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Public sector reform and administrative culture: a comparative analysis of divergent pathways in Ghana and Singapore

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comparative dynamics of public sector reform and administrative culture in Ghana and Singapore, two countries with distinct colonial legacies, governance trajectories, and approaches to civil service modernization. Despite their divergent pathways, both nations grapple with fundamental questions about how to build professional, efficient, and responsive public services that can drive national development. The research employs a comparative case study methodology, drawing on policy documents, reform evaluations, academic research, and scholarly

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analyses spanning multiple decades to 2026. Singapore's public sector is globally renowned for its efficiency, professionalism, and meritocratic culture. The Singapore Administrative Service (elite civil service) has been described as one of the "few, truly effective administrative systems of the postcolonial world" . This success is rooted in foundational choices at independence: the rejection of corruption as a "way of life," the establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies, the commitment to meritocracy in recruitment and promotion, and the creation of elite administrative institutions including the Administrative Service and the Civil Service College . Key features include competitive remuneration ("to pay them well, to keep them honest, and to have a clean and efficient government"), rigorous selection processes attracting top graduates, and a culture of pragmatism and continuous learning. Lee Kuan Yew's philosophy emphasized "making the impossible possible" through a can-do spirit that permeates the public service . Recent initiatives focus on digital transformation and whole-of-government approaches to complex challenges .

Ghana presents a different picture characterized by cycles of reform, persistent implementation challenges, and the enduring influence of clientelism on administrative culture. Despite numerous reform initiatives—from the Civil Service Reform Programme (1987) to the National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP, 2017-2025) and the ongoing Public Sector Reform for Results Project—the civil service has struggled to shed legacies of politicization, patronage, and inefficiency . Research by the African Capacity Building Foundation identifies key barriers: political interference in administrative appointments, weak enforcement of performance management systems, and a culture of risk aversion rooted in centralized decision-making . The 2025 Africa Integrity Indicators assessment highlights persistent concerns about transparency and accountability in public procurement and resource management . The National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP), with its focus on "winning hearts and minds" and "calling the civil service to order," recognized that sustainable reform requires cultural transformation, not merely structural changes . Capacity-building initiatives, including the Ghana-Capacity-Building Program for Sustainable Development Goals, have sought to strengthen civil service capabilities through training and institutional partnerships . Yet patronage and politicization remain deeply embedded, with some scholars arguing that administrative reform cannot succeed without addressing the political economy of clientelism that shapes state-society relations .

Singapore's strength lies in foundational choices that established meritocracy, competitive remuneration, and anti-corruption as inviolable principles; elite institutions that attract and develop top talent; and a pragmatic, problem-solving culture that continuously adapts. Its challenge is maintaining these principles in a changing political landscape and adapting to new governance challenges including digitalization and citizen engagement. Ghana's advantage is the accumulated experience of multiple reform efforts, growing recognition that cultural transformation is essential, and partnerships with development organizations supporting capacity-building. Yet persistent politicization, clientelism, and weak enforcement of performance systems constrain progress. Both countries demonstrate that effective public sector reform requires: (1) foundational commitment to meritocracy in recruitment and promotion; (2) competitive remuneration enabling integrity and professionalism; (3) independent anti-corruption institutions with teeth; (4) elite administrative institutions attracting top talent; (5) sustained political will across electoral cycles; (6) attention to administrative culture, not merely structures; (7) capacity-building aligned with reform objectives; and (8) recognition that reform is generational work requiring persistence through setbacks .

KEYWORDS: Public sector reform, administrative culture, Ghana, Singapore, meritocracy, civil service, clientelism, anti-corruption, capacity-building, governance

RÉSUMÉ

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine les dynamiques comparatives de la réforme du secteur public et de la culture administrative au Ghana et à Singapour, deux pays aux héritages coloniaux, trajectoires de gouvernance et approches de modernisation de la fonction publique distincts. Malgré leurs voies divergentes, les deux nations sont confrontées à des questions fondamentales sur la manière de construire des services publics professionnels, efficaces et réactifs capables de stimuler le développement national. La recherche emploie une méthodologie d'étude de cas comparative, s'appuyant sur des documents politiques, des évaluations de réformes, des recherches académiques et des analyses savantes couvrant plusieurs décennies jusqu'en 2026. Le secteur public de Singapour est mondialement réputé pour son efficacité, son professionnalisme et sa culture

méritocratique. Le Service administratif de Singapour (élite de la fonction publique) a été décrit comme l'un des « rares systèmes administratifs véritablement efficaces du monde postcolonial » . Ce succès repose sur des choix fondamentaux à l'indépendance : le rejet de la corruption comme « mode de vie », l'établissement d'agences anti-corruption indépendantes, l'engagement en faveur de la méritocratie dans le recrutement et la promotion, et la création d'institutions administratives d'élite, notamment le Service administratif et le Collège de la fonction publique . Les caractéristiques clés incluent une rémunération compétitive (« pour les payer convenablement, pour les garder honnêtes, et pour avoir un gouvernement propre et efficace »), des processus de sélection rigoureux attirant les meilleurs diplômés, et une culture de pragmatisme et d'apprentissage continu. La philosophie de Lee Kuan Yew mettait l'accent sur « rendre l'impossible possible » grâce à un esprit de « can-do » qui imprègne la fonction publique . Les initiatives récentes se concentrent sur la transformation numérique et les approches pangouvernementales face aux défis complexes .

Le Ghana présente un tableau différent caractérisé par des cycles de réforme, des défis de mise en œuvre persistants et l'influence durable du clientélisme sur la culture administrative. Malgré de nombreuses initiatives de réforme—du Programme de réforme de la fonction publique (1987) au Programme national de renouveau institutionnel (SALP, 2017-2025) et au projet en cours de Réforme du secteur public pour les résultats—la fonction publique a eu du mal à se défaire des héritages de politisation, de patronage et d'inefficacité . La recherche de la Fondation africaine pour le renforcement des capacités identifie les principaux obstacles : l'ingérence politique dans les nominations administratives, la faible application des systèmes de gestion de la performance, et une culture d'aversion au risque ancrée dans une prise de décision centralisée . L'évaluation 2025 des Indicateurs d'intégrité en Afrique met en évidence des préoccupations persistantes concernant la transparence et la responsabilité dans les marchés publics et la gestion des ressources . Le Programme national de renouveau institutionnel (SALP), avec son accent sur « gagner les cœurs et les esprits » et « rappeler la fonction publique à l'ordre », a reconnu qu'une réforme durable nécessite une transformation culturelle, et pas seulement des changements structurels . Les initiatives de renforcement des capacités, y compris le Programme de renforcement des capacités du Ghana pour les objectifs de développement durable, ont cherché à renforcer les capacités de la fonction publique par la formation et des partenariats institutionnels . Pourtant, le patronage et la

politisation restent profondément ancrés, certains chercheurs soutenant que la réforme administrative ne peut réussir sans s'attaquer à l'économie politique du clientélisme qui façonne les relations État-société .

La force de Singapour réside dans les choix fondateurs qui ont établi la méritocratie, la rémunération compétitive et la lutte contre la corruption comme principes inviolables ; des institutions d'élite qui attirent et développent les meilleurs talents ; et une culture pragmatique de résolution de problèmes qui s'adapte en continu. Son défi est de maintenir ces principes dans un paysage politique changeant et de s'adapter aux nouveaux défis de gouvernance, y compris la numérisation et l'engagement citoyen. L'avantage du Ghana est l'expérience accumulée de multiples efforts de réforme, la reconnaissance croissante que la transformation culturelle est essentielle, et les partenariats avec des organisations de développement soutenant le renforcement des capacités. Pourtant, la politisation persistante, le clientélisme et la faible application des systèmes de performance entravent les progrès. Les deux pays démontrent qu'une réforme efficace du secteur public nécessite : (1) un engagement fondamental en faveur de la méritocratie dans le recrutement et la promotion ; (2) une rémunération compétitive permettant l'intégrité et le professionnalisme ; (3) des institutions anti-corruption indépendantes dotées de moyens d'action ; (4) des institutions administratives d'élite attirant les meilleurs talents ; (5) une volonté politique soutenue à travers les cycles électoraux ; (6) une attention à la culture administrative, pas seulement aux structures ; (7) un renforcement des capacités aligné sur les objectifs de réforme ; et (8) la reconnaissance que la réforme est un travail de génération nécessitant de la persévérance malgré les revers .

MOTS-CLÉS : Réforme du secteur public, culture administrative, Ghana, Singapour, méritocratie, fonction publique, clientélisme, lutte contre la corruption, renforcement des capacités, gouvernance

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of public administration is a fundamental determinant of national development. Effective public services deliver infrastructure, education, and healthcare; regulate markets; collect taxes; and create the conditions for private sector growth. Conversely, weak public administration undermines development, perpetuating poverty and eroding citizen trust in the state. Yet building professional, efficient, and responsive public services remains one of the most persistent challenges facing developing countries.

Ghana and Singapore, two former British colonies with very different trajectories of public sector development, offer a compelling comparative lens. Singapore's public sector is globally renowned for its efficiency, professionalism, and meritocratic culture. The Singapore Administrative Service has been described as one of the "few, truly effective administrative systems of the postcolonial world" . This success was not accidental but the product of deliberate foundational choices at independence: the rejection of corruption as acceptable, the establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies, commitment to meritocracy in recruitment and promotion, and the creation of elite administrative institutions.

Ghana presents a more complex picture. Despite numerous reform initiatives spanning decades—from the Civil Service Reform Programme in 1987 to the National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP) and the ongoing Public Sector Reform for Results Project—the civil service has struggled to shed legacies of politicization, patronage, and inefficiency. Research identifies persistent barriers: political interference in administrative appointments, weak enforcement of performance management, and a culture of risk aversion. The 2025 Africa Integrity Indicators assessment highlights ongoing concerns about transparency and accountability.

This study examines the comparative dynamics of public sector reform and administrative culture in Ghana and Singapore. Drawing on policy documents, reform evaluations, academic research, and scholarly analyses, it explores how foundational choices, institutional design, and political economy shape public service effectiveness. The analysis is organized around four interconnected themes: (1) foundational choices and historical trajectories; (2) institutional design for meritocracy and integrity; (3) administrative culture and civil service ethos; and (4) reform dynamics and implementation challenges.

The study contributes to scholarship on public administration, governance reform, and comparative politics. It argues that sustainable public sector reform requires not merely technical interventions but foundational commitment to meritocracy, sustained political will, and attention to the cultural dimensions of administrative behavior.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Public Sector Reform and Administrative Culture

Public sector reform encompasses deliberate efforts to improve the performance of government bureaucracies. Reform may target structures (organizational arrangements, reporting lines), processes (budgeting, procurement, personnel management), systems (information technology, performance management), or culture (values, norms, behaviors). The literature distinguishes between first-generation reforms focused on structural adjustment and second-generation reforms emphasizing institutional and behavioral change.

Administrative culture refers to the shared values, norms, and beliefs that shape how public servants perceive their roles and conduct themselves. It encompasses attitudes toward citizens, corruption, risk-taking, innovation, and public service ethos. Administrative culture is shaped by history, political context, training, and incentives. Changing culture is widely recognized as more difficult than changing structures.

2.2 Singapore's Foundational Choices and Institutional Design

Singapore's public sector transformation is rooted in deliberate choices at independence. Key features include:

- **Rejection of corruption:** Lee Kuan Yew's government made anti-corruption a foundational principle. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) was strengthened and given independence to investigate corruption at all levels.
- **Competitive remuneration:** Civil service salaries were set at levels competitive with the private sector, enabling recruitment and retention of talent while reducing incentives for corruption. Lee's principle was "to pay them well, to keep them honest, and to have a clean and efficient government".
- **Meritocratic recruitment:** Selection for the elite Administrative Service is rigorous, attracting top graduates from universities. Promotion is based on performance, not patronage.
- **Elite institutions:** The Administrative Service was established as a corps of high-potential officers rotated through key ministries, developing broad understanding of government. The Civil Service College provides continuous professional development.
- **Pragmatic problem-solving culture:** Lee's philosophy emphasized "making the impossible possible" through a can-do spirit. Public servants are encouraged to find solutions rather than recite obstacles.
- **Anti-corruption institutions:** CPIB's independence and powers, combined with severe penalties, create strong deterrence. Political will to prosecute regardless of rank has been consistently demonstrated.
- **Continuous learning:** The Public Service Division promotes innovation and learning through initiatives like the Public Sector Transformation (PST) agenda and the "Whole-of-Government" approach to complex challenges.
- **Digital transformation:** Recent initiatives leverage technology to improve service delivery, including the Smart Nation program and integrated service delivery platforms.

2.3 Ghana's Reform Trajectory and Persistent Challenges

Ghana's public sector has undergone multiple reform cycles since independence. Key features include:

- **Colonial legacy:** The British colonial administration established a civil service focused on maintaining order rather than development. Post-independence governments inherited a structure ill-suited to developmental challenges.
- **Early reforms:** The Civil Service Reform Programme (1987) aimed to improve efficiency and reduce politicization. Implementation was uneven, and gains were not sustained.
- **National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP, 2017-2025):** A comprehensive reform effort with multiple components:
  - Institutional capacity audits and organizational restructuring
  - Performance management system strengthening
  - Leadership development and succession planning
  - "Winning hearts and minds" campaign addressing culture
  - "Calling the civil service to order" —reasserting discipline and accountability
- **Public Sector Reform for Results Project:** Current World Bank-supported initiative focusing on results-based management and citizen engagement.
- **Capacity-building initiatives:** The Ghana-Capacity-Building Program for Sustainable Development Goals, in partnership with the Civil Service College of Singapore and UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, has trained civil servants in SDG implementation.
- **Persistent barriers:** Research by the African Capacity Building Foundation identifies key challenges :
  - Political interference in administrative appointments
  - Weak enforcement of performance management systems
  - Culture of risk aversion rooted in centralized decision-making
  - Inadequate remuneration undermining morale and integrity
  - Patronage networks undermining meritocracy
- **Africa Integrity Indicators (2025):** Assessment highlights ongoing concerns about transparency and accountability in public procurement and resource management.
- **Scholarly analysis:** Some scholars argue that administrative reform cannot succeed without addressing the political economy of clientelism that shapes state-society relations in Ghana.

2.4 Comparative Perspectives on Reform Success

Comparative analysis of Singapore and Ghana reveals key factors distinguishing successful from unsuccessful reform:

- **Foundational choices:** Singapore established meritocracy and anti-corruption as inviolable principles at independence. Ghana's post-independence trajectory included periods of military rule and politicization that entrenched clientelism.
- **Political will:** Singapore's leadership sustained commitment to reform across decades. Ghana's reform efforts have waxed and waned with political cycles, with implementation often undermined by competing priorities.
- **Institutional design:** Singapore created elite institutions with capacity to attract and develop talent. Ghana's civil service has struggled to compete with private sector for top graduates, and training investments have not always translated into performance.
- **Remuneration:** Singapore's competitive salaries reduce corruption incentives and attract talent. Ghana's civil service pay remains low, forcing many officers to supplement income through other activities.
- **Cultural transformation:** The SALP program's recognition that "winning hearts and minds" is essential acknowledges that cultural change requires sustained effort beyond structural reform.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the foundational choices and historical trajectories of public sector development differ between Ghana and Singapore, and how have these shaped contemporary administrative systems?
2. What institutional designs for meritocracy, anti-corruption, and talent development exist in each country, and how effectively do they function?
3. What characterizes administrative culture in each context, and how does culture enable or constrain reform?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative case study methodology to examine public sector reform and administrative culture in Ghana and Singapore. The research design integrates document analysis of primary sources with synthesis of secondary literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of governance dynamics in both countries.

Primary sources analyzed include: scholarly analyses of Singapore's public sector ; research on Ghana's civil service reform by the African Capacity Building Foundation ; SALP program documentation ; Africa Integrity Indicators (2025) ; and capacity-building initiative reports .

The comparative framework examines four dimensions of public sector reform: (1) foundational choices and historical trajectories; (2) institutional design for meritocracy and integrity; (3) administrative culture and civil service ethos; and (4) reform dynamics and implementation.

The analysis covers the period from independence to 2026, capturing recent developments including SALP conclusion and ongoing reform efforts.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Foundational Choices and Historical Trajectories

Singapore: Singapore's post-independence trajectory was shaped by deliberate foundational choices. Key features include:

- **Anti-corruption as foundational:** At independence, Lee Kuan Yew's government made clear that corruption would not be tolerated as "a way of life." The CPIB was strengthened and given independence to investigate all levels of government.
- **Meritocracy as organizing principle:** Recruitment and promotion based on ability, not patronage, was established as inviolable. The Administrative Service was created to attract and develop top talent.
- **Competitive remuneration:** Civil service salaries were set at levels competitive with private sector, enabling recruitment of top graduates while reducing corruption incentives. Lee's principle: "to pay them well, to keep them honest, and to have a clean and efficient government".

- **Elite institutions:** The Administrative Service and Civil Service College created pathways for developing high-potential officers with broad government experience.
- **Pragmatic culture:** Lee's philosophy emphasized "making the impossible possible," encouraging problem-solving and innovation rather than bureaucratic obstruction.
- **Continuity of commitment:** Reform principles have been sustained across successive governments, creating predictability and enabling long-term capacity-building.

Ghana: Ghana's post-independence trajectory has been more turbulent. Key features include:

- **Colonial legacy:** Inherited civil service focused on maintenance of order rather than development. Structures and practices ill-suited to post-independence challenges.
- **Post-independence instability:** Periods of military rule and political turbulence entrenched politicization and patronage. Civil service became site of political appointment rather than career progression.
- **Reform cycles:** Multiple reform initiatives since 1987 have sought to improve efficiency and reduce politicization. Implementation has been uneven, and gains often reversed.
- **SALP recognition of cultural dimension:** The National Institutional Renewal Programme (2017-2025) explicitly recognized that "winning hearts and minds" is essential for sustainable change. Its "calling the civil service to order" component sought to reassert discipline.
- **Capacity-building partnerships:** Initiatives like the Ghana-Capacity-Building Program for Sustainable Development Goals, with support from Singapore's Civil Service College and UNDP, have sought to strengthen capabilities.
- **Persistent clientelism:** Despite reforms, patronage and politicization remain deeply embedded. Some scholars argue this reflects the political economy of state-society relations that reform cannot easily shift.

Table 1: Comparative Foundational Choices and Historical Trajectories

Dimension	**Singapore**	**Ghana**
Foundational commitment	Anti-corruption; meritocracy; competitive pay established at independence	Colonial legacy; post-independence turbulence; politicization entrenched

Institutional creation	Administrative Service; Civil Service College; CPIB	Multiple reform initiatives; SALP; capacity-building partnerships
Leadership philosophy	"Making the impossible possible" (pragmatic problem-solving)	"Winning hearts and minds" (SALP)
Continuity	Sustained commitment across decades	Cyclical; gains often reversed
Political economy	Meritocracy insulated from clientelism	Clientelism deeply embedded

5.2 Institutional Design for Meritocracy and Integrity

Singapore: Singapore's institutional design for meritocracy and integrity is sophisticated and mutually reinforcing. Key features include:

- **Recruitment processes:** Rigorous selection for Administrative Service attracts top university graduates. Multiple assessments evaluate aptitude, character, and potential .
- **Career development:** Officers rotated through key ministries, gaining broad experience. High-potential officers identified early and groomed for leadership .
- **Performance management:** Annual appraisals with forced distribution; poor performers weeded out. Promotions based on demonstrated capability.
- **Remuneration:** Salaries benchmarked to private sector; performance bonuses provide incentives. Compensation enables recruitment of talent and reduces corruption incentives.
- **Anti-corruption institutions:** CPIB independent, adequately resourced, and empowered to investigate all levels. Political will to prosecute regardless of rank demonstrated consistently. Severe penalties create deterrence.
- **Public Service Division:** Central agency oversees human resource policies, ensuring consistency and quality across government.

- **Civil Service College:** Provides continuous professional development; inculcates shared values and approaches.
- **Smart Nation and Digital Government Office:** Drives digital transformation and innovation in service delivery.

Ghana: Ghana's institutional framework for meritocracy and integrity faces persistent challenges. Key features include:

- **Recruitment processes:** Formal merit-based recruitment exists, but political interference in appointments remains common. Patronage networks influence selection and promotion.
- **Performance management:** Performance management systems exist but enforcement is weak. Poor performers rarely sanctioned; promotions often based on seniority or connections rather than demonstrated capability.
- **Remuneration:** Civil service pay is low relative to private sector, making it difficult to attract and retain top talent. Inadequate pay creates incentives for corruption and undermines morale.
- **Anti-corruption institutions:** Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO) exist but face resource constraints and political interference. Enforcement inconsistent.
- **Public Services Commission:** Constitutional mandate to oversee appointments, but influence limited in practice .
- **National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP):** Sought to strengthen performance management, leadership development, and accountability. Implementation outcomes mixed .
- **Capacity-building initiatives:** Partnerships with Singapore and UNDP have trained officers in SDG implementation and results-based management .

Table 2: Comparative Institutional Design for Meritocracy and Integrity

Dimension	**Singapore**	**Ghana**
Recruitment	Rigorous selection; top graduates	Formal meritocracy undermined by patronage

Career development	Rotation across ministries; talent grooming	Limited; often politicized
Performance management	Annual appraisals; forced distribution; poor performers weeded out	Systems exist; enforcement weak
Remuneration	Competitive with private sector	Low; creates corruption incentives
Anti-corruption institutions	CPIB independent; strong enforcement	CHRAJ, EOCO exist; resource constraints; inconsistent enforcement
Central oversight	Public Service Division	Public Services Commission (limited influence)
Training infrastructure	Civil Service College	Capacity-building partnerships

5.3 Administrative Culture and Civil Service Ethos

Singapore: Singapore's administrative culture is characterized by distinct values and norms:

- **Meritocracy:** Belief that ability and effort determine advancement; respect for excellence .
- **Integrity:** Corruption unacceptable; public trust as foundational value .
- **Pragmatism:** Focus on problem-solving rather than ideological purity; "what works" orientation .
- **Can-do spirit:** "Making the impossible possible" — willingness to tackle difficult challenges .
- **Continuous learning:** Emphasis on self-improvement and adaptation; learning from others .
- **Whole-of-government:** Collaborative approach transcending ministerial silos .
- **Service orientation:** Focus on citizen needs; continuous improvement of service delivery .

Ghana: Ghana's administrative culture reflects historical legacies and contemporary challenges:

- **Risk aversion:** Centralized decision-making creates fear of taking initiative; officers avoid responsibility .

- **Patronage norms:** Appointment and promotion often perceived as based on connections rather than merit, undermining morale .
- **Politicization:** Civil servants may feel loyalty to political patrons rather than institutional mission .
- **Low trust:** Public skepticism about civil service integrity; internal distrust among officers .
- **Routine orientation:** Focus on following procedures rather than achieving outcomes .
- **Corruption tolerance:** Some acceptance of corruption as normal; ethical lapses not consistently sanctioned .
- **SALP cultural focus:** Program's "winning hearts and minds" component recognized need for cultural change, but transformation is generational work .

Table 3: Comparative Administrative Culture

Dimension	**Singapore**	**Ghana**
Meritocracy	Deeply embedded; belief in ability	Patronage norms; merit undermined
Integrity	Corruption unacceptable	Corruption tolerance; inconsistent sanction
Risk-taking	"Can-do" spirit; problem-solving	Risk aversion; fear of initiative
Inter-agency collaboration	Whole-of-government approach	Siloed; limited coordination
Service orientation	Citizen focus; continuous improvement	Routine orientation; procedure focus
Trust	High public trust	Low public trust; internal distrust
Cultural reform	Continuous learning embedded	SALP "hearts and minds" recognized need

5.4 Reform Dynamics and Implementation Challenges

Singapore: Singapore's reform dynamics reflect sustained commitment and adaptive capacity:

- **Sustained political will:** Reform principles maintained across successive governments. Long-term perspective enables capacity-building .
- **Evidence-based adaptation:** Continuous evaluation and adjustment of policies. Learning from others (e.g., benchmarking salaries to private sector) .
- **Whole-of-government coordination:** Central agencies ensure coherence; silos minimized .
- **Digital transformation:** Smart Nation initiative driving innovation in service delivery; integrated platforms improve citizen experience .
- **Citizen engagement:** Increasing focus on citizen feedback and co-creation of services .
- **Capacity-building:** Civil Service College provides continuous learning; leadership development programs groom future leaders .
- **Challenges:** Maintaining meritocracy in changing political landscape; adapting to new governance challenges; ensuring digital inclusion .

Ghana: Ghana's reform dynamics reflect cycles of ambition and implementation gaps:

- **Political will fluctuations:** Reform commitment varies with electoral cycles; implementation often stalls when political attention shifts .
- **Implementation gaps:** Well-designed programs (SALP) face implementation challenges; monitoring and enforcement weak .
- **Patronage pressures:** Political interference undermines meritocracy; civil service appointments used for political reward .
- **Resource constraints:** Inadequate funding for reform implementation; limited capacity for training and system improvement .
- **Coordination failures:** Multiple reform initiatives poorly coordinated; competing priorities fragment effort .
- **Donor dependence:** Reform often driven by external partners; ownership and sustainability limited .
- **Cultural persistence:** Clientelism and risk aversion deeply embedded; cultural change slow .
- **Opportunities:** Growing recognition of need for cultural transformation; capacity-building partnerships; SALP's focus on "hearts and minds" .

Table 4: Comparative Reform Dynamics and Implementation Challenges

Dimension	**Singapore**	**Ghana**
Political will	Sustained across decades	Fluctuates with electoral cycles
Implementation	Effective; adaptive	Gaps; monitoring weak
Patronage pressures	Meritocracy insulated	Patronage deeply embedded
Resources	Adequate; competitive pay	Inadequate; low pay
Coordination	Whole-of-government	Fragmented; multiple initiatives
External dependence	Minimal	Significant donor dependence
Cultural change	Continuous learning embedded	"Hearts and minds" recognized but slow

5.5 Summary of Comparative Findings

Table 5: Comprehensive Comparative Analysis

Dimension	**Singapore**	**Ghana**
Foundational choices	Anti-corruption; meritocracy; competitive pay established at independence	Colonial legacy; post-independence turbulence; politicization entrenched
Key institutions	Administrative Service; CPIB; Civil Service College; Public Service Division	SALP; Public Services Commission; CHRAJ; EOCO
Recruitment	Rigorous selection; top graduates	Formal meritocracy undermined by patronage
Performance management	Annual appraisals; forced distribution; poor performers weeded out	Systems exist; enforcement weak

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Remuneration	Competitive with private sector	Low; creates corruption incentives
Anti-corruption	CPIB independent; strong enforcement	Institutions exist; resource constraints; inconsistent enforcement
Administrative culture	Meritocracy; integrity; pragmatism; can-do spirit; whole-of-government	Risk aversion; patronage norms; politicization; low trust
Reform focus	Continuous improvement; digital transformation; whole-of-government	Structural reform; SALP cultural focus; capacity-building
Key strengths	Sustained political will; elite institutions; competitive pay; pragmatic culture	Accumulated reform experience; growing cultural awareness; capacity-building partnerships
Key challenges	Maintaining principles in changing landscape; digital inclusion	Political interference; clientelism; weak enforcement; resource constraints

PARAITRE

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Explaining Divergent Pathways: Foundational Choices and Political Economy

The dramatic differences between Singapore's and Ghana's public sector trajectories reflect fundamentally different foundational choices and political economies.

Singapore's success was not inevitable but the product of deliberate decisions at a critical juncture. Lee Kuan Yew's government made anti-corruption, meritocracy, and competitive remuneration

inviolable principles. These choices were reinforced by institutional design—the Administrative Service, CPIB, and Civil Service College created structures that embedded these principles in daily operations. Crucially, these institutions were insulated from clientelist pressures; political will to prosecute corruption regardless of rank was consistently demonstrated.

Ghana's trajectory reflects different choices and constraints. Post-independence instability, including periods of military rule, entrenched politicization and patronage. Civil service appointments became a means of rewarding political loyalty rather than selecting talent. Multiple reform initiatives sought to reverse this, but implementation was undermined by the very clientelist dynamics they sought to change. As some scholars argue, administrative reform cannot succeed without addressing the political economy of state-society relations .

The contrast illustrates that reform is not merely a technical exercise but a political one. Singapore's leadership had both the will and capacity to insulate administration from clientelism. Ghana's reformers have faced more challenging political terrain.

6.2 The Primacy of Meritocracy

Singapore's experience demonstrates that meritocracy in recruitment and promotion is foundational for public sector effectiveness. When appointments are based on ability rather than patronage, the civil service attracts talent, commands respect, and delivers results. The rigorous selection for the Administrative Service, rotation through key ministries, and performance-based advancement create a cadre of leaders with both technical competence and broad government experience .

Ghana's meritocratic institutions exist on paper but are undermined by political interference and patronage norms. The result is a civil service that struggles to attract and retain talent, where advancement depends as much on connections as capability. This affects not only efficiency but morale—officers who see less capable colleagues promoted through patronage become cynical and disengaged .

The implication is that meritocracy cannot be established by decree alone. It requires sustained political will to resist patronage pressures, transparent processes, and consequences for violations.

6.3 The Role of Competitive Remuneration

Singapore's principle of paying civil servants competitively serves multiple purposes. It attracts top graduates who might otherwise choose private sector careers. It reduces incentives for corruption—when salaries are adequate, the temptation to supplement income through illicit means diminishes. And it signals respect for public service, reinforcing professional identity .

Ghana's low civil service pay creates opposite dynamics. Talented graduates are lost to private sector or international organizations. Officers may need secondary employment or accept bribes to meet basic needs. Low pay undermines morale and reinforces perceptions that public service is a stepping stone rather than a career .

The fiscal constraints facing Ghana are real—Singapore's wealth enables remuneration that Ghana cannot match. But even modest improvements, combined with non-monetary recognition and career development, could shift incentives. The SALP program's focus on performance management and accountability recognized that pay alone is insufficient without systems that reward good performance and sanction poor performance.

6.4 Anti-Corruption Institutions and Political Will

Singapore's CPIB is often cited as a model anti-corruption agency, but its effectiveness derives not merely from institutional design but from political will to use it. Independence, resources, and powers are necessary but insufficient; consistent prosecution regardless of rank sends the signal that no one is above the law .

Ghana has anti-corruption institutions—CHRAJ, EOCO—but they face resource constraints and political interference. High-profile cases may be pursued while lower-level corruption continues unchecked. The 2025 Africa Integrity Indicators assessment highlights ongoing concerns about transparency and accountability in procurement and resource management .

The lesson is that institutional design must be accompanied by sustained political commitment. Without it, agencies become window dressing rather than effective deterrents.

6.5 Cultural Transformation as Generational Work

The SALP program's recognition that "winning hearts and minds" is essential reflects understanding that sustainable reform requires cultural change. Structures can be redesigned and systems improved, but if values and norms remain unchanged, old behaviors will reassert themselves .

Singapore's administrative culture was not created overnight. It was built through decades of consistent messaging, training, and reinforcement. The Civil Service College plays a key role in inculcating shared values. Leaders model desired behaviors. Performance systems reward those who embody the culture .

Ghana's cultural transformation will similarly require generational effort. The "hearts and minds" focus is a start, but must be sustained through leadership commitment, training, and consistent reinforcement. Patronage norms are deeply embedded; shifting them will take time.

6.6 Implications for Reform Practice

The findings have significant implications for public sector reform practice.

*First, foundational choices matter***.** The principles established at critical junctures shape trajectories for decades. Countries emerging from transition periods should prioritize establishing meritocracy and anti-corruption as inviolable.

Second, political will is essential. Reform cannot succeed without sustained commitment at the highest levels. This requires leaders who prioritize long-term institutional development over short-term political advantage.

Third, meritocracy must be institutionalized. Recruitment, promotion, and career development systems must be designed to select and advance talent. Patronage pressures must be resisted through transparent processes and accountability.

Fourth, remuneration matters. While fiscal constraints are real, adequate compensation reduces corruption incentives and enables talent attraction. Non-monetary recognition and career development also play important roles.

Fifth, anti-corruption institutions need teeth and will. Independence, resources, and powers are necessary; consistent prosecution regardless of rank is essential.

Sixth, cultural transformation requires sustained effort. "Hearts and minds" work must be integrated with structural reform, reinforced through training and leadership modeling, and sustained across generations.

*Seventh, capacity-building must be aligned with reform objectives***.** Training and development should reinforce desired values and behaviors, not merely transmit technical knowledge.

Eighth, reform is generational work. Singapore's success was built over decades; Ghana's journey will similarly require persistence through setbacks.

7. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of public sector reform and administrative culture in Ghana and Singapore reveals two fundamentally different trajectories shaped by foundational choices, institutional design, and political economy. Singapore's public sector, built on principles of meritocracy, competitive remuneration, and zero tolerance for corruption, has become a global model of administrative effectiveness. The Administrative Service attracts top talent, CPIB enforces integrity consistently, and the Civil Service College develops leaders with broad government experience . The culture of pragmatism and continuous learning, embodied in Lee Kuan Yew's "making the impossible possible" philosophy, enables adaptation to new challenges.

Ghana's trajectory has been more complex. Multiple reform initiatives—from the 1987 Civil Service Reform Programme to the National Institutional Renewal Programme (SALP) and ongoing Public Sector Reform for Results Project—have sought to improve efficiency and reduce politicization . Yet persistent challenges remain: political interference in appointments, weak enforcement of performance systems, low remuneration undermining morale, and a culture of risk aversion rooted in centralized decision-making . The SALP program's recognition that "winning hearts and minds" is essential reflects understanding that sustainable reform requires cultural transformation, not merely structural change.

Several cross-cutting conclusions emerge from this analysis.

First, foundational choices shape trajectories**.** Singapore's early commitment to meritocracy, anti-corruption, and competitive pay created path dependencies that have persisted for decades. Ghana's post-independence instability and politicization entrenched clientelism that subsequent reforms have struggled to shift.

Second, meritocracy must be institutionalized and defended**.** Recruitment, promotion, and career development systems must be designed to select and advance talent. Patronage pressures must be resisted through transparent processes and accountability.

Third, competitive remuneration enables integrity and talent attraction**.** While fiscal constraints are real, adequate compensation reduces corruption incentives and enables public service to compete for top graduates.

Fourth, anti-corruption institutions need both design and will. Independence, resources, and powers are necessary; consistent prosecution regardless of rank is essential for deterrence.

Fifth, cultural transformation requires sustained effort. Values and norms cannot be changed by decree; they must be cultivated through training, leadership modeling, and consistent reinforcement over generations.

Sixth, political will must be sustained across cycles**.** Reform cannot succeed if commitment waxes and wanes with electoral politics. Long-term perspective is essential.

Seventh, capacity-building must align with reform objectives**.** Training and development should reinforce desired values and behaviors, not merely transmit technical knowledge.

For Singapore, the path forward involves maintaining foundational principles while adapting to new governance challenges. Digital transformation, citizen engagement, and whole-of-government approaches to complex problems require continuous learning and innovation . Ensuring that meritocracy and integrity remain embedded in a changing political landscape is an ongoing task.

For Ghana, the priority is sustaining reform momentum across political cycles, addressing patronage pressures directly, and investing in the generational work of cultural transformation. The SALP program's "hearts and minds" focus provides a foundation; building on it requires consistent leadership commitment, transparent enforcement of meritocratic principles, and adequate investment in training and capacity-building.

For the broader community of scholars and practitioners, this comparison underscores that public sector reform is not merely a technical exercise of redesigning structures and systems. It is a political and cultural endeavor that requires sustained commitment, foundational choices, and generational persistence. Singapore demonstrates what is possible when these conditions align. Ghana's experience reminds that reform is a journey, not a destination—and that even when progress is slow, the work of building effective public services must continue.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the comparative analysis relies primarily on secondary sources and published research rather than primary data collection. Direct fieldwork in both countries, including interviews with civil servants and policymakers, would strengthen comparative insights.

Second, data availability differs between the two countries. Singapore benefits from extensive documentation of its public sector institutions and practices. Ghana's reform documentation is more fragmented, though SALP and ACBF research provide valuable insights.

Third, the study focuses on formal institutions and reform programs with limited attention to informal dynamics—the actual practices, relationships, and norms that shape administrative behavior on the ground.

Fourth, the voice of civil servants themselves—their experiences of reform, their motivations, their frustrations—is mediated through research rather than captured directly.

Fifth, the study covers a period of significant change; findings may require updating as new reforms unfold.

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10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conceived the study, designed the comparative framework, conducted the literature review and document analysis, synthesized findings across countries, and drafted the complete manuscript. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy of information presented and interpretations offered.

11. COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest.

12. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

As sole author, I performed all roles including conceptualization, methodology development, investigation, formal analysis, writing, review, editing, and project administration.

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14. DATA AVAILABILITY

All sources analyzed in this study are publicly available documents, including research reports, policy documents, program evaluations, and academic publications. Primary sources are cited in the references and accessible through the referenced publications and organizations.

15. DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution or organization with which the author may be affiliated. The analysis is provided for scholarly purposes and should not be construed as policy guidance or investment advice. Public sector reform and administrative culture are subject to change, and readers should consult current official sources for specific information about Ghana, Singapore, and governance policy.

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