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**THE HUMAN FACTOR IN
GOVERNANCE:
FINDINGS AND PROSPECTS FOR
DEVELOPMENT**

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The human factor in governance: Findings and prospects for development

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Abstract

This paper is a slightly adapted draft of the final chapter of McCourt (forthcoming, 2006). In it we synthesize the findings of seven case studies to create a two-stage normative model of HRM in which countries whose political dispensation and institutional structure as they affect staff management are flawed concentrate initially on correcting those flaws, emphasizing compliance with organizational norms. Countries whose political dispensation and institutional structure are sound are able to move to Stage Two, concentrating on refining their strategic frameworks and improving the professional conduct of HR, with a view to improving staff performance and, consequently, the performance of public services.

However, the model does not give us a formula for generating plans of action. Instead, actions must be informed by a 'thick description' of the

political, economic, social and historical influences on staff management. Actions to improve staff management require a 'total explanation' of those influences, and of the interactions between the four levels of our governance model. We therefore present an account of government priorities which uses our normative model as a starting point but which is informed by the 'thick description' and 'total explanation' which our cases have tried to present. Replicating that account in other countries will be demanding, but it arguably offers the best chance of taking actions that will stick and will make a difference.

Keywords: governance, human resource management, developing countries

NOTE: This paper is a slightly adapted draft of the final chapter of McCourt (forthcoming, 2006). It reports the findings of seven country case studies, and also a chapter on the experience of 'downsizing' in several developing countries, which are the core of that book. The individual case studies are available as working papers on the IDPM website where this paper appears, or else as journal articles which most readers will find easy to obtain.

In a few places the paper refers to the research framework on which the book is based. Details of it, including the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) model which is integral to it, will appear in Chapter 1 of the book.

INTRODUCTION: THE HUMAN FACTOR IN GOVERNANCE

Our central chapters used case studies to explore particular themes which we will now review, roughly in the order in which they have arisen in the course of the book, discussing them more broadly than we could in individual chapters.

STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The SHRM model and its associated HR practices were a theme in all the case studies. Since SHRM is predicated on the existence of a *strategic framework* in the form of a mission statement or similar statement of organizational purpose translated into numerical strategic objectives or a full-fledged business plan, we were interested in whether such a framework existed and the extent to which there was *strategic*

integration between it and the way staff were managed. We were also interested in *line manager ownership*, in the form of delegation of staffing authority to line ministries and agencies, and to line managers lower down.

The strategic framework

The strategic management framework is now widely disseminated. Apart from Morocco, the Francophone exception, all the countries we studied have at least the basic apparatus of mission statements. In the majority of cases, however, strategies existed only on paper in central ministries, or in the form of mission statements in line ministries. Underneath them, day-to-day management – Morocco's 'gestion courante' – continued much as before.

Where strategy was real, as it was in Malaysia and Namibia, it made a positive difference. Namibia's success in creating and training a cadre of enrolled nurses was a direct outcome of the national primary health care strategy. Malaysia's 'Vision 2020' led to the creation of central strategic agencies, and to the new prime minister's emphasis on performance indicators.

Two things distinguished Malaysia and Namibia. The first was a shared sense of political purpose. In 'power distant' Malaysia, purpose rained down from above, with the personal leadership of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed being decisive. In Namibia it had a broader base, coming from many politicians' and senior officials'

participation in the liberation struggle, and from the policy preparation that took place in that period.

However, Namibia faced a strategic dilemma. Its relatively strategic approach to managing its staff ought to give it an advantage in working towards the MDGs, which in this sense represent the application of strategic management on a global scale, with ambitious outcome targets for maternal mortality and so on. Yet we saw that this global strategy ironically cuts across the national strategy which Namibia has been pursuing with some success since independence, leading to tension between the government and some international donors. The dilemma has its roots in the meta- or political level, in the government's commitment to its established primary health strategy as opposed to a commitment to the health MDGs, or to a concerted effort against AIDS, about which Namibia has shared some of its neighbour South Africa's notorious ambivalence.

The second thing that distinguished Malaysia and Namibia was the capacity of the government machinery: the two governments could be confident that the machine would respond to a touch of the strategic tiller, because the framework of institutions was stable and functioning. Even in those two countries, though, strategy had its limits. Malaysia's framework was a little more apparent than real, as it served a legitimizing function as well as the ostensible substantive one. Namibia's framework in relation to health was more substantial. But even here, its elaborate HIV/AIDS strategy set targets only for activities, not results (in the jargon, output rather than outcome indicators). When the government did set (very modest) result targets, it was to meet the requirements of the Global Fund, rather than out of any spontaneous conviction.

Capacity could be equally notable in its absence. One reason why there was little evidence of strategy in Sri Lanka was that the government felt obliged to give its attention to strengthening basic staffing institutions such as the Public Service Commission. This suggests that there may be a reform sequencing issue: we will return to this point.

Strategic integration

There may also be a reform sequencing issue with strategic integration, the keystone of the SHRM model. The question of integration only arises if an overall strategy already exists. In the countries where strategy was rudimentary at best, namely all but Malaysia and Namibia, it is not surprising that we found little evidence of integration. But even in Malaysia and Namibia, integration was piecemeal. From time to time a policy area would become important – whether TQM in Malaysia or HIV/AIDS in Namibia – and the government would demand a HR response. This is very different from the systematic and comprehensive HR strategy, mirroring overall organizational strategy, that the SHRM literature assumes. Moreover, those piecemeal responses were not usually initiated by the HR function, and might even bypass them completely.

One reason for this that our case chapters did not highlight was the unimaginative rigidity of the HR function. We saw in Chapter 1 that 'strategy expert' is one of the four roles which HR specialists are supposed to play in Ulrich's (1998) widely quoted model, but there was little evidence of it in operation. From the insouciance of the HR official in

Mauritius whose response to our question about major HR initiatives was *'Well, have there been any?'* through Morocco's 'finicky' Civil Service Ministry with its consuming interest in enforcing rules, to Sri Lanka, where the head of a line agency told us that *'We don't have any freedom, every aspect comes under the Establishment Code'*, the picture was of a central agency dedicated to policing conformity rather than facilitating performance. Only in Malaysia and Namibia did we have the sense that HR has a role to play in advancing government's strategic objectives.

In all the countries that we studied, HR was a general administrative function which conformed to the 'clerk of works' model of HR that we outlined in Chapter 1. At the time of an earlier study of Sri Lanka (McCourt, 2001), the most senior official responsible for HR fortuitously had a Master's degree in Human Resource Management. By the time of our interviews in 2004, he had moved on, and his post was again occupied by a general administrator.

With none of the governments in this book taking the fully strategic approach that the textbooks commend, it seems clear that there is something wrong with the strategic model itself. The SHRM literature assumes a systematic and uniform mapping of strategic objectives on to staff management activities. But where strategy occurs, it is much more likely to be piecemeal, as in Malaysia and Namibia: particular HR responses to particular strategic priorities.

The HR literature shows little recognition of such a piecemeal approach, distinct as it is from the 'blueprint' approach which formerly monopolized discussion of strategic management, and which continues to dominate development thinking about strategy in

the form of the well-known 'logical framework' technique. But it tallies with the strategic tradition to which we alluded in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 9 (Lindblom, 1959; Mintzberg, 1989; Korten, 1980). Mindful of the data limitations that managers face, strategy in this tradition is an incremental process in which strategic thinking is more important than the strategic product, continually overtaken by events as that inevitably is. A piecemeal approach in which there are particular HR responses to particular strategic priorities is arguably within that tradition.

This approach should not be thought of as 'watered-down' strategy: instead, it means thinking strategically, and learning, throughout the strategy process, rather than doing all the thinking at the planning stage, with only minor adjustments thereafter if the strategy slips off track. It also means sensitivity to the political environment, in which party manifestos and government policies may stand for strategic objectives.

Line manager ownership and the institutional framework

Another reason why strategic integration was piecemeal at best in our study countries was the typically centralized but also fragmented structure of HR. Discussing line manager ownership entails discussing the institutional framework of staff management, the focus of Chapter 4, as it represents the formal division of responsibility between government agencies.

Division between central and local

The political argument for devolving responsibility is that local officials make better decisions because local people can shape them and hold officials to account. Yet a review of decentralization experience in several developing countries found that decisions were only properly 'pro-poor' in one region of one country (West Bengal in India), and even there it was because of the commitment of the central state government. Poverty orientation came from the top down rather than the bottom up (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001).

The public management argument for devolution is that line managers make better decisions because they know they will carry the can for their mistakes. As the 1980s report that paved the way for staffing devolution in the UK civil service put it,

'Too much authority is centralised ... this is wrong because it means that decisions are not being taken by those who have to live with them.' (Cassels, 1983, p.36)

Yet there is also a view that devolving power to public managers who cannot or will not use it fairly will increase inefficiency and corruption (Schick, 1998).

In most countries all significant decisions were made by the Centre. In the historiographical terms we used in Chapter 8, there was some 'path dependence' here: decisions were centralized in Malaysia, for example, partly because they always had been, and governments had obtained the 'increasing return' of getting used to this way of operating. The effect of political decentralization, where it occurred, was more apparent than real: ostensible decentralization followed by covert recentralization in Sri

Lanka, and a reinstatement of local authorities in Tanzania in which central government kept control of staffing decisions.²

Central control frustrated some managers, but reassured others. Awareness of bureaucratic pathologies was more often outweighed by the belief that central management was a bulwark against political influence. In a situation where *'Government officers' sound is very low, MPs' sound is very big'*, as a Sri Lankan official put it, only a strong central agency could provide a counterweight to the power of politicians. Sri Lanka was indeed the extreme case, where a constitutional amendment had consolidated the power of the PSC in the centre with strong support from line ministry staff and the trade unions. Crook and Manor (1998) found that while decentralization might initially increase corruption, in the long run it tended to decrease it as local scrutiny began to operate. But in the majority of our countries, civil servants and their unions believed otherwise, at least where staff management was concerned.

The two exceptions to the central control rule were Morocco and Namibia. In Namibia, despite some clawing back of central control in response to a budget squeeze, line ministries could advertise nationally for posts right up to the top, and central officials did not seem to object. Tellingly, the Ministry of Finance was relaxed, and was in fact making plans for further devolution, something that its Swazi counterpart on the other side of southern Africa could not begin to contemplate. In Francophone Morocco, however, it was the line minister who exercised the freedom to appoint, so that the potential for more responsive decision-making was negated by the breach in the separation between politics and administration (see below), with predictable results.

Division between line ministries and local managers

In countries where power is centralized in agencies like the PSC, there is no question of delegation to local managers within a line ministry, although this is the meaning that 'line manager ownership' usually has in the HR literature (see Guest, 1989). Yet even in Namibia, where line ministries do have a great deal of authority, they have passed little of it on to their local managers.

The central/local division of responsibility

We support the Cassels view that staffing decisions should be taken at the level that is affected by them, other things being equal – but other things rarely are. Table 1 suggests that staffing devolution will be viable to the extent that four factors have a positive value. The position in Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Namibia conforms to the table. We suggested in Chapter 3 that the arguments for and against devolution in Mauritius are quite finely balanced. Staffing was even more strongly centralized in Sri Lanka than it had been previously, but was relatively decentralized in Namibia. Malaysia, however, does not conform, for reasons we explain below when we discuss the influence of history.

**Table 1 Factors affecting staffing devolution
in Namibia, Mauritius and Sri Lanka**

Factor	Mauritius	Sri Lanka	Malaysia	Namibia

How strong is the commitment to political decentralization or deconcentration?	Weak	Weak	Weak	Strong
Are staffing decisions free from political influence?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Is the periphery reasonably efficient relative to the Centre?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Is the periphery at least as fair as the Centre?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Is devolution viable?	Possibly	No	Yes	Yes

There is still scope for limited devolution even in countries where the position is generally unfavourable. However inefficient or corrupt the periphery might be, it is very hard to defend a position in which a line ministry has to get central permission to change the walking allowance paid to forest guards (as in Mauritius) or the design of official forms (as in Tanzania).

Staffing delegation, where viable, will only be fully effective if accompanied by budgetary delegation and a shift from ex-ante to ex-post controls of both staff and budgets, as one of our Malaysian interviewees suggested. And there is a final caveat: major pay decisions should continue to be made centrally. As we saw in Chapter 9, there was no appetite for devolving pay decisions even in Namibia's relatively devolved

structure, given the strength of Namibia’s trade unions and the bad experience of performance-related pay in the 1990s.

Divisions at the Centre: balkanization

Binary discussion of whether decisions ought to be central or local has been at the expense of considering where decisions should be made among the different agencies at the centre. In the Commonwealth countries of Mauritius, Tanzania, Swaziland, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, where decisions about all but very junior staff were centralized, responsibility was parcelled out among several agencies.

**Table 2: Responsibility for HR in central government agencies
(Commonwealth model)**

AGENCY	FUNCTIONS
Office of the Prime Minister	overall government policy
Ministry of Finance	pay and pensions
Ministry for the Civil Service	deployment and conditions of service for public servants
Public Service Commission	appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline
National Administrative Staff College	training and development

Perhaps because it was overlooked in the decentralization debate, this institutional settlement was very stable, having either remained intact (Mauritius and Malaysia), or re-emerged after flirtation with other models (Tanzania and Sri Lanka). But it created a balkanized or '*fragmented*' structure – to use a Mauritian Permanent Secretary's term – which made strategic integration all but impossible, as each agency had its own priorities; especially so with the Commonwealth PSCs whose role was fixed by the national constitution. At a more basic level, fragmentation meant duplication of functions, as we saw in Tanzania.

Divisions at the Centre: politics and administration

In Tanzania and Swaziland the position was further complicated by the superimposed final authority of the president, prime minister or king, whether formal or informal. Chapters 4 and 6 indicated the problem that this created: the justified perception that staffing decisions would be secretive and arbitrary, and that civil servants' only effective right of appeal was outside the civil service, through the courts or the public ombudsman. The fact that Sri Lanka has gone to so much trouble to take this arbitrary power away from the politicians reinforces our argument in Chapters 4 and 6 that Tanzania and Swaziland ought to do the same, and that in this instance the public administration orthodoxy enjoining a strict separation between politics and administration is correct. However, in Chapter 7 we also saw that governments like Sri Lanka's and Tanzania's which deliberately politicized the civil service in the 1960s and 70s did so with the perfectly proper intention of transforming an aloof colonial civil service into one that would respond to development objectives. There will be little gain if

restoring civil service independence just means reinstating the colonial aloofness, which politicians in any case may no more tolerate than they did in earlier years. The civil service must be politically independent, but also responsive to political objectives.

Downsizing and employment reform

It is appropriate to deal with this issue in the context of strategy, as one of Chapter 2's major conclusions was that employment reform needs to be approached in a strategic context. Certainly we found that there are emergency measures that some governments should take to cut costs and 'stop the bleeding', notably the elimination of 'ghost workers'; following Arogyaswamy *et al.* (1995), these are 'Stage One' of recovery. But we also found that in the private and public sectors of both industrialized and developing countries, downsizing programmes were only sustained when they were part of a recovery strategy (Stage Two of recovery). The empirical experience suggests that it is every bit as important to have strategic integration between overall government or agency strategy and downsizing as the literature tells us it is between strategy and the other HR activities like recruitment and selection.

Strategy is the meso-level in the governance model that we presented in Chapter 1 (Table 1.2). But the micro-level is also important. In a strong strategic framework, it is still important to consider management issues such as the desirability of focusing on cost savings rather than on reducing the number of jobs, since focusing on numbers may not deliver savings, and it will be regressive if lower-paid staff are disproportionately affected. Similarly, it is usually better to design a package for the

victims of downsizing that puts cash in their hands rather than to enrol them in elaborate but ineffectual retraining and employment schemes.

Table 3 is a summary of our findings on SHRM and associated HR practices.

Table 3 Human resource management in study governments: summary findings

COUNTRY	STRATEGIC HRM			HR ACTIVITIES		
	Strategy	Strategic integration	Line manager ownership	Employee selection	Performance management	Other
Mauritius	Mission statements only	None	Centralized	Politicised PSC open to nepotism; unskilful	PRP floated in 1987; new scheme piloted in 2004	
Tanzania	At ministry level only; donor-driven	None	Centralized	CSC under Presidential control	PA a 'dead letter'	
Morocco	Policies but not strategy	'clerk of works' HR	Ministries have power but don't delegate	Merit-based at middle level; some movement towards merit	Confidential reports; PA initiatives in some ministries	Downsizing launched in 2005
Swaziland	National Development Strategy with little momentum	None	Centralized	CSB under Prime Minister's control	Confidential reports: piloted scheme not adopted	
Sri Lanka	Mission statements only, except in donor-driven areas	None	Recentralization under PSC to combat patronage	Inflexible procedure to contain patronage	PA moribund; seniority promotion	
Malaysia	Strong framework; piecemeal strategy	'Piecemeal integration'	Central control supporting affirmative action	efficient, though affected by affirmative action	PRP scheme watered down; exam assessment	Affirmative action central to staff management
Namibia	Strong framework and strategic thinking; weak targets	'Piecemeal integration'	Line ministries in control, except over pay	Elaborate, driven by affirmative action	PRP scheme abandoned; new pilot scheme	Affirmative action is central; training and the 'skills mix'

OTHER HR ACTIVITIES: EMPLOYEE SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

We prioritized the above activities so that we could explore them in detail, hoping that they would stand for the other activities that space obliged us to exclude (although we broke our own rule in Chapters 8 and 9, where we discussed affirmative action and training respectively).

Employee selection

We found three approaches here. The dominant one was the Commonwealth PSC approach, where following public advertising, a central agency acting on line agencies' behalf conducts academic-style examinations which lead to rigidly structured interviews at the end of which applicants are scored. Only in this last respect is the approach in line with professional 'good practice'. However, although this dispensation allowed Malaysia to operate a covert gender quota and flout the official race quota over many years, it is still relatively transparent, as shown by the support that public service trade unions tend to give it, even in Mauritius where the PSC has been a political football.

The second approach was Morocco's, where ministries could do as they pleased, allowing some to increase transparency, but others to fall prey to nepotism. This has led to an unlikely convergence between the trade union side and the World Bank, with both advocating a move to something like the Commonwealth PSC model, where recruitment would be centralized in a politically independent agency.

The third approach was Namibia's, where despite the government having impaled itself on the horns of an affirmative action dilemma, practice was transparent and decentralized, with

ministries making their own appointments right up to Permanent Secretary, and the PSC acting as an aggressive watchdog in relation to appeals. Practice was also relatively skilful, with explicit procedures and guidance for recruiters to follow. However, it still did not go beyond traditional selection methods, with little use being made of tests or assessment centres.

Most of the energy devoted to employee selection has gone into increasing its transparency rather than its quality, or, to put it another way, into its institutional rather than professional dimension, even when the former has been at the expense of the latter. Sri Lanka's experience highlights this. In re-establishing the PSC as an independent constitutional body, the government opted to make integrity its exclusive objective. The system was less efficient than before; sophisticated selection methods were ruled out; but the civil service unions and by most central officials considered this an acceptable price to pay.

Performance management

The starting point for all the countries discussed in this book, both Anglophone and Francophone, is what Commonwealth countries call the 'annual confidential report'. Since in reality it is no more than what a Mauritian report called an 'annual ritual', every country has attempted to replace it with some form of performance management. Moroccan and Sri Lankan officials were politically astute enough to introduce a simple scheme whose modest objective was to get managers to recognize their responsibility for staff performance, even if the schemes failed to stick because managers were unfamiliar with them and because political support was weak. Those officials were acting, unconsciously or otherwise, on the recognition, embodied in the HR and performance debate that we outlined in Chapter 1, that the ultimate role of staff management is to contribute to organizational performance. In a sense Mauritius, Malaysia and Namibia were taking that recognition to its logical conclusion

when they introduced schemes which included a performance-related pay (PRP) element, modelled on the experience of influential governments like New Zealand's and the UK's. But because they were not aware of the negative aspects of that experience, they ended up repeating or even compounding those governments' mistakes, and also running into political difficulty in the shape of civil service union hostility.

So in Chapter 9 we said that Namibia's experiments with performance management took it down the bumpy trail blazed by Mauritius and Malaysia: the belated introduction of a scheme with a pay element that was intended to introduce the culture of performance, but which quickly succumbed to particularistic tendencies in the broader society, and also to the sheer inability of managers to deal fairly with staff; followed after a cooling-off period by the tentative re-introduction of a diluted scheme which emphasized employee development rather than pay but which had still to prove its worth. All three governments at the time of our research were still trying to rebuild the political capital which the earlier experiments had depleted. Their experiments had ironically made it harder to create a culture of performance.

A TWO-STAGE NORMATIVE MODEL OF HRM

To say in the light of our cases that different countries will have different priorities might be true, but does not take us far. We think we can derive a model from our findings which accommodates country differences. It is a normative model in that we cannot read off priorities for any individual country. Its two-stage structure derives from Arogyaswamy *et al*'s corporate recovery model which we adopted in Chapter 2.ⁱⁱⁱ

Table 4 A two-stage normative model of HRM

STAGE	ONE	TWO
Focus	Integrity	Performance
Method	Bureaucratic rule-following	Strategic human resource

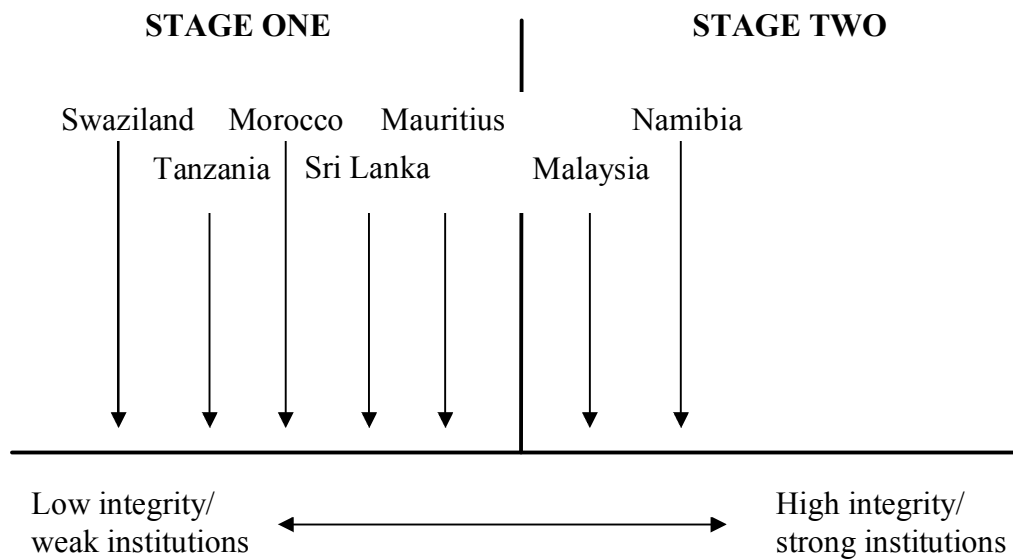
		management
INSTITUTIONS	Ensure framework of constitutional, primary and secondary legislation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing organizations (PSC etc.) • Respective roles of politicians and officials 	Maintain (and devolve)
STRATEGY		
Strategic management	-	Set strategic/policy objectives
Strategic human resource management	-	Piecemeal harmonization of HR with objectives
Line manager ownership	Centralize to ensure rule following	Devolve to line ministries and line managers
ACTIVITIES		
Downsizing/ employment reform	Emergency action to bring spending and budgets in line: remove ghosts etc.	Align staffing with objectives
Employee selection	Rigid procedures: interview scoring etc.	Professionalize: train managers, introduce tests etc.
Performance management	-	Introduce performance management linked to objectives but minus pay
(Other activities)	-	Training and other activities to support new objectives

The model accommodates both the countries that need to concentrate on the integrity of staffing and the institutional framework that will promote it (in our view, Swaziland, Tanzania, Morocco and Sri Lanka) and countries where lapses of integrity are exceptional rather than systemic, and where governments can concentrate on improving staff performance so to as to improve the quality of public services (Malaysia and Namibia). Mauritius has, as it were, a foot in both Stages, as institutions are weak, but credible initiatives to improve management quality in the form of the Action Plans have been taken under the government elected in 2000.

Legislation from simple secondary legislation right up to constitutional amendments is the main vehicle for change at Stage One. As well as its substantive value, such legislation can

represent the irrevocable step that Chapter 6 suggested was the litmus test of political commitment to reform. Sri Lanka’s Seventeenth Amendment (Chapter 7) was our clearest example of that.

Figure 1 Countries at Stage One and Stage Two of reform



A gloss on the above figure is that we saw in Chapter 2 that savings from the emergency actions to cut costs that constitute Stage One of corporate recovery have only been sustained when they have led to a second, strategic stage. Countries like Swaziland, Tanzania and Sri Lanka may need to concentrate initially on Stage One activities, but they should also have a vision of a Stage Two towards which Stage One will lead. Moreover, the Stage One activities of cost cutting and bureaucratic rule following are intrinsically unappealing. A vision of a performing civil service providing good services to citizens will help motivate governments to persevere with Stage One. That is one reason for our suggestion in Chapter 3 that modest actions to prepare the ground for Stage Two such as strengthening the HR function and training managers can accompany the Stage One actions; and it is one reason why the Moroccan reform team’s role as a clearing house for

line ministry initiatives such as introducing performance appraisal is useful, even if substantial results should not be expected.

Before moving on, we draw attention to the respective focus of the two stages of our model. Following Schick (1998), our model implies that it will be necessary to establish integrity before addressing performance; before addressing, in other words, the *quality* of staff management and of public services at large. But this creates a difficulty. Governments have committed themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, and in Chapter 9 we argued, following Fukuyama (2005), that achieving them will require a performing public service. That is not a problem for Namibia, the subject of Chapter 9, which we have located at Stage Two in our model; but it is definitely a problem for countries like Tanzania and Swaziland. However, we cannot dodge the logic of our model. Improvements to public services that will advance the MDGs will only be sustained if a framework and a political and official culture of rule-following have first been established: *reculer pour mieux sauter* may be in order. To put the point concretely, Sri Lanka's reformers were right to beat a tactical retreat from the ineffectual 'Stage Two' activities of what in Chapter 7 we called the 'third wave' of Sri Lanka's reforms in favour of the 'Stage One' activity of putting the Public Service Commission and the other service commissions on a firm footing. Thus development advocates who wish to reach the sunlit uplands of the MDGs must first pass through the Valley of Despond of HR and public service reform; or, to put it positively, HR and public service reform, far from being a parlour game of interest only to bureaucrats, becomes an integral preliminary stage in a strategy for achieving the MDGs.

THE POLITICS OF HRM (Chapters 5, 6 and 7)

While Table 3 integrated the macro (institutional), meso (strategic) and micro (management) levels of our governance model, it omitted the political or meta-level. We

turn our attention, therefore, to the final analytical task of this book, which is to integrate that level with the model we have just proposed in a comprehensive account of human resource management in developing country governments.

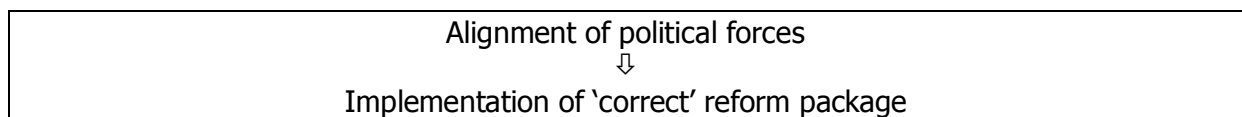
It would be possible – in fact it has been usual – to explain the trajectory of staff management in the public sector purely in management terms. We could confine ourselves, rather as we did earlier with performance management, to blaming failure on the choice of ‘inappropriate’ models, implying that an appropriate, properly contingent model would succeed. Similarly, we could apply standard organizational change notions such as ‘resistance to change’, as we suggested in Chapter 5. Certainly we should always prefer such parsimonious explanations where we can. But mechanical application of ‘good practice’ cannot occur when public management is politically contentious, as it is in all of our countries. Even where the political dispensation is stable, a political party may be determined to convince voters that it and it alone is able to deliver good public services, as the Barisan Nasional in Malaysia and the Labour party in the UK were both doing at the time of writing. There is no such thing as a politics-free public management, even if the political issues are starker when the political dispensation is fundamentally flawed.

Chapters 5 to 7 therefore tried to show why talking about staff management in purely management terms is inadequate. Whether the problem was the general preference for reacting rather than initiating, as in Morocco, or an absence of political will deriving from the ‘dual’ system of government, as in Swaziland, or the existence of a patronage system which politicians and officials feel obliged to stoke, as in Sri Lanka, all three cases had one thing in common: the failure of management reform had its roots in the political system.

We believe that this lesson is an important one that in some quarters is still not recognized: we must not go back to the contextless, apolitical and therefore fruitless civil service reform

recipes of the 80s and 90s. But strangely, by the time we wrote this final chapter it was a lesson that in other quarters we were in danger of over-learning. With a political scientist, Paul Wolfowitz, newly installed as President of the World Bank, and with the UK Department for International Development's (2005) ambitious multi-country report series on the political and social 'drivers of change', we no longer need to labour the importance of political analysis with readers who are aware of those agencies' work. The new danger is that analysis has tended to assume that the direction of causation is exclusively from politics to policy, institutions and management: get the politics right, and the appropriate reform measures will fall into place:

Figure 2 Politics and management: the DFID premise



Thus the premise of DFID's 'drivers of change' project is that there is a 'correct' policy package, and it is just a question of getting the political actors to line up behind it:

'There is a broad agreement about the nature of the problems in Bangladesh and even on what needs to be done to promote broad-based poverty reduction in Bangladesh – civil service reform, reduce corruption, liberalise the economy ... bring about greater policy-focus and accountability ... privatise the SOEs, etc. But how to do this remains unclear for many actors. The central task that has emerged from the paper is how, over time, to strengthen underlying socio-economic processes and agents that will sustain pressure for pro-poor change across the wide agenda of policy and institutional reform and investments that are required for successful development.' (Duncan *et al.*, 2002, p.8; see also Duncan *et al.*, 2003, p.1; and Ng'ethe *et al.*, 2004, p.3).

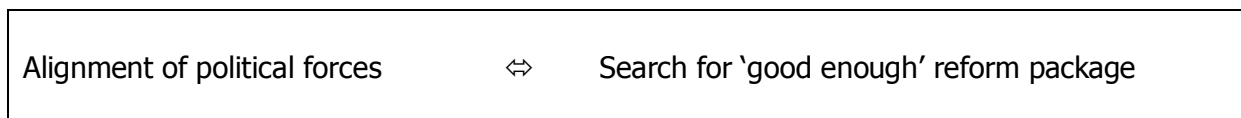
Now that is broadly in line with our analysis of Morocco, where we suggested that political action would be necessary before any management initiative could hope to succeed. But other cases in this book show how causation is often reciprocal. We make two points to support this view. First, we have seen that part of the reason for the difficulties with performance management in Mauritius, Malaysia and Namibia is that the version attempted included a PRP element which heightened particularistic tensions because most managers lacked the finesse to operate it properly, creating the suspicion that they favoured members of their own ethnic group. Yet there was no professional reason for them to make that mistake. The HRM literature shows that PRP is dispensable, and that worthwhile performance management is possible without it. A different version, minus PRP but including training or briefing for managers, might have succeeded in exactly the same political climate. This corroborates the World Bank's opinion, quoted in Chapter 2, that political will can be a function of the quality of advice that politicians receive from their officials and advisers.

Second, our view dovetails with the growing interest in 'policy networks' which proceeds from the recognition that policy emerges from a network of actors that includes politicians, but potentially also civil servants and non-state actors such as trade unions, NGOs and international donors (Perkin and Court, 2005; Rhodes, 1997). The origin of the Seventeenth Amendment to Sri Lanka's Constitution, discussed in Chapter 7, is an example of that.

So while studies of management need to be better informed politically than they have been in the past, policy-orientated studies of politics need to show an equal understanding of the machinery of policy, institutions and (human resource) management in order to bear fruit. Our preference for an approach to performance management which would be more politically acceptable because it would exclude pay, but which would still have the potential to improve civil service performance, is an example of that. So also is our recommendation

in Chapter 6 that policy-makers in Swaziland should frame a limited reform to the Civil Service Board that would detach it gently from the patronage system without disturbing the basic dual system of government. In the end, politics and management are interdependent, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3 Politics and management: reciprocal causation



Patronage (Chapter 7)

Patronage is a sub-set of political corruption, which following Johnston (1998) we defined as the abuse of public roles or resources for private benefit. While it has some desirable effects that include inducting citizens into the political process and rectifying bureaucratic injustices, they are outweighed by patronage's distortion of public resource allocations.

The preferred remedy to patronage has been institutional reform. In Sri Lanka, that reform, in the shape of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, was necessary, since rule-following bureaucracy is indeed one of patronage's 'countervailing forces', as scholars like Eisenstadt and Roniger have argued. Sri Lanka was right to reject alternative institutional remedies: administrative devolution would have made the problem worse, and political decentralization to the provinces had already done so. However, bureaucratic reform was still insufficient. The narrowness of the reform's political base and the legacy of suspicion between politicians and officials means that steps were needed to make officials more responsive to political control in order to strengthen politicians' commitment. The countervailing force of 'horizontal associations', or civil society as we have come to call it, could also have been deployed. In Sri Lanka no one has attempted to sell administrative reform: politicians are reluctant to abandon the pork barrel.

A further reason why institutional reform is insufficient is that, as we saw in Chapters 6 and 7, patronage in public staff management is part of a broader patronage system which also manifests itself in allocation of land, places at popular schools and other public resources. That system cuts across the institutional structure of government, so that the discrete reform of one part of the system such as staff management is like digging a trench in a bog: patronage seeps back in from other parts of the system. In the long run, our analysis of Sri Lanka, and also Mauritius and Swaziland, suggests that patronage will decrease as the countervailing forces increase in strength, as we saw with economic success in Mauritius and institutional strengthening in Sri Lanka. Chapter 7 showed that there are steps that governments can take to increase their strength.

Political commitment (Chapter 6)

The reciprocal relationship we have outlined between politics, institutions and management becomes particularly clear when we consider commitment, a concept that is at the interface between politics and management. Even after we have taken thorough account of the political economy of reform, commitment may still be necessary to carry a policy over the implementation threshold. That may be the reason why the same authors who find the concept unsatisfactory still end up using it themselves; and why, as with organizational culture (Barley *et al.*, 1988), commitment seems to be a concept where the academics who find it unsatisfactory have to give way to the practitioners who find it indispensable.

In Chapter 6, therefore, we proposed a model of commitment and applied it to Swaziland's experience of staffing reform. Given the disappointing history of reform in countries like Mauritius, Morocco and Swaziland, observers and activists may find it useful to have a way of assessing whether a reform is going to succeed; and donors in particular may find it

useful to have a way of assessing whether a particular reform proposal deserves their taxpayers' money. Moreover, using our model to pinpoint where a reform is weak gives a government the opportunity to strengthen it. It may be the reform's political base that needs strengthening, but it could also be the institutional framework or the detailed management content of the reform: action at any or all of the four levels in our governance model may be needed. We suggested just above that in Swaziland, the priorities are at the political and institutional level. In Namibia, as we shall see, they are at the political and management levels.

Social and economic influences

A politically informed account of staff management increases its complexity, as we have just seen. As if this was not already demanding enough, our analysis in the individual case chapters suggested that we must also take account of social and economic influences. We support that with reference to Chapter 8, the most theoretically elaborate of our cases, where we listed five principal causes of the development of HR in the Malaysian civil service: the pervasive respect for authority, Malaysia's ethnic make-up, the stable and buoyant economy, the National Development Policy of 1990, and the personal role of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. Two of those causes are social, one economic and two political; all play a part, none is decisive on its own.

HISTORY (Chapter 8)

We contended in Chapter 8 that even after we have looked at staff management in a political, social and economic perspective, it may be valuable to add the time dimension of history. We reached that view through an exploration of the currently fashionable 'path dependence' and 'punctuated equilibrium' theories of economic and public policy history. We

found that path dependence had a certain explanatory force when applied to Malaysia, where the structure of Malaysia's civil service was settled in the early 1950s and withstood the shocks of independence in 1957, the civil upheaval of May 1969, the ensuing New Economic Policy of 1971 and the subsequent National Development Policy of 1990 onwards. Many managers think it appropriate in this power-distant society, even though it militates against line manager ownership.

Malaysia's civil service structure of course resembles that of the other Commonwealth countries in some respects, notably in the role of its Public Service Commission. But it is a strength of the path dependence analysis that it can also explain Morocco's roughly opposite structure. Morocco's 'administrative feudalism', in which line ministries have a good deal of power, is as stable – as firm a 'path' – as Malaysia's opposite system. Borrowed in a hurry from France just after independence, the Moroccan system allows great disparities in pay and conditions between ministries, influenced by the power of the *corps* around which they are organized, and it has resisted the advice of the World Bank and of staff associations to centralize staffing on the Commonwealth model.

However, path dependence is also limited as an account of political and administrative history. When applied to countries on a negative path, whether we are talking about clientelism in southern Italy or economic stagnation in Spain or Bolivia, path dependence has the fatalistic character of the famous last line of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past' (1990, p.172). This is the fatalism that Houtzager and Moore objected to when they insisted that even 'relatively small groups of politicians and bureaucrats' might be enough to get a country off a negative path (2003, see especially p.3, p.13 and p.278).^{iv} But Malaysia's experience shows that paths can be good things to be on. Malaysia was lucky that the basic structure of the civil service withstood the shocks of independence and the 1969 riots.

A more profound limitation is that the 'path' and 'punctuated equilibrium' metaphors^v provide over-simple accounts of history. We have followed the historians Bloch, Braudel and Carr in expecting to find multiple historical causes. In Chapter 8 we identified six such causes of the development of Malaysia's civil service: respect for authority, the tripartite ethnic mix, an Anglo-Saxon orientation, the health and stability of the economy, the effect of the National Development Policy of 1990 and the personal influence of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. The structure of the civil service has remained stable, and somewhat path dependent, through the half-century since independence, but its content has changed incrementally and out of recognition as a result of those six causes, with no single cause being decisive.

Path dependence can explain stability, which we have neglected, but not change. A more wide-ranging survey of historical development such as ours identifies further obstacles to change, to be sure, but also dynamic possibilities that policymakers can turn to their advantage. The solidity of the civil service structure explains why staff management remains centralized in Malaysia, even though staffing devolution would appear viable in terms of Table 1. But in a society which respects authority and in a public service with an Anglo-Saxon orientation, a prime minister can use the authority which Mahathir Mohamed bequeathed to his successor to make changes to that structure, capitalizing on the prestige that the Anglo-Saxon devolved civil service model holds in Malaysian eyes by consciously emulating it.

However, such a survey must be done for every country individually. Malaysia happens to be a country where Houtzager and Moore's 'small group of politicians and bureaucrats' can get its way and is likely to want to. By contrast, in Morocco's segmented society the king hesitates to impose his possibly limited authority, despite which other political actors still

tend to wait for him to make the first move in the prevailing atmosphere of 'attentisme'. The executive authority that Malaysia can take for granted is problematic in Morocco.

In general, we hope that we have justified our belief that 'We must add the depth of time to studies that so singularly lack it' (Plumb, 1966, p.142) in order to correct what the political scientist Sydney Tarrow (1996, p.396) has called 'the presentism of much social science work'. Of course country-level historical analysis may lead us to conclude that a given country's 'path' is ingrained, and that change is unlikely. As we have seen, that is not always a bad thing. But we have managed to find potential for positive change even in countries like Morocco and Swaziland about which we might be entitled to feel pessimistic. In unpromising circumstances we may still manage to make 'hope and history rhyme', in the words of the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1998, p.330).

TOWARDS 'TOTAL EXPLANATION' AND 'THICK DESCRIPTION' IN GOVERNANCE

We believe that recognizing the importance of political, social and economic influences on public staff management propels us towards what, echoing the French historian Fernand Braudel's concept of 'total history' which we invoked in Chapter 8, we will call a 'total explanation' of politics, institutions, policy, strategy and management, because that is what will be necessary to produce reforms that will stick and that will make a difference. It may be that the successful reformer will be like Braudel's 'true man of action',

'who can measure most nearly the constraints upon him, who chooses to remain within them and even to take advantage of the weight of the inevitable, exerting his own pressure in the same direction. All efforts against the prevailing tide of history – which is not always obvious – are doomed to failure.' (1973, pp.1243-4^{vi})

This view constrains the role of the individual, but it does not negate it. There is still room for a gifted and determined leader to make a difference, as we saw in Chapter 8 that Mahathir Mohamed managed to do.

But there is no calibration that the reformer can use to measure the constraints upon him (or her). Drawing on a normative model such as the SHRM model, or indeed our own two-stage model of public HRM, to produce a reform programme is not the same as applying a formula. We do not want to underestimate the practical and political skills that a reformer needs, but in this context his or her task – and certainly the task of the scholar who wishes to help the reformer – is essentially the task of an ethnographer as Clifford Geertz has portrayed it:

'Ethnography is thick description. The ethnographer is faced with ... a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and explicit ... Doing ethnography is like trying to read ... a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations and tendentious commentaries.' (Geertz, 1973, p.10)

Like the ethnographer, the reformer or scholar finds himself or herself having to weigh up evidence which is every bit as flawed as the ethnographer's. The best way at this final stage of our book of illustrating how the reformer should 'read' governance is probably to point to the way we have conducted our analysis in earlier chapters. However, the specific example of the structure of government in Swaziland may be helpful. As we noted in Chapter 6, at first glance that structure is a standard Westminster one, complete with prime and cabinet ministers who are supported by the usual ministries. Yet a 'thick description' reveals that this façade disguises the reality of a dual system of government in which the 'traditional' side calls the shots. Understanding the role which the standard Westminster model plays in

Swaziland is the starting point for framing a meaningful reform. Professional initiatives like performance management which have worked well elsewhere are likely to fail in Swaziland, and may even compound the political problem by depleting the scarce reserve of political capital. It is in this sense that 'vice may be virtue uprooted', to repeat the words of David Jones that we quoted in Chapter 1.

GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LEVELS

Stage One and Stage Two priorities

We now complete our analytical task by synthesizing our findings in terms of the four levels of our governance model, taking the opportunity to summarize the main policy implications of our analysis of the individual cases at the same time. On this occasion we present countries in the order in which they appear in Figure 1, as this serves to emphasize how priorities are increasingly at meso and micro levels as countries move from Stage One to Stage Two.

Table 5 Governance priorities and interactions between levels

LEVEL	Swaziland	Tanzania	Morocco	Sri Lanka	Mauritius	Malaysia	Namibia
(STAGE)	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE → TWO	ONE/TWO	TWO	TWO
Meta (politics)	Autonomy within autocracy	End presidential discretion	Break the political stalemate	Autonomous responsiveness	Further reduce ethnic competition	-	Commitment to scaling up action on AIDS
Macro (institutions)	Restore Civil Service Board independence	Delegation from politicians to officials; end duplication among central agencies	Royal Commission?	Consolidate autonomy and strengthen responsiveness	Autonomy and pilot devolution	Start to devolve	Extend devolution via programme budgeting
Meso (policy and strategy)	-	-	-	(After consolidation:) Revive ministry reviews	Extend Action Plans	Continue 'piecemeal' SHRM	Resolve tension between existing strategy and scaling-up of health plans
Micro (HR management)	-	(Training of 'mid-level cadres?')	Downsizing; Centre continuing to broke line ministry initiatives	(After consolidation:) professionalize HR	Extend performance management pilots	Continue professional improvements	Training of 'mid-level cadres'

Interactions between levels

Presenting our findings in the above table highlights the interaction, or reciprocal causation, between levels (see Figure 3). The priorities we have suggested for each country at the macro level illustrate this important point. It would be possible to apply a single template to every country's institutional framework, and then read off priorities mechanically. This has a diagnostic value, as with the OECD checklists that we used in Chapter 4 to assess Tanzania's primary and secondary legislation. But it will lead to impractical recommendations that countries do not 'own', of the kind that resulted in the World Bank assessing 40 per cent of its own civil service reform projects up to the late 1990s as unsatisfactory at completion, as we saw in Chapter 2.

Instead of recommending a single universal institutional framework, we have offered tailored priorities based on our 'reading' of the cases. Our approach to devolution is an example of that. At one extreme, we have suggested that fundamental contradictions in Swaziland's dual system of government mean that devolution will not be a priority until there is political agreement to make civil service independence a reality. At the other extreme, we have suggested that Namibia's political stability and successful experience with devolution justify extending devolution, using the pilot programme budgeting scheme as a vehicle. In the middle, as it were, we have suggested that consolidating civil service autonomy in Sri Lanka requires, paradoxically, making the civil service more responsive to political objectives in order for politicians to have confidence in administrators and not start to undermine the Seventeenth Amendment reform as they have undermined previous reforms.

HR and other governance reforms

In Chapter 1 we expressed the hope that taking a broad view of the political, social, economic and historical influences on staff management would allow us to extend the scope of our conclusions to other areas of governance. It seems to us now that in Tables 4 and 5 we could substitute other governance topics. Narrowly, we could substitute the management of other resources: all the points we have made about the viability of taking a strategic or politically informed view of human resource management also apply to financial and information management (see for example Heeks, 2005). More broadly, we could substitute other areas of governance reform: proposals to reform customs and revenue collection or the judiciary or intergovernmental relations in terms of the balance between central and local powers all appear equally likely to require a sequencing of reform where fundamental political and institutional actions combined with rudimentary management actions lead to on to a political settlement in which more elaborate management actions can be taken to improve the quality of the judiciary or of revenue collection as the case may be. Thus we hope that readers whose interest in governance is broader than the one that this book has mostly taken have indeed found something to repay their study, as we hoped in Chapter 1 that they would.

CONCLUSION: INSTITUTIONAL SETTLEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE CULTURES

'Mistress Gloria was always saying to me softly ... Agu make sure you study book enh? If you are studying hard you can be going to the university to be Doctor or Engineer ... I am liking school very much and always thinking about going until the war is coming.' (Iweala, 2005, p.35)

We opened the book with a 'Third World' novelist of the last generation, and we close it with a writer of the next one. The narrator of the young Nigerian novelist Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of no nation* has been a scholarly boy, but when his school closes he is press-ganged as a child soldier into a war he barely understands. He suffers and commits atrocities. At the end of the novel he has achieved an ambiguous redemption, enrolled in a rehabilitation programme but traumatized, and struggling to reconcile what he has done and had done to him with the Christian values of his upbringing.

As in William Golding's *Lord of the flies*, a descent into savagery fills the vacuum that a school's collapse has left behind. Far from the state being 'predatory', the teachers that it employs – and we should recall that education is everywhere the biggest function of government apart from defence – have given order and purpose to children's lives. That connection tolls like a bell throughout the novel – Iweala, like Lampedusa (see Chapter 6), uses repetition to drive home his point: 'Then they are stopping school because there is no more government' (p. 35); 'One day, they are closing school because there is no more government (p. 71); 'There is no more school' (p. 77).⁷ Mistress Gloria, the Head Teacher who has picked out Agu's potential from among the sea of faces in her one-room rural primary school, and Agu's own father, whom Iweala has also made a teacher, present a positive image of public employees that is missing from the downsizing literature of the 80s and 90s. An atomized society is in no position to create private organizations or throw up private individuals to take the place of Agu's school and its head teacher.

The staffing institutions like the Public Service Commissions of Commonwealth countries are an important block in that project of building, or rebuilding, states which Fukuyama and others have seen as one of our most pressing public tasks. Whether or not the MDGs which came to the fore in the second half of our research project and which we focused on in

Chapter 9, will be realized, it seems clear that without public institutions and public services they certainly will not be. The acid test of a rarefied analysis like ours is whether it has the potential to make a difference to the way the Mistress Glorias of this world do their jobs. We hope that this book has shown how an institutional settlement that promotes rule following can set the scene for a culture of performance which will allow public employees to steer Agu's real-life counterparts towards a life in which they can develop rather than destroy the societies in which they are growing up.

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Notes

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² Tanzania was carrying out a local government reform programme whose effects were still unclear at the time of our research.

ⁱⁱⁱ See also the World Bank's (2003) similarly structured model, based on the work of Manning and Parison (2003).

^{iv} Robert Putnam endearingly allows an Italian regional president to express the same reaction in his well known *Making democracy work*: 'This is a counsel of despair! You're telling me that nothing I can do will improve our prospects for success. The fate of the reform was sealed centuries ago' (Putnam, 1993, p.183).

^v For an account of theories as metaphor, see McCourt (1997).

^{vi} There is a remarkable similarity with the view of history that Tolstoy expounds in *War and peace*, in which Prince Andrey says about Russia's Napoleonic war leader, General Kutuzov, that he 'knows that there is something stronger and more important than his will – that is the invisible march of events, and he can see them, can grasp their significance, and, seeing their significance, can abstain from meddling, from following his own will, and aiming at something else' (2002, p.851). Also see David (1985, p.333).

⁷ This is no mere literary conceit. We remind readers that in Chapter 7 we traced a connection between patronage, including in public employment, and civil war in Sri Lanka.