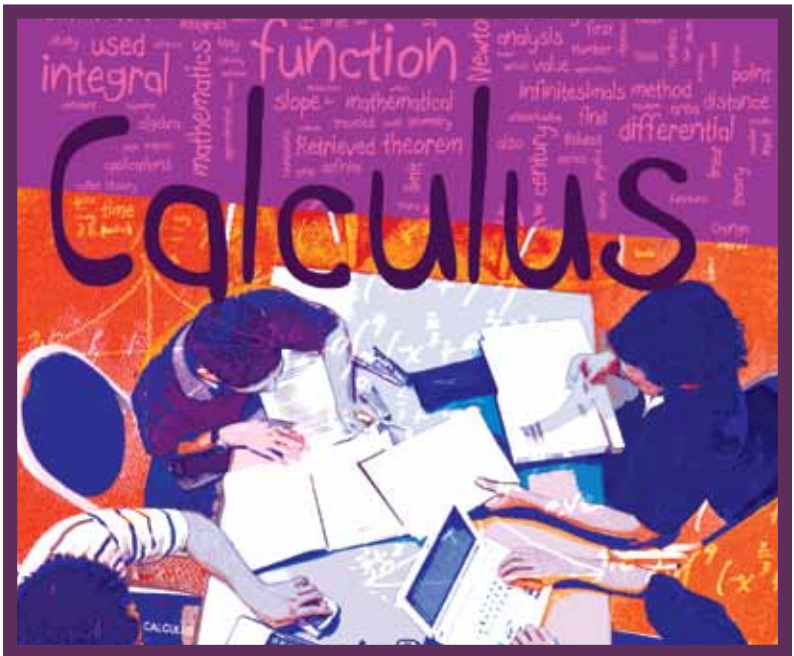


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NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION SUCCESS @ A THEORY OF EVERYTHING BASED ON SIMPLICITY AND SOPHISTICATION

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ABSTRACT

The 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. We offer another way of seeing and doing transformation using an enhanced critical theory and critical practice. We define critical practice as an iterative reflexive process, firstly by developing knowledge-for-understanding from a sophisticated model of reality. Secondly, we provide 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, we re-create, re-define, re-design, re-imagine, re-invent and re-vision the pragmatic, doable and implementable programmes from knowledge-for-action. Finally, we combine the extant government transformation model of “Doing and Being”, a simplicity model with critical practice, which is a model of sophistication. This new ‘theory of

everything' could be the underlying basis of the transformation methodology for the success of the various national transformation programmes to convert Malaysia into a high-income developed country by 2020.

Keywords: *National Transformation Programmes, Critical Theory and Practice, Yin and Yang, Theory of Everything for Implementation Success*

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 that time was that 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.

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 per the national Vision 2020, the Government designed

a new quantum leap mega-project labeled as “Transforming Malaysia”. The new national vision is “1Malaysia” 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 Government’s National Transformation Policy and Programmes, and the concepts underlying the initiative are described. Next, I evaluate the theoretical basis of the national transformation initiative from an interpretive methodology, based on my subjective interpretation of events, actions, and processes. Then, a review of the literature on various influential theories will attempt to provide an enhanced model of critical theory and practice. From the analysis, a new theoretical framework will be formulated from a combination of the national transformation model of “Doing and Being” with the enhanced critical theory and practice model. This new “theory of everything” could form the basis for an alternative practical methodology for transformation.

TRANSFORMATION MODEL AND NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION POLICY

The Prime Minister’s vision is “Transforming Malaysia” and Figure 1 captures the key components of the transformation initiative. By 2010, Malaysia has 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 has been “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 the theme, that is, “National Transformation Policy: Welfare For The People, Well Being For The Nation”.

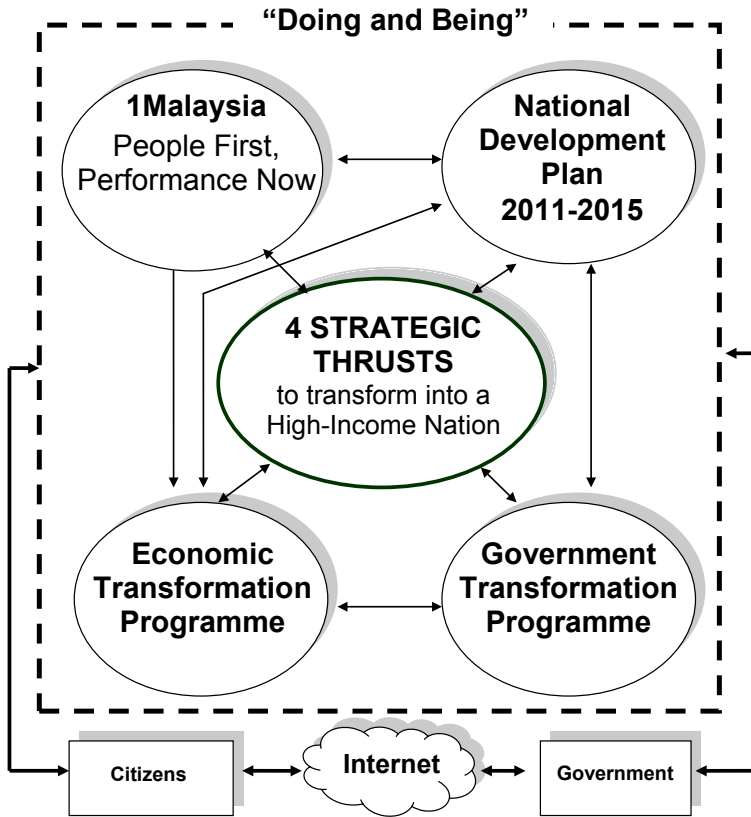


Figure 1: National Transformation Model

The New Economic Model (NEM) aims to transform the economy into one with high income and quality growth over the remaining years to 2020. The NEM has three guiding principles and objectives on per capita income, economic sustainability and the inclusiveness of all citizens regardless of race. The final part of the NEM document was launched and described as a “Quantum Leap for Malaysia” on 3rd December 2010. A series of justifications and principles of the new national programme were expounded and put on the Internet. The National Economic Council analyzed the comparative GNI per capita with neighbouring countries, identified diverged growth trajectory and GDP growth since the post-Asian crisis, measured quality of human capital, research and development capabilities

as compared to the rest of the world, income distribution disparity, state participation in the economy, and the conventional approaches to strategic planning and policy formulation and implementation. The report described various strategic reform initiatives, and identified national key economic areas to focus on. The new emphasis is on private sector-led growth, technologically-capable industries, cluster and corridor-based economic activities, and localized autonomy in decision making.

The ETP and GTP, together with the incumbent 5-year national development plan on macroeconomic growth targets and expenditure allocation were integrated into Malaysia's national transformation initiative. They are readily available and downloadable from the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu)'s website, including almost daily news of the impressive progress on the internet, TV and newspapers. Indeed, a Google search on "national transformation", "state transformation", "economic transformation" and "government transformation" finds that Malaysia is the country having the most number of sites and reports on transformation, and gets the most related hits. Transformation is widely seemed by the Government and the Barisan Nasional (BN, the National Front being the ruling political coalition) as the prerequisite to becoming a developed country by 2020. The imagination is best captured in the transformer picture, accessible from the government transformation website.

Policy speaks that the transformation model is an "entirely new, new way" of doing things in Malaysia. Conceptually, "doing" (or action) refers to innovative ways of prioritizing projects, innovative ways of problem solving, instituting discipline and delivering results. "Being" (or character) refers to an innovative mindset, innovative culture and innovative capabilities. This new model deletes the traditional methods used in private and public sector management tools and methodologies such as incremental changes, six sigma, kaizen, ICT system implementation, training and development, mindset change, process improvement, policy change, just-in-time, capability building, research and development, corporate planning and strategy. In order words, conventional techniques and tools, largely from Western management practices are now no longer relevant to bring about transformation in Malaysia. Their relevance is even being questioned in the West; Wright et al. (2012) titled their new research paper: "How Useful are the Strategic Tools We Teach in Business Schools?" Indeed, the transformation model of doing and being has been depicted as a double-fish symbol or the "Yang-Yin" approach to success. Dato' Sri Idris Jala, Minister

without Portfolio in the Prime Minister's Department and chief executive officer of the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu), said: *"When you don't have that measure of true north, you cannot prioritize because everybody uses the word 'strategic'. That's the worst word you can ever use". His philosophy has been "by heading towards true north.... a compass to measure where true north is, and very simply. Three measures: GNI, investments and jobs". According to him, "We need the yin and yang.... focus and competitiveness.... doing and being.... projects and Strategic Reform Initiatives..."* (The Edge, 8 April 2012, S6-7).

In an October 2011 McKinsey Quarterly article, Dato' Sri Idris Jala, explained the approach to implementing the ETP and GTP in the article McKinsey Quarterly (Daly & Singham, 2011). They asked the question *"You were in the private sector for many years. To what extent do private-sector tools work in the public sector?"* Idris Jala's response was:

"One of the reasons I took this job was to see whether the techniques and tools that were used in transforming a company can be used in a country. I think all of it works. I'm absolutely sure now. The methodologies are the same. It's just a different slant for how you tackle it—the public versus customers. You've got to deal with customers in a corporation. Here you deal with the general public, but you treat them as customers. Because this program is about fundamentally changing the way we do things, so that there's a full, whole system change in the economy and also the government".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL PRACTICE

The transformation programmes had rapidly kicked off in the last three years. "Transforming Malaysia" aims to build a new world of difference. But how different or familiar are the consequences to the extant situation and constitution of the Malaysian society? Perhaps it is too early to predict "transformation success". Softly speaking, at this point in time, we are at the stage of "INCEPTION", characterized by acts of birth, evolution, inspiration and illumination. A variety of viewpoints had been formed, reflecting the diversity of opinions of the different stakeholders in the country. The general perception, as appeared in the newspapers and websites, is that there are two

principal groups with diverging views, namely the ruling political coalition versus the opposition coalition. To the ruling coalition, the transformation initiative is an awesome project for bringing about a huge significant change to the country. To the opposition coalition, the transformation initiative is difficult to achieve, entails political posturing and presents a mirage of great change (Shazwan, 2012).

Conceptually, the national transformation programmes were designed from the successful practice of organizational transformation around the world. Organizational transformation models were developed since the early 1990s, beginning with Michael Hammer's business process re-engineering. A range of theoretical frameworks on organizational transformation abound in the literature (Bock *et al.*, 2012; Burford *et al.*, 2011; Demers, 2007; Dixon *et al.*, 2010; Edwards, 2010; Hutton & Liefooghe, 2011; Jepperson & Meyer, 2011; Meaney & Pung, 2008; Pettigrew, 2012; Sugarman, 2007; Wooldridge, 2011) over the last two decades. The only core theoretical basis has been the "Doing and Being" model; the transformation model has been depicted as a double-fish symbol or "Yin and Yang" approach to implementation success. The "Yin" or "Doing" refers to Entry Point Projects and the "Yang" or "Being" refers to the Strategic Reform Initiatives (Pemandu's definition). Theoretically, both are essentially the duality of actions and institutions.

Malaysia surely could and would be the first country to develop a national transformation success model, as we monitor measure and review the implementation of our National Transformation Policy over the next several years. One way to seeing the success of the transformation programmes is from the perspective of critical practice. Critical practice, aka critical praxis, refers to a methodology for understanding, evaluating and improving a programme beyond the usual concerns into its unintended side effects, causes and consequences. Critical Practice has been grounded in the concepts of critical theory vis-a-vis the conventional critical thinking approaches (Kwong & Han, 2011; Mulnix, 2010; Parker & Thomas, 2011; Pavlidis, 2010).

COMPONENTS OF AN ENHANCED CRITICAL MODEL

In the past half decade, an increasing number of researchers have used critical theory in the fields of private and public management studies.

Critical Theory is a broad approach to challenging and destabilizing established knowledge. In a more focused sense, Critical Theory comes out of the German “Frankfurt School” (where it was called Critical Theory of Society or Critical Social Theory), which emphasizes that all knowledge is historical and biased, and that “objective” knowledge is illusory. According to Horkheimer (1937), per Fuchs’ (2008) book titled *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*, critical theory would constitute a whole that is not orientated on the preservation of contemporary society but in its transformation into the right kind of society. Its goal is the transformation of society into a “society without injustice” that is shaped by “reasonableness, and striving for peace, freedom, and happiness”: man’s actions no longer flow from a mechanism but from his own decision, and that is “a state of affairs in which there will be no exploitation or oppression”. In the area of information systems (IS) and management research (McGrath, 2005) and public service (Wallace *et al.*, 2007), being critical is to develop in-depth knowledge-for-understanding at the local levels through interpretive, contextualist, hermeneutic and ethnographic approaches. Next, it involves a critique of taken-for granted assumptions underpinning organizational, managerial and technological practices. Finally, it defines transformation by developing knowledge-for-action and practical understanding that enable technology-related organizational change, diversity, and re-constructing new ways of living and working.

The business and public administration schools in the USA and UK have only just started to apply critical theory to their management research. Books and articles on the application of critical theory are recent, for example, Fuchs (2008); Kelemen and Rumens (2008); Stahl (2008); Antonacopoulou (2010); Arthur (2011); Corradi *et al.* (2010); Ferlie *et al.* (2010); Ford *et al.* (2010) Gherardi (2009); Miller and Dunn (2006); Miller and Tsang (2010), Mitev (2006); Parker and Thomas (2011); and Tatli (2011). The general idea was that with the rapid development of technologies and the evolution to the knowledge and innovation economies, major changes have been occurring at the level of the individual, organization and society. In order to accommodate these changes in a positive way, in-depth insights into the existing situations and a critical outlook on the underlying assumptions could enable us to define the desired transformation. Being critical is a pre-requisite for the transformation of a developing country into a developed country with high-income capital. Indeed, in both the developed and developing countries, critical practice would provide the relevant

policies and implementation methodologies to ensure transformation and “revolution” in the real sense, and not just a political tag.

Our model of Critical Theory and Practice is enhanced and enriched by drawing on the increasingly influential stream of work in the areas of actor network theory, structuration theory and complexity theory as the theoretical basis for management practice in economic and government transformation programmes compared to the conventional models. We had used them in previous research and consulting work in the local context of government policies and projects and that enabled us to develop a more sophisticated way of seeing and doing. Stage 1 and Stage 2 of critical theory and practice would employ a combination of structuration, actor network and complexity theories.

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is a general theory of the social sciences that aims to grasp the importance of the concept of action in the social sciences without failing to highlight the structural components of social institutions. All social action consists of practices, located in time-space, which are the skilful, knowledgeable accomplishments of human agents. Pozzebon & Pinsonneault (2005) made an assessment of the increasingly application of structuration theory on management research. Its recent application to strategy was collected in Golsorkhi *et al.* (2010).

Actor Network Theory (ANT) explicitly theorizes about actors and the ways in which they are connected with and through their technologies, that is, both human and non-human are inseparable Latour (2005). The majority of studies using the ANT framework have focused on innovation processes, according to references in Demers (2007). But, Brooks *et al.* (2008) noted that ANT cannot account for how these “humachine” networks persist over time and space other than at the behest of some “focal actor” who has to constantly exercise their will in driving them and translating more actions into the network until it becomes increasingly consolidated and undifferentiated. They combined ANT and structuration theory into a hybrid model know as structurANTion, in which structured networks come into being and persist through time and space without the necessity of some focal actor doing them; and constitutes itself autopoietically (self-organizing). Shah and Kesan (2007) also combined ANT and structuration theory into their model ITSI (IT and Societal Interactions). By using a combination of ANT and structuration theory to critique the case (Kwong, 2010), we were able to define the knowledge-for-action to bring about transformation.

Complexity theory is an approach to understanding and modeling the realm of systems that have many interacting parts, that is, systems too complex for deterministic mathematical solutions and too simple for averaging by statistics. The term ‘complexity’ as used in our critical theory and practice model refers mainly to the theories of complexity as applied to the Complex Adaptive Systems. These are dynamic systems - able to adapt and change within, or as part of, a changing environment, that is, open evolutionary systems in which the components are strongly interrelated, self-organizing and dynamic. To the best of our knowledge, we are not aware of any application of complexity theory in Malaysia. As long ago as 2005, we started using complexity theory and we are now incorporating it in our enhanced critical theory and practice model (IFORS National Contribution Malaysia, 2005; APORS National Contribution Malaysia, 2006; Wahab & Kwong, 2009).

THE ENHANCED CRITICAL PRACTICE MODEL

The evolution and development of the various theories described above enable us to design and formulate critical practice as consisting of 3 stages/steps/action steps/acts. Our model of Critical Practice is enhanced and enriched by drawing on the increasingly influential stream of work in the areas of actor network theory, structuration theory and complexity theory as the underlying theoretical basis for management practice in economic development compared to the conventional models. Our previous use of these in research and consulting within the local context of government policies and projects enabled us to develop a more sophisticated way of seeing and doing. Stage 1 and Stage 2 (subsequently, the stages and actions to be labeled as “acts”) of critical practice would employ a combination of actor network, complexity and structuration theories. The Critical Practice Model is an iterative process, whereby Act 1, Act 2 and Act 3 interplay and interact among one another. This is as depicted in Figure 2.

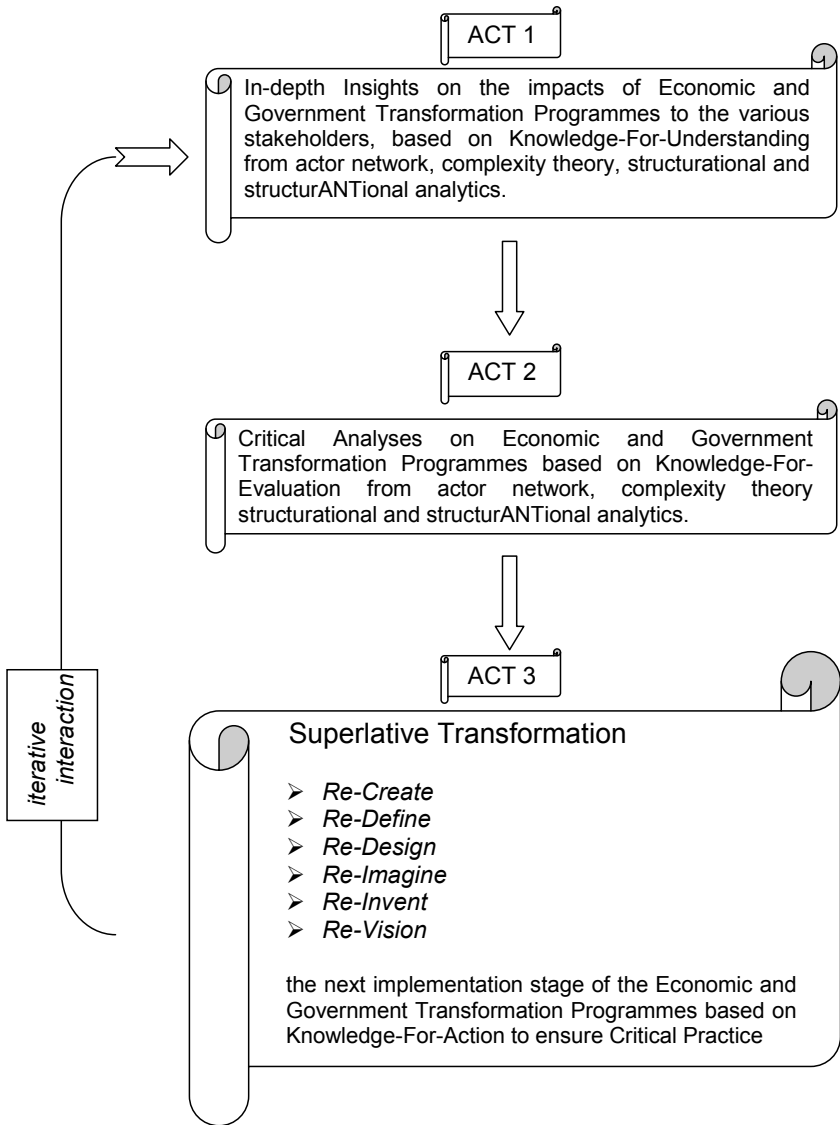


Figure 2: Critical Practice Model

CONCLUSION: A THEORY OF EVERYTHING

When Barack Obama successfully campaigned for the presidency of America in 2008 and 2012, his slogan was simple: “Change we can believe in”. But “Transforming Malaysia” is more complex; that is a pre-requisite to achieve the higher aim of being a developed country with high-income status. Hence, under the leadership of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib TA Razak, the country has embarked on a new, new approach consisting of the NEM with 8 strategic reform initiatives, the GTP, the ETP and the PTP, to realize Vision 2020 by its due date. “Transforming Malaysia” aims to create a new world via an “altered state” of the whole society from the levels of the individual, citizenry, organization, industry, government and the nation.

Hence, we have formulated an enhanced conceptual framework for critical practice to ensure that the transformation programmes will deliver the desired expected benefits and outcomes to the country. Action Step 1 or Act 1 ensures that in everyday practice, the “theories in use” are made explicit through a sophisticated model generated from a combination of theories on the human condition. Act 1 generates the knowledge-for-understanding. Action Step 2 or Act 2 permits us to review the progress, the underlying assumptions and presumptions that are underpinning the transformation programmes at the project level. Act 2 generates the knowledge-for-evaluation. Both Acts provide a greater measure of reflexivity in decision making by the various stakeholders. From this vantage point, we next generate the knowledge-for-action to re-create, re-define, re-design, re-imagine, re-invent, re-think, and re-vision pragmatic, doable and implementable plans and actions.

In everyday practice, a range of implicit and explicit theories influence our thinking on particular topics and impact our decisions. Since more than 70 years ago, Chester Barnard’s (1938) *The Functions of the Executive* and other prescriptive, conceptual, theoretical developments have had a direct and significant impact on practice because managers and practitioners subscribing to one of these theoretical positions organized resources to achieve corporate objectives according to the theories they espoused and used. But as Ghoshal (Birkinshaw & Piramal, 2005) stated, “bad theories” are destroying good practices. In order to develop “good theories”, that is, explicit theories or deep insights that can capture the complexity of real-world decisions, we must design a more sophisticated model for practice.

That sophisticated model or the critical practice model is combined with Pemandu's transformation concept of "Doing and Being". Indeed, "Doing" can be redefined as an innovative way of project prioritization, problem solving and delivering outcomes through the enactment of critical praxis. "Being" can be refined as an innovative mindset and competences derived from learning about being critical (from the perspective of critical theory vis-à-vis conventional critical thing and problem solving). But "Doing and Being" is based on Yin and Yang, which is also a 'theory of everything' as it has been used in all disciplines and fields in both the East and the West. Yin and Yang is a simple description of reality — from the perspective of simplicity. Thus, we now generate a new 'theory of everything' that could be the basis of a new transformation methodology.

At this stage, the above 'theory of everything', that is "Doing and Being" plus "Critical Practice" is conceptual model using the jargon of the social sciences. In order to be a pragmatic methodology, the terminology must be based on everyday working language that can be readily understood by all the stakeholders. In a world of complexity, highly effective decision makers, skillful strategists and creative innovators are those who develop a sophisticated knowledgeable of problem situations. This new breed of people and knowledge workers are not those with simplistic worldviews; they possess wisdom re-defined as knowledgeable of simplicity and sophistication {aka "Advanced Simplicity and Sophistication" or the pseudonym "ASS", and hence Wisdom = ASS or "Wisdom@ASS" per APORS National Contribution Malaysia (2006), Han (2010; 2012)}. They shall inherit the new worlds of knowledge, innovation and dream economies and they could and surely would bring about real superlative transformation of Malaysia.

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