Softly Speaking: National Transformation in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian Government has been taking a radically new approach to national transformation in the past three years. The Government Transformation Programme was initiated in 2009, followed by the New Economic Model and Economic Transformation Programme in 2010, and subsequently political and rural transformation. The “Transformation Budget 2012” announced the “National Transformation Policy”. Presently, transformation can be perceived as the inception stage, as the various programmes will be undergoing a long continuous implementation journey into 2020. In order to make a real significant change to the country, the transformation needs to be driven from a synthesis of economic, managerial, organizational, social and technological dimensions at the multiple levels of the individual, organization, industry, government, society and nation. The author offers another way of seeing and doing transformation using a “theory of everything” based on simplicity and sophistication. The extant national transformation model of “Doing and Being” or Yin Yang is a simplicity model. As Malaysian academicians, we have a significant role to provide thought leadership by combining the “Doing and Being” with a sophisticated model based on an understanding the complexity of human behaviour. The author combines the Pemandu’s model with a model of sophistication based on an enhanced framework of critical practice. The author defines critical practice as an iterative reflexive process, firstly by developing knowledge-for-understanding from a sophisticated model of reality. Secondly, the author provides a critique of underpinning assumptions and presumptions whereby the constraining conditions of the status quo and emancipation become knowable and explicit, that is, knowledge-for-evaluation. Thirdly, the author re-creates, re-defines, re-designs, re-imagines and re-visions the pragmatic, doable and implementable programmes from knowledge-for-action. This theory of everything provides a new vigorous theoretical model to review and redesign the practical methodology for implementation success of the national transformation programmes.

Keywords: Critical Theory and Practice, Malaysia, Model of Simplicity and Sophistication, National Transformation Programmes, Theory of Everything

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INTRODUCTION

Long ago, from the beginning of the 1990s, Malaysia had been adopting the concept of “Quantum Leap” in all its government projects. In the mid-1990s, an Information Communications Technology (ICT) mega-project known as Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), was created by the Government to convert and transform the whole country into its own version of California’s Silicon Valley. The rationale at the time that was Malaysia would have to make a transition from the industrial economy model to the post-industry model by drawing on multimedia technologies and the ICT industry. Without this transition, Malaysia would not be able to become a developed country by 2020, a target set in Vision 2020. The MSC was marketed as Malaysia’s “Gift to the World”, and from its beginning to now, the MSC has been developing the ICT industry to compete with those in developed and developing countries in both the East and West (MDC Annual Report 1998, MDeC Annual Report 2012).

A focus on the knowledge-based economy (k-economy) and the innovation economy were heavily underscored in Malaysia’s development plan of 2006-2010. The strategic intent was to capture and highlight the crucial aspects of knowledge, creativity and innovation in order to create new value in generating and sustaining economic growth. But in 2009, the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) was initiated to make the government machinery a more effective, advanced, safe and accountable entity. National key results areas include reducing crime, fighting corruption, improving student outcomes, raising living standards of low-income households, improving rural basic infrastructure and improving urban public transport. The GTP built on the MSC’s Electronic Government Flagship whereby ICT had been the enabler of process re-design in the government ministries and agencies in the previous decade. By 2010, with 10 years remaining to achieve the target of becoming a developed country as per the national Vision 2020, the Government designed a new quantum leap mega-project labeled as “Transforming Malaysia”. The new national vision is “1 Malaysia” and the concept is for the government to focus on the needs of the citizens and to act now rather than merely talk. Importantly, forming a united, multi-racial society is foremost on the minds of the policy makers.

In this paper, the Malaysian National Transformation Programmes, and the concepts underlying the initiatives are described. Next, I evaluate the theoretical basis of the national transformation initiative from an interpretive methodology, based on a subjective interpretation of events, actions, and processes. Then, a review of the literature on various influential theories provides the insights needed to enhance a model of critical theory and practice. From the analysis, a new theoretical framework is formed by combining the national transformation model of “Doing and Being” with an enhanced critical theory and practice model. This new ‘theory of everything” could form the foundation for an alternative practical methodology for national transformation.

NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION POLICY AND TRANSFORMATION MODEL

The Prime Minister’s vision is “Transforming Malaysia” and Figure 1 below captures the key components of the transformation initiative. By 2010, Malaysia had reformulated an entirely new model for economic, government, political, rural and social transformation. The Malaysian Budget 2012, also known as the “Transformation Budget”, emphasized efforts to transform the nation into a developed and high-income economy with inclusive and sustainable development, spearheaded by the private sector. The Budget 2012’s theme is “Transformation Towards a Developed and High-Income Nation” with a focus on the following four key strategies: reinvigorating private investment; intensifying human capital development; enhancing quality of life of Malaysians; and strengthening public service delivery. A new policy is embedded in
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