

An Academician's Thought Leadership on National Transformation Success

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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 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. We combine the Pemandu's model with a model of sophistication based on an enhanced framework of critical practice. We define critical practice is 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. 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: National Transformation Programmes, Theory of Everything, Model of Simplicity and Sophistication, Critical Theory and Practice

ABSTRAK

Kerajaan telah mengambil pendekatan baru yang radikal untuk transformasi negara dalam tempoh tiga tahun yang lalu. Program Transformasi Kerajaan telah dimulakan pada tahun 2009, diikuti oleh Model Ekonomi Baru dan Program Transformasi Ekonomi pada 2010, dan kemudiannya transformasi politik dan luar bandar. Transformasi bajet 2012 mengumumkan Dasar Transformasi Nasional. Pada masa ini, transformasi boleh dianggap sebagai permulaan, program-program yang akan dilaksanakan berterusan sehingga ke tahun 2020. Dalam usaha untuk membuat perubahan sebenar yang besar kepada negara, transformasi perlulah dipandu dari sintesis ekonomi, pengurusan, organisasi, dimensi sosial dan teknologi pada semua peringkat individu, organisasi, industri, kerajaan, masyarakat dan negara. Kami menawarkan satu lagi cara untuk melihat dan melakukan transformasi menggunakan "Theory of Everything" berdasarkan konsep kesederhanaan dan konsep kecanggihan. Model transformasi negara yang sedia ada iaitu "Doing and Being", atau "Yin Yang" adalah model kesederhanaan. Kita sebagai seorang ahli akademik Malaysia yang mempunyai peranan penting untuk menyediakan kepimpinan pemikiran dengan menggabungkan "Doing and Being" dengan model yang canggih berdasarkan pemahaman kerumitan tingkah laku manusia. Kami menggabungkan model Pemandu dengan model kecanggihan berdasarkan rangka kerja amalan kritikal yang dipertingkatkan. Kami mentakrifkan amalan kritikal sebagai proses lelaran refleksif, pertamanya dengan membangunkan pengetahuan untuk pemahaman daripada model canggih realiti. Kedua, kami

memberikan kritikan yang menyokong andaian dan anggapan di mana syarat-syarat yang mengekang status quo dan kebebasan menjadi boleh diketahui dan jelas, iaitu, "Knowledge-for-evaluation". Ketiga, kami "re-create, re-design, re-imagine, re-invent" dan "re-vision" program pragmatik, doable dan dilaksanakan dari pengetahuan untuk tindakan. Ini teori baru, "Theory for Everything" yang boleh menjadi asas utama kaedah transformasi untuk kejayaan kepada pelbagai program transformasi negara untuk mengubah Malaysia menjadi negara maju berpendapatan tinggi menjelang tahun 2020

Kata kunci: Program Transformasi Nasional, "Theory of Everything", Model "Simplicity", Model "Sophistication", Teori and Amalam Kritikal

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 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 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 my subjective interpretation of events, actions, and processes. Then, a review of the literature on various influential theories would provide the insights 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 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".

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. Transformation is widely seemed by the Government 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 other words, conventional techniques and tools, largely from Western management practices are now no longer relevant to bring about transformation to Malaysia. Their relevance is even being questioned in the West; Wright, Paroutis and Blettner (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 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, pp 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"*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

National Transformation has been happening per the recent 2012 annual progress reports on the economic and government transformation programmes. "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.

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, Opsahl, George, & Gann, (2012); Burford, Kennedy, Ferguson, & Blackman (2011); Demers (2007); Dixon, Meyer & Day (2010); Edwards (2010); Hutton & Liefoghe (2011); Jepperson & Meyer (2011); Meaney & Pung (2008); Pettigrew (2012); Sugarman (2007); and Wooldridge (2011)), over the last two decades. According to Pemandu, our country is the FIRST to do NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION.

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. BUT scholarly articles on national transformation could not be traced in reputed academic journals such as Public Administration Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, and Public Administration and Development. Our literature review revealed that several developing countries are talking about national transformation such as Nigeria (Daily Trust 2012, Akunyili 2013), Jamaica (Jamaica Gleaner News 2010), and Trinidad and Tobago (National Transformation Movement 1995). References such as "Spearheading a National Transformation" (Adelaja 2008) was about a Christian pastor recounting his experience on witnessing the demolition of communism and the government of Mikhail Gorbachev. An organization such as the Institute for National Transformation, last dated 4 February 2011, contained a mission statement with the facility for notes but so far there had been no messages in the notes at all.

A research conducted by McKinsey was about US government agencies (Lovegrove, Ulosevich and Warner (2011). In October 2012, the first Global e-Government Forum was about the current status of e-government and several developing countries used the term "transformation" such as eTransformAfrica, Panama's Transformative Agenda, Transforming Viet Nam into an Advanced ICT Country, and my good self on Malaysia's GTP (GeGF Proceedings 2012). In other words, the literature has been about organizational transformation rather than national-level transformation.

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. The only core theoretical basis has been the "Doing and Being" model; the transformation model is the "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. Yin and Yang 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. 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); and Pavlidis (2010)). We firmly believe that by combining Pemandu's model with a more sophisticated model based on critical practice, we will have a "Theory of Everything" that provides a new vigorous theoretical framework to review and redesign the practical methodology for the national transformation programme.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL PRACTICE

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, Fertig & Schneller 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 & Rumens (2008); Stahl (2008); Antonacopoulou, E. P. (2010); Corradi, G, Gherardi, S., & Verzelloni, L., (2010); Ferlie, E., McGivern, G., & Moraes, A. D., (2010); Ford, J., Harding, N., & Learmonth, M. (2010) Gherardi, S., (2009); Miller & Dunn (2006); Miller & Tsang (2010), Mitev, N. N. (2006); Parker, M., & Thomas, R. (2011); and Tatli, A. (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 the 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, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara (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, Atkinson & Wainwright (2008) noted that ANT cannot account for how these “humanchine” 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 known 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 & 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).

In recent local news, Dr Nungsari Radhi, head of research at Khazanah Nasional Bhd referred to the work of Dani Rodrik that proposed using what theory offers to explain bits of reality rather than proffering a theory of everything. Dr Radhi suggested that a second-best solution is the practical approach to Malaysian's transformation agenda (The Edge, pp.44-45, 25 February 2013). In our view, economics has been a dismal disciple in the last several decades, having failed to provide the best (algorithm) solution. On the other hand, Dr Dzulkerry Ahmad, executive director of PAS Research Centre, referred to the Pakatan Rakyat's manifesto (The Edge, pp.70, 11 March 2013) calling for a "revolution". Is this somewhat similar to Karl Marx's ideology some 175 years ago? However, the critical practice model we are developing is based on the latest developments in Europe and very different from the Marxist's 175-year old model.

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 Model of Sophistication in Figure 2 below:

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.

First, we 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 revision pragmatic, doable and implementable plans and actions. Finally, we combine the extant Pemandu's transformation concept of "Doing and Being" with the enhanced critical practice model to create a Theory of Everything for National Transformation, as depicted in Figure 2 above.

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. Theoretically, as academicians, we design a

sophisticated model for practice. 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 a 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 knowledgeability of problem situations. This new breed of people and knowledge workers are not those with simplistic worldviews; they possess wisdom re-defined as knowledgeability 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), and Han (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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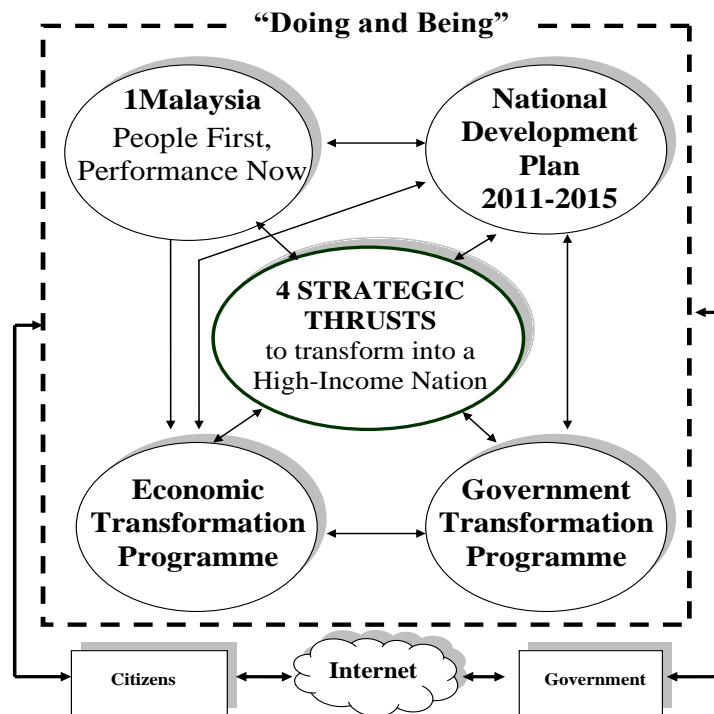


FIGURE 1: National Transformation Model

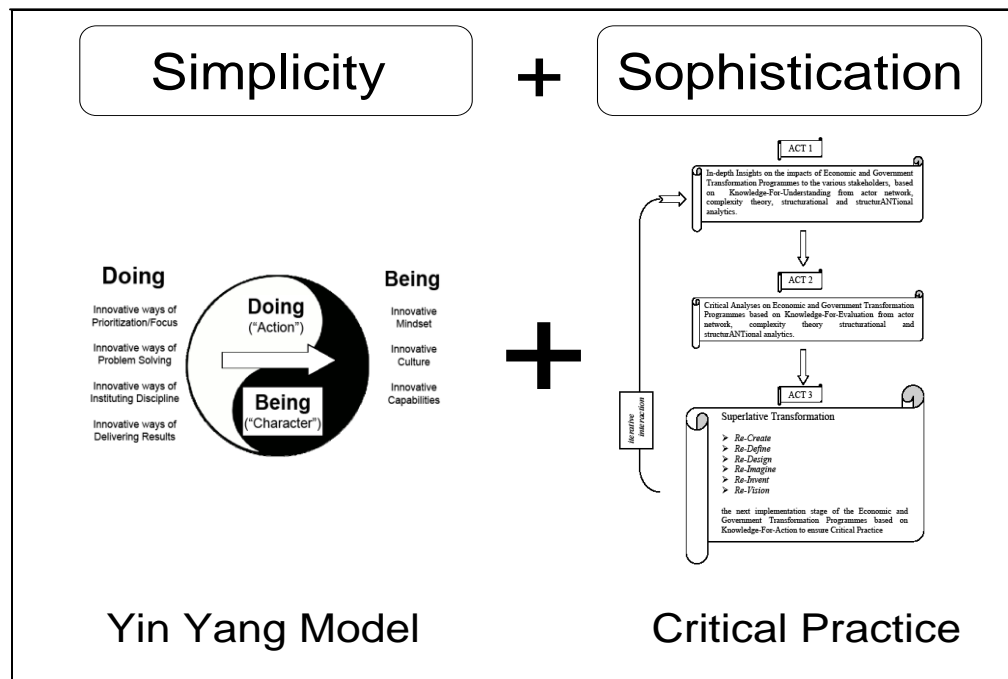


FIGURE 2: Theory of Everything for National Transformation