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**Working in neopatrimonial settings:
Perceptions of public sector staff in Tanzania and Uganda**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on staff perceptions of the use of merit principles in staff management. It focuses specifically on hiring, firing, transfer, demotion and promotion practices in the public sector in Tanzania and Uganda and on how such practices influence organisational performance and staff motivation to work in such ostensibly neopatrimonial (NP) settings. The central argument is that the NP paradigm applied to these issues does not provide an adequate analytical basis for understanding politics and administration. Specifically, proponents of NP tend to: (a) ignore that legal-rational and patrimonial practices co-exist and interact; (b) interpret all evidence of informality and poor performance as a result of patrimonial practices thereby ignoring other relevant factors identified by human relations and organisational theory; and (c) use the category 'patrimonial' as a label for practices that are actually quite different. As a result, analyses based on the paradigm tend to overlook the often significant variations in organizational capacity in the public sector; the uncertainty that characterises relations in NP settings; and the peculiar kinds of hypocrisy that this generates.

The author

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Working in neopatrimonial settings: Perceptions of public sector staff in Tanzania and Uganda

Introduction¹

The performance of organisations – their capacity to produce mandated outputs – exists to the extent that they possess and effectively manage external relationships and a sufficient range of human, financial, infrastructural, coercive and normative resources (Boesen & Therkildsen, 2004). There are often considerable differences in, and contestation about, the performance of government organizations within and across countries. One explanation for these differences – especially among poorer countries – is that performance is influenced not only by “intrastate” governance factors such as the extent of rule based decision making, the competency of public officials and “correct” governmental procedures in a rather narrow sense, but also by how – and how efficiently – various sections of the state apparatus interact with societal groups (Moore, Leavy, & White, 2003: 189). The relationship between state and societal actors is at the centre of this “polity” approach (Houtzager, 2003: 13).

Some observers claim that neopatrimonialism (NP) dominates this relationship in Africa. Chabal (2005: 21), for example, argues that “[c]ontemporary politics in Africa is best understood as the exercise of neopatrimonial power.” NP connotes “those hybrid political systems in which customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions” (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997, 62). Proponents of the neopatrimonial paradigm claim that “scholars of African politics have embraced the neopatrimonialism model” (ibid: 63). It “has become the standard for understanding African politics” (Leonard & Straus, 2003: 5).

While the concept of NP means widely different things to different scholars (Erdmann & Engel, 2007), and claims of the dominance of the paradigm in studies on Africa are clearly exaggerated (Mkandawire, 2001), it is certainly true that the paradigm has significant influence, and that this influence extends beyond academic circles. Thus, the World Bank (1997: 93) states that “[m]eritocracy has not yet become established in many countries. Instead the state has often become a massive source of jobs, with recruitment based on connections rather than merit.” Interestingly, this resonates well with opinions expressed by the government in Tanzania. The new public service management and employment policy, for example, states:

“For quite some time now, the public service has been viewed as a liability to the tax payer rather than an asset. This is because low productivity, erosion of work ethics, indiscipline, blatant violation of rules, regulations and procedures, weak control and corruption have been observed as common features in the service” (President's Office, 1999: 10).

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference on “The artifices of government: On the appropriation, the use and the formation of states” held at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, July 20-21, 2006.

Some of the empirical information used is collected through commissioned work for Danida and the governments of Tanzania and Uganda (see Therkildsen and Tidemand (2006). I alone am responsible for the opinions and assessments made here

Also the Ugandan government presents a very critical picture of its own public service: staff is poorly managed, has a low integrity, and uses limited resources inefficiently. “A disabling public service culture” is also lamented (Government of the Republic of Uganda, 2005: 8).

But how useful is the NP paradigm for understanding African bureaucracies? This paper focuses on staff perceptions of the use of merit principles in staff management. It focuses specifically on hiring, firing, transfer, demotion and promotion practices in the public sector in Tanzania and Uganda and on how such practices influence organisational performance and staff motivation to work in such ostensibly neopatrimonial settings.

There are two main reasons for this focus. First, public servants are said to be at the centre of many patrimonial practices. Yet empirically grounded analyses of staff matters and their impact on organizational capacity from this perspective are rare. Second, a central premise of human relations theory is that organizational capacity is strongly influenced by staff (Guest 1999). Although public servants are obviously not the only factor of importance for capacity, this simple premise is especially relevant for poor countries where public sector organizations are relatively labour-intensive. Moreover, conflicting or cumbersome bureaucratic rules, resource scarcity, and contested relations with societal groups or individuals often make even simple administrative tasks demanding so that staff efforts beyond the normal call of duty are required to get things done. Staff motivation and management are therefore central to capacity.

The central argument of the paper is that the NP-paradigm applied to these issues – on its own, and as it is currently used in studies on Africa – does not provide an adequate analytical basis for understanding politics and administration. Specifically, proponents of NP tend to: (a) ignore that legal-rational and patrimonial practices co-exist and interact; (b) interpret all evidence of informality and poor performance as a result of patrimonial practices thereby ignoring other relevant factors identified by human relations and organisational theory; and (c) use the category ‘patrimonial’ as a label for practices that are actually quite different. As a result, analyses based on the paradigm tend to overlook the often significant variations in organizational capacity in the public sector; the uncertainty that characterises relations in neopatrimonial settings; and the peculiar kinds of hypocrisy that this generates.

The empirical basis for this study is a 2006 survey of public servants’ perceptions about merit, motivation and staff management in their workplace in particular and in the public sector in general. One pair of ministries, local governments and executive agencies respectively was selected in Tanzania and Uganda. The selection was based on assessments of their relative performance (above and below average in each category). Some 400 public servants – graduate degree, middle level officers working in headquarters – were interviewed in these twelve organizations. Around 100 of these officers also participated in a total of 24 focus group discussions (a separate group of younger and older staff in each case organization). The information collected in this way offers a glimpse inside the “black box” of bureaucracies in poor countries, which more macro-oriented approaches tend to ignore. As a consequence, less explicit attention is paid to the general macro-context in which public organizations operate.

The rest of the paper is divided in seven sections. Following a very brief introduction to some of the main features of the public service in Tanzania and Uganda, the concept of NP is presented and discussed, and the methods used to study it with respect to staff management are presented. Next, it is shown how variation in adherence to bureaucratic rule is clearly associated with variation in

organizational performance. Then follow findings on employee perceptions of staff related practices. It is pointed out that a legal foundation for legal-rational behaviour is often weak, and that it can be analytically and conceptually difficult to distinguish between practices driven by merit-principles, patronage or clientelism. Finally, analyses of staff acceptance and contestation of neopatrimonial practices are presented. The conclusions also briefly discuss the prospects for transformations and change of public organizations in neopatrimonial settings.

The public service in Tanzania and Uganda

Presidential power is a key feature of the political system in both Tanzania and Uganda. The president is the head of state and effectively the leader of government although the prime minister is the head of the cabinet. While Tanzania has held competitive presidential elections every five years since 1985 – and peacefully changed office-holder three times – Uganda has only had two competitive presidential elections (in 2001 and 2006) during the same period with no change of office-holder.

Many formal presidential powers are set out in the legislation but reinforced by informal mechanisms. For the president is also the leading figure in the ruling party, tends to dominate politics, and often has strong influences on the way that the administration is run.

In Tanzania presidential appointing powers over the public service are wide ranging. They include the provision that even delegated appointing powers can be exercised by the president should he so desire (Bana & McCourt, 2005: 8). In Uganda, presidential powers vis-à-vis the public service are written into the Constitution and are similarly wide ranging. The Public Service Commissions in both countries are ostensibly independent, but the president appoints their members. Central control of a substantial part of staff in ministries therefore remains strong. However, the recent decentralisation reforms and the establishment of executive agencies in both countries have given these two types of organizations some autonomy in staff matters – more so in Uganda than in Tanzania.

The Ugandan public service had the reputation of being the best in Africa in the 1960s, but it collapsed during the Amin era and the subsequent civil war. State capacity has remained weak in the strife-ridden Northern Uganda for decades. The National Resistance Army came to power in 1986. Since then state capacity has risen significantly until the late 1990s when problems of corruption, patronage and governance came to the fore (Barkan, Kayunga, Njunga, & Titsworth, 2004; Robinson, 2006). Public perceptions of bribery in different public organisations vary, however, widely (Deininger & Mpuga, 2005: 178). Since independence, when over half the civil servants were Bangandas, the ethnic composition of the public service has remained politically sensitive, and the Movement has always had a rather ambivalent view of the public service, regarding it with suspicion while relying heavily on it to implement its policies. Museveni's own writings (1997) and the 2006-election manifesto exemplify this.

The Tanzanian public service has not had a similar performance reputation. It was feeble at Independence and soon thereafter put in charge of state-led rural and industrial development. Its official mandates have outstripped its capacity ever since with the push for the Millennium Development Goals being the most recent example among many. The 2005 CCM party manifesto, inspired by the Nyerere era, adds new tasks to the public sector. Nevertheless, political stability, some political support for public service reform, and donor funding for implementation has meant

that Tanzania's public service has been strengthened in recent years compared to other countries (Hyden, Court, & Mease, 2004). Ethnically based recruitment is not common – at least not to the upper levels of the public service (Nyang'oro, 2004). Nevertheless, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of public organizations, and the delivery of services is generally believed by the public to be corrupt (President's Office, 2005: 30).

A merit-based public service is the officially declared goal in both countries. Public service reform efforts have been to promote a performance culture in the public sector (Clarke & Wood, 2001). Efficiency, effectiveness and accountability have been the buzzwords (Therkildsen, 2001). Major changes in size, structure and pay have been implemented to achieve that (Mutahaba, 2005; Rugumyamheto, 2004).

Thus, the size of the public service has changed significantly in the last twenty years.² Following fairly drastic reductions in the size of the service during the Structural Adjustment Programmes from the mid-1980s and onwards – most pronounced in Uganda – employment is now growing again partly due to internal political pressure (especially in Uganda) and partly due to efforts to reach the MDGs. Security of employment, which was one of the privileges of public service in the past, is now coming under pressure. Moreover, career promotions are no longer supposed to be based on length of service, as in the past, but on merit and individual performance. Staff is ambivalent about these changes. A performance-oriented culture in the two bureaucracies is clearly not strongly rooted.

At the same time, a multitude of restructurings have taken place. Many ministries are restructured regularly. Staff has also been decentralised, so that local governments in Tanzania and Uganda now employ 64 percent and 87 percent of the public service respectively. In addition a number of executive agencies and other public agencies have been established during the last 10 years – especially in Uganda; they now employ some 5-10 percent of the total staff.

African public servants are the best paid in the world relatively to the average person (Schiavo-Campo, 1999) - as are the formally employed in general. Tanzania and Uganda are no exceptions. Public servants here have, however, many social obligations to extended families. The number of dependants that rely in whole or part on a public servant income is often large. In our survey sample, the family size of public servants (including dependants) was – in average – fifty percent higher than the average family size in the capital.³

Over-paid compared to ordinary people or over-burdened with social obligations? In any case, staff complains loudly (in interviews, rarely on the streets) about low salaries for three reasons. Present salary levels are significantly lower than thirty years ago despite recent improvements. Moreover, public servants do not compare their situation with that of the average person on the street; they use pay levels in the upper league of the private sector as yardstick instead – and feel dissatisfied as a consequence. In addition, as part of the public sector reforms (which included substantial retrenchments), both governments promised much higher salaries to those who remained - but did not deliver. Pension improvements have not materialised either (Kiragu, Mukandala, & Morin, 2004). Finally, substantial wage decompressions have taken place, especially in Uganda. Here the

² Public service employment was 299.000 in Tanzania and 240.000 in Uganda in 1986. In 1998, the figures were 264.000 and 154.000 respectively. In 2004 they were 295.000 and 219.000. In Tanzania, the employment growth rate has been lower than the population growth rate (2.9 percent) since 1998 (Therkildsen & Tidemand, 2006).

³ Data from the most recent population census (where a household is defined as those that eat together).

pay difference between the salary of the president and the lowest paid employee is 51: 1 – without considering fringe benefits (Kiragu & Byaruhanga, 2004: 4). Employees in executive agencies in Uganda earn some 27-60 percent more than their occupational counterparts in central government (Ministry of Public Service, 2005: 21). Indeed, massive pay differentials now exist in the public service, with drivers in some agencies earning 50 to 150 percent more than economists in the central ministries (Government of Uganda, 2004: 140). Such differentials cause resentment. In both countries, but especially in Tanzania, equality (among bureaucrats themselves) remains a strong norm.

Interestingly, salary is not the most important legal source of income for public servants. Various allowances are equally or much more important for incomes for almost 90 percent of the respondents in our survey. There may well be even bigger disparities between beneficiaries of allowances than there are in salaries although this is difficult to establish (Valentine, 2004).

Finally, both Tanzania and Uganda have, at varying times, been a favourite of donor countries. Tanzania fell from grace in the early 1990s. Relations improved again after that, but have now soured again following recent corruption scandals involving high level politicians. Uganda was the darling of donors for some years in the 1990s. Now political developments – the war in the north, the political transition issue and corruption - worry them. Nevertheless, donors have been major funders of the two governments for years. Both countries are aid-dependent with total aid being 12 percent of GNI for Tanzania in 2000, and of a similar magnitude for Uganda. Some 30-50 percent of the government budget is financed by donors. In both countries, but particularly in Tanzania, donors have funded major public sector reform activities, including retrenchments, restructuring of public organizations, decentralisation, pay reform, establishment of executive agencies and so on.

Problems of neopatrimonialism as an analytical concept

NP has become the standard approach for analysing bureaucracy and politics in sub-Saharan Africa. The paradigm is based on two main propositions. ‘Patrimonialism’ means that a patron, who is culturally anchored in a social and political order, distributes gifts from own resources on followers to obtain and strengthen loyalty and support. Clients, on the other hand, obtain material benefits and protection. ‘Neo’ means that office-holders in legal-rational state institutions are patrons who use public funds to build their personal loyalty among clients so as to stay in power (Clapham, 1985: 47-49). In other words, a clear public/private boundary, so central to the notion of modern administration, is ambiguous and contested. That boundary may not exist at all in some cases.

In studies on Africa, however, the use of the NP paradigm often leads to very different results. Some argue that the role of the state, especially the President (the Big Man), is central, while others take a more society-centric view based on the proposition that the state in Africa has never been properly institutionalised. There are also differing views about distributional effects. Some claim that resource scarcity restricts the use of patrimonialism to try to establish intra-elite accommodation in new multi-ethnic and poorly integrated political systems. There are limited trickle-down effects. Others claim that the spoils of the state are more widely distributed in society (Therkildsen, 2005).

Despite such differences, Africa is exceptional in the eyes of key proponents of the NP paradigm. “Although neopatrimonial practices can be found in all polities, it is the *core* feature of politics in Africa... . Whereas personal relationships occur on the margins of all bureaucratic systems, they constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions in Africa” (Bratton and van de

Walle (1997: 62-63), their emphasis). Chabal and Daloz (1999: 16) make a more extreme claim: in “most African countries, the state is no more than a décor, a pseudo-Western façade masking the realities of deeply personalised political relations. There may well appear to be a relative institutionalization of the main state structures but such bodies are largely devoid of authority.”

Such claims of African exceptionalism fit nicely with images of miserable conditions on the continent. Much of the paradigm’s attraction lies, perhaps, herein. That neopatrimonialism is especially widespread in Africa and less important everywhere else is based on two arguments. One is cultural. “Neopatrimonialism originates in the African extended family, with the dominance of older males and strong interpersonal ties. It has been reinvented in the form of the “big men” and personal political relationships that pervade post-colonial African political institutions, including government bureaucracies” (Bratton, 1994). The other argument refers to the logic of capitalism and increasingly globalised markets. Competition promotes efficiency and effectiveness. Eventually, therefore, principles of rationality will extend to all areas, including that of the public sector. This has just not yet happened in Africa.

The use of the NP paradigm to understand politics and administration in Africa are problematic for many reasons.⁴ Six problems are especially relevant for the subsequent empirical study of staff issues in Tanzania and Uganda.

First, in many studies is assumed – rather than empirically investigated -- that patrimonial practices dominate politics and administration across African countries. This bias is most explicitly stated in the quotes above by Chabal and Daloz and less pronounced by Bratton and van de Walle. Obviously, this skews the empirical analyses and forecloses that legal-rational practices may be important, too.

Second, legal-rational and patrimonial practices may be exercised simultaneously. Different state organizations play different roles in the political economy of the country. Islands of organizational capacity in the public service can exist alongside poorly performing organizations within the same country as Moore, Leavy et al. (2003: 190) point out.⁵ Some of these variations may be due to deliberate political decisions by rulers to pursue developmental and clientelistic policies at the same time. The United States is an example of this, as is Japan (Woodall, 1996) and many Latin American countries (Avritzer, 2002). Similar two-track strategies may be used in African countries. Consequently, some organizations (as well as units within them) may perform well, while others do not.

Third, proponents of NP regard patronage as a special feature of administration and politics in Africa. This ignores that patrimonial practices exist in hierarchical organizations all over the world - sometimes pervasively so - and not just in African countries. Thus, specific personal networks at the upper level of organizational hierarchies continue to play a central role even in rich countries in both the private and the public sector. It is, for example, estimated that there were some 4 million patronage positions in state and local government in the United States during the early 1980s. Today, political appointees occupy some 3000 of the most senior posts in government.⁶ The US extends this practice to the UN-organizations as well. The present Executive Director of UNICEF, Ann Veneman, for example, was positioned by the Bush administration, under which she had a

⁴ See Erdmann and Engel (2003) for a critical review, which has also inspired some of the following points.

⁵ See also Skocpol (1985); Paul (1982); Grindle (1997).

⁶

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/0,,contentMDK:20134011~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:286305~isCURL:Y~isCURL:Y,00.html> accessed February 1, 2010.

position as the Secretary of State for Agriculture (she was earlier a director of Calgene, a major agro-business).⁷

Patronage being so widespread, its driving forces cannot be especially African. To the contrary, according to Theobald (1999: 496-497), it is rooted in certain features of all hierarchical organisations. Required merit qualifications become increasingly difficult to specify as the organizational hierarchy is ascended.⁸ Incumbency of such positions also yields highly valued rewards and exceptional opportunities, so that vague criteria of exclusion are needed to restrict access. In addition, occupants of higher positions often have to make controversial decisions that may subject them to public scrutiny or create conflicts and therefore they prefer trusted supporters around them. To strengthen this trustworthiness, the rewards of office are usually high. It should be added that an influential body of studies of organisations in rich countries, both private and public, have shown that cliques, factions and informal networks function within, and sometimes dominate, formal rules and regulations (March & Olsen, 1989).

Fourth, NP ignores insights from human resources management and institutional theories. These argue that organizational performance depends on compliance to merit principles in staff management; motivation of staff to work (monetary and non-monetary factors); staff management (supervision, encouragement and sanctions, communication, etc); and context (relations to other organizations and organised groups, norms and values, etc) (Guest, 1999). There is no reason why such factors should not be important in African countries as well.

Fifth, the legal framework which regulates staff management in the public sector is often ambiguous, contradictory and complex. This is a common feature of many public services across the world, Tanzania's and Uganda's included (Therkildsen & Tidemand 2006). Some proponents of the centrality of patrimonialism in African politics and administration may argue that this is the result of intentional decisions (or non-decisions) aimed at enabling the exercise of patrimonial power: disorder as political instrument in the interpretation of Chabal and Daloz. A different interpretation of the causes of the problems of the legal framework is that they result from errors in legislative drafting, confusions about key terminology in the legislative process (sometimes a result of inexperienced and overworked legal staff), and unsolved conflicts about who should control staff. It is an analytical challenge to assess staff management practices in such situations.

Sixth, proponents of NP tend not to distinguish between various forms of patrimonialism such as patronage and clientelism (as Erdmann and Engel (2006, 20) also point out). Thus in this study patronage is defined as the practice of using state resources to provide jobs and services for political supporters (groups rather than individuals). It is part of high-level politics aimed at gaining political support.⁹ Clientelism concerns individuals. Whereas 'traditional' clientelism involves direct dyadic relations between patron and client and tends to be durable over time, 'neopatrimonial' clientelism as used in this study involves the personal hierarchal networks of politicians and bureaucrats. Rather than being political in function, such networks aim primarily at using state resources for the economic support of network members. Networks may be based on ethnicity, common schooling,

⁷ On Veneman's qualifications for the UN position see Flanders (2005). Absurdly, the World Bank's (1997: 93) advice to poor countries in the face of what it calls extensive "political appointments" in industrial countries, such as the United States, is that "countries with weak institutions and inadequate checks and balances are better off relying on more transparent and competitive mechanisms."

⁸ Peters (1995: 90-91) seeks to capture this through the concept of "responsive merit."

⁹ *Prebendalism* is a specific form of patronage. It refers to the handing out of public offices to individuals in order for them to benefit from personal access to state resources. It is not specifically dealt with in this paper.

or service in the conscription army and sometimes help members or their dependants in the absence of social security arrangements. Patronage and clientelism may be difficult to distinguish empirically, but it is important to do so for analytical reasons as the two forms have different aims, may not be equally stable, and therefore have different impacts on state capacity and on the dynamics of politics and administration.

Seventh, some versions of NP tend to exaggerate the control and power of the president in politics and administration. Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 63), for example, describe “presidentialism” as a system in which “one individual, ... resists delegating all but the most trivial decision making powers.”¹⁰ van de Walle (2005: 20) exemplifies this by the claim that President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia personally controlled some 50,000 jobs in and around the city of Lusaka in the late 1980s. This image of overwhelmingly centralised presidential power is not only based on an incorrect reading of the source.¹¹ It is also highly unlikely to exist in practice because it is an organizational impossibility. No individual can personally control that number of persons, even with the help of the most efficient of bureaucracies.

Finally, NP assumes that narrowly defined self-interest motivates both patrons and clients. Patrons seek accumulation of personal power. Clients seek personal and family protection and economic advantages. This ignores other sources of staff motivation commonly recognised in studies of bureaucracies (Peters, 1995: 102-107) such as conviction (i.e. ‘doing good for my country’); professionalism (‘doing things right’); or involvement in decision making (i.e. as an employee in running the organization; as an politically active citizens).

To clarify some of these problems, the concept of NP defined by Erdmann and Engel (2007, 105) is used as the starting point for the empirical analyses. NP is:

“a mixture of two, co-existing, partly interwoven, types of domination: namely, patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination...the distinction between the private and the public, at least formally, exists and is accepted, and public reference can be made to this distinction. Neopatrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with a claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy and ‘modern’ stateness.”

This means that the formal institutions of the state – and the formal legal frameworks for their operations – should not just be regarded as mere facades as Chabal and Daloz do. They must be taken seriously. Not all official relations are privatised, nor do all public organizations operate on an informal basis. Therefore recruitment, promotions, demotions and dismissals of staff are just not decided based on patrimonial logics. On the other hand, evidence shows that such activities do not necessarily follow stated procedures, rules and laws either. Elements of patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination co-exist. Erdmann and Engel (2007, 15) state that it is the former that penetrates and twists the logic, functions and effects of the latter. However, the empirical analyses below illustrate that the two forms of practices penetrate – and may reinforce – each other under certain circumstances. It is therefore the mutual articulation of patrimonial and legal-rational practices – and the context specific relations between them – that are in focus in the analyses presented below.

¹⁰ Quoted from Erdmann and Engel (2003: 10). They point out that Bratton’s and van de Walle’s use of ‘presidentialism’ differs significantly from conventional political science usage (in which the term simply connotes that the president heads a democratic regime as opposed to a parliamentary democracy).

¹¹ His source is Bates and Collier (1993: 391). They write that the UNIP party – not the president – filled over 40,000 local party positions in various committees and positions – not jobs in the public service. Even that claim appears exaggerated; it originates from a local newspaper.

Methods

Most information on staff issues in the public sector of Tanzania and Uganda was collected in five ways *primo* 2006: (a) questionnaire survey of *perceptions* of 400 public servants (around 35 from each of twelve organisation selected) using mostly Likert-scale based questions filled in by employees themselves in one-half to one hour; (b) one to two hour discussions in 24 focus groups (half junior staff; the other half senior staff) with some 100 of the 400 sampled staff members; the same questionnaire and focus group issues were used in both countries and in all organizations to facilitate comparisons.; (c) interviews with chief executives; (d) interviews with a substantial number of well-informed people within and outside the public sector; and (e) secondary sources such as government and consultancy reports.

Organizations were selected among local governments, ministries and executive agencies. Together these categories employ around 90 percent of all staff working in the public sector, and each category has specific formal arrangements for staff management (although these arrangements differ between Tanzania and Uganda as explained earlier). We aimed to select one organization performing above and one below average respectively in each category in each country (twelve cases in total) by using information from well-informed persons and available official assessments. However, upon closer scrutiny of additional material, including focus group discussions in all twelve organisations, we judged that the information on performance was reliable for only nine organizations. Therefore, mainly information from these is used in the following. The details of case organization identification is explained in Therkildsen and Tidemand (2006, appendix volume).

Some limitations of the survey should be noted. Only officers (graduates) working in headquarters - in particular finance and administration staff, but also other professional staff - were sampled. Front-line staff, for example, was not included. Their motivation may be quite differently constituted (Lipsky, 1990). Lower level staff is certainly lower paid than the employees included in the sample. Second, individuals that had failed to get a job in the selected organisations were not sampled. Their views on the recruitment process may differ from those of successful candidates. Third, the survey was done as part of ongoing work on public sector reforms in the two countries; these gave access to engage with staff, but may also have associated the interviewers with the authorities and therefore have influenced respondents' answers. Fourth, the selected organisations are not representative for the public sector as a whole as the sample was purposively constructed to allow comparisons between organisations that perform above and below average. Finally, the analyses build on staff perceptions and opinions solicited through interviews.

Obviously, some scepticism about the validity of information obtained quickly and by outsiders unknown to staff is appropriate. Respondents may simply try to echo what researchers want to hear. Not surprisingly, some staff clearly preferred to talk about the application of merit in their workplace rather than about patrimonial practices. This was especially the case in Tanzania. Ugandan respondents seemed more frank. Moreover, people in organizations face formal expectations about performance and compliance with certain norms that they may not be able to meet. Therefore they sometimes respond with hypocrisy as is discussed below.

Consequently, the survey information should be interpreted with care but there are two reasons to have confidence in it. First, the focus group discussions generally supported the findings of the

quantitative interviews and the limited information available from secondary sources. Second, several of the results are consistent with findings from the relatively few empirical studies of merit, work motivation and staff management in public sector of poor countries (for example Court, Kristen, & Weder, 1999; Grindle, 1997; Owusu, 2006; Rauch & Evans, 2000; Tendler, 1997), and with the general findings in the human resources management literature (see literature review by Guest (1999)).

Variation in organizational performance across the public sector

As argued above, performance variations across organizations of the same type may— in part — be caused by differences in the use of legal-rational and patrimonial staff related practices.¹² To establish this association empirically we compared assessments by staff from organizations performing above and below average with respect to issues of merit, work motivation, and staff management. We found the following.

First, staff in above average performing organizations consistently, and significantly, rated the merit-quality of their organization's recruitment practices (as well as the organization's transfer, disciplinary and promotion practices) higher than staff from organizations performing below average. The quality rating is based on agreement/disagreement with questions such as "In this organization, staff is hired on the basis of: ... merit (ability and skills required for the job); ...clear and transparent rules; ... tribal affiliation and home region; ...political connections; ...gender considerations; ...social connections (who knows who); ... corruption, bribery and back-door arrangements."

Second, we found significant association between staff statements about their own work motivation and organizational performance. This is based on replies to statements such as "I work in this organization because I: need salary/security/pension; have no other options; can do something important for my country; gives me prestige; improves my career possibilities" and to questions about future employment (actively trying to find job in the private sector, with NGOs or donors, etc).

Third, assessments of the quality of staff management were associated significantly with organizational performance differences. Ratings were based on questions about the extent to which supervisors set clear targets and standards of work; make follow up; encourage performance; improve office environment; help staff with personal problems; and reward and discipline staff fairly.

The broad conclusions are that differences in adherence to merit principles, in rule related work motivation and in rule related staff management practices do help to explain differences in organizational performance (undoubtedly these three factors interact, too).¹³ These conclusions are not surprising. They fit well with the results of similar analyses elsewhere (Grindle, 1997; Tendler, 1997). They are, however, remarkable in light of the generalisations about African politics and administration made by some proponents of NP.

¹² Since this paper focuses on staff related factors that affect organizational performance, other capacity relevant factors receive less attention.

¹³ Other factors than those related to staff may also help to explain performance differences (e.g. differences in access to funds; in competitive pressures). Nevertheless, even when such factors are considered, the staff-related factors identified here are significantly associated with performance as shown in Therkildsen and Tidemand (2006).

Employee perceptions of staff management related practices

How do public servants themselves perceive staff related practices in situations where legal frameworks do not provide a clear basis for decision making and day-to-day administration, and where practices of patronage and clientelism may be common and explicitly acknowledged by the government (as illustrated in the introduction), by public servants (as shown below) and by the public (as indicated in numerous opinion polls (e.g. Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005))?

In the staff survey empirical information on this was obtained by focusing on staff perceptions of hiring, firing, transfer and promotion/demotion practices (HFTP) in their workplaces. The survey data indicate that:

- only slightly more than 50 percent had ever applied in writing for the positions they had held in the public service
- a little less than 50 percent had ever been transferred to another job – most by order of the authorities; fewer by own request. It is unusual to have been transferred more than twice
- some 50 percent had been promoted twice in their career in average
- around 10 percent had experienced a demotion for various reasons.
- Less than 5 percent had experienced a disciplinary case.

The first thing to note is that HFTP-events are relatively rare considering that the sampled staff had worked in the public sector for an average of 17 years.¹⁴ Moreover, the pattern of HFTP-events is fairly similar across countries and organizations except that staff in Tanzania dealing with finances is more frequently transferred than staff in other positions: handling money in the public service is a sensitive matter.

How do public servants perceive these HFTP-events in their own work-place? Public servants have a range of views on these as Table 1 shows. It focuses on recruitment practices which the literature normally regards as the most vulnerable to neopatrimonial practices.¹⁵

Table 1. Recruitment practices in the workplace according to staff perceptions (percent of respondents that ‘agree’/‘agree very much’ that factor is important)

	Tanzania Uganda		Tanzania		Uganda	
Organization→ Factor	All	All	Performance above	Performance below	Performance above	Performance below
Merit	80	83	94	68	82	77
Political connections	6	29	6	8	23	46
Social connections	9	22	0	19	16	38

¹⁴ Aggregate statistics on such events do not exist. This is itself an interesting feature of staff administration in light of the expansion of statistical information on many other key issues of the public sector, especially finances. As a researcher it has always been much more difficult to get access to aggregated information on staff than to information on public finances.

¹⁵ Public servants do not agree with this. They regard the processes of transfers and promotions as the most problematic. Thus, interviewees (in percentage of the whole sample) that ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ that the HFTP process is ‘fair and transparent’ are as follows: recruitment (13); disciplinary action (15); transfers (21) and promotions (29). However, for reasons of space only recruitment is dealt with in some detail here.

Ethnic connections	9	16	8	16	13	28
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Source: Survey data from Therkildsen and Tidemand (2006).

Merit-based recruitment is the dominant practice in the selected public organizations, according to the respondents. This corresponds well with the finding that six out of ten recruitment cases comply to rules in Tanzania (President’s Office, 2005). That fewer than half of the staff had not applied for a job (see bullet points above) cannot in itself be construed as an indication of widespread patrimonial practice, since recruitment by application has only recently been introduced as a general rule. Previously all graduates were secured a job upon obtaining a degree. Many of the staff interviewed was recruited at that time.

Non-merit principles are, however, also used. There are remarkable differences in answers to questions about the importance of ‘political connections’ (patronage) and clientelism (‘social connections’ and ‘ethnic connections’) in the recruitment process: Uganda scores significantly higher than Tanzania in both categories. A similar difference exists when patronage and clientelism in organizations performing above and below average are compared. Although cross-country differences in these figures should be interpreted with care¹⁶ there is little doubt that patrimonial pressures on public sector organizations are higher in Uganda than in Tanzania.

It is also noteworthy that for the sample as whole political, social and ethnic connections are mentioned with roughly the same frequency in Tanzania. Variation is larger in the Ugandan sample (Table 1). While the former involves political patronage, the focus group discussions and other interviews revealed three types of ‘social/ethnic connections.’ One is constituted, in both countries, by *secondary-school/university-based networks*. These can be actively used to get a new job (and to get promotions, transfers or to handle disciplinary cases). Peer-based relations and pursuit of mutual economic benefits are probably as characteristic of these networks as hierarchal patron-client relations. Another type of networks were established during service in the conscription *army* in Tanzania (now abolished) – and the national resistance army in Uganda in the 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁷ In Tanzania these networks seem to serve the same purpose as the school-based networks, whereas political patronage is clearly more dominating in the Ugandan version of the army network. The third type of networks is based on *ethnicity*. Where members in two other types of networks are intra-governmental with public servants and/or politicians as members, the third type involves relationships with prominent persons (elders, businessmen, religious leaders, etc) outside the public sector. The aim of this type of network may be to gain political or economic support – or both. Sometimes it is, however, analytically difficult to distinguish the political and social motivations in these networks from each other, although the implications of conflating them are, obviously, significant for the understandings of staffing related practices.

Nevertheless, ‘social and ethnic connections’ seem to be as important in recruitment as ‘political connections’ are. The former may, or may not, involve patron-client relations aimed at gaining political support. Only a context specific assessment may determine this (and we did not do that).

¹⁶ For example, Ugandan respondents appeared to be more open and frank in focus group discussions than the Tanzanian respondents. See also Peters (1995).

¹⁷ The conscription army in Tanzania, which also included women, was compulsory for all university graduates after independence. It was abolished due to economic crisis and donor pressure in the late 1980s. Its role remains poorly researched, although it was regarded as a central element in state building for decades after independence. Museveni (1997) describes some of the prominent persons in networks originating in the Ugandan resistance army. Members in this network are closer linked to the political hierarchy than the Tanzanian network.

Van de Walle (2005: 21), who defines patronage as “the practice of using state resources to provide jobs and services for political clientele” is therefore on uncertain ground when he makes the following generalisation: “Hiring a member of one’s ethnic group to a senior position in the customs office is an example of patronage.” In any case, all three types of networks aim at obtaining economic benefits and protection for members and their families. And all three types of networks seem fairly stable although they are obviously not inter-generational as ‘traditional’ clientelistic relations are. Several networks may exist simultaneously within an organization, and this may lead to unstable and conflictual relations (see next section).

Table 1 is based on staff’s general perceptions about the situation in their place of work – not on their assessments of specific recruitment events. The conclusions that can be drawn are therefore general ones: (a) merit-principles, as understood by staff, are often used in recruitment but clearly more so in organizations that perform above average; and (b) patrimonial practices are also used, and more so in Uganda than in Tanzania, it seems.

Acceptance and contestation of patronage and clientelism among staff

Patrimonial and legal-rational practices occur in all public organizations in Tanzania and Uganda as indicated in Table 1 and vividly expressed in the focus group discussions. However, Chabal and Daloz argue that the former practices totally dominate, while Bratton and van de Walle state that the former ‘suffuse’ the latter. Erdmann and Engel (2007: 105) propose that the two systems operate simultaneously and co-exist but that “the patrimonial penetrates the legal-rational system and twists its logic, functions, and output, but does not take exclusive control over the legal-rational logic. That is, informal politics invades formal institutions.”

In all three formulations – domination, suffusion, and penetration – patrimonial practices are deemed to pervade all activities. The existence of legal-rational islands in neopatrimonial systems is ruled out as is contestations about these practices. Also ruled out are the possibilities that: (a) use of patrimonial practices can invigorate and strengthen the uses of legal-rational practices; (b) practices of the former can weaken practices of the latter; (c) the two types of practices may deliberately be operated simultaneously within an organization.¹⁸

Co-existence

The case studies show that on the one hand patrimonial pressures to influence recruitment “are everywhere” as one executive agency personnel officer in Uganda said. Sometimes this includes high-level outside pressures on specific organizations as well. Two of the six Ugandan organizations, for instance, had received recent phone calls from “state house”¹⁹ to request that specific individuals be considered for a job. In both cases the vacancy was at the lower end of the hierarchy.²⁰ In one organization the request was rejected, according to our sources; in the other it was complied with. Staff involved in recruitment processes in local government in Tanzania also talked about how they often received “piles of notes” aimed at influencing their decisions. Here we were not told of any “state house” attempts at influencing staff recruitment.

¹⁸ This proposition is also valid for the public sector as a whole as already discussed.

¹⁹ “State house” is a big building. We do not know if the calls were from conmen (or women) or from ‘genuine’ inhabitants of that house. Clearly, our respondents did not believe that these were phony calls.

²⁰ And may therefore have been motivated as much by the prospect of securing a paid job for economic reasons as by political patronage.

On the other hand, merit-based principles also featured strongly in our discussions with staff and in the survey results. One personnel officer, for example, recorded all steps in the recruitment process in his organization and volunteered to let us look through the recruitment files.²¹ Moreover, during many focus group discussions, staff and superiors talked about the use of merit-based principles as if they are an accepted norm in their workplace and a well established routine (e.g. “in this world of globalisation,” one respondent in a local government in Tanzania told us, “we must accept the merit principles to survive”). The growth in university-level intake – and in the number of universities – in both countries illustrates a rapidly increasing demand for better formal qualifications. Particularly in Uganda, many staff members in the sampled organisations are enrolled for further studies to improve their qualifications for a better job. Indeed, the opportunities for further education offered by the workplace are a significant incentive in the eyes of staff. Such views would not make sense if recruitment and promotions were only done according to patrimonial practises. Even where these are widely practiced they seem to be generally restrained by requirements of formal educational qualifications. This interpretation is consistent with the answers in Table 1.

Thus, legal-rational and patrimonial practices co-exist within organizations in both countries. We cannot establish the extent, to which officials follow formal workplace rules and obligations, and how many officials do so, but the typical situation is that compliant and non-compliant colleagues work in the same organizations, and are keenly aware of that. Moreover, formal bureaucratic behavior seemed much more routinised vis-à-vis patrimonial behavior in some units (departments, sections, desks) than in others within almost every case-organization. There are also often significant intra-organisational variations.

Interactions

Interactions between bureaucratic and patrimonial behaviour are clearly influenced by this co-existence. However, some of the well-known and expected findings from the case studies also turned out to have unexpected implications.

It is, for example, well known that patrimonial practices can undermine bureaucratic behaviour especially in organizations with low bureaucratic capacity. For where patrimonial practices dominate there can be few incentives for officials and politicians to comply with or enforce rules, the argument goes. That is the situation most often described in the literature (e.g. van de Walle 2005: 26).

Paradoxically, the co-existence of bureaucratic and patrimonial behaviour can also strengthen the resolve to comply with rules as the following examples illustrate. First, weak enforcement of bureaucratic practices can lead to a (often unmet) staff demand for discipline in the work place. It was a fairly general complaint, especially among younger staff, that superiors failed to supervise; and that work-plans and targets were too vague or unrealistic to be taken serious. There were complaints of too much idle time and frustrations of having nothing much to do. Others have registered a similar staff demand for strengthened bureaucratic practices (Keele Consortium, 2005). It belongs to the picture that an opposite view was expressed by many elder staff and women with family obligations: they saw the slack discipline as a clear advantage as it allowed them to tend to

²¹ This executive agency has started to do consultancies in a growing market for professional recruitment services in Uganda.

their private business or family affairs. It is this lack of discipline that makes employment in the public sector attractive even for staff that could get better paying jobs in the private sector (see also Cohen and Wheeler (1997) on Kenya).

Second, several respondents explained how recruitment in the work place was done in a rigid and highly regulated manner to avoid subjective assessment of applicant qualifications that may cause accusations of wrongdoing and biases. Thus, as a rule for the entire public sector in both countries, most advertisements specify only requirements that can be objectively assessed (typically about age, years of experience, educational qualifications). Similarly, interviews in some organizations are done in a highly regulated manner. The panel prepares questions to applicants that only probe technical competencies – not attitudes to work and target groups, team efforts, social skills, past achievements and failures, etc. No additional or follow-up questions are allowed. In this way all applicants are faced with exactly the same questions. The entire recruitment process is aimed at excluding any subjective assessments to avoid patrimonial practices.

But could bureaucratic rules be a façade behind which patrimonial practices are exercised, as Chabal and Daloz claim? That cannot be ruled out. In Tanzania, for example, a Programme Implementation Unit (PIU) offered positions with donor funded salaries well above ordinary public service levels (see also Therkildsen (2004) for an Ugandan example). Elaborate procedures for recruitment to these top positions were agreed with the donors to secure adherence to merit principles. These required an inter-ministerial interviewing panel to provide a priority list of candidates from which the Permanent Secretary (PS) could choose. He appointed three of the five positions candidates identified by the panel, while two were given to persons lower down on the list. Donors complained but the priority list was confidential. The PS assured them that the recruitment had followed all the agreed procedures. But as often happens in such cases, information was eventually leaked, and panel's priority list became known. Two years later, when the PS was transferred to another post, the two officers in question were sacked immediately.

The problem with the Chabal-Daloz position is not that it is entirely wrong, but that it is very often difficult to generalise as this example shows. And paradoxically, patrimonial practices carried out behind a bureaucratic facade may sometimes strengthen personal relationships and adherence to bureaucratic rules. For example, in a large public service commission in Uganda in charge of central recruitment of many public servants, candidates for positions were called for interviews in Kampala and entitled to reimbursement of various expenses for transport, etc. However, the administrative unit in charge of processing the reimbursements systematically delayed and obstructed the process. Management did not attempt to clean out the known culprits for “human reasons” as a supervisor told us but also for fear of reprisals: “life is cheap here.” Instead, management assigned a trusted employee from another department to keep the money in a drawer in his office, and to make the payment to applicants from there. To comply with legal-rational practice a personal and trusted relationship between a superior and that individual had to be relied upon. However, such relations burden the good performers because supervisors often over-loaded them (or such employees volunteer to do tasks beyond their job assignments). While these efforts may sometimes be rewarded in cash or kind, the only sure reward is more work. Consequently, in many organizations over-worked good performers can be found side by side with colleagues that do not do much – or have little to do.

We encountered several other examples of such personal ties between trusted individual employees and their superiors. Typically, the literature focuses on ostensibly patrimonial networks. The

person-based performance-oriented networks (i.e. individuals who help to fulfil the official mandates of the organization) receive less attention.

Finally, the co-existence of legal-rational and patrimonial practices sometime provides decision makers with useful choices. In Uganda, for example, a reform of pay structures in 2003/04 resulted in the consolidation of lunch allowances for health staff into their salaries. This did not change actual pay much (allowances were now taxable). Health staff was still paid higher – up to 85 percent - than other professionals in the same salary scale. Nevertheless, doctors and nurses were aggrieved and organized pay negotiations directly with president Museveni. He agreed that health staff be paid a lunch allowance again – on top of the one they de facto received as part of their consolidated salary – and contrary to technical advice. It is a good example of patronage in action with the president trying to buy support from a vocal and influential interest group. In other cases when Ugandan government staff demanded pay increases, no access to the president was granted but had to negotiate through ‘normal channels.’

There is an interesting twist to this example. The government is now, with reference to the example above, proposing to “distance” the president from pay decisions in the future (Ministry of Public Service, 2005: 19-20, 27-28). This is unlikely to deter him from using pay policy for patronage purposes in the future. But it makes the motives for the president’s future involvement in pay decisions more transparent.

Variation, insecurity and hypocrisy

The co-existence and interaction of legal-rational and patrimonial behaviour across the public sector and within each of its organizations make for a messy (working) life for many public employees: which practice to follow and which to avoid is often far from clear cut.

For public servants are faced with many ambiguous choices. They work in organizations where both legal-rational and patrimonial practices are typically used simultaneously. Even where the former practices dominate in their workplace, their organization often operates in a context where external patrimonial pressures can be strong. These are key features of working in a neopatrimonial setting.

Moreover, staff choices not only depend on individual preferences and on the consequences of alternative actions in light of these preferences: choice-based decisions. They also depend on the social appropriateness of these actions in the specific context: norm-based decisions. These are the two basic parameters of individual and organizational decision-making (March 1994).

These two perspectives – the political science perspective on neopatrimonialism and the organizational studies perspective on decision-making – can be combined. An individual or an organization may act based on choice-based decisions (seeking to anticipate the future effect of current actions evaluated in terms of preferences) in mixed legal-rational and patrimonial settings. However, the ambiguities are many both with respect to reading the setting and then to calculate the actions that best fulfil preferences, and the capacity for such rational decision making is limited. Likewise, an individual or an organization may act based on norm-based decisions (seeking appropriate action based on an understanding of the context and the rules that apply to it such that individual or organizational identity is preserved or enhanced). But also this approach is fraught with difficulties as situations, rules and identities are all likely to be ambiguous. The most likely

outcomes of decision-making and action in neopatrimonial settings are therefore variation, insecurity and hypocrisy.

Neopatrimonial settings fuel *variation* in organizational performance across the public sector as documented earlier. Comparatively well performing public organizations exist – contrary to many predictions – but so do poorly performing ones. This is a logical consequence of the ambiguities outlined above. When public organizations are weakly institutionalised and the legal framework for decision-making is conflictual, vague, or poorly externally enforced, there is a larger scope for organizational-internal decisions and actions and more space for management and staff to influence how these are made. There is little doubt that individuals at the top of the organization can have considerable influence on the extent to which bureaucratic or patrimonial behaviour is practiced. Executives in the better performing organizations clearly made a positive difference (and employees often admired them for this). In fact, the poor institutionalisation of bureaucratic rules may leave executives and staff with more room for manoeuvre to improve effectiveness and efficiency than would otherwise be the case. Nevertheless, this room for manoeuvre should not be exaggerated. In one of the poorer performing organizations staff explained how a new executive had tried to enforce working hours: “... for one year he struggled, then he gave up... now we are comfortable with him.” The variation is both temporal and cross-organizational.

Neopatrimonialism also fuels *insecurity* (Erdmann & Engel, 2006, 19). A client needs a patron for protection or for improving livelihood in situations where prospects are uncertain. In return the provider expects political support or a return of favour at some future time. Insecurity is increased if patrimonial practices become widespread because it then becomes more difficult to fulfil mutual obligations.

Moreover, patrimonial practices blur hierarchical authority relationships within organizations and in dealings with other organizations. It means that an employee can challenge the instructions of a superior with open or subtle reference to powerful political or social connections. One of the major problems in the new open staff appraisal systems that both Tanzania and Uganda introduced recently is precisely that supervisors are reluctant to exercise their authority. They fear the reactions of subordinates who now have access to the evaluation result. Previously it was confidential and made without a face-to-face meeting between supervisor and employee. Even the officially lowest ranking employee can turn out to be an opponent that must be treated with caution. Where politicians are closer to the decision-making processes the adherence to bureaucratic rules seems to be especially under pressure as is often the case in local governments.

Thus, insecurity is generated by the difficulties of individuals and organizations to find out what constitute appropriate norms or procedures in the situation they find themselves in. For what is appropriate when both legal-rational and patrimonial practices are exercised simultaneously; or when they co-exist both internally and externally? Moreover, each situation highlights a different set of relationships so that it becomes difficult to live up to important relationships and cultural expectations. This is a key feature of norm-based decision-making (March, 1994: 63).²²

²² Thus, Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005: 200) are wrong when they write that people in Africa “are buffeted by conflicting values... and respond to these tensions by adopting multiple, shifting identities.” This is a general phenomenon.

Not surprisingly, therefore, we found widely varying staff assessments of their situation. At one extreme was a group of young employees in a poorly performing local council who frankly stated that since they were paid “tokens” contrary to government promises of pay improvements in the 1990s, they were justified in seeking compensation through corrupt practices when given the chance. At the other extreme were supervisors who preferred to work with staff from other ethnic groups, because this helped to clarify and amplify the formal non-personal hierarchical relationship between them. Other executives emphasised (and actually practised) that “in the interest of the nation” it is the duty of the work place to provide its staff with further education – even if they would not return to their work place upon completing a course. In between these extremes, there were numerous cases of fence-sitting: although many interviewees stressed their desire to contribute to better organizational performance through improved bureaucratic behaviour, they were clearly more loyal to each other as colleagues than to their organization and its official mandate. Hence firing is an exceedingly rare event in both countries (disregarding retrenchments that are typically done to reduce costs not to sanction wrongdoers or non-performers and which are often pushed by donors). “You know, we don’t fire staff in this country” as a ministry official in Uganda remarked. In fact, pension and death (often due to HIV/AIDS) remain the two most common ways of leaving the public service except where specific staff, such as medical personnel, has access to foreign labour markets.

Hypocrisy is the third outcome of decision making and action in neopatrimonial settings although it is a generic phenomenon.²³ It is “a way of handling severely conflicting values, and this is exactly what organizations imbued with hypocrisy do” in all societies. Hypocrisy makes it possible for people “to talk and make decisions about high values, even if they do not act in accordance with such values themselves” as Brunsson (2002: xii & xvii) argues on basis of his studies of local governments in Sweden. Thus, an organization (or an individual) is hypocritical when what it says, what it decides and what it does are inconsistent. The lack of conventionally assumed causal relations between talk, decision and action challenge traditional decision-theory and traditional administrative wisdom. For hypocrisy may help to solve a true dilemma of how to respond to a situation with contradictory but compulsory demands that exceed capacity. It can therefore be useful in dealing with (and diffuse) conflicting demands within an organization and between that organization and society. In this way it may enhance the legitimacy of those who exercise it. When exercised without skill, hypocrisy can, of course, also have the opposite result.

Although hypocrisy is not a particular African phenomenon, neopatrimonial settings bring specific dilemmas to the fore. Most of our respondents, for example, would claim that recruitment follow merit-principles in their work place, but some would also, when explicitly asked, readily admit that non-compliance to such principles is common (see Table 1). Asked about what to do about non-performing colleagues most answers were consistent with standard bureaucratic behaviour: they should be disciplined. That disciplinary action is rare was explained with the need to understand the particular (often family) situation of the individuals involved. Or we were told that non-action against wrong-doers and non-performers was indeed a problem in the past, but things are changing now. (“It is a process, you know”). Or the blame for non-action was put on others (“a few unfortunate individuals,” lack of externally provided tools/budgets/training, etc). Hypocritical conduct is an art rather than a science, of course, but it is one that is useful to master for staff and organizations faced with conflicting demands in neopatrimonial settings.

²³ Riggs (1964, 201) refers to “double talk,” but argues that this is characteristic of societies in transition to modernity.

Conclusions

To claim that African states are neopatrimonial, as many analysts of African countries do, may often tell us little about how politics and administration actually work there. This paper focuses on employee perceptions of staff issues in the public sector in Tanzania and Uganda – such as hiring and firing, staff motivation and management. It is inspired by human resources literature and by institutionalism. From these perspectives the paper provides a critical look at the use of the neopatrimonial paradigm for studies of organisational level human resource management in African countries.

A main problem with the NP paradigm is that it takes for given what should be empirically investigated: namely, in specific settings, to understand the actual impacts on politics, administration and organizational capacity of the *co-existence and interactions* of legal-rational and patrimonial practices in and around organizations.

Moreover, to interpret all evidence of informality and poor performance as a result of patrimonial practices – as is fairly common in studies on Africa using the NP paradigm – clearly leads to biased understandings. Patrimonial practices are just one (albeit sometimes important) of many reasons for non-compliance with legal rules and regulations. These other reasons are well known from organizational studies: lack of capacity to follow rules due to under-funding, poor skills, and incompetent management; ambiguous, complex, conflicting or non-existing legal framework; etc. Likewise, narrow self-interest is not the only motivational factor. Nationalism, sense of duty, and participation in decision making, for example, may also induce people to work to enhance organizational mandates, as some of the cases presented here clearly show.

A third problem with the NP paradigm, related to the above, is that the category ‘patrimonial’ actually merges widely different practices into one category. Not all patrimonial practices are politically motivated although this is a typical assumption among NP proponents. In poor countries economically motivated clientelism is widespread and public sector staff – not just politicians - is often involved in it. For staff have substantial social obligations (being among the best paid groups in their country) and they are strategically placed to engage in clientelism so as to help members of their social or ethnic network. Patronage, to the contrary, is politically motivated and focuses on groups rather than individuals.

If these problems are addressed, the NP paradigm may help to improve the understanding of the complex interactions between legal-rational and various forms of patrimonial practices in specific public sector organizations. However, this does not necessarily provide more clear-cut and general answers about their impacts on politics, administration and capacity. Not only is there *variation* in impacts between countries; impacts also vary across public sector organizations within countries. Moreover, the co-existence and interactions between legal-rational and patrimonial practices generates *uncertainty* because norms that are regarded as appropriate bases for action may differ depending on the specific situation. Neopatrimonial settings also generate *hypocrisy* in organizations when the gap between organizational means and official ends is large.

However, hypocrisy is far from being a specific phenomenon in organizations in Africa. Donors and many analysts also engage in this activity. Some of their views on patrimonialism are remarkable. In spite of the recognition that the West’s historical experience is distinctive and unique there is an implicit notion that this experience provides African countries with a ready-to-use model of the ‘modern’ state. The recipe is that market-conforming economic policies and liberal democratic

governance reforms are mutually supportive and jointly represent the best way towards development. Quantitative regression analyses of governance and economic growth are increasingly used to back up such claims. Kaufmann (2004, 86) of the World Bank argues that even poor countries can improve their governance (which includes getting rid of patrimonial practices) because there is little evidence to support the claim that poor governance in Africa is attributable to its poverty. The optimistic message is that a de-patrimonialised state is realistic. This claim seems just as problematic as the general claim by Chabal and Daloz that the African state is merely a pseudo-Western façade.

It is more likely that the co-existence and interactions between legal-rational and patrimonial practices may produce different types of changes, perhaps even transformations, in both patrimonial and legal-rational directions depending on the specific context. Some of the possibilities are outlined in this paper. However, where patrimonial pressures are strong, such changes/transformations will be unstable (reversible), certainly in the short term. But even where legal-rational practices may prevail (in organizations or larger parts of the public service), certain key transactions through the structures of formal organizations may remain personalised as experiences from our own part of the world indicate (Peters 1995: 48-51; Theobald (1999)). After all, the legal-rational form of authority identified by Weber is an ideal type. And so it remains for most countries, also some in the North.

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