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## Introduction

1. The subject before us, Providing High Quality Services, is very relevant as it is the central agenda of public administration reform programmes of many governments all over the world. I would like to share my understanding of high quality services and highlight some of Malaysia's endeavours to attain a high standard of excellence in the quality of public service delivery.

## What Do We Mean by Quality and High Quality Services?

2. There are many definitions of the word quality such as a degree of excellence, fitness for use, and conformance to requirements. The most precise definition, to my mind, is the one which is used under ISO 9000, which defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Applying this definition to the public service, we therefore, can say that quality service is one that possesses features that satisfy customer needs. The problem here is how do we measure customer satisfaction. What is good quality service to a particular customer may be poor to another. The problem is further compounded by the fact that customers of services provided by the government are diverse and they also include stake holders who may have a different set of expectations. To solve this problem, we have to resort to using some subjective terms such as high, low, good or poor quality. When the service satisfies the needs of customers we can say that it is of good quality. Likewise, when customers are dissatisfied, we assess the service as being of poor quality. When the service exceeds customer expectation, we can deem the service to have achieved high quality. These terms, while still subjective, enable us to gauge the customer's rating of a particular service. To be more precise, we in the public service should further refine these measurements by defining not only the stated needs but also perceived or implied needs of the customers. This can be done by identifying the ideal characteristics of a quality service from the perspective of the customer. Normally service quality characteristics have a human dimension, while product quality characteristics are more technical in nature. Some of the more common characteristics of a quality service are accessibility, accuracy, courtesy, comfort, competence, credibility, dependability, efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, honesty, promptness responsiveness, reliability and security.

## Highlights of Malaysia's Experience

3. Experience has indicated clearly that successful reforms are built on a foundation of a conscious and continuous efforts towards institutionalising a quality culture amongst public servants. Central to these efforts is the need for a set of shared values that are customer-focused, results and performance oriented, responsive and accountable. Customer satisfaction must be the focal point of all public service operations. This customer-driven identity is paramount and there should be a conscious move to understand the needs of customers and continuously upgrade service delivery standards towards not only meeting customers expectations but exceeding those expectations. Recognising the fact that attitudinal and value changes are crucial in any reform effort, we in Malaysia, have embarked on programmes to still positive work culture since the 1980s. One of the major efforts was the implementation of a Code of Ethics. At the same time various improvement programmes in the area of systems management were introduced. These programmes included the introduction of a detailed procedure manual and work instructions called the Manual of Work Procedures and Desk Files; the establishment of Quality Control Circles and the implementation of Productivity Measurement.

4. A major landmark in the history of the administrative reform efforts in Malaysia was the launching of the Excellent Work Culture Movement in the late 80s by the Prime Minister. The primary objective of the movement was to enhance public awareness on the importance of providing quality services, thereby institutionalising a quality culture where a mind-set on quality becomes a way of life. The movement provided the public service with a new paradigm, one which orientates the public servants towards

becoming customer-driven. Since then, the public service has pursued to improve the quality of service delivery. Allow me at this juncture to highlight some of the major strategies and programmes, which are: (a) the provision of customer-oriented services; (b) improvements in systems and procedures; (c) greater use of information technology; (d) continuous training; and (e) the enculturation of excellent values (a) The Provision of Customer-oriented Services The key component in our efforts towards developing a quality culture is the continuous emphasis on greater customer focus orientation in service delivery. In this regard, major programmes has been the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM as a management philosophy upholds the principle of participatory management which promotes employee participation while emphasising the importance of customer satisfaction and continuous improvement. Accordingly, values like cost, timeliness, meeting targets, innovativeness and responsiveness to customer needs become integral to the quality culture.

All public sector agencies are required to formulate their respective mission statement through the process of strategic quality planning. The primary objective is to galvanise public sector agencies to be market-driven and to institutionalise a distinct customer-orientation in the delivery of services.

In this context, the Client's Charter was introduced in 1993. The Client's Charter is a written commitment made by all government agencies pertaining to the delivery of outputs or services to their respective customers. It is an assurance by agencies that their outputs or services will comply to the declared quality standards that is in conformance with the expectations and requirements of the customer. The Client's Charter recognises the sovereignty of the customer and confers the concomitant rights to the consumer of public goods.

A critical factor contributing to the effectiveness of the Client's Charter is in its ability to provide Service Recovery Mechanisms in instances where pledges contained in the respective Charters cannot be fulfilled. Such service failures must be addressed and agencies must be ready at all times to restore the satisfaction of customers by activating a planned service recovery system. We believe the Client's Charter is the starting point in bringing about the empowerment of the citizenry vis-a-vis the Civil Service.

A number of other measures have also been implemented to provide customer oriented services through upgrading the quality of counter services provided by the public service. Guidelines for quality counter services have been introduced whereby government agencies are required to provide the necessary facilities for the comfort of its customers. In addition various types of one-stop service centres were established such as one-stop payment centres, one-stop licensing centres and one-stop investment centres. This one-stop centre concept has been extended with the introduction of the Public Services Network, a facility which enables government agencies to offer on-line services through post offices.

(b) Improvements in Systems and Procedures Systems and work procedures impact on organisational performance. Efforts to improve systems and procedures in the Malaysian public service has always being a continuous process. A key focus area is in the streamlining of rules and regulations.

Serious efforts were carried out since 1990 to streamline, simplify and eliminate procedures and regulations deemed cumbersome by the customer. As a result, a number of innovations were introduced.

Among them is the use of composite forms, composite licences and the establishment of one-stop centres for licences. These improvements are in line with the efforts of the Government in facilitating the private sector in their dealings with the public agencies - a key factor for the success of the Malaysia Incorporated Policy.

Another important initiative is the improvements in the design and the use of application forms for government services. The main objective is to ensure that the information requested in such forms is relevant for the decision making process. The exercise also calls for a clear set of written criteria for decision making. This has not only overcome the problem of ad-hoc decisions but also introduced greater transparency in decision making.

(c) Greater Use of Information Technology The new paradigm which emphasises accuracy, timeliness,

performance measurement and strategic planning, requires the use of computers to organise, channel and disseminate pertinent information to achieve these aims. We have undertaken a major office automation programme to replace existing manual systems. Computerised text processing, information storage and retrieval and communication systems have been introduced to increase efficiency and enhance productivity. Our objective is to move towards a paper-less civil service.

A major initiative in the area of information technology is the establishment of the Civil Service Link (CSL) in 1994. The CSL is the forerunner of a new culture in the Civil Service which stresses on a more systematic information collection and management system. The CSL is a central database which contains information on various aspects of the Civil Service which is of importance to the private sector in facilitating their planning towards meeting competitive challenges. The CSL provides another step towards information sharing between the public and private sectors in the spirit of Malaysia Incorporated and is a successful attempt at process re-engineering vis-a-vis access to government information.

This supportive environment for information sharing between the public and private sectors can also be seen through the implementation of the Electronic Data Interchange or EDI to facilitate trades. EDI is a direct computer to computer application with respect to the exchange of standard business documents. EDI replaces the need for paper documents and is thus suitable for the sending and receipt of purchase orders, invoices, bills of lading and other trade documents. Direct benefits of EDI include speed of transaction, reduced error and a reduction in costs associated with paperwork.

(d) Continuous Training A key success of reform efforts in our public service is the emphasis on continuous training. Training is used not only to upgrade knowledge and skills but also to develop the right attitude and mind-set among the public servants towards the assimilation and internalisation of positive values and work ethics. Training cover the whole spectrum of management and administration with special focus on the implementation of on-going improvement programmes. There are also training programmes aimed specific areas like building expertise and specialisation; developing language skills, enhancing the application of information technology and exposing senior public servants to the operations of the businesses of the private sector.

(e) Enculturation of Excellent Values The process of developing and institutionalising development of a quality culture requires a process of transforming the organisational culture towards the enculturation of a set of core values. In Malaysia, an important priority area is in building a working environment that fosters and upholds core values such as quality, productivity, innovativeness, integrity, accountability, discipline, and professionalism together with other universal values of neutrality, intellectual honesty, trustworthiness, a sense of responsibility, dedication, moderation, diligence, cleanliness, cooperation, kindness and a sense of gratitude. Our emphasis on the internalization of these values is premised on our believe that excellence in the management of quality and productivity will only be meaningful when accompanied by the practice of positive values and the right work ethics. In this respect, other than training, documents and guidebooks have been published to help inculcate these values in the public service. At the same time reinforcement is provided through clear rules and regulations which spell out the do's and don't's pertaining to the official Code of Conduct.

An important value which I would like to stress here is accountability. Public servant must at all time be accountable for their actions, act in a competent and effective manner to achieve set purposes and produce desired results, and use public funds entrusted to them for authorised public purposes and not for their own or private gain. They are required to manage the public organisation with full transparency for the scrutiny of our diverse clients and stakeholders. The most critical aspect would obviously be financial transparency.

In our public service, we have introduced numerous programmes to improve financial management and to ensure greater financial accountability. These include the Modified Budgeting System and Micro Accounting System. Early this year we launched a computerised Standard Accounting System for Government Agencies or what we called SAGA. The package aims at facilitating agencies in the preparation of their annual financial reports. It enables the agencies not only to produce the financial statement on time but also the closing of daily accounts.

In our efforts towards greater accountability, we have also adopted the principle of Managing for Results. Every government agency has been directed to formulate and use performance indicators to show the results of their programmes and activities. At the individual level, we have introduced a new comprehensive Performance Appraisal System. The system incorporates new aspects of evaluation and introduces an important element, that is the setting of the Annual Work Target, which is used to assess the performance of civil servants by comparing their work target with actual achievement in the year assessed.

The public service is not devoid of complaints.

However, what is important is that there are avenues for the resolution of public complaints. The availability of these avenues is vital as they offer an outlet for disgruntled individuals to voice their complaints, act as a proper channel for the submission of complaints, enable corrective actions to be taken systematically and future plans to be mapped out. They are also a testimony of a caring Government that is committed to provide quality services to the society at large. Towards these we have developed a systematic redressal system and established a special agency called the Public Complaints Bureau to be responsible for the management of public complaints.

### Reform Strategies

5. An important lesson learned from our experience in affecting change in the public service was the ability not only to continuously look for new ways of doing things but to make them really happen at all levels. In this regard we learned that a number of factors contributed to the success of a new reform initiative. Some of the critical ones are: (a) the commitment of leadership; (b) consensus building; (c) establishment of formal mechanisms, (d) information dissemination (e) follow-up and follow through; and (f) a reward and recognition system.

(a) The Commitment of Leadership We are fortunate that our quest for excellent and customer-oriented public service has the full support of the political leadership including that of the Prime Minister himself. At level of senior officials, the prime mover of administrative reforms is the Panel on Administrative Improvements to the Civil Service which I chair. The Panel represents the think tank that initiates new ideas in improving the public service and for translating these ideas into programmes to be implemented.

Apart from the role of the Panel, the top management of the public service has also contributed by providing visionary leadership. It is this effective leadership that has made things happen. A key feature of this leadership has been to practice hands-on management so that the necessary change effort is implemented effectively and efficiently.

(b) Consensus Building Consensus building and continuous consultation, from our experience, is another important pre-requisite for a successful reform efforts. Before any new administrative improvement programmes is introduced, a rigorous process of deliberations was undertaken.

These programmes are discussed by various high level committees comprising heads of the various levels of Government. The adherence to the principle of consensus has garnered the necessary support and commitment from the heads of departments at the time of programme implementation, which is essential for effective achievement of programme objectives and goals.

(c) Establishment of Formal Structures At the agency level, there are formal structures to plan, coordinate and undertake administrative improvement programmes. The departments have set up a three-tiered management structure consisting of the Quality Steering Committee, Quality Task Forces and Quality Work Teams to ensure that improvement programmes are continuously implemented. In certain organisations, additional structures have been established to suit their operational requirements.

Committees were also set up to look into specific programmes.

(d) Information Dissemination We have discovered a way of handling resistance and obstacles to change, that is, through communicating the change programme to all levels. Our premise is that information flows both vertically and horizontally will reduce uncertainty during the change period to an acceptable level and elicit the necessary commitment to change. The principal mechanisms for communicating the change programme involves the issuance of a series of Development Administration Circulars, other administrative circulars and by instituting training courses based on these circulars.

Development Administrative Circulars are used to convey government directives, guidelines and suggestions on new administrative improvement programmes to all public sector agencies. These circulars are accompanied by guidelines which give clear and comprehensive explanations on the concept, objective, modus operandi for implementation as well processes or activities which could be used as examples. To date twenty one Development Administrative Circulars have been introduced.

Ministries and departments are also encouraged to produce information booklets, guidebooks, magazines, bulletins, pamphlets and such publications to better inform their clients on the various services provided by them, the ways and means of obtaining such services, and the progress made in improving or innovating these services.

(e) Follow-up and Follow-through One of the critical stages in the implementation of any reform effort is to ensure that the programme is well understood and executed effectively. This calls for continuous follow-up and follow-through. In our public service, a special inspectorate team has been established to oversee the implementation of all improvement programmes as well as to act as consultants to the implementing agencies. At the same time the implementation is reinforced through training, and an interview and examination system.

Based on the fact that learning is central to success in the implementation of change, training in the various change programmes especially the Development Administration Circulars is carried out at all levels and to all categories of public servants. To speed up the training process, the "cascading principle" is employed where trainers are trained, and they in turn will train their organisation members. We have also introduced "training franchise" concept where comprehensive and standard training packages prepared by our National Institute of Public Administration or INTAN, are provided to Government agencies to be used in their in-house training programmes.

Interviews for new entrants to the civil service and for the awards of scholarship are also used to reinforce reform efforts. During these interviews, among other things, candidates are asked on the contents of the Development Administration Circulars and other relevant guidelines on administrative reforms. Another reinforcing approach is through various government examinations. A part of the syllabus for these examinations contains questions on the administrative reforms as embodied in the circulars.

(f) Reward and Recognition System The success of the improvement programmes in our public service is also attributed to the system of recognition and rewards. Under the system, appropriate recognition and appreciation is given to agencies, teams and individual public servant who have shown excellence in their performance. The introduction of the various types of awards under the system has become the driving force that has contributed to a more efficient and effective administrative machinery. The creation of healthy competition among Government agencies can be seen in the competitive spirit in which they strive to achieve higher standards and recognition. Agencies have also benefitted from the evaluation process for the various awards introduced.

To date we have introduced ten different awards, including the Prime Minister Quality Award, the Chief Secretary to the Government Quality Award, the Public Service Special Award, the Public Service Innovation Award, the District Office Quality Award, the Local Authority Quality Award, the Client's Charter Award and the Civil Service Excellent Award.

#### Future Agenda

6. The public service, to my mind, will remain an important and valued institution to serve the citizenry.

The demands of the economic growth in the midst of global challenges will lead to a continuous refocussing of the role of the public service. The main thrust, I believe, is still centred around the need for a strong customer orientated public service that is imbued with the ethos of quality, global outlook and with a strong underpinning in ethics and values.

We, in the Malaysian Public Service have identified several major programmes which we will be focussing on in our reform agenda in the next few years. In the context of providing high quality services to customers, the emphasis will be in two major areas, namely: (a) enhancing the quality management system; and (b) provision of more sophisticated delivery systems.

(a) Enhancing the Quality Management System The public service will continue to introduce new initiatives to improve the quality management system in the public sector. While the existing system has successfully improved the quality of services delivered, the rising expectations of the public for more efficient, fast and timely services have spurred the public service to introduce new measures to further improve the provision of services that will fully meet, or even exceed, customer needs.

A new and bold initiative to be adopted is the implementation of the ISO 9000 series of standards in the whole of the public service. The ISO 9000 series represents standards for quality assurance and management which are internationally recognised and provides comprehensive guidelines for developing and implementing quality management systems in organisations. The ISO 9000 series of standards contain 20 elements that are crucial for establishing a good quality assurance and management system. These elements encompass the important aspects of quality management that will provide the basis for a systematic method of working that is more structured, uniform and consistent in producing quality services. The implementation of ISO 9000 will thus enable Government agencies to develop a well planned and comprehensive quality assurance and management system.

We are confident that with the modernisation and improvement efforts that have been implemented by Government agencies over the past few years such as the Manual of Office Procedures, Desk Files, Client's Charter, Service Recovery Systems, Checklists and Quality Control Circles, have built up a strong foundation for the adoption of ISO 9000.

Detailed guidelines have already been prepared and this will be followed by training programmes to create awareness and enhancement in the understanding of ISO 9000. By the year 2000 we expect all Government agencies to have adopted ISO 9000.

(b) Provision of More Sophisticated Delivery Systems Rapid developments in information technology and telecommunication systems have impelled the public to continuously look for more sophisticated methods of service delivery whilst improving the operational efficiency of public sector agencies. One of the initiatives that is actively being undertaken is the establishment a comprehensive telecommunications infrastructure known as the Government Integrated Telecommunications Network (GITN). GITN will provide, amongst others, services such as video conferencing, electronic mail, bulletin boards, distance learning, 'tele-medicine' for the transmission and exchange of medical and patients' records among government hospitals, work-flow automation and workgroup applications. Such applications are expected to spearhead the Government's efforts at reducing the use of paper and promote the establishment of a paper-less civil service. When fully operational, the network is expected to expedite and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of inter-departmental communication. It will also provide communication channels between Government departments and the private sector.

Steps are also being undertaken to ensure that public domain Government information is kept in databases for public access. These databases will be electronically linked using the latest in telecommunication technologies to ensure the integrity and currency of information. Through such an approach, Government records maintained in such databases can be updated on-line without the need for reference with the original source of information. In addition, to ensure the wide dissemination of public domain Government information, the establishment of public access databases, centralised computerised information centres and information kiosks at public places are also being considered.

## Conclusion

7. The Malaysian Public Service has come a long way in its quest for achieving a high quality delivery system. But the attainment of high quality is a moving target. The rising expectations of citizens, rapid changes in technology, and the ever changing global environment all contribute to a situation where the public service cannot afford to rest on its laurels. It must relentlessly pursue the goal of higher quality services at all times.