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How Much Time Will Be Needed for the Appointment Process to Move from a Discretionary System to Merit-Based Selection of Representatives in Publicly Traded Companies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

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Abstract

This article analyzes the challenges of recruiting executives for public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by examining the contrast between a meritocratic system, based on skills, qualifications, experience, integrity, and suitability for the position, and a clientelist system structured by political, familial, community, and relational networks. The study demonstrates that the existence of formal procedures, such as calls for applications and the digitization of selection processes, does not necessarily guarantee the objectivity of appointments, as a gap can persist between officially established rules and actual decision-making practices. Drawing particularly on agency theory, the institutional approach, and analyses of neopatrimonialism, the article emphasizes that the politicization of appointments can undermine the accountability of executives, the autonomy of governance bodies, and potentially, the performance of public enterprises. Methodologically, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of 254 observations, document analysis, and a qualitative component based on purposive sampling comprising 12 interviews conducted in 17 public companies across various sectors. Three hypotheses structure the investigation: the first concerns the influence of relational capital and political factors on recruitment practices; the second examines the role of transparency, oversight, and effective rule enforcement in promoting meritocracy; and the third analyzes the relationships between meritocratic selection, governance, and organizational performance. Descriptive analyses suggest the importance of relational and political dimensions in appointment processes, while statistical tests do not consistently confirm a direct and significant relationship between recruitment methods and key organizational indicators. Conversely, certain relationships involving relational capital appear more significant, confirming the need to examine the social and institutional mechanisms surrounding appointments. This article thus advocates an integrated approach in which qualitative analysis can explain mechanisms that cannot be fully captured by statistical data alone. It concludes that reform of the appointment system must be based on professionalization, transparency, independence, and accountability, in order to transform the discretionary power of appointment into a legally regulated, traceable power grounded in verifiable professional criteria.

Keywords

Meritocracy, Clientelism, Public Governance, Public Enterprises

1. Introduction

1.1. The Research Problem

The appointment of directors of public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a major governance issue, as it determines the quality of management, the capacity to manage public resources, and the performance of organizations entrusted with economic and social missions. The problem arises when discretionary appointments, based on political trust, family, community, or personal connections, replace meritocratic selection based on competence, experience, integrity, and suitability for the position. Discretionary appointments are not necessarily illegitimate in themselves, particularly when the State must exercise its role as a shareholder or choose managers who align with its strategic orientations. However, they become problematic when they escape public, verifiable, and comparable criteria. From an agency theory perspective, Jensen and Meckling (1976) show that delegating management to executives creates risks of information asymmetry and opportunism. If representatives are selected primarily based on their loyalty to the appointing authority, their responsibility may lie more with that authority than with the company, its governing bodies, and the citizens. Similarly, Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasize that the existence of formal procedures does not guarantee their actual implementation: a call for applications, a committee, or an evaluation grid may be used as instruments of legitimation even though the decision has already been made informally. The shift from discretionary appointment to meritocratic selection thus poses a fundamental institutional problem that leads us to ask: How can we ensure that competence truly constitutes the determining criterion for the appointment of representatives?

The persistence of this problem stems from the interaction of institutional, political, economic, and social factors. In a context of job scarcity and the high social value of public office, access to an elected position becomes a strategic resource that political and relational networks may seek to control. Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) define clientelism as a personalized and asymmetrical relationship in which access to resources depends on an exchange of loyalty or support; applied to public enterprises, this mechanism can transform appointments into instruments of political reward, coalition building, or the redistribution of benefits. Bratton and van de Walle (1997), through the neo-patrimonial approach, demonstrate that formal institutions can coexist with personalized practices of power: modern rules are officially maintained, but their application is influenced by relationships, interventions, and obligations of loyalty. This situation is exacerbated by the limited autonomy of selection bodies, insufficient traceability of decisions, the absence of precise sectoral criteria, weak appeal mechanisms, and the difficulty of penalizing irregularities. This mechanism is likely to generate significant consequences, such as inadequate selection leading to reduced productivity, increased management errors, delayed reforms, diminished service quality, and higher control costs. It can also demotivate managers and staff who feel that their effort and competence are not rewarded. According to Barney (1991), human skills constitute a strategic resource for organizations; their poor selection or underutilization therefore weakens institutional capacity. In terms of governance, clientelistic appointments can also reduce the autonomy of boards of directors, undermine accountability, and diminish citizens' trust in the state.

Resolving this problem requires a comprehensive reform of recruitment governance, not simply the adoption of a call for applications. It is essential to first professionalize and empower the structures responsible for selection, widely advertise positions, define precise job profiles before applications are received, and establish measurable criteria related to sectoral experience, managerial skills, integrity, and past performance. Selection committees should be pluralistic, subject to mandatory conflict of interest declarations, and required to use standardized assessment grids, structured interviews, and mechanisms for verifying qualifications, references, and professional backgrounds. Following the agency analysis proposed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), selection should be linked to a performance contract that includes objectives, indicators, deadlines, and mechanisms for sanctions or contract renewal. Transparency should also be strengthened through the digitization of applications, the archiving of decisions, the publication of key procedural steps, and the possibility of independent appeals. The OECD (2015) recommends that public enterprises clarify the role of the state as shareholder, strengthen the role of boards of directors, and distinguish between setting public policy and day-to-day management. Finally, the reform must reduce the gap between formal rules and actual practices identified by Meyer and Rowan

(1977) by establishing external controls, protecting whistleblowers, and regularly evaluating the performance of directors. Thus, the shift from discretionary appointment to meritocratic selection can contribute not only to improving the competence of managers but also to strengthening the performance of public enterprises, the legitimacy of the state, and public trust.

In state-owned enterprises, the recruitment of public officers is a particularly sensitive governance decision. These officers are not simply administrative agents. They perform management, administrative, representative, and oversight functions. They are called upon to define and implement strategies, manage resources, lead reforms, report to governing bodies, and produce measurable results.

1.2. Selection of Representatives

The central issue lies in how these representatives are selected. In theory, their appointment should be based on experience, technical skills, integrity, industry knowledge, managerial abilities, and strategic vision. In practice, however, nomination processes can be influenced by political, familial, community, or personal considerations. This tension reflects the conflict between a meritocratic and a clientelist approach.

Meritocracy can be defined as a system in which access to positions of responsibility depends primarily on skills, qualifications, achievements, and aptitude for the role. Clientelism, on the other hand, is based on personalized and asymmetrical relationships in which access to resources depends on loyalty to or support for a political or institutional patron (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984).

The problem, therefore, is not simply a matter of having or not having a degree. It concerns the overall functioning of the selection process. A candidate may be competent but selected primarily because of their connections to an authority figure. Conversely, a candidate may have a relevant profile but be rejected because they lack the necessary networks. Scientific analysis must therefore determine whether competence truly constitutes the decisive criterion for appointment.

2. The Importance of the Problem

The issue of recruiting public officials is important for at least four reasons. First, it concerns the economic performance of public enterprises. According to Barney (1991), internal resources and skills constitute an essential source of organizational capacity. The quality of managers influences financial management, strategic planning, risk control, investment mobilization, and service quality.

Secondly, it concerns the responsibility of the state as a shareholder. In agency theory, Jensen and Meckling (1976) demonstrate that delegating management creates a risk of opportunism on the part of the agent. The state, citizens, and users entrust the management of public assets to managers who often possess superior information about the company's operations. The selection and oversight of agents thus become essential mechanisms for reducing agency costs.

Third, the problem concerns institutional legitimacy. When citizens believe that jobs and responsibilities are allocated based on personal connections rather than competence, trust in the administration declines. Meritocracy not only produces technical efficiency; it also contributes to the legitimacy of the state.

Fourth, the issue concerns the modernization of public governance. The introduction of a call for applications for the recruitment of directors of public enterprises reflects a governmental desire to formalize, make more transparent, and professionalize the selection process. However, the existence of a formal procedure alone does not guarantee a transformation of practices.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) demonstrate that organizations can adopt formal structures to meet the expectations of their environment while maintaining different internal practices. This phenomenon of institutional decoupling poses a major risk to the application process. A procedure may be published but not actually determine the final decision.

3. The Coexistence of Meritocracy and Clientelism in the Recruitment of Public Enterprise Managers in the DRC

The reform of the recruitment of public officials in the DRC is part of the legal transformation of public enterprises initiated by the laws of July 7, 2008, and the decrees of April 24, 2009, which sought to correct inefficiency, politicization, and the confusion between commercial companies and public institutions. Within this framework, the digital platform, technically managed by Lawson Human Resources, represents a useful innovation for centralizing applications, securing files, and displaying criteria of merit, competence, fairness, and gender. However, it does not, on its own, change the final power of appointment, which remains with the President of the Republic, the Government, and the Council of Ministers.

The core of the problem lies in the coexistence of two logics: a meritocratic logic, based on competence and transparency, and a clientelist logic, based on personal loyalty and networks of influence. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explain that formal rules can serve as a facade without transforming actual practices; thus, calls for applications and digitization modernize the procedure, but their effectiveness depends on their impact on the final decision. Similarly, Jensen and Meckling (1976) show that delegating management in public enterprises, such as those in the DRC, can create a risk of opportunism: if the appointment is based on political loyalty rather than competence, the appointee becomes more beholden to their patron than to the enterprise and the public interest.

The persistence of clientelism is also explained by the dynamics of patronage and neo-patrimonialism. Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) describe an exchange of resources and loyalties between patron and beneficiary, while Chabal and Daloz (1999) show that formal institutions often coexist with personal power relations in Africa. In this context of public enterprises in the DRC, the ideas of Shleifer and Vishny (1994) are particularly relevant when they suggest that public enterprises can be used for distributive or political purposes, to the detriment of economic efficiency. Furthermore, Barney's (1991) resource-based view reminds us that human skills are a strategic resource: clientelism thus undermines performance by replacing competence with proximity, while simultaneously underutilizing the profiles available in the private sector, the diaspora, and the provinces.

The central governance issue also concerns information asymmetries, the concentration of power, and weak accountability. The legal framework grants significant power to the President, while technical bodies may be reduced to merely formalizing decisions already made. Digitalization reduces opacity in the application process, but not necessarily at the evaluation, appointment, and monitoring stages. Financial shortcomings are striking in terms of oversight: in 2021, almost the majority of public enterprises had not submitted their financial statements to the Court of Auditors; among twenty companies examined, only eight submitted their financial statements to the CPCC in 2019, nine in 2020, and eight in 2021, representing an average of 41.6%. Despite the existence of numerous oversight bodies, accountability remains merely formal as long as information is not verifiable, reports are not published, and sanctions remain weak.

4. African Exploration of Comparative Lessons Learned on the Recruitment of Public Enterprise Officers and a Reform Model for the DRC

Comparative analysis of Africa confirms that the politicization of recruitment remains a major obstacle, but that credible reform depends on transparency, professionalization, managerial autonomy, and performance evaluation. In Ghana, the creation of the State Interests and Governance Authority by the SIGA Act of 2019 illustrates the clarification of the state's role as a shareholder; the World Bank (2014) emphasizes that a better separation between ownership and management improves performance. In Kenya, calls for applications and selection committees are in place, yet the distribution of positions can remain influenced by political rivalries, making it important to document the decision-making process. In Nigeria, political coalitions have at times influenced the management and control of state-owned enterprises. In Rwanda, performance contracts and administrative discipline have played an important role in strengthening public-sector management, although this approach is closely linked to a highly centralized political and administrative context. In South Africa, these experiences demonstrate that well-designed rules alone are insufficient when the institutions responsible for implementing them become subject to political capture.

4.1. The Politicization of Recruitment as an Obstacle to the Governance of Public Enterprises

To ensure the credibility of recruitment in the DRC, the reform must meet specific requirements: defining the criteria in advance, publishing their weighting, providing reasons for eliminations, and making decisions traceable. The proposed criteria cover education and qualifications, sectoral experience, management experience, strategic skills, past performance, integrity, independence, and the absence of conflicts of interest. An indicative weighting could be set as follows: education

10%, sectoral experience 20%, management and leadership experience 20%, strategic plan 20%, past professional performance 15%, integrity and absence of conflicts of interest 15%, totaling 100%. Exclusions must be based on objective and verifiable grounds, distinguishing between administrative and qualitative exclusions, and must be recorded in minutes that are appropriately disseminated to prevent any abuse based on political or personal preferences.

4.2. Establish a Verifiable Ranking and Strengthen the Accountability of Public Officials

The difficulties in governing Congolese public enterprises cannot be explained solely by inadequate legal frameworks. They stem primarily from the persistent gap between formal rules and their effective implementation. In many African contexts, appointments remain heavily influenced by patronage, political loyalty, personal relationships, and informal networks. This situation corresponds to the neo-patrimonial logic analyzed by Chabal and Daloz (1999), according to which public institutions are permeated by informal power relations. In such a system, the appointee often sees themselves as indebted to the authority that appointed them rather than as responsible for a mission oriented towards the public interest and the enterprise's performance.

The credibility of reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo therefore requires that selection procedures be based on predefined, published criteria tailored to the specific characteristics of each public enterprise. These criteria should focus on education, sectoral and managerial experience, management skills, prior professional achievements, integrity, independence, and the absence of conflicts of interest. This approach aligns with the OECD (2015) principles, which advocate for appointments based on merit, professionalization, transparency, and objectivity. It also reflects North's (1990) institutional perspective, which posits that predictable rules help reduce uncertainty and discretion in decision-making.

The weighting of the criteria should be made public before applications are reviewed. For example, sectoral and managerial experience could account for 40% of the final score, the strategic plan 20%, past performance 15%, qualifications 10%, and integrity 15%. Such a framework would not entirely eliminate human judgment, but it would allow it to be placed within a rational, comparable, and verifiable framework. The elimination of a candidate should be based on objective and verifiable grounds, such as an incomplete application, insufficient qualifications, inadequate experience, a false statement, a conflict of interest, or a lack of integrity. These grounds should be documented and communicated to prevent arbitrary decisions.

5. The Framework for the Gap between Technical Ranking and Political Appointment

The ranking should result from a collegial process including eligibility verification, application review, interviews, presentation of the strategic plan, integrity checks, assignment of scores, calculation of weighted scores, and drafting of a final report. Each candidate's score could be established using the following formula: $Si = Ej \times lnwj \times xiji$. In this formula, S represents the final score of candidate i, wj represents the weight of criterion j, and xij represents the score obtained by candidate i for that criterion. Each score should be linked to specific elements of the application, interview, or submitted plan. Committee members should sign a declaration of impartiality and conflict of interest, and the minutes and evaluation documents should be retained to allow for future audits. This requirement aligns with the analysis of Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2009), according to which the quality of governance is based on accountability, transparency and the control of corruption.

The political authority may retain the final appointment power, but its authority must be legally and institutionally regulated. A discrepancy between the technical ranking and the final appointment could only be permitted for exceptional, objective, and duly justified reasons. Such reasons could include a specific strategic requirement, particular experience insufficiently assessed by the ranking system, the need for urgent restructuring, a crisis affecting the continuity of public service, new information concerning a candidate's integrity, or a legal incompatibility discovered after the ranking.

On the other hand, political loyalty, family ties, personal proximity, or membership in a network cannot constitute legitimate grounds for preference. Any decision deviating from the ranking must be made in writing and subject to independent review. It must specify the reasons why the selected candidate, although not ranked first, remains competent, ethical, and capable of achieving the company's objectives. This requirement is fundamental, as the discretion of the political authority must not be confused with arbitrariness. The exercise of public power must be based on principles of justification and equal treatment: the authority can choose, but it must explain the reasons for its choice. Similarly, state capture becomes possible when particular networks influence public decisions without effective control mechanisms.

6. Evaluate the Agent Based on Performance Indicators

The appointment of the agent should also be linked to a performance contract that includes financial, operational, social, environmental, and ethical objectives. Financial indicators could include revenue growth, loss reduction, cost control, debt levels, improved collection, reduced operating subsidies, and regular audits. Operational indicators should cover service continuity, productivity, service quality, reduced interruptions, adherence to deadlines, equipment maintenance, and user satisfaction.

The evaluation should also incorporate governance indicators, including the regularity of board meetings, the quality of internal controls, the publication of financial reports, compliance with procurement rules, conflict of interest management, implementation of audit recommendations, and fraud prevention. Social and environmental dimensions could be measured through equitable access to services, respect for workers' rights, operational safety, environmental protection, and contribution to national development. This multidimensional approach aligns with the balanced scorecard model proposed by Kaplan and Norton (1992), which recommends evaluating organizations along several dimensions rather than solely on the basis of financial results. The Rwandan experience also confirms the value of contracts based on measurable and regularly assessed objectives.

7. Institutions to Be Strengthened

The reform must also strengthen boards of directors, which should be composed of competent, independent members capable of effectively overseeing management. Specialized committees could be established in the areas of auditing, risk management, appointments, compensation, and ethics. The state should also clarify its role as a shareholder by setting corporate objectives, defining public service obligations, ensuring transparent financing, and avoiding interference in day-to-day operations.

A consolidated annual report on state-owned enterprises should present their financial situation, subsidies and guarantees received, performance of their managers, audits conducted, appointment procedures, sanctions imposed, and recommendations not implemented. The Court of Auditors, Parliament, inspectorates, and anti-corruption bodies should have access to selection documents and be able to verify the regularity of appointments. According to Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016), combating corruption precisely requires reducing unchecked secrecy and increasing the traceability of decisions.

Ultimately, overcoming the impasse of ungovernability rests on a three-pronged institutional framework: competence in recruitment, transparency in decision-making, and accountability in management. Without competence, appointments lose their economic rationale; without transparency, they lose their legitimacy; without accountability, they produce no lasting improvement. Congolese reform must therefore break with the conception of the mandate as a political reward. The elected official must become a professional entrusted with a public mission, selected according to established criteria, evaluated using precise indicators, and sanctioned based on their results. Political power can retain its strategic role, but it should no longer be able to substitute personal loyalty for expertise, opacity for justification, or political protection for the obligation to perform.

The appointee must cease to be the beneficiary of a political favor and become the custodian of a public mission, subject to verifiable criteria, regular evaluation, and effective sanctions in the event of mismanagement. Thus, our hypotheses are formulated as follows:

8. Research Hypotheses, Methodology and Epistemological Position

This research analyzes the potential effects of management recruitment methods on the governance and performance of public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is based on the idea that the quality of managers is a determining component of the organizational capacity of these enterprises, but that this quality itself depends on the institutions, selection procedures, and power relations that structure appointments.

From an institutional perspective, North (1990) distinguishes between formal rules and observed practices. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of public enterprises, where the existence of regulatory appointment procedures does not necessarily guarantee their impartial application. Meyer and Rowan (1977), from a neo-institutional perspective, demonstrate that organizations can adopt formal mechanisms without these mechanisms entirely determining actual practices. The question of meritocracy must therefore be addressed by examining the gap between the official rule and the actual selection process.

To this end, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative analysis of 254 observations with a qualitative investigation based on document analysis and depending on the accessibility of the field, semi-structured interviews and institutional observations. The quantitative component identifies regularities and statistical associations; the qualitative component aims to explain the social, political, and institutional mechanisms likely to produce these regularities. This approach improves the credibility of the findings by examining evidence from different sources and perspectives.

General hypothesis

The general hypothesis maintains that the methods of selecting representatives influence the quality of governance and the organizational performance of public companies, subject to the effect of institutional, organizational and sectoral factors.

The null hypothesis (H0) states that there is no statistically significant association between the method of recruiting representatives and the governance and performance indicators selected.

H1. Political influence, relational capital and nomination

H1 postulates that the intensification of political influence and relational capital increases the likelihood of recruitment based on loyalty, proximity and personal networks rather than on professional qualifications.

This hypothesis aligns with the neo-patrimonial approach of Chabal and Daloz (1999), who demonstrate that formally bureaucratic institutions can operate according to personal and relational logics. It also highlights the contrast between rule-based authority and personalized forms of power, with the former emphasizing formal rules and competence and the latter relying more heavily on personal relationships.

Hypothesis H1 is examined based on recruitment method, network capital, political sponsorship, political affiliation, experience, educational level, and the suitability of the candidate's profile for the position. When the dependent variable is dichotomous, a logistic regression will be used to estimate the probability of meritocratic recruitment based on these factors.

H2. Transparency, control and respect for the rules

H2 argues that procedural transparency, traceability of decisions and the existence of independent control mechanisms promote the effective application of meritocratic criteria.

The hypothesis rests on the idea that formalizing a procedure is not enough to guarantee its impartiality. North (1990) emphasizes that institutions only produce predictable effects when the rules are effectively applied. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) show that reducing corruption and arbitrary discretion requires credible mechanisms for control and accountability.

In this case, hypothesis H2 is therefore assessed based on information relating to job postings, the prior definition of criteria, the verification of qualifications, the declaration of conflicts of interest, the archiving of decisions, the independence of the committees, and the appeal and sanction mechanisms. If these dimensions are not directly present in the quantitative database, H2 is primarily tested through documentary and qualitative analysis; it is then artificially presented as a quantitatively verified hypothesis.

H3. Meritocracy, Governance and Performance

H3 posits that the selection of agents based on professional, transparent and verifiable criteria is positively associated with the quality of governance and the performance of public enterprises.

This hypothesis draws on Evans and Rauch (1999), who highlight the role of bureaucratic professionalization in state capacity, as well as on Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012), who link merit-based bureaucratic systems to better institutional governance. The OECD (2015, 2024) also emphasizes that the professionalization of boards and management in public enterprises is an important condition for their effectiveness and accountability.

H3 is examined based on several organizational outcomes: performance, financial orthodoxy, service quality, managerial stability, and social climate. This multidimensional approach prevents us from reducing public performance to a single financial indicator. However, in accordance with Jensen and Meckling (1976), and Shleifer and Vishny (1997), the effects of managerial competence are likely to be mediated or moderated by agency mechanisms, institutional dependencies, available resources, and policy interventions. The analyses thus allow us to establish statistical associations, but not, on their own, definitive causality.

9. Epistemological Position of the Research

The research adopts a pragmatic, predominantly empirical approach, complemented by a comprehensive and interpretive perspective. This approach is consistent with the use of mixed methods, since the phenomenon under study simultaneously possesses an observable and measurable dimension and a social and institutional dimension that requires an interpretation of meanings and practices.

The empirical component falls within a tradition close to positivism, insofar as it seeks to measure the characteristics of recruitment and identify statistical regularities. Recruitment methods, experience, networking capital, political patronage, and performance indicators are thus transformed into observable and analyzable variables.

This approach, however, does not lead to viewing social practices as mere statistical regularities. Social action should be understood by considering the meanings that individuals attach to their actions. A political recommendation may thus be perceived by some actors as an obligation of solidarity, whereas, from the perspective of administrative rationality, it may constitute a breach of the principle of equal access to public office. The interpretive approach therefore allows us to interpret the mechanisms of clientelism, nepotism, and patronage without reducing them to normative judgments. It also allows us to analyze the coexistence between rational-legal domination and personalized practices. The stance adopted is thus compatible with a conception of research in which measurement establishes regularities, while interpretation explains the mechanisms. The convergence of these two dimensions constitutes the epistemological foundation of the methodological framework.

10. Methodology and Data Collection

The research is based on a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative component uses 254 observations contained in the SPSS and JAPS database created for the study. The unit of observation is kept constant across all analyses and corresponds to the unit actually recorded in the database: agent or company-agent unit, depending on the initial data collection method.

The quantitative sample consists of observations meeting the inclusion criteria defined by the research and containing the information necessary for analysis. Missing data will not be automatically considered null values and have been subjected to specific processing depending on the variable concerned.

The cleaning procedure includes checking for missing values, extreme values, theoretical modalities, potential duplicates, and coding anomalies. Any inconsistent value was verified in the source before being recoded or excluded.

The qualitative component includes a literature review, a document analysis of legal texts, regulations, job descriptions, appointment decisions, and institutional documents, as well as semi-structured interviews when access to the field allows. The qualitative sampling is purposive and based on the relevance of the profiles rather than statistical representativeness.

Triangulating quantitative data, documents, and testimonies made it possible to compare observed practices with formal rules. This strategy is particularly important in the study of informal and potentially hidden phenomena.

11. Operationalization of Concepts

Meritocratic recruitment refers to selection based on verifiable professional criteria: qualifications, relevant experience, competence, suitability for the position, integrity, past performance, and a competitive process. Relational capital refers to the mobilization of family, community, professional, or personal relationships that can facilitate access to a position. Political clientelism refers to a relationship in which access to a position or public resource is linked to a relationship of loyalty, support, or political proximity. Political sponsorship is an indicator of this dimension but cannot, on its own, encompass the entire concept of clientelism. Service quality refers to the level of quality of services provided by the public enterprise, according to the scale used in the survey.

Performance refers to the level of achievement of the economic and organizational objectives identified in the study. Financial orthodoxy refers to adherence to the principles of discipline, control, and financial management as defined in the corresponding index. Managerial stability refers to the continuity of the leadership team and the stability of organizational management. The social climate refers to the quality of professional relationships, internal cohesion, and the level of social stability within the organization.

This operationalization is accompanied by a dictionary specifying for each variable its SPSS name, JAPS, its level of measurement, its modalities and its coding system.

12. Results of the Statistical and Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis constitutes the first step in processing the 254 observations. Its aim is to establish the distribution of variables before any explanatory analysis. The available results indicate an average of 1.38 for the recruitment method, 3.42 for network capital, and 3.68 for political patronage. General experience has an average of 2.18, compared to 2.64 for relevant experience. The suitability of the candidate's profile to the position reaches 1.39. The organizational indicators also show average levels: 1.85 for performance, 1.84 for financial orthodoxy, 1.97 for service quality, 2.50 for the social climate, and 1.68 for managerial stability (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive table of statistical observations.

N	MOY	MOD REC	CAP REL	EXP GEN	EXPERT	ADE PRO p	INDICATOR ORG MOY	ORTHO FINA.	QUAL SERV.	CLIMATE SOCIAL
254	1.38	3.42	3.68	2.18	2.64	1.39	1.85	1.97	2.50	1.68

These statistics suggest a significant influence of relational and political factors on appointment processes, alongside areas for improvement in several organizational indicators. However, they do not allow us to conclude that the recruitment method has a causal effect.

The interpretation is particularly cautious due to missing data and coding anomalies.

12.1. Cross-Tabulations

Cross-tabulations provide an initial approach to the association between recruitment methods and organizational outcomes. The analysis successively examines recruitment methods × service quality; recruitment methods × performance; recruitment methods × financial orthodoxy; recruitment methods × managerial stability; recruitment methods × social climate; relational capital × recruitment methods; and political patronage × recruitment methods. For each table, the observed numbers, relevant percentages, and expected numbers are presented. The chi-square test is supplemented, where relevant, by Cramer's V to assess the strength of the association.

The previously mentioned result $\chi^2 \approx 86.2$ will not be presented as a definitive empirical result without the corresponding contingency table. The χ^2 value can only be interpreted in relation to the variables actually crossed, their categories, and the observed frequencies.

This requirement responds to the principle of statistical reproducibility: a reader must be able to reconstruct the test from the published information.

12.2. Chi-Square Test $\chi^2 = i \times 1\sum rj/1\sum cEij\ (Oij - Eij)^2$

Pearson's chi-squared test assesses the independence between two categorical variables. The null hypothesis assumes the independence of the distributions, while the alternative hypothesis assumes the existence of an association.

At the 5% significance level, a p-value < 0.05 leads to the rejection of the hypothesis of independence; a p-value ≥ 0.05 leads to its acceptance. The previously reported result $\chi^2(2) = 0.780$; $p = 0.677$ indicates, if it does indeed correspond to the analyzed table, a lack of sufficient statistical evidence of association. However, it does not allow us to conclude that the variables are definitively independent.

This distinction is essential: the absence of significance does not constitute proof of the absence of an effect. Cohen (1990) reminds us that the interpretation of results must take into account statistical power, while Wasserstein and Lazar (2016) warn against a dichotomous reading of the p-value.

The results: $R^2 = 0.009$; F (5, 248) = 0.461; $p = 0.405$ indicate that the effect of recruitment method is significantly positive: B = 0.304; $p = 0.144$. H_1 is not supported in this model. Model H_2: Recruitment and service quality. Dependent variable: Service quality, $R^2 = 0.001$; F (2, 248) = 2.249; $p = 0.25$. Recruitment method: B = −0.087; $p = 0.398$. No statistically significant effect. Model H_3: Recruitment and financial orthodoxy. Dependent variable: Financial orthodoxy. $R^2 = 0.023$; F (3, 248) = 3.881; $p = 0.42$; the recruitment method is significant: B = −0.031; $p = 0.354$. Relational capital also shows a statistically significant association: B = 0.137; $p < 0.001$. The overall model is significant, but the specific effect of the recruitment method is not demonstrated.

H1 test by logistic regression

H1 is rigorously tested using binary logistic regression since the recruitment method is coded into two categories. The model estimates the probability of meritocratic recruitment based on relational capital, political sponsorship, political affiliation, experience, educational level, and profile suitability.

The results are expressed in particular by odds ratios and their confidence intervals.

H2 test

H2 is genuinely tested quantitatively since the database includes indicators directly measuring transparency, traceability, and institutional control. It is examined through documentary and qualitative triangulation. This distinction prevents the misuse of descriptive analysis as empirical proof of a hypothesis that is not directly measured.

H3 Test

H3 is examined using models of the dependent variables, including performance, service quality, financial orthodoxy, managerial stability, and social climate. The choice of model depends on the measurement level of each variable. An ordinal variable is automatically treated as a continuous variable without methodological justification; ordinal logistic regression is preferred.

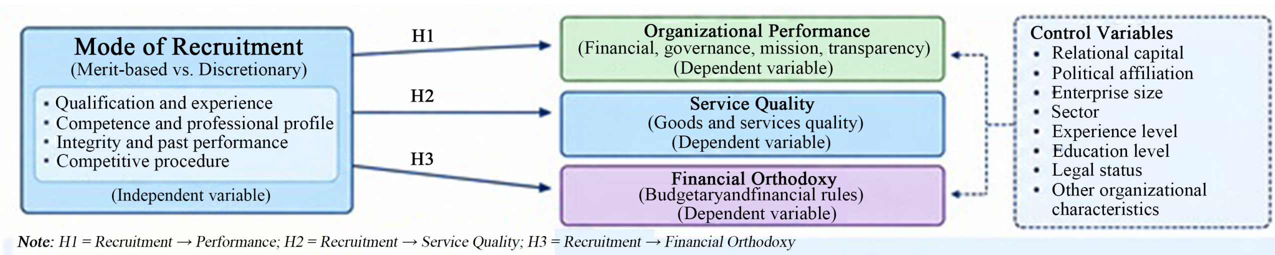

Figure 1. Conceptual model H1-H3 and synthesis of quantitative analyses.

This analysis of the recruitment of directors of public enterprises in the DRC shows that the question of meritocracy goes beyond the simple choice between political appointment and formal administrative procedure. It relates more broadly to the capacity of institutions to impose impersonal, verifiable, and effectively applied criteria (**Figure 1**).

The works of North (1990), Chabal and Daloz (1999), and help us understand this tension between institutional rationality and relational logics. The OECD (2015, 2024) recommendations reinforce this perspective by making the professionalization, transparency, and independence of governing bodies central principles of public enterprise management. The 254 observations provide a useful empirical basis for examining these relationships, but they also impose strict methodological discipline. In the course of this analysis, the relationships between the variables were discovered while highlighting the general trends in the recruitment of agents in public companies, but the qualitative approach makes it possible to understand the "how" and the "why" of these relationships.

13. Justification of the Qualitative Approach

Qualitative analysis provides an interpretative extension of quantitative analysis by explaining the mechanisms underlying the observed regularities and statistical associations. While the quantitative approach identifies relationships between variables and highlights general trends in the recruitment of public sector employees, the qualitative approach allows us to understand the "how" and "why" of these relationships. This complementarity aligns with the logic of mixed methods, according to which combining quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the overall understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, qualitative analysis sheds light on the institutional, political, and strategic rationales that explain the statistical results, while also placing these results within their social and organizational context. Their integration therefore makes it possible to move beyond simply describing empirical regularities to construct a more in-depth and multidimensional interpretation of the processes involved in recruiting public sector employees.

The use of a qualitative component is also justified by the inherent limitations of purely statistical analysis. Certain variables studied in the quantitative component, such as relational capital, political sponsorship, or political affiliation, can hardly capture the full complexity of recruitment practices. A statistical variable can identify the apparent existence or absence of an association, but it does not always allow us to answer questions about the concrete mechanisms by which this relationship occurs.

The concept of relational capital provides a significant example in this regard. A network can represent a professional resource built through experience, reputation, and institutional interactions. However, it can also constitute a privileged access tool to certain positions when personal connections become more decisive than professional qualifications. Qualitative analysis thus allows us to distinguish a legitimate professional network from potential favoritism, a distinction that a single quantitative variable cannot always make.

This approach is also important for examining the hypothesis regarding transparency, control, and compliance with rules. North (1990) emphasizes that institutions only produce predictable effects when rules are effectively applied. The formal existence of a recruitment procedure is therefore not, in itself, proof of its impartiality. Qualitative analysis thus allows us to question the effectiveness of rules through the advertising of positions, the prior definition of criteria, the verification of qualifications, the independence of selection bodies, the management of conflicts of interest, the traceability of decisions, and the possible existence of appeal or sanction mechanisms. Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) remind us in this regard that reducing arbitrary discretion largely depends on credible control and accountability mechanisms. The qualitative component therefore plays a crucial role in explaining areas insufficiently illuminated by quantitative data. It does not aim to transform testimonies into statistical evidence, but to understand the meanings, mechanisms and institutional conditions surrounding the observed relationships.

13.1. Qualitative Sampling Strategy

The qualitative sampling was reasoned and intentional, consisting of 12 interviews with representatives from 17 public companies across various sectors. Unlike quantitative sampling, it does not aim for statistical representativeness of a population. Rather, it seeks to select participants likely to provide rich, diverse, and directly relevant information for understanding the phenomenon under study. This approach aligns with the principles of qualitative research, in which the value of the sample depends primarily on its informational relevance.

The selection of participants is based on their position, experience, and proximity to the recruitment, appointment, management, or oversight processes of public enterprises. The sample includes current and former public officials, senior managers, human resources managers, candidates who have participated in selection processes, experienced public enterprise staff, institutional leaders, public governance experts, and representatives of workers or civil society. This diversity of profiles allows for the comparison of multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon. Public officials describe their experience of the appointment process and the constraints they encounter after taking office. Administrative managers shed light on formal procedures. Candidates and former candidates reported on their perception of the transparency and actual accessibility of the processes. Internal staff, for their part, observed the organizational consequences of recruitment methods on governance, managerial stability, and the social climate. The objective is therefore to seek analytical diversity rather than numerical representativeness. This strategy makes it possible to study the convergences and divergences between the discourses of the different actors and to gradually reconstruct the mechanisms of recruitment.

13.2. The Main Axes of the Qualitative Investigation

The semi-structured interviews are organized around several themes directly related to the research hypotheses and variables. The first theme concerns the concrete experience of recruitment and appointment. It aims to identify the different stages of the process, the officially announced criteria, and the practices actually observed. In particular, it allows for an examination of any potential gap between formal procedures and their implementation.

The second theme concerns the definition of merit. The interviews seek to determine how stakeholders define truly meritocratic recruitment. This question allows us to move beyond a restrictive conception based solely on diplomas. The responses may highlight a multidimensional conception of meritocracy that combines qualifications, experience, technical skills, managerial capacity, integrity, and the suitability of the candidate's profile to the job requirements.

The third theme examines the role of relational capital and networks. The aim is to understand how professional, personal, familial, or political relationships can influence selection processes. This analysis allows for a more nuanced interpretation of H1 by distinguishing between networks that facilitate the flow of information and professional recognition and those that may allow individuals to circumvent merit-based competition.

The fourth theme concerns political influence and loyalty relationships. It aims to examine how actors perceive the boundary between the legitimate role of the state in the strategic governance of public enterprises and potential personalized intervention in the selection of individuals. This distinction aligns with work on neopatrimonialism, which highlights the possibility of an interweaving of formal bureaucratic structures and personalized power relations (Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

The fifth theme focuses on transparency, oversight, and the effective enforcement of rules. It helps us understand why the existence of formal procedures does not automatically guarantee meritocratic selection. The analysis therefore examines oversight mechanisms, the traceability of decisions, and the institutional conditions necessary for the effective application of rules.

Finally, the sixth theme examines the consequences of recruitment on governance and performance. This analysis is based on the idea that recruitment is not necessarily a direct and isolated cause of performance. Its influence can be mediated by the quality of the selected candidate, decision-making autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and available resources. This perspective aligns with Jensen and Meckling's (1976) agency theory, Shleifer and Vishny's (1997) analyses of the institutional and political constraints that can affect the management of public organizations.

13.3. Analysis, Saturation and Construction of Stylized Facts

The collected data are analyzed using a thematic and inductive approach. The interviews are first examined to identify units of meaning. These are then grouped into categories, and subsequently into themes, allowing for the reconstruction of the main mechanisms mentioned by the participants. This approach allows analytical categories to emerge gradually through an ongoing interaction between empirical data and the theoretical framework.

The qualitative analysis continues until thematic saturation is reached. Saturation does not correspond to a predetermined number of interviews, but rather to the point at which new interviews no longer introduce substantially new dimensions to the categories already identified. The initial interviews generally allow for the identification of the main themes, while subsequent interviews explore them in greater depth, refine their nuances, and allow for verification of their recurrence.

The progressive confrontation of discourses then allows for the construction of stylized facts. In this research, several qualitative regularities can be analyzed: meritocracy appears as a multidimensional process; relational capital has an ambivalent nature; the gap between formal rules and their application constitutes a central dimension; the method of recruitment can influence the nature of the agent's accountability; and the effects of recruitment on performance are conditioned by institutional, financial and organizational factors.

The qualitative component thus allows us to interpret statistical results that have not always confirmed theoretically expected relationships. The absence of a statistically significant association does not necessarily mean the absence of the phenomenon in social practices. It can also reveal the existence of indirect mechanisms, conditional relationships, or insufficiently measured variables. The qualitative approach allows us precisely to explore these dimensions.

13.4. Triangulation and Articulation with the Hypotheses

The analytical value of this approach ultimately rests on the triangulation of quantitative, documentary, and qualitative data. The credibility of the interpretation can be strengthened by examining evidence from different sources and perspectives. In this research, this triangulation allows for the comparison of three levels of analysis: statistically measured regularities, rules and procedures outlined in institutional documents, and practices and mechanisms described by the actors themselves.

Triangulation is particularly useful for studying potentially informal or hidden phenomena. Documents help identify what should theoretically be applied; quantitative data reveal certain regularities; and interviews help understand what actually happens and how the actors interpret these practices.

This structure directly reinforces the examination of the three research hypotheses. H1 is explored through an analysis of the concrete mechanisms for mobilizing networks, relationships, and political support. H2 is primarily informed by a qualitative and documentary analysis of the mechanisms of transparency, oversight, and effective compliance with rules. H3, for its part, is interpreted through the intermediate mechanisms linking meritocratic selection, the competence of the representative, their autonomy, the quality of governance, and organizational performance.

Ultimately, the qualitative component does not replace quantitative analysis; it constitutes an interpretative extension of it. The former primarily allows us to understand the mechanisms, while the latter enables us to identify observable regularities and associations. Their articulation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the recruitment of representatives in public enterprises. Statistical measurement establishes general trends, document analysis compares practices with institutional norms, and qualitative interpretation reconstructs the social and political logics likely to explain the observed phenomena. The convergence of these three sources thus forms the methodological basis for triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

13.5. Conceptual Modeling of the Methodological Position of the Qualitative Component (Figure 2)

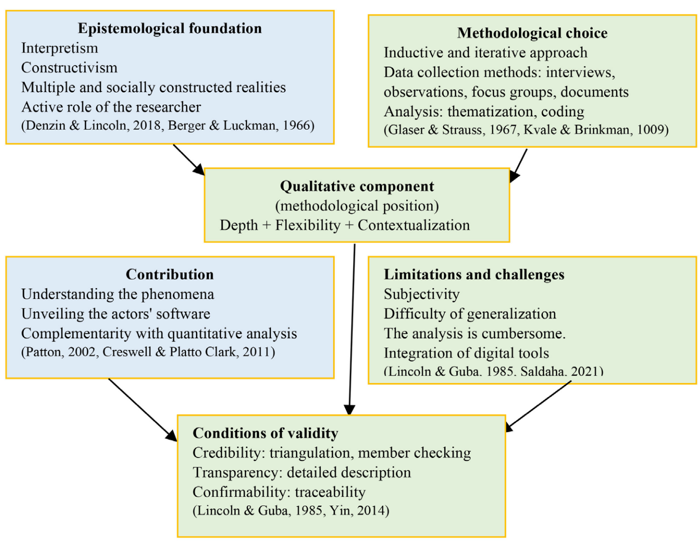

Figure 2. Conceptual modeling of the methodological position of the qualitative component.

14. Conclusion

An analysis of the recruitment of executives in public enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlights that the issue of meritocracy cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between political appointment and formal administrative procedures. More fundamentally, it relates to the capacity of institutions to ensure that impersonal, transparent, verifiable, and effectively applied criteria prevail in access to leadership positions. The existence of calls for applications, digital platforms, and selection committees represents significant institutional progress, but these mechanisms remain insufficient when the final decision can still be influenced by loyalty, personal networks, or political considerations.

The study also shows that the relationship between recruitment methods and organizational performance is more complex than a direct causal link. The quantitative results from the 254 observations do not systematically confirm the existence of a statistically significant effect of recruitment methods on performance, service quality, or financial orthodoxy. These results thus suggest moving beyond a simplistic interpretation that simply adopting a meritocratic procedure is sufficient to guarantee improved organizational results. The effects of recruitment also appear to depend on intermediary mechanisms, such as the actual quality of the selected candidate, the manager's autonomy, network capital, control mechanisms, accountability, and available institutional resources.

From this perspective, the article's main contribution lies in the complementarity between quantitative, documentary, and qualitative approaches. While statistical analysis allows for the identification of certain regularities or associations, the qualitative approach helps to understand the social, political, and institutional mechanisms that explain the potential persistence of informal practices. Triangulation thus appears as an essential condition for studying a phenomenon characterized by the coexistence of formal rules and practices that are difficult to observe.

Ultimately, the reform of the recruitment of elected officials should be structured around four fundamental requirements: the professionalization of selection criteria, the transparency of procedures, the independence of evaluation mechanisms, and the accountability of leaders. The state's power of appointment should not necessarily be eliminated, but it should be governed by objective procedures, reasoned decisions, and effective control mechanisms. Competence, sectoral experience, integrity, and the suitability of the candidate's profile for the position should thus become the verifiable foundations of selection, while the exercise of the mandate should be linked to measurable objectives and regular performance evaluations. Such an approach would allow the appointment of elected officials to gradually evolve from a potentially personalized process to a genuine strategic decision of public governance.

15. Management Lesson

The main managerial implication is that the appointment of a representative should be conceived as a strategic governance decision rather than a political reward.

Competence, sectoral experience, integrity, and suitability of profile must constitute the fundamental selection criteria. This requirement is consistent with the literature on bureaucratic professionalization (Evans and Rauch, 1999; Dahlström et al., 2012) and with the principles of public enterprise governance advocated by the OECD (2015, 2024).

The state, as a shareholder, must retain its role in strategic guidance while avoiding arbitrary intervention in operational management. Boards of directors must have genuine oversight and evaluation capabilities.

The implementation of performance contracts, measurable indicators and periodic evaluations would make it possible to link the power of appointment to an effective obligation of results.

16. Recommendations

The reform of the appointment system should be based on four principles: professionalization, transparency, independence, and accountability. It is recommended that job descriptions and selection criteria be published before each appointment; that open and competitive procedures be organized; that technical and professional criteria be explicitly weighted; that qualifications, experience, and references be verified; that declarations of conflicts of interest be required; that the functional independence of selection committees be ensured; that all stages of the process be archived; that any decision deviating from the technical ranking be justified; that appeal and oversight mechanisms be strengthened; that appointments be subject to performance contracts; that their performance be periodically evaluated; that the capacities of boards of directors be strengthened; that internal and external audits be reinforced; that whistleblowers be protected; and that sanctions be effectively enforced. The objective is therefore not necessarily to eliminate the public authority's power of appointment, but to transform this discretionary power into a legally regulated, justified, traceable power subject to verifiable professional criteria.

Research perspectives: Future research should develop multidimensional indices to separately measure meritocracy, relational capital, patronage, transparency, governance, and performance. A longitudinal approach would allow for comparisons of firm performance before and after leadership changes. It would also allow for a better distinction between the effects of appointments and the inherent structural characteristics of the firms. More comprehensive models could incorporate board independence, audit quality, debt levels, government oversight, firm size and age, and the competitive environment. This evolution would allow a shift from primarily descriptive and cross-sectional analysis to a more robust explanatory analysis.

17. Limitations of the Analysis

The first limitation relates to data availability. Informal mechanisms influencing appointments are inherently difficult to observe and can lead to underreporting. The second concerns missing data and coding anomalies. The lack of usable data on certain variables and inconsistencies in coding can reduce the quality of the estimates. The third limitation lies in the cross-sectional nature of the data. The 254 observations allow for the identification of associations but do not allow for the definitive establishment of the temporal direction of the relationships. The fourth concerns the measurement of complex concepts. Meritocracy and clientelism cannot be fully represented by a single variable.

Finally, some hypotheses, notably H2, require more direct institutional indicators than those currently available in the database.

18. Imperfections Inherent in the Study

The study faces a difficulty inherent to its subject matter: recruitment practices are simultaneously formal and informal. Administrative procedures are observable, while the influences surrounding them remain difficult to document. Self-reported data are ambiguous in terms of social desirability, the respondents' institutional interests, and their position within power structures. Measuring variables such as relational capital or clientelism therefore involves a degree of uncertainty. For this reason, triangulating quantitative, documentary, and qualitative data is not only a methodological choice but also a condition for the credibility of the interpretation.

Conflicts of Interest

We declare that we have no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design of this research, the data collection, the analysis, or the interpretation of the results. Given the political sensitivity of the subject, the study pays particular attention to the transparency of procedures, the confidentiality of information, and the independence of the analysis.

Any professional, institutional, political, or personal relationships between the researcher and the organizations or individuals studied are explicitly declared when they exist. Data and coding decisions are stored securely to allow, where possible, for the verification and replication of analyses.

The presentation of the results will respect the principle of scientific integrity: significant and non-significant results are reported, and no hypothesis has been declared confirmed in the absence of a corresponding empirical result.

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