gives an account of how staff management contributes to achieving an organization's purposes (such as profitability where private companies are concerned), and we have strong empirical evidence, subject to the familiar methodological limitations, that applying it does actually make a difference (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Delery and Doty, 1996; Guest, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Patterson *et al.*, 1997; Tsui *et al.*, 1997). HR practitioners and scholars, a somewhat downtrodden sub-profession only 15 years ago, have acquired a sudden self-confidence, reflected in a leading scholar's claim that the favoured HR practices have a universal validity (Pfeffer, 1998). Translating all this into the language of governance, it offers

governments a way to improve their effectiveness, and in so doing achieve their overall purposes, including facilitating economic development.

### **The SHRM Model**

The SHRM model is by now extensively documented on both sides of the Atlantic (seminal texts include Beer *et al.*, 1985; Fombrun *et al.*, 1984; and Guest, 1989).

Despite its current competitors, such as the so-called 'resource-based view' (Kamoche, 1996), we judge that it remains the dominant normative model, given the powerful theoretical and empirical support which it has obtained, detailed below.

We have chosen to analyse selected features of it in detail, rather than to attempt a more comprehensive but inevitably superficial analysis.

While some writers reject the idea of a monolithic model, distinguishing, for instance, between 'hard' and 'soft' HRM (Storey, 1995) or 'lean' and 'team' production (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994), there are several features on which most writers agree. Probably chief among them is the notion of strategic integration: 'All definitions of human resource management agree on one point: that there must be a link between a firm's strategy and ... the human resource' (Purcell, 1995: 63). Strategic integration means aligning staff management systems with organizations' overall strategic objectives and with each other (Anthony *et al.*, 1993; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Fombrun *et al.*, 1984; Guest, 1989; Wright and McMahan, 1992). While it has emerged from the normative HR literature, there is some empirical support for the implication that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Huselid, 1995; Macduffie, 1995).

Indeed Becker and Gerhart (1996) suggest in their review of the performance debate that it is what they call the 'strategic architecture' rather than individual HR practices that has a universal validity.

Strategic integration implicitly changes the HR specialist's relationship with line managers. The specialist is supposed to design the HR systems that will align with strategic objectives, while the manager is supposed to carry them out. Guest (1989: 51) observes that almost all writers say that HR must be managed by line managers: 'HRM is too important to be left to the personnel managers.' Thus at the strategic level we concentrate on the twin questions of 'strategic integration' and 'line manager ownership' of HR.

### **Recruitment and Selection, and Performance Management**

We also address two HR operational activities, employee selection and individual performance management and appraisal. We have chosen them because:

1. We have good evidence for their effect on organizational performance. The evidence for employee selection is particularly robust (Schmidt and Hunter, 1977). The evidence for performance management is also robust, although oblique: it documents the effect of objective setting and feedback on performance, both central features of performance management (Walters, 1995).
2. Both are relevant to Evans and Rauch's research. Employee selection is one of the two 'Weberian' elements on which they focus, and performance management is

implicit in their second element, predictable career progression. Moreover, we have seen already that *WDR 1997* emphasized merit-based selection, and it also appears in several of the surveys that Kaufmann and Kraay draw on.

3. We know from previous studies that there are substantial national differences in the practice of performance management. Countries as far apart as Denmark and Japan have resisted the Anglo Saxon model that focuses exclusively on the individual's performance (Brewster and Hegewisch, 1994; Love *et al.*, 1994; Milliman *et al.*, 1998).

Readers who are boggling at the apparent implication that the elaborate SHRM model and associated HRM practices are widely applied, or even applicable, in developing country governments should be reassured that the question of applicability is one which our study explicitly poses.

## **THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF REFORM**

Our case study focuses on public staff management in one developing country. Why Morocco? Firstly, because developing an effective public administration, including staff management, in order to facilitate economic development is an explicit aim of the government's reform programme: 'Morocco has undertaken reforms to ensure sustained economic growth, macro-economic stability, opening up to the global economy ... Their success ... is intimately linked to the quality of the civil servants involved' (Ministère de la Fonction Publique, 1998; see also Proulx, 1999). Secondly,

as a North African middle-income country whose public administration is coloured by the French colonial legacy, it is an interesting contrast with a previous study carried out of Mauritius, a middle-income former British colony (McCourt and Ramguttty-Wong, 2003), given that the Francophone/ Anglophone divide is a major fissure in post-colonial Africa.

### **Enduring Features of the Moroccan Political System**

An objective of our paper is to show how in Morocco, and arguably elsewhere, we need to understand the underlying political system to make sense of or improve public staff management, which in Morocco is becalmed by two settled features of Morocco's governance. The first is the centralized yet disparate nature of government. Power in Morocco centres on the palace. In formal terms, the 1996 constitution envisages a multiparty system of democracy, but also allows the king a lot of executive leeway. He personally appoints the Prime Minister, key central ministers and regional governors. While he often delegates his authority over more junior appointments (including officials), the practical contrast with, say, the British monarch, who also has the theoretical right to select the Prime Minister, is stark. Moreover, the late king Hassan did pass a strong legacy of skilful government in its own terms to his son at his accession in 1999, whatever one's misgivings about certain aspects of it. Finally, even at the start of the twenty-first century one should not underestimate the king's *baraka* (roughly charisma), a quasi-religious quality which derives from the monarch's important religious role<sup>iii</sup>, and which he shares

with Muslim saints (Munson, 1993): the popular grief at the death of King Hassan in 1999 attested to it.

But it is a surprising fact that some have argued that the monarchy's power essentially consists of holding the ring between strong autonomous elites: the urban bourgeoisie, including senior government officials; professors and intellectuals; the army; and the rural notables (Clement, 1990). The model statement of this view is still Waterbury's (1970). For him, the king was like a Nuer chief who, in Evans-Pritchard's classic analysis (1940: see especially 172-6) had little formal authority, and merely mediated between tribes and sub-tribes in the event of disputes in a society where rebellion has been endemic for much of its history<sup>iv</sup>, held together, paradoxically, for the most part by opposition between its 'segments'. The king is then obliged to trim between and placate powerful rival groups. Some see Waterbury's view as over-ingenious (Eickelman, 1998; Gellner, 1981), but there is agreement that whether from a position of strength or of weakness, the palace has played groups off against each by the well-judged use of patronage, albeit the modernizing bent of both the present king and his father means that recent recipients of patronage have often been highly qualified technocrats (Joffe, 1988; Pennell, 2000; Tessler, 1987; Zartman, 1987).

The Palace's resort to patronage is an expression of Morocco's deep-rooted clientelism. While in other countries favouritism relates to a single feature of identity, such as ethnicity in Rwanda or religion in Northern Ireland, in Morocco it is

'fluid', to use Gellner's word (1981: 72): 'Any individual ... will seek a person who can help him from any place in the country, any position in the official hierarchy and on the basis of any personal connection that best serves his particular purpose at that moment' (Rosen, 1979: 53). Individuals are thus reluctant to commit themselves irrevocably to any single aspect of their identity, as that might preclude emphasizing another aspect later on; and by extension, to nail their colours to the mast of a single policy, as they might need to espouse a different one later on.

Both 'strong' and 'weak' king views agree on some features of Morocco's politics. A positive feature is that, within a stable system, political actors have developed the instinct to consult and seek consensus: Morocco was a practitioner *avant la lettre* of what we have come to call 'stakeholder politics' (Hutton, 1995). The IMF stabilization programme of 1983 illustrates this. In the face of IMF pressure to adopt a rapid, not to say brutal approach to reform, the Moroccan side entertained a wide range of opinions across government, and even the IMF came to admit that the gradual pace of the reform programme that emerged and the care taken to address the public's anxieties contributed to its success (Azam and Morrisson, 1994; Nsouli *et al.*, 1995). Involving reform stakeholders has also been central to the government's administrative reform strategy, as we shall see.

However, a negative feature, to which the particular character of Morocco's clientelism also contributes, is a tendency to passivity or *attentisme* in political actors, leading to an 'abhorrence of bold initiatives, and the overall stalemate that

characterizes Moroccan politics' (Waterbury, 1970: 8). Government is fundamentally quietist, and does not so much take initiatives as arbitrate between opposing interests when action is unavoidable, as in the stabilization crisis of the early 1980s. Even the dramatic 'Green March' which culminated in the 'liberation' of the Spanish Sahara was arguably precipitated by the impending collapse of Fascism in Spain (Pennell, 2000). This tendency, which has deep roots in Morocco's royal history, is compounded by the hostility to innovation of the mainly conservative rural notables who are an important part of the monarchy's powerbase (Hammoudi, 1997; Leveau, 1985).

In this analysis, royal intervention becomes the only way of overcoming political stalemate; and, partly for this reason, other political actors have tended to accept it: 'Everyone wants to believe in it, even when the sovereign's decisions appear to be guided by the interests of the monarchy and the social categories closest to it' (Hammoudi, 1997: 23). However, the analysis is silent on whether, in the particular case of civil service reform, that intervention will materialize or, rather, will resemble the 'Godot' character in Beckett's play (1952) for whom the other characters are doomed to wait in vain .

### **The Degree and Scope of Recent Changes**

Now some would object that while our account might have been true for most of the late king's reign, his last few years, when he consciously smoothed the way for his son, and the first few years of his son's reign itself, have changed everything. This

brings us to the second relevant feature of Morocco's governance, the impact of recent dramatic changes on a system that had been stable to the point of sclerosis.

At issue here are the degree and the scope of change. No one disputes that there have been real changes. Already in 1997 the general election had ushered in Morocco's first centre-left government, popularly known as 'le gouvernement de l'alternance' (the government of the changeover), and the old king had appointed respected opposition leader Abderrahmane Youssoufi as his prime minister. The new king continued the trend through symbolic actions like dismissing the powerful Minister of the Interior, Driss Basri, and allowing longstanding opponents to return from exile. Even Amnesty International, previously critical of Morocco's human rights record, welcomed the initial changes, and has continued, with reservations, to welcome ensuing measures such as the gradual release of political prisoners (Amnesty International, 1999 and 2002). Outside government, civil society groups have mushroomed. Morocco with its semi-absolute monarchy is still one of the most democratic régimes to be found between the Atlantic and the Persian Gulf.

But how profound have all the changes been? After three years in office, the 'gouvernement de l'alternance' represented 'a kind of continuity rather than a break with the past' (Bouachrine, 2001: 10). Following the 2002 elections, as well as his usual quota of five key ministers, the king appointed an unelected businessman and political neophyte as his prime minister, picked *faute de mieux* when the squabbling political parties failed to yield up a credible candidate. (It is important to note that

recent governments have been coalitions drawn from the plethora of political parties, with all the problems of agreeing a common programme that bedevil coalitions everywhere.) The new prime minister is even more the creature of the palace than his predecessor, who at least had an independent political base. The king continues to chair the meetings of his 'inner cabinet' of appointed ministers, at which all the big decisions are taken (Economist, 2002). According to one critic, even the government's privatization programme, which was proceeding and even accelerating at the time of writing (Al-Hayat, 2002), has become ensnared in the patronage game so as to strengthen the state's links with the commercial elite (Najem, 2001). Thus while we do not accept the cynical view of one of our interviewees that the 'gouvernement de l'alternance' was no more than a device *'to facilitate the transfer of power from the old king to his son'*, we consider that recent changes have been real, but not fundamental.

Every manager will recognize the king's dilemma in this somewhat changed context: should I facilitate, 'empowering' and building up long-term capacity, or command, getting things done today? Morocco's segmentary political system gives him the abiding temptation to use his power to break the stalemate; the more so because the public, whose confidence in its bickering and historically corrupt politicians is scant, has mostly been happy for him to use it, even where it has served a particular royal interest, as we have seen. But each time he does, he confirms other political actors in their passivity and negates his espoused commitment to democracy and a strong civil society. His uneasy solution, one that in the Waterbury tradition is typical of the

timidity of Moroccan political actors, is to use his power sparingly and hesitantly, with the result that areas that are not vital, or that are simply outside his field of vision (this is the issue of the scope of change), have been left to stagnate. We shall suggest that government effectiveness, including staff management, is one such area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We have used a case study methodology for three reasons. First, it is especially appropriate to research on government, since in the nature of things each country has only one government to study, precluding the quantitative, multi-firm study that is the staple of the SHRM/performance literature (Yin, 1994). Second, Becker and Gerhart's review of that literature calls for 'deeper, qualitative research to complement the large-scale, multiple firm studies that are available' (1996: 796), a call that Guest (1997) has echoed. Third, as noted already, it complements the quantitative methodology used by Kaufmann and Kraay and Evans and Rauch.

The case data came from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data gathering in 2001 and 2002 took the form of interviews and a focus group meeting. Secondary data comprised government reports and other documents, including the reports of two workshops, organised by the Civil Service Ministry and by a trade union, and the academic literature on Morocco.

Our main primary data-gathering method was interviews with key stakeholders (Burgoyne, 1994). A semi-structured format (Lee, 1999) was used, based on the themes outlined in the previous section (strategic integration, line manager ownership, employee selection and performance management). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted from sixty to ninety minutes. The two authors conducted the interviews jointly, with the exception of two interviews, which the first-named author conducted alone.

A nonprobability judgement sampling approach was used, targeting officials at the most senior levels. Seven government officials were selected for interview, identified by one of the authors, who is familiar with the structure of the Moroccan civil service, as having a key responsibility for the design and operation of HRM systems. In two case, officials were accompanied by two subordinates.

The following officials were interviewed:

- The secretary-general (i.e. the most senior official) of a central ministry
- A senior official with a central responsibility for civil service reform
- The Human Resource Directors of four Ministries
- The director of the civil service training academy

In addition, we interviewed a member of the national executive of one of the largest trade unions representing civil servants, and an international consultant based in Morocco who has conducted HRM projects with several Ministries. We also

conducted a mixed gender focus group (Morgan, 1997) of junior civil servants from different Ministries to give the point of view of a lower level in the hierarchy. The semi-structured format based on identified themes was again used.

All but one interview, and also the focus group meeting, were conducted in French, and were taped and subsequently transcribed. A content analysis was carried out in which interview transcripts, our own interview notes and government reports and other documents were coded using the themes previously identified.

## **FINDINGS**

The picture that we hope to paint is of a new government inheriting a stagnant, partly corrupt administration leavened by some able technocrats in senior positions, and relying on weak central authority and a standard but very slow-moving reform model as a vehicle for change, while a few technical ministries have moved ahead and introduced HRM initiatives of their own whose sustainability and transferability, however, are in doubt.

### **The Civil Service**

The civil service partakes of the centralized yet disparate character of government as a whole. Hourani (1991) has observed how different branches of government in Arab countries tend to become separate centres of power, a tendency strengthened in

Morocco by the French administrative heritage, ironically consolidated by Morocco's haste to develop its own administrative procedures after independence when France was the only available model (Moussa, 1988; Snoussi, 2001). Morocco has reproduced intact the French system of powerful professional *corps*, the groups of engineers, lawyers etc., each with its own *statut particulier*, to which every senior civil servant belongs (Rouban, 1999). Thus the *corps* of engineers, with its graduates from elite institutions like the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées in France, has its own favourable pay and benefits which reinforce the separateness of the Public Works Ministry where most of them work. This has created a rather divisive 'administrative feudalism' (Marais, 1973) but it does give ministries some real autonomy. A second desirable consequence, augmented by the monarchy's technocratic bent, is that the senior civil service is competent, as Evans and Rauch's (2003) informants and Nsouli *et al.* (1995: 55) agree.

Another aspect of the French influence is that Anglo-Saxon models of strategic management and SHRM are not widely disseminated or practised in Francophone countries (Barsoux and Lawrence, 1990). Moreover, a system where officials identify with a technical *corps* undervalues management. One of our interviewees noted that line managers tend to see themselves as technical experts rather than managers.

The French legacy also affects the role of the Ministry of Finance and the Civil Service Ministry (CSM), the relevant central agencies. As throughout the political system, they have more power to block than to initiate. Budget approval for staffing

decisions has to come from Finance. CSM, the gatekeeper of administrative law – its legal remit charges it with ‘ensuring the application of the *statut général* of the public service (Sbih, 1977) - is there mainly to confirm that decisions conform with law and regulations, just as one would expect in a society where what Hofstede (1980) called ‘uncertainty avoidance’ is high. Despite this cultural appropriateness, few readers will be surprised to hear that line ministries do not particularly appreciate CSM’s ‘finicky’<sup>vi</sup> role (*‘All that CSM and Finance are interested in is following the regulations’*), and we shall see that the decision to locate the civil service reform programme in CSM has in fact undermined its credibility and contributed to the inertia of reform.

### **Civil Service Reform**

Improvements to HRM stand or fall with the national administrative reform programme, which has been the vehicle for introducing them. The ‘gouvernement de l’alternance’ wanted to turn over a new administrative leaf, aware that while there were able technocrats in senior positions, the emphasis on patronage and security during most of the late king’s reign, when the Ministry of the Interior was the paramount ministry, meant that the civil service had stagnated, a view that a critical report from the World Bank (1996) confirmed. The government placed a small reform team in CSM and, following its customary diagnosis and consultation, it launched a ‘Good Management Charter’ with three elements: action against corruption, budget rationalization and improved communication. The latter included three HRM initiatives: staffing decisions should be based on merit, pay

should be based on equity and designed to motivate, and the workplace should be conducive to productivity.

Some actions duly followed. Civil servants had to declare their property in order to identify people whose wealth had corruptly increased. The government sold off official vehicles and stopped paying water, electricity and telephone charges in senior officials' homes. It also changed public procurement law and asked Ministries to take heed of press criticisms and respond to citizens' requests and complaints.

The aim of the Charter was as much to raise awareness as to make concrete changes. CSM organized workshops at which the Charter was presented, and ministries and representatives of overseas governments which had introduced things like performance appraisal were invited to present to ministries at large, the hope being that the latter would recognize the value of the innovations and spontaneously adopt them. *'Our only power,'* said a central official, *'Is the power to persuade.'*

All these were definitely steps in the right direction. *'This is the first time that we are talking about corruption in Morocco,'* said one senior official. Another declared that *'Until now we've been thinking that administration represents authority and power, but now we think that it should serve people and resolve their problems.'* Moreover, rather than resent the endless workshops, *'tables rondes'* and the like, some of our interviewees appreciated the attempt to consult. But there were difficulties. A central official closely involved in the Charter invited us to *'Go now and ask about the destiny of this*

*Charter. People don't even know what it is'. When we took him at his word, we found that junior civil servants did know about it but saw no sign of it being implemented: 'We are good at studying problems and proposing solutions, but they are rarely implemented. That's why I haven't even bothered to see what's in the Charter.'* The government had been unable even to take the simple step of reducing the long French-style lunch break, even though a survey showed that over 80% of staff favoured it.

### **Strategic Integration**

We turn now to the first of the HRM elements on which our study concentrates. In a word, there is virtually no evidence of SHRM-style strategic integration in the civil service. There are favourable factors: the policies of the new government could be the basis for strategy, piecemeal though they are; there is some awareness of strategic management among central officials and in some technical line ministries; and the relative autonomy of line ministries makes it possible for them to develop their own strategies, as one of them was at pains to point out. But one searches in vain for the strategic elements: there is no HR strategy, and no conscious attempt to link individual HR activities such as recruitment and selection to an overall strategic plan which in any case does not exist (vertical integration) or to each other (horizontal integration).

What goes on instead is what ministries call 'gestion courante' or day-to-day management, analogous to what Tyson and Fell (1986) called the 'clerk of works' model of personnel administration. The more able technical ministries, such as

Finance, Housing and, Public Works have taken professional initiatives, introducing computerized HR information systems or performance appraisal. The less able ministries see themselves as fighting, and often losing, a battle to maintain basic integrity, with a demoralized, partly corrupt HR function which competent staff make it their business to leave. Able and unable alike are pinned down by personnel files. To get a civil servant promoted, a ministry has to satisfy itself that there is a case, before referring it first to CSM and then to Finance. The whole thing takes up to three months, during which the anxious civil servant bombards the ministry with requests for an update (*'you might have a couple of hundred a day'* said one official, using dramatic exaggeration to make his point).

### **Line Management Ownership**

Are managers free to manage? Yes and no. At the top, Morocco's 'administrative feudalism' means that line ministries have more autonomy than they do in Commonwealth countries like Mauritius (McCourt and Ramguttty-Wong, 2003), and some have taken advantage of it. But delegation to lower levels within ministries is constrained by the central controls that we have already discussed, and by a tangible barrier (the high pay and education differential between senior and junior staff) and an intangible one (Morocco is probably high in 'power distance' [Hofstede, 1980], just like other Middle Eastern countries and also France). It is symptomatic that one of our informants said that *'Your relationship with your boss determines everything.'* The same officials who grumble about petty central controls impose them on their junior

colleagues. Junior officials complained that even a simple decision about permission to attend training might go all the way up to the ministry's secretary-general.

## **Recruitment and Selection**

The Moroccan constitution stipulates that 'each Moroccan has the right of access, in equal conditions, to civil service jobs'. Article Six of the *Dahir*, or royal decree, of February 24 which fleshes this out, states that the king, acting on the Minister's recommendation, appoints senior civil servants such as secretaries-general and Chiefs of Police. The King and Ministers have a great deal of discretion in how they do this, and ministers have complete discretion to appoint whomever they like to their personal Cabinets. Moreover, while the Palace and Ministers influence official appointments, there is movement in the other direction too: the post of minister can turn out to be the next rung on an official's promotion ladder (El-Messaoudi, 1996). At less exalted levels, appointments have been regulated since 1976 by a legal text, which specifies some criteria to which all but the most senior appointments conform. That is why Claisse (1987: 53) says that 'The highest and lowest levels of administration reflect the most traditional forms of patrimonialism whereas the intermediate level is evolving towards modernization,' though there is the proviso that patronage appointees at the top are often highly qualified technocrats.

Moreover, just as patronage appointees can be competent, 'merit' appointees can be the opposite. '*Someone with a Master's degree in nuclear studies may be recruited as an administrator.*' The state still plays the role of employer of last resort to an extent, even

*though 'Recruitment and promotion of people without the required qualifications and training does not reflect commitment to reform. It is not with these practices that we are going to reach performance and quality.'*

In October 2000, the former Prime Minister called on his Ministers in a circular to make key appointments on merit. How much notice did they take? Vacancies do get advertised, examinations are administered, private recruitment agencies are engaged, eventual appointments are made by a selection panel – sometimes. Such initiatives by individual ministries taking advantage of the freer climate of government are sporadic and not institutionalized,<sup>vii</sup> and Ministers and senior officials continue to use or abuse their discretion. We certainly do not have the monolithic central civil service recruitment examination hankered after by Evans and Rauch and by the World Bank (1997), which recently advised the government to emulate the Commonwealth Public Service Commission model by centralizing recruitment.

### **Performance Management**

The civil service law stipulates that civil servants should be appraised and graded every year on their 'professional knowledge, effectiveness and performance, and behaviour', criteria vague enough to leave appraisers plenty of room to manoeuvre. The grade can affect salary, but only at the margins. Reports, which do not have to be discussed with their subjects, have to go to CSM and Finance, like most things. Our interviewees agreed that there is much effort for little return.

In other developing countries such as Tanzania or Mauritius (McCourt, 1999; McCourt and Ramguttty-Wong, 2003), that is where things have been left. But the Ministries of Agriculture, Housing and Public Works have taken the initiative by introducing orthodox performance appraisal. The reform team in CSM has pounced on this initiative and, in its reform broker role (see below), has disseminated it to other ministries. But it has two limitations: it is not linked to any overall strategy, which is what essentially distinguishes performance appraisal from performance management, and it is not fully owned by government, reducing its chances of spreading to other ministries or even of being sustained in the ministries that have introduced it. Several informants said that initiatives depended largely on individuals, so that progress could come to a halt if that individual moved elsewhere, as happened when the dynamic secretary-general of one ministry was transferred.

### **Civil service Pay and Employment**

There is one other important HRM issue which is outside our research framework. Observing that public sector wage bills represent 12% of GDP (and 30% of government spending, as the Minister for the Civil Service admitted in a recent TV interview), the World Bank (2000) called for 'resizing' of the civil service to free resources for productive investment. While, as is often the case, a comparison with other countries in the region muddies the waters (Schiavo-Campo *et al.*, 1997), none of our informants disputed the need to do something. As yet, action has been incoherent: the former Prime Minister froze senior salaries pending a general pay

review which failed to materialize. The pay freeze built up pressure, especially from the *grands corps*. The government gave ground, at some cost to its credibility.

## DISCUSSION

### The Inadequacy of a Management Explanation

How can we make sense of our findings? A parsimonious explanation would be to see them through a management lens as an instance of generic resistance to change (Kotter, 1979), a view which duly emerged in our focus group discussion, one lending itself to the use of standard techniques like force-field analysis to analyse change, as one of us has done already (Al-Arkoubi, 1999). Moreover, it was clear that current management approaches, including the SHRM model which we focused on in our interviews, are not widely known. There is also scope for a management restructuring, whether to delegate stifling administrative controls from Finance and MFP to line ministries or even, moving in the opposite direction, to centralize recruitment and selection as the World Bank has recommended.

But pondering the role of CSM shows why a management explanation is inadequate. As one of our interviewees said, *'We need to diagnose the Civil Service Ministry itself ... this Ministry is not appropriate to conduct reform.'* CSM is expected to drive reform, but we have seen three reasons why it is weak. The first is its role in the French tradition as the gatekeeper of administrative law, which disposes it to assume that reform can

proceed by administrative *fiat* (Proulx, 1999), and which makes it all but despised by the line ministries, and by members of the *grands corps*, who tend to look down on their administrative brethren, just like in France (Rouban, 1999). The second is the relative strength of the line ministries, organised around their *corps*, and centres of power in their own right. The third is the deep-seated inclination of political actors to hold the ring between opposing factions rather than to initiate, with the related clientelistic preference for keeping every option open without committing oneself irrevocably to any one.

All this is reflected in how the government has discharged its reform mandate. Placing reform in CSM was arguably its first mistake, tarring reform with CSM's legalistic brush. (Sri Lanka corrected a similar mistake by moving reform into the President's Office, the strategic centre of government [McCourt, 2001], though it is unclear where the strategic centre of Morocco's government might be located, if not in the Palace.) The government mitigated its mistake by placing typically able technocrats in charge of the reform. They played a weak hand skilfully, but also characteristically. The Good Management Charter raised awareness of new but not over-ambitious approaches to reform, which some ministries, who wield the real power in staff management, moved to exploit. CSM then used its central position to act as a broker of good practice, organizing workshops, circulating newsletters and so on: *'To those who are lagging behind we say: Look what others are doing, try and imitate them.'* In doing all this they lowered their own expectations of reform – *'there are some modest reforms which are also necessary'*, as one of them put it. Officials whom one

might have expected to be champions of change talked about *'trying to be neutral, open to all experiences'*, and of *'facilitating, not saying: C'est moi, la réforme'*. This was sensible in one way, but also allowed them to keep their heads down in the way political actors in Morocco like to do. It provoked the observation from one of our interviewees that *'the file of civil service reform has been opened, but very timidly.'* More crucially, the observation was echoed in a UNDP evaluation report that regretted that the programme *'seems a little timid to us'*, and also, since *'concrete results remain(ed) some way off'*, ultimately to the termination of UNDP's support (Proulx, 1999: 8 and 41). It all boils down to that classic reform black box, *'political will'*: *'it is not so much (a problem of) having models to apply but having capacity to change'* or, as another interviewee put it neatly, not so much of *'savoir faire'* as of *'vouloir faire'*.

In a way, SHRM-style strategic integration is well suited to an assault on Morocco's *'administrative feudalism'*. Surprisingly perhaps, it was a trade union official who made the point most forcefully to us that a *'holistic and global'* approach to HRM would be an antidote to the multiplicity of *corps* and the piecemeal character of reform initiatives to date. Moreover, the fact that Morocco's ministries have greater control over their staff than their Commonwealth counterparts facilitates line manager ownership. But the sheer unfamiliarity of SHRM means that introducing it would require a considerable slice of the government's limited political resources; and even then, the underlying problem of political will would remain.

Thus we judge that is actually beside the point to recommend that Morocco should adopt SHRM or indeed any specific management approach at the moment, because it is likely to fall prey to the same timidity that has put paid to attempts at reform over the last five years, with the danger of each successive reform failure eroding the will of political actors. There is no harm in carrying on with modest awareness-raising exercises which may bear fruit later on, but it is the underlying political problem that needs to be solved before progress at the management level will be feasible. This is what we now address.

### **Political Action as a Prerequisite for Management Change**

How to proceed in a system where no one wants to be the first to jump? We suggest that the first step is to reframe the problem in political rather than management terms as one of overcoming political timidity and taking purposeful action, rather than of adopting this or that management model. Following from that, any action to address the problem must take account of the need to recognize the fundamental reality of the primacy of the palace while not exacerbating the timidity of other political actors by an arbitrary royal fiat, something that we have seen the present king is in any case reluctant to do. A number of approaches are possible. A first, low-key approach might be to promote the Civil Service Council, envisaged in the *Statut Général* of the Civil Service as long ago as 1958 but only convened for the first time in 2002. However, it follows from our analysis that any approach which did not involve the Palace would fail to overcome the inertia in the political system.

A more ambitious approach would be for reform advocates to persuade the king to make a keynote speech in which he would set up something like a British Royal Commission, a committee of eminent people which would take submissions from various quarters, including possibly from abroad. South Africa's Presidential Commission for the Transformation of the Public Service (1998), set up after the first democratic election, offers a model for such an exercise. The Secretariat for such a Commission, which would need to be in the Office of the Prime Minister or possibly even the Palace itself rather than in CSM and which might include able staff involved in recent initiatives, would over time evolve into an Office of Public Service Reform, which while small should have greater resources than those available to recent reform efforts.

The advantages of such an arrangement are that it harnesses the authority of the Palace while not disempowering politicians and officials; it allows the preferred consultative style to continue, in fact extending it to Morocco's energetic civil society, who could be represented on the Commission and might supply a director of reform who is untainted by the ingrained timidity of the civil service; and it might be possible to interest an international donor in providing technical support. Moreover, one central official volunteered something very like our Office of Reform proposal in an interview, though without the Palace dimension. The disadvantage, however, is that our arrangement could become merely the latest talking shop. However, while a suitable head and secretary for the Commission and progress-chasing arrangements would reduce this danger, essentially one would be relying on the king to act in his

role of arbiter, for which Morocco's history provides strong precedents, to reconcile the different views and decide the way forward. This would be a political drama which, contrary to all expectations, has a happy ending (unlike Beckett's play!), with Godot turning up in the final act in the form of a royal resolution of the reform stalemate. However, the danger of vesting so much in the whim of an individual, albeit a royal one, who has a finite attention span will be obvious to most readers.

### **Lessons for HRM in Other Countries**

In the face of those like Pfeffer who have suggested that favoured HRM practices are universally valid, our study has found that they are not widely known let alone widely practised in the government of Morocco, despite it being overwhelmingly Morocco's biggest employer and despite the abundance of able technocrats in senior positions. This corroborates the finding of an earlier study of Mauritius (McCourt and Ramguttty-Wong, 2003) in a heightened form, since moving from the Anglophone Commonwealth world of Mauritius to the Francophone world of Morocco increases the intellectual distance from HRM practices, including of course from the SHRM model on which our research interviews focused. Moreover, while we noted that such practices would address real problems that at least some officials recognize, the effort required to implant them would be misplaced, as it would be at the expense of addressing the underlying problem of political timidity.

Every country is *sui generis* to a degree, but we suggest that the importance of the relationship between HRM and the underlying political dispensation is an intrinsic

feature of HRM in the public sector, even if its particular terms no doubt vary from country to country. Evidence for this comes in the ubiquity of 'political will' in World Bank evaluation reports as an explanation for the failure of so many of the Bank's civil service reform efforts (Nunberg, 1997), and in public administration sources going all the way back as Caiden (1970).

Now of course a political view of organizations is quite well established in work such as Child's (1972) or, slightly ironically, even that of Pfeffer (1992) himself, albeit not much in evidence in the HRM literature. But such work applies the notion of politics metaphorically to organizations, treating them *as if* they were political systems (Morgan, 1986). By tracing a direct connection between a nation's politics and the way its government manages its staff, we are talking about politics in the literal sense. Organizational politics, with all the shifting alliances and conflicts of interests that Pfeffer and Morgan discuss, is still only as big as the organization itself. The politics that influences HRM in a government is as big as the society that the government presides over, and can encompass, as in Morocco, a monarchy, a democratically elected government and civil society. The implication is that anyone hoping to influence HRM in the public sector, and possibly also any senior HRM practitioner, necessarily becomes a political analyst. To make a difference, an understanding of politics is every bit as important as an understanding of HRM itself.

## CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF HRM

In this paper we have tried to understand why one developing country, Morocco, has made so little progress in improving the way it manages its public servants. We have suggested that while the SHRM model has some relevance to its problems, ignorance of the model means that the effort of introducing it would be disproportionate, and would be at the expense of tackling Morocco's fundamental problem, the institutional timidity of political actors which is not a personal failing but is a consequence of the way in which Moroccan politics has evolved. Rejecting the Beckett-like fatalism into which an analysis like ours might easily slide, we have suggested practical steps that political actors might take in this unpromising situation.

Ultimately, our analysis suggests that the elusive Monsieur Godot of civil service reform and improvements in public human resource management is most likely to be found lurking in the political undergrowth of reform, both in Morocco and elsewhere. If we want staff management to realize its potential and contribute to overall government objectives such as economic development and poverty alleviation, as Evans and Rauch and Kaufmann and Kraay have shown that it can do, or perhaps similarly to profitability in the case of the private sector, then those of us whose disciplinary expertise is in HRM will need to look beyond 'universal' models of HRM and engage with political issues, both the metaphorical ones that we find in private companies in industrialized countries and the literal and very complex ones that we find in governments.

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<sup>i</sup> The view to which we are alluding is perhaps too well-known to require rehearsing here. Readers not familiar with its origins or the policies to which it led can consult Williamson (1993).

<sup>ii</sup> Curiously, these papers don't reference Evans and Rauch's research.

<sup>iii</sup> Similar claims were still being made in Britain as recently as the start of the reign of the current Queen, who remains the formal Head of the Church of England (Jones, 1973).

<sup>iv</sup> This view is enshrined in the French colonial distinction between the *bilad al-siba* (zone of rebellion) and the *bilad al-makhzan* (zone of government) (Pennell, 2000).

<sup>v</sup> Quotations from interviews and from other French and Arabic sources are translated by the authors.

<sup>vi</sup> This is the word used in a UNDP evaluation of the reform programme: see Proulx (1999: 41).

<sup>vii</sup> Staff reported that an unanticipated consequence for those ministries that have improved their practice is to raise the expectations of staff appointed, only to dash them when the appointee comes face to face with the less glamorous reality of Moroccan public administration.