

**PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN
SOUTH AFRICA 1994–2021**

PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Edited by Professor Evan Berman, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

This series brings together the best in international research on policy and governance issues. Authored and edited by experts in the field, these books present new and insightful research on a range of policy and governance issues across the globe. Topics covered include but are not limited to: policy analysis frameworks, healthcare policy, environmental/resource policy, local government policy, development policy, regional studies/policy, urban policy/planning, and social policy.

Titles include:

Corruption, Accountability and Discretion

Nancy S. Lind and Cara Rabe-Hemp

The Experience of Democracy and Bureaucracy in South Korea

Tobin Im

Governmental Financial Resilience: International Perspectives on How Local Governments Face Austerity

Ileana Steccolini, Martin Jones and Iris Saliterer

The Global Educational Policy Environment in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Gated, Regulated and Governed

Travis D. Jules

Governing for the Future: Designing Democratic Institutions for a Better Tomorrow

Jonathan Boston

Asian Leadership in Policy and Governance

Evan Berman and M. Shamsul Haque

Different Paths to Curbing Corruption: Lessons from Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Singapore

Jon S. T. Quah

Institutional Reforms in the Public Sector: What Did We Learn?

Mahabat Baimyrzaeva

New Steering Concepts in Public Management

Sandra Groeneveld and Steven Van de Walle

Curbing Corruption in Asian Countries: An Impossible Dream?

Jon S. T. Quah

Public Policy and Governance Frontiers in New Zealand

Evan Berman and Girol Karacaoglu

Transformation of Korean Politics and Administration: A 30 Year Retrospective

Tobin Im

PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA 1994–2021

By

ROBERT CAMERON

University of Cape Town, South Africa



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Copyright © 2022 Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80382-736-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-735-3 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-737-7 (Epub)

ISSN: 2053-7697 (Series)



ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	<i>1</i>
Chapter 2 Evolution of Political–Administrative Relationships in South Africa	<i>11</i>
Chapter 3 Political–Administrative Relationships	<i>33</i>
Chapter 4 Delegation of Powers to Managers	<i>87</i>
Chapter 5 Performance Management	<i>115</i>
Chapter 6 Conclusion	<i>155</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>169</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>183</i>

This page intentionally left blank

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Average Years of Service of Permanent Type of Employees in the Public Service by Dispensation	74
Table 2.	Vacancy Rate in the Public Service	75
Table 3.	Vacancy Rates of DGs/HODs	76
Table 4.	Government Departments Complying with Rating Levels 3 and 4	104
Table 5.	Government Departments Complying with Rating Levels 4 Only	105
Table 6.	Number of Performance Agreements of DGs/HoDs Submitted	134
Table 7.	Reason for Performance Agreements of DGs/HoDs Not Being Submitted	136

This page intentionally left blank

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Auditor General
ANC	African National Congress
APP	Annual Performance Plan
CD	Chief Director
CoA	Commission of Administration
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DA	Democratic Alliance
DCD	Department of Cooperation and Development
DDG	Deputy Director General
DG	Director General
DoL	Department of Labour
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
EA	Executive Authority
EPMDS	Employee Performance Management and Development System
GAPP	Government and Public Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HoD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICTS	Information and Communication Technology
IPMS	Integrated Performance Management System
IPSA	International Political Science Association
KGFA	Key Government Focus Area
KRAs	Key Results Areas
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MICs	Minimal Inhibitory Concentrations
MPAT	Management Performance Assessment Tool
MPME	Ministry of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation
MPSA	Minister of Public Service and Administration
MTSF	Medium Term Strategic Framework
NCOP	National Council of Provinces
NDP	National Development Plan
NP	National Party
NPAI	New Public Administration Initiative
NPC	National Planning Commission
NPM	New Public Management

NSG	National School of Government
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Performance Agreement
PARI	Public Affairs Research Institute
PERSAL	Personnel and Information System
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PMDS	Performance Management and Development System
PMS	Performance Management System
PODSCORB	Planning, Organising, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, Budgeting
PSA	Public Service Act
PRC	Presidential Review Commission
PSR	Public Service Regulations
PSC	Public Service Commission
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SES	Senior Executive System
SGT	Self-Governing Territories
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound
SMS	Senior Management Service
SOES	State Owned Enterprises
SONA	State of the Nation Address
SPS	Single Public Service
TBVC	Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei
TPA	Traditional Public Administration
UDF	United Democratic Front
VSP	Voluntary Severance Programme
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
WPTPS	White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I arrived at UCT rather belatedly just before my 23rd birthday. I had spent the first few years after school trying to work out what I wanted to do with my life. This included a number of eclectic activities, including being a doorman at the night-club and a spell at the then South African Railways & Harbours where I earned my first post-school qualifications in the form of a Certificate in the Duties of Station Foreman (which included Guard's and Shunter's duties). After this somewhat unconventional start to my working life, I eventually came to the conclusion that I should go to university.

I found my subjects at university relatively manageable, with the exception of one subject, Public Administration. I could not understand my textbook and had concerns that I was not going to make it out of first year, let alone become a Professor of Public Administration in the future. As a matter of interest, the book that gave me much angst was *Democracy in the Administrative State* by Emmette Redford. As I grew older and (hopefully) wiser, I grew to appreciate the book more and still have a copy of it on my shelves.

After this inauspicious start in Public Administration, I have made a career as a Professor in the discipline. This book is a monograph on Public Administration, examining public sector reform in the South African public service since democratisation in 1994.

I would like to express my gratitude to the following colleagues who gave me advice during the research for this book. They include Willie McCourt, Sergio Fernandez, Vinothan Naidoo, Karen Johnston, Ian Goldman, Anthony Butler, Brian Levy, Sandra Van Thiel and Ivor Chipkin.

I would also like to thank those who have helped shape my ideas more generally down the years. They include George Frederickson, Richard Stren, (the late) Jan Beekman, Gerhard Töttemeyer, David Welsh, Robert Schrire, Eckhard Schröter, Norbert Kersting, Ladipo Adamolekun, Todd La Porte, Allan Rosenbaum, Blue Wooldridge, Chris Game, (the late) Chris Pollitt, Jefferey Sellers, Larry O 'Toole and Paul Smoke.

I would also like to thank the officials at the Department of Public Service and Administration, Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation and Public Service Commission who took time out from their busy schedule to provide me with invaluable data.

Thank you also to Jacqueline Gamble who assisted with the physical reproduction preparation of this manuscript.

Finally, a fervent thank you to my wife, Cathy, for her support and encouragement.

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

The objective of the book is to examine specific public sector reforms in three core Public Administration areas, namely political–administrative relationships, the delegation of authority to senior managers and performance management.

It also locates the relevant public sector reforms within the context of the broader international debate on public sector reform. Each of three chapters on public service reform begins with a comparative perspective on the respective theme.

The period of the study is from the onset of democratic rule in 1994 until 2021. This period covers the Presidencies of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa.

This book uses a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analyses. Quantitative data in the form of descriptive statistics were obtained from The Personnel and Information System (PERSAL), the central human resources database for the South African public service. This database is not ‘off the shelf’ information – rather, the data are tailor-made to the specific needs of those who request information. Qualitative sources used include data obtained from virtual recordings of webinars on public sector reform and an examination of written documents. This includes an analysis of government legislation, White Papers and Commission reports.

Keywords: Public sector reform; South African Public Administration; political–administrative relationships; performance management; delegation; administrative delegation

INTRODUCTION

After South Africa democratised in 1994, a spate of newly elected representatives at all levels of government, i.e., national, provincial and local, set out with enthusiasm and vigour to transform the apartheid state. This zeal often led to politicians intruding on the traditional domain of officials.

Thema Maseko (2021, p. 79), the Superintendent-General of Education in the Gauteng province from 1995 to 2000, stated that the then Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education:

wanted to be the final decision-maker on everything, including administrative matters such as school admissions and the resolution of disputes between principals and parents, parents and teachers etc. This encouraged schools to liaise directly with her office and led to some schools bypassing and undermining officials on the ground. There were also reports of her having run-ins with some of my officials and meeting departmental officials without my knowledge.

This book deals with such political–administrative relationships. However, before we examine the focus of the book, let us contextualise this study.

In the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa was in the deepest throes of apartheid. Due to the academic boycott, it was largely isolated, with South African academics dependent on limited literature available from a small number of countries. Academics were often refused entry to other countries to attend conferences or do research (Thornhill, 2018). This was also in the pre-internet era, so information on current trends in Public Administration was not available online.

There were similar constraints on government officials in accessing international documentation. All this contributed to the South African public service being isolated and out of touch with international developments in public sector reform (Thornhill, 2008).

There were also limits to what South African academics could research. The Orwellian Protection of Information Act of 1982 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1982) restricted access to government documentation, particularly with respect to sensitive issues such as separate development that could imply criticism of the apartheid government. There was limited access to public sector documents as a result of stringent legislation relating to confidentiality, secrecy and state security. This situation resulted in research often being limited to topics that were uncontroversial (Thornhill, 2018). This not only excluded studies of apartheid bureaucracies, but also Public Administration data on staff turnover; delegation of powers to management; staff length of service; and performance management. The government did have some data, but it did not share it with the public. This contributed to limited publications on public sector reform in South Africa.

Further, Public Administration, the academic discipline, was largely normative, descriptive and lacking an empirical focus (Cameron, 2008; Cameron & McLaverty, 2008; Wessels, 2016). An insightful study by Marais (1989) was a partial exception to this trend.

The early 1990s saw major political changes in South Africa. Political pressure led to the unbanning of political organisations, most notably the African National Congress (ANC), by the National Party (NP) government which committed itself to negotiating a new constitution with all political parties. Multi-party

negotiations occurred in 1992 and 1993, during which time a two-stage transformation was agreed upon. The interim phase began with the passing of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act (RSA, 1993). This was referred to as the Interim Constitution, and it had a number of power-sharing mechanisms to protect minority rights. As part of the final phase of restructuring, the Constitutional Assembly (consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate) had to adopt a final constitution with a two-thirds majority within two years. The constitution makers did agree that there were specific fixed constitutional principles to which both the Interim and Final constitution makers had to adhere. The Final Constitution was certified in December 1996 and came into full effect in the national and provincial spheres after the 1999 elections. The Constitution is the supreme law of the Republic and any law inconsistent with it is invalid. A highly advanced Bill of Rights forms the cornerstone of the Constitution. Provision was made for a three spheres system, which comprised central, provincial and local government. The public service comprises of national and provincial government employees, although local government is separate with each municipality being a separate employer (RSA, 1996a).

Questions of political power and economic transformation dominated the negotiation phase. However, questions of public sector reform and transformation were not foremost on the political agenda. Very little work had been done on the nature of post-apartheid administrative systems. The erstwhile Minister for Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, stated in an interview, 'Public Service Reform was not seen as a sexy topic' (Cameron, 2009a, p. 914).

There were two main imperatives of the new ANC-led government. Firstly, there was the need to transform the public service from a largely White male-led system to a more representative bureaucracy. This involved extensive affirmative action measures. This has been covered comprehensively (Fernandez, 2019), and is not the subject of the book.

Secondly, there was a need to update archaic management systems and practices. International boycotts had isolated the apartheid state and latest trends in public sector reform had largely passed it by. It is the efforts of the government to pursue public sector reform which is the subject of this book.

OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOK

The objective of the book is to examine specific public sector reforms in three core Public Administration areas in South Africa, namely political-administrative relationships, the delegation of authority to senior managers and performance management. Public management reforms have been driven by four imperatives: delegation, performance, competition and responsiveness to clients (McCourt, 2013, p. 8). The book focuses on delegation and performance, while competition and responsiveness are beyond the scope of this book. It also focuses on political-administrative relationships, the interface between politicians and

officials, which is the glue that holds governance together. Both delegation and performance reforms are due to shifting political–administrative relationships. If managers must take responsibility for improved service delivery they must be given authority to get results and then be held accountable through performance measures (Hood, 1991; Hughes, 2003; Kaul, 1996).

The central questions this book sets out to answer are: What changes did the ANC make to political–administrative relationships in South Africa post 1994? Is the South African public service politicised? What differences have there been between various ANC Presidents in respect of political–administrative relationships. What measures have there been to delegate powers to senior officials in order to improve service delivery? What impediments have there been to the execution of performance management? Is performance management influenced by technical or political considerations?

It also locates the relevant public sector reforms within the context of the broader international debate on public sector reform. Each of the three chapters on public service reform begins with a comparative perspective on the respective theme.

The period of the study is from the onset of democratic rule in 1994 until 2021. This period covers the Presidencies of Nelson Mandela (1994–1999), Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008), Jacob Zuma (2009–2017) and Cyril Ramaphosa (2018–2021).¹

The book tries to tell a story in a chronological way. This may occasionally lead to some repetition and it is also sometimes difficult to systematically evaluate changes in epochs because of overlapping policies and programmes. Having said that, I think a chronological account best highlights the twists and turns of the evolution of South African public service to a more modern system.

There are a few other points that are worth highlighting.

First, this is not a systematic policy evaluation of public sector reform. The book looks at the evolution of public sector reform in South Africa, but it is not a formal econometric analysis. Second, while New Public Management (NPM) reforms are an important part of public sector reform in South Africa (Cameron, 2009a), this study is not looking specifically at its influence in this regard. It is looking at the public sector in a more general way. Third, it is intended to focus primarily on the national sphere of government, looking at provincial government from a comparative point of view only. Fourth, it focuses on Heads of Department (HoDs) and the Senior Management Service (SMS) levels rather than street-level bureaucrats on the lower levels of the bureaucracy. Fifth, issues of corruption and state capture are very much in vogue in South Africa (Camerer, 2020; Chipkin & Swilling, 2018; Patel & Govindasamy, 2021). After 2009, state-owned enterprises emerged as an especially lucrative area for powerful and well-connected individuals and factions to engage in systematic looting (Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo, & Nxele, 2021). As important as it is, this book is not focusing on state capture and corruption except when it provides context for the public sector reforms that are being investigated (Chipkin & Swilling, 2018).

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

There is not consistency in the use of terminology when it comes to the reorganisation of the public service. For example, Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) refer to 'public management reform' while Corkery, Daddah, O'Nuallain, and Land (1998) use the term 'public sector reform'. The term 'public sector reform' is used in this study because it is in most common usage in South Africa.

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017, p. 2) define 'public sector reform' as:

deliberate attempts to change the structures, processes, and/or cultures of public sector organisation with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better.

This is a more open-ended definition and, as the authors state, leaves all sorts of important questions unanswered. For example, 'structure or processes' could be the organisational structures of ministries or agencies, or the processes through which public servants are recruited, promoted and dismissed or the legal and political relationship between the citizens using public servants and the bureaucracy providing them.

Many countries in the developed world have carried out public sector reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, p. 16), and the authors caution that systematic evidence of casual connections and improvements in outputs and outcomes is difficult to establish.

A large-scale literature review of NPM-style public sector reforms across the European Union concluded that it was a very hit-and-miss affair. Fewer than 9% of the 519 studies analysed could show credible information about changes in outcomes resulting from reforms. Only about a quarter had such information on changes in outputs. In the minority of studies where there was some serious information relating to changes attributed to reforms, the proportion of findings which indicated improvements (rather than no change or actual deterioration) was modest: 44% for improved outcomes and 53% for improved outputs (Pollitt & Dan, 2013, p. 9).

There have also been a number of studies of public sector reform in developing countries (Kaul, 1996; Larbi, 1999; Manning, 2001; Olowu, 2012; Turner, Hulme, & McCourt, 2015).

Much of the institutional architecture of Public Administration in the developing world is borrowed from first world theory and practice. Its relevance has been questioned. Developing countries are characterised by informality rather than formal bureaucratic rules and contracts. A discussion of performance contracts and decentralised authority (key NPM features) is characteristic of a more formal world. Developing countries need old-style Public Administration with a framework of rules and a culture of implementing them before NPM reforms can be introduced (Schick, 1988). Context is more important than international best practice, which proponents believe can be transferred uncritically with regard to the environments that they are transferred to and from (McCourt, 2013).

While there have been studies looking at aspects of public management reform in South Africa, such as financial reforms, performance management

and Information and Communication Technology (ICTS), there have been few studies looking at public sector reform in a broader way. The seminal study in this regard has been Miller (2005), although there have been edited journal editions by Cameron and Tapscott (2000) and Cameron (2009a).

There is also innovative research coming out of policy advocacy units on specific aspects of public sector reform (Government and Public Policy [GAPP], 2021; Public Affairs Research Institute [PARI], 2020, 2021). This book is, however, trying to do something different. Public Administration scholarship in South Africa is characterised by lack of theory, an overreliance on secondary material and consultant-type reports masquerading as academic articles (Cameron, 2008). This study attempts to promote academic scholarship in Public Administration through a theoretically and empirically informed piece of work. Nonetheless, there are some implications for practice, which are discussed in the ‘The Way Forward’ section in the Conclusion.

All this suggests that there is a need for an updated academic analysis of public sector reform in South Africa. This book plans to be the first overview of public sector reform encompassing the entire democratic South Africa era (1994–2021).

A broad sweep of public sector reform involves some type of disaggregation to discuss detail, otherwise there is the risk that (1) the study would be spread too thinly, and (2) there are manuscript deadlines that make it practically difficult to cover all NPM reforms. It was accordingly decided to study political–administrative relationships along with two interconnected fields, delegation of powers to managers and performance management. These are all considered to be core public sector reform issues and a good representation of public sector reform as a whole in South Africa.

These three reforms will be introduced individually. First, political–administrative relationships, i.e., the relationship between elected politicians and appointed officials, have been one of the most contested issues in Public Administration since Wilson’s seminal contribution (1887). Whether it be Traditional Public Administration (TPA), NPM or Public Governance, political–administrative arrangements often take centre stage.

The kernel issue in this relationship has been to ensure that politicians do not exceed their policy-making powers by getting involved in the management of departments. The division between politics and administration is the central organising principle of modern bureaucracies and is recognised as the professional norm on which the merit system can be organised (Rouban, 2012, p. 344). Having said that, attempts to separate politicians and officials have been fraught with difficulties in the Public Administration literature through the years. Studies over the years have shown that bureaucrats are more than mere implementers of policy. They contribute to policy-making through their expertise and can help shape the outcome of policy (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981; Peters, 2001). Further, politicians in developing countries are more likely to make patronage appointments to senior positions in the public service.

The second issue is that of delegation. One way to strengthen officials is through the delegation of authority to managers. Delegation involves devolving human resources and management functions from politicians to officials (Hughes, 2003).

The most effective organisations are those that are run by highly capable individuals who have few formal institutional controls (Fukuyama, 2014). Delegation to managers was a pivotal part of the NPM reforms, i.e., let the manager manage, which gave high discretionary power to achieve results (Hood, 1991). There are studies that suggest delegation should be promoted in developing countries (Grindle, 1997).

The notion of devolving human resources powers to managers was also part of human resources management (HRM) thinking (Taylor, 2001). Traditional HRM had been criticised for being too centralised and that too much of the job of managing people had been concentrated in human resources departments, such as appointments, terms of condition of workers and disciplinary issues, which were not in the purview of managers whose responsibility was to achieve results through people.

Third, there is the topic of performance management. Although performance management is commonly associated with NPM, it is not new, having been used in some countries long before the emergence of NPM (Aoki, 2019).

NPM bargained the Minister's right to intervene in administration in exchange for a performance contract that specified not only what was expected in terms of products, but also what level of productivity was expected. Performance management was the back end of this arrangement: Ministers could assess how managers performed and acted accordingly with rewards such as bonuses or sanctions such as dismissal or refusal to renew appointments

(Aucoin, 2013; Kaul, 1996; Larbi, 1999).

Explicit standard measures of performance require that goals are defined, and performance targets are met (Hood, 1991). This can take the form of using performance indicators and setting targets. Managers were given more autonomy while being accountable for performance through a system of rewards and sanctions (Hughes, 2003; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This book uses a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analyses. The intrinsic appeal of the mixed methods approach lies in the opportunity to leverage the strengths and attenuate the limitations of single method approaches and challenge the purported incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods. Over the last decade, the Public Administration field has been increasingly receptive to the adoption of mixed methods (McNabb, 2002; Mele & Belardinelli, 2019).

What are the limitations of mixed methods? The implementation and reporting of specific components of mixed methods leaves room for improvement, largely along the lines of explaining better the choices entailed by this design and fully employing the results obtained through the separate methods (Mele & Belardinelli, 2019).

The quantitative technique used is descriptive statistics, which is described as the measurements or numbers used to summarise or describe data sets.

A common use for descriptive statistics is summarising a set of data. It is simply a collection of a distinct set of measurements (McNabb, 2002, p. 108).

Quantitative data in the form of descriptive statistics was obtained from The Personnel and Information System (PERSAL), the central human resources database for the South African public service. PERSAL is the only South African database that provides macro public sector human resources data. This database is not ‘off the shelf’ information – rather, the data are tailor-made to the specific needs of those who request information. PERSAL’s major focus had been on the financial module, because PERSAL had been developed originally and largely used as a pay-roll system rather than a human resources information management system (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2010). It seems reasonably accurate, with the major problem appearing to be inaccurate information due to lack of effective and efficient management of the system and data by both national and provincial departments. The Treasury has planned to replace PERSAL with the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) but this has not yet happened. The IFMS project, which has cost more than R1bn since its inception in 2006, is meant to incorporate human resources and financial management systems across national and provincial governments. The first phase of the project had to be aborted after governance lapses resulted in misspending of R1.2bn. The IFMS has still not been implemented (Business Day, 2021e). The data attained from PERSAL consisted of indicators for political–administrative relationships, delegation of authority and performance management. As indicated, this study focuses on HoD and SMS data. One had to apply through the respective department whose remit the data was, i.e., the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the Public Service Commission (PSC).

The other possible data source was annual reports of national departments. Why was this not used? For the most part national government gets its data from PERSAL, which includes information on overall vacancies and length of service of HoDs. This is more readily accessible at a macro level by the respective government department as compared to perusing individual annual reports. Annual reports also do not have important indicators, such as individual performance information for managers, delegation of powers to managers, vacancy rates for HoDs and average length of service for senior managers other than HoDs.

The term ‘qualitative data’ is used for any data collected in a semi-structured or unstructured way. This includes unstructured observations, open-ended interviews, analysis of written documents and focus group transcriptions (Johnson, 2002, p. 118).

Qualitative sources used include data obtained from virtual recordings of webinars on public sector reform, and an examination of written documents. This includes an analysis of government legislation, White Papers and Commission reports. An analysis is also undertaken of relevant books, book chapters and journal articles on public sector reform.

A few unstructured internet conversations took place. Permission was obtained from the authors for the use of their interview material.