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Civil Service Reform in Malaysia: Commitment and Consistency

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Civil Service Reform in Malaysia: Commitment and Consistency[☆]

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Abstract

During the last forty years, the willingness and capacity of the Malaysian public service to accept and implement administrative changes and reforms should be appreciated. This was especially true in the eighties when there was political backing to administrative reforms and what appeared to be a permanent agenda on such reforms by top administrative leadership. In order to anticipate challenges brought by globalization and economic liberalization, the civil service has to be more efficient in the frontline, whereas frontier agencies must instill a global mindset, meaning they must observe the world from a broad perspective. One way to acquire this expertise is by providing better education and training programs to all Malaysian regardless of race and religion.

Keywords: Administrative leadership, economic liberalization, efficient civil service

1. Introduction

Like most civil servants elsewhere in the world, Malaysia's civil servants make decisions which affect the general public. The civil service¹ in Malaysia is entrusted with the responsibility of providing various services to the general public and to guide the nation towards development and industrialization. Therefore, the public's expectation of the civil servants in relation to their performance is quite high or above average. Falling short would indicate incompetence or lack of productivity. Worse, it might stir feelings of betrayal since civil ser-

vants should be seen to perform their best to serve the public.

In Malaysia, ethical guidelines play prominent part in the life of civil servants. Civil service ethics shape the behavior and discipline of Malaysia's civil servant and reinforce good values as well as enhance efficiency at work. To date, three major established sets of values have been identified as those which represent civil service values in Malaysia. The formula advocated is based on "Bersih, Cekap, dan Amanah"². There should be optimal dosage of "Bersih", best translated in the form of clean management practices, optimal dosage of

[☆]Based on the field research conducted under the financial support from API-The Nippon Foundation (TNF), Tokyo, Japan, 2007-2008.

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¹Article 132 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia defines the various public services to include the armed forces, the judicial and legal service, the general public service of the federation, the police force, the joint public service, the public service of each state, and the education service.

²Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy. See: "Dasar-dasar Baru Kerajaan", Department of Information Malaysia, Second Edition, Kuala Lumpur : Rina Publication Sdn. Bhd. For Government Printers, 1987. It was modified to become: "Amanah (honesty), Bijaksana (Wisdom), Cekap (efficient), Dedikasi (dedicated), and Efektif (Effective)" or in abbreviation of the principle of "ABCDE" by Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and presently a Prime Minister. See: New Strait Times, 26 January 2008.

“Cekap” to ensure the highest level of productivity, quality and efficiency, and a very strong commitment for incorporating “Amanah” to ensure the public sector deliver its services free from corruption practices. This “Amanah” concept demands civil servants to love their nation. The civil servant is therefore expected to incorporate these values into the job. This becomes important when dealing with a more liberalized world of the present, since a clean and efficient civil service is needed for establishing good governance and facing global competition.

2. Reforms in Civil Service

Early efforts at administrative reform in Malaysia began in the 1960’s. The government saw the need to improve the administrative machinery in order to carry out various socio-economic development programs as well as promote increased responsibilities subsequent to the country’s independence in 1957 when it was marked by lawlessness and disorder. Consequently, there was the need to ensure public sector agencies had the capability and capacity to carry out responsibilities effectively. The emphasis at the time was on effective institutional development to support development planning as well as the implementation. Thus, in 1965 the government with assistance of the Ford Foundation obtained the service of two-man team consultants to undertake a review of public administration and to suggest reform and innovation. The recommendation of those two consultants which was known as the Montgomery Esman Report³ led to the establishment of the Development Administration Unit (DAU). The DAU was entrusted with the responsibility for planning and guiding the reform efforts in the public service. It was instrumental in laying the foundation for public

sector training policies and program while providing the focus for overall administrative and personnel developments.

The decade ended with a sour and tragic note with outbreak of the ethnic hostility on May 13, 1969. It became a watershed in the country’s history. The government decided, after a great deal of study and inter-ethnic consultancies, that to prevent the recurrence of another May 13⁴, the economic disparity between the Malays and non-Malays should be bridged. It’s therefore formulated and launched with the New Economic Policy (NEP), as a master policy for socio-economic development, in 1971, with the two-fold aims and that was to eradicate poverty irrespective of ethnic origin and restructured the Malaysian society in order to erase ethnic identification with their economic function. The establishment of the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) in 1972 AND The Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) in 1977 were the main stone of administrative reform in the 1970’s. While INTAN was set to replace the then Staff Training Center, MAMPU is put inside the Prime Minister’s Department.

In the decade of 1980’s, more program-oriented reform efforts were introduced. One and the most important of them was the launching of the Malaysian Incorporated in 1983⁵. It was mooted at a time when the coun-

³John Montgomery and Milton J. Esman (1966), “Development Administration in Malaysia: Report to the Government of Malaysia”, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printer.

⁴In November 25, 2007, Indians who make up less than 10 percent of the population of about 26 million in Malaysia and are disproportionately poor, led a protest march through Kuala Lumpur, the first large-scale ethnically motivated street demonstration in almost four decades since May 13, 1969. The police broke-up the demonstration with water canon and tear gas and arrested five representatives of a group called the Hindu Rights Action Force or HINDRAF, which led the protest. The five men are being held indefinitely and without trial under a Malaysians International Security Law (ISA).

⁵Malaysian Incorporated was inspired by the Japanese notion of “coordinated inter-dependence”, a key ingredient of the famed Japanese teamwork, collective pride and high achievement.

try was flush with the bold ideas of dynamic and invigorated new administration that was really to break from the morales of the old. The essence of Malaysia Incorporated was that the country would be run a single business corporation, with the private sector following its growth and expansion, and the public sector providing the all important support vital for the success of the corporation.

The Malaysian Incorporated was the realization of the Look East Policy which was introduced in 1982. The main objective of this policy was to promote the adoption of work culture, ethics and values from Japan and Korea. It is a known fact that Japan and Korea's work culture have contributed significantly to their economic success. Indeed, it was a time of looking east, rediscovering Eastern values and work ethics in order to push for quality improvement on all fronts of the public sectors to provide better services to the community. Another significant reform was the Privatization Policy which was also introduced in 1983. Privatizations are a policy of allowing private sectors to own and manage service formally run by the government. The policy is contrary to nationalism in which government takes over the running of businesses. This policy was in keeping with a shift in the role of the public sector from "rowing" to "steering" which became a new paradigm for the governmental bureaucracy in the early 1980's.

In conjunction with the launching of the Malaysian Business Council (MBC) in 1991 is generally seen as the starting point of a concerted and focused reform program for the 1990's. VISION 2020 is a statement of a goal for MALAYSIA to pursue in order to attain a developed nation status by 2020. It outlined challenges of changing political, economic and social scenario, both national and internationally to meet and to overcome basic challenges brought by the globalization era⁶.

The 1990's also began with the government

declaring October 31 as Civil Service Day or Hari Q (Quality Day). The objective is to reinforce values of quality culture in an organization. "Q Day" is celebrated by holding "Open Day" talks on quality and other activities relating to productivity and quality of work in organization. In conjunction with "Hari Q", the government launched national quality awards to give recognition to agencies for quality achievement. The awards are : (a) Prime Minister's Quality Award (Public Sector), (b) Chief Secretary to the Government (KSN) Quality Award, (c) Director General of Public Service (KPPA) Quality Award, (d) Director General of MAMPU Quality Award, (e) District Office Quality Award, (f) Local Authority Quality Award, and (g) Human Resources Management Award. In addition the government also introduced the Civil Service Innovation Award from 1991 followed by the Public and Private Sector Joint Research Innovation Award from 1993.

The introduction of the Client's Charter in 1993 also helped to set the stage for more predictive standards of service delivery to private sector. The Charters have also become a focal point for the critical evaluation of an agency's performance by the private sector. This was so, since the Client's Charter is written commitment made by all government agencies with regard to delivering of services to their customer. It is essentially a declaration made by the civil service that services provided would comply with the declared quality standards, which is conformance with the expectation of public. Quality service would therefore include

DR. Mahathir Mohamad then the Prime Minister of Malaysia, as follows: "By the year 2020, Malaysia can be united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust, and resilient "from" Malaysia-Melangkah ke Hadapan (Malaysia : Moving Forward)" a working paper delivered at the launching of Malaysia Business Council (MBC) ; February, 1991.

⁶VISION 2020 is best elucidated by Dato Seri

all counter services at government department as well.

Furthermore, the public service embarked on the implementation of MS ISO 9000 in 1996 as a direct challenge to the needs of the private sector. The objective of implementing MS ISO 9000 is to develop an efficient and effective quality management system in order to provide the best service to the public. The implementation of MS ISO 9000 is also in relation to other major reform namely the implementation of Electronic Government (EG) and E-Public Service. E-Government is since then becoming a permanent feature of the public service as well as how it delivers service to the people of Malaysia. While E-Public Service, or E-PS, is one of the five thrust in efforts to build a society infused with an IT-Culture (information technology culture). The other thrust areas are E-Economy, E-Learning, E-Community and E-Sovereignty. The E-PS implementation plan will adhere to its motto: "Online, anytime, anywhere".

Under quality management, since the introduction of MS ISO 9000 and E-PS, the public service also put in place for managing public complaints and grievances rapidly and more equitably. In 2001 throughout the public sector, the implementation of "Meet the Customer Day" program was seen as one of several actions to provide better service to costumers and the public. Through face-to-face communication between agencies and their customers, the program helped to strengthen costumer orientation of government agencies and in provided additional avenue for change and innovations.

Administrative improvements and reforms have been going on in the public service since the early 1960's, a few years after Malaysia gained "Merdeka (Independence)" in 1957. From the most mundane reform such as name tags and systems to quality and emails, there has been no let up. One most credit the indigenous post independent government for its seriousness in implementing administrative

changes led by political leaders such as Tun Abdul Razak and DR. Mahathir Mohamad. However, supports from top leadership of the bureaucracy are also a crucial factor. There seemed to be meeting of minds between the political leadership and the top civil servants to bring about to deliver goods and services efficiently to the people.

The public service reform in Malaysia is one-going process backed by the high level authority. The seriousness of the top leadership to reform the bureaucracy can be seen from their concerns about future public service in Malaysia as summarized in Table 1. The numbering of proposal was based on the five proposal developed at first in 2003 during the Eight National Civil Service Conference by then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Another two proposals are fitted to the first one. Therefore, the consistency of the reforms can be evaluated all together.

3. Issues and Challenges

Since the launching of the Malaysian Incorporated Policy in 1983, the civil service has introduced various initiatives to provide the foundation for its successful implementation and the realization of long-term national economic development goals. The focus of administrative reform effort has been on enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector output and services in meeting customer and stakeholders' requirements. Given that the public service employs more than one million employees, great emphasis is placed on human resource management policies and practices to maintain a healthy working climate within public sector organizations. In establishing the Integrity Institute of Malaysia (IIM) in 2004, the Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Ahmad Badawi stressed the importance of a nation with moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest ethical stan-

Table 1: Proposal for Future Public Service in Malaysia

No	YAB Dato's Sri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi "Five Principles to Increase Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Public Service Delivery"*)	YAB Dato's Sri Moh. Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak "Five Elements or characteristics of a High Performance Culture Which Should be Adopted by the Public Service"*)	Jawatan Perkhidmatan Awam (PSD)**)
1	The need to have zero tolerance for substandard performance	3. To have personal and professional accountability	3. Keep pace with the speed of technology
2	To continuously seek accuracy, timelines and volume at work	2. To be quality focused in delivery the service to the public 4. To have commitment to continuous improvement	1. Raise service standard
3			The need to appreciate orderliness and cleanliness
4	The need to be consumer focused	1. To be consumer focused	2. Adopt a more global outlook 4. Change the culture of the service to become more responsible; innovative
5	To adhere to the public service ethics	5. To have a team work spirit	

Note: *)Both speeches of Dato Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Dato Seri Najib Tun Razak were delivered in their position as a Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. **)Attitudes needed to Adapt to the Change for the Civil Service" based on the Research done by JPA (PSD).

Source :

1. Zulkarnain Hj. Awang and Muhamad Hamzah (Ed), "Managing the National Economy in Challenging Times: Enhancing Delivery System and Mechanism". Proceedings of the Eight National Civil Service Conference, January 2004.
2. Hj. Malek Shah Hj. Mohd. Yusoff and Muhamad Hamzah (Ed), "Strengthening Public Service Delivery: Forging Ahead Together" INTAN-PTD, 2005.
3. JPA (PSD) "The New Ethos of Leadership for the Malaysian Civil Service Competence for the Future", Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2003.

dards⁷. The NIP (National Integrity Plan) stipulates five targets for the First Five Year (2004-2008) which is known as Target 2008. The first three are directly related to "good governance" and "bureaucratic reform", which are: (a) effectively reducing corruption, malpractice and abuse of power, (b) increasing efficiency and the public delivery system and overcoming bureaucratic red tape; and (c) enhancing corporate governance and business ethics. All the

three targets touch the core of good governance reforms in both the public and private sector in Malaysia in the last forty years.

In order to implement the NIP, one of the factors that should be considered is the ethnicity of civil servants since Malaysian society is a very unique one. There are many countries that have multiracial, multi-religion and multi-lateral societies. However, it is difficult to find a country that has such a complex combination of races, religions and cultures to the same extent and degree as in Malaysia. According to the latest census figure in 2006, Malaysia has a

⁷"National Integrity Plan", Government of Malaysia. Integrity Institute of Malaysia. Putrajaya. 23 April 2004.

population of 26.67 million people. Indigenous Bumiputeras which are largely ethnic Malays make up 60 percent of the population but have 87 percent of government jobs. The biggest loser in the current system is Indians, who, according to government statistics make up 9 percent of the labor force but hold 16 percent of menial jobs and control just 1.2 percent of equity in registered company in the country⁸.

The civil service staffs can be increasingly multiracial to remove the present overwhelming dominance of Malays in public service as indicated in Table 2.

In order to overcome the issue, on January 16, 2008, the government has adopted "One Service, One Delivery, No Wrong Door" policy with pledge to provide first class public service. This policy provides public queries with non discriminatory opportunities should they reach the wrong authority. Instead, the authority concern is expected to forward it to the relevant department. The policy will also be "color blind" and "gender blind" with regard to attracting and retraining the best talents in the public service⁹. There is a big hope that with this policy it will improve ethnic diversity in the public service through recruitment and career development programs and ensure that the right exemplary leaders are recognized and placed correctly for effective changes to occur.

Another important issue deals with the professionals and the large number of employment at the lower levels of public service. Professionals like accountants, lawyers, doctors, and engineers should be granted all the favorable considerations given to *Pegawai Tabir dan Diplomatik* (PTD) and perhaps even more, since the professionals are rare breed. They should be given equal opportunity with regard to promotion in the PTD. The breakdown of officers ac-

cording to different services and ethnic groups is summarized in Table 3.

Similar to the problem facing ethnic groups in Malaysia's to bureaucracy, the professionals also faced ethnic problems. Promotions of the professionals were not based on performance but more on ethnic considerations. Such promotions constitute the surest way to reduce moral, initiatives and overall efficiency and commitment to serve the government and people. This is one of the major reasons why there were so many frustrated professionals and why those professionals left the government service. In the past, the private sector was exclusively dominated by non-Bumiputeras. It is a very different scenario now where many of the Bumiputeras occupy the most important and strategic positions within the corporations. Therefore, the private sectors show more balance in terms of ethnic composition when compared to the public sectors.

4. Concluding Remarks

During the last forty years, the willingness and capacity of the Malaysian public service to accept and implement administrative changes and reforms should be appreciated. This was especially true in the eighties when there was political backing to administrative reforms and what appeared to be a permanent agenda on such reforms by top administrative leadership. The Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Planning Unit or MAMPU became a central agency, placed under the Prime Minister's Department and directly under the Chief Secretary to the Government. From then on administrative modernization agenda became a permanent agenda of Malaysia's public service.

Reform efforts and administrative improvement of Malaysia's public service were intensified with the launching of the Malaysia Incorporated in 1983 and later the enunciation of VISION 2020 in 1991. The Malaysian Public Service is aware that to enable it to fully support the achievement of VISION 2020, a process of

⁸Other compositions are Chinese 28 percent and other 3 percent. See: International Herald Tribune, International Newspapers. 31 January 2008.

⁹New Strait Times, January 17, 2008 and January 19, 2008; respectively.

Table 2: Breakdown of Officers and Top Managers by Ethnic Groups, 2006

No.	Ethnic Group	Officers Person(%)	Top Managers Person(%)
1	Malays	692,736(77.0)	13,70(83.8)
2	Chinese	84,295(9.4)	151(9.2)
3	Indians	46,054(5.1)	83(5.1)
4	Other Bumiputera's	69,828(7.8)	25(1.5)
5	Others	63,37(0.7)	5(0.3)
	Total	889,250 (100.0)	1,634(100.0)

Source: Center for Public Studies, Malaysia, 2006.

Table 3: Breakdown of Officers by Service and Ethnic Groups on 30 September 1999

No	Service	Malays Person	%	Chinese Person	%	Indians Person	%	Others Person	%	Total Person	%
1	Perkhidmatan Tabir dan Diplomatik	3,366	85	277	7	238	6	79	2	3960	100
										(26.5)	
2	Accountants	369	73.5	71	14.1	13	2.6	49	9.8	502	100
										(3)	
3	Medical	3,579	51	1,473	21	1,614	23	352	5	7018	100
										(47)	
4	Engineers	1,945	68	629	22	57	2	230	8	2861	100
										(19)	
5	Legal	503	83	42	6.9	31	5.1	30	5	606	100
										(4.5)	
	Total	9,762	-	2,492	-	1,953	-	740	-	14,947	
										(100)	

Source: Public service Department, Government of Malaysia, 2000.

realignment must occur in terms of structure, processes, procedures, and the value system. With regard to the value system, the Malaysian civil service has produced a set of values to be subscribed by the civil servant know as "The Twelve Pillars"¹⁰. It provides the ideal foundation of values and ethical practices for the civil servants to apply and adapt to in the course of

his/her duty.

The advantages accruing from Malaysia Incorporated policy has in fact provided the framework for the public service to consolidate an effective partnership with the private sector. Cooperation is required in the present age of globalization. To anticipate challenges brought by globalization and economic liberalization, the civil service has to be more efficient in the frontline, whereas frontier agencies must instill a global mind set, meaning the must observe the world from a broad perspective, always anticipating unexpected trends and opportunity to achieve the national development objectives. One way to acquire this expertise is by providing better education and training programs to all Malaysians regardless of race and religion.

¹⁰The Twelve values or "pillars" are : (i) the value of time, (ii) the success of perseverance, (iii) the pleasure of working, (iv) the dignity of simplicity, (v) the worth of character, (vi) the power of kindness, (vii) the influence of example, (viii) the obligation of duty, (ix) the wisdom of economy, (x) the virtue of patience, (xi) the improvement of talent and (xii) the joy of originating. See : "Tonggak Dua Betas: Penerapan Nilai, Norma dan Etika Perkhidmatan" Kuala Lumpur, INTAN 1992.

They will then be better equipped for the new globalized world of greater competition.

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