

Instituting Collaborative Governance: Accidental or Designed?

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This article describes Malaysia's experience in collaborative governance. In making its case, the article will trace the role of Malaysia's performance, management and delivery unit (PEMANDU) in providing preconditions to collaborative governance. It will examine PEMANDU's various initiatives in bringing about economic and government transformation that has ultimately laid down, albeit nascent, institutionalization of collaborative governance. The paper concludes that Malaysia's collaborative governance endeavor is an unintended consequence of Malaysia's Economic Transformation and Government Transformation programmes. It argues that collaborative governance in Malaysia is still at an early stage primarily because the articulation of collaborative governance is nested within Malaysia's larger policy concerns and a function of regime legitimacy.

Background

Since the year 2009, the Malaysian government has been embarking on ambitious government and transformation programmes. These programmes are, in part, responses to the ruling political party's – the Barisan Nasional (BN) – waning popularity after it suffered heavy defeat at the 2008 general election, one in which the opposition parties took control of 5 states and increased their parliamentary seats from 22 to 82 seats. Among the first policy initiatives that the newly appointed Prime Minister Najib Razak introduced was the New Economic Model (NEM), whose objective is to promote inclusive growth which would allow Malaysia to join the ranks of world's high-income economies. The introduction of the NEM was quickly followed by other initiatives to revamp the bureaucracy and the economy which came in the form of the government transformation programme (GTP) and the economic transformation programme (ETP) that, collectively, was termed the National Transformation Programme (NTP). The aim of the NTP is to improve public service delivery in six key areas called the National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) and this involves reducing crime, fighting corruption, improving student outcomes, raising living standards of low income households, developing rural basic infrastructure and improving public transport.

The task to ensure that the NTP goals are achieved rests on a newly established Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu). Pemandu is not a typical public agency. Structure-wise, Pemandu behaves like a pseudo public organization. It is a unit in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) but unlike other government agencies, Pemandu does not come under the direct control of the head

of the civil service, the chief secretary to the government. Instead, the unit comes under the direct charge of the Prime Minister.

Pemandu's primary role is to act as a change agent to mobilise and harness resources from various public and private agencies to produce the goals of the NTP. Collaboration is a centre piece of Pemandu's delivery effort as it needs various agencies to deliver the NTP goals. How extensive is Pemandu's collaboration effort in delivering the outcomes of the NTP? To what extent has collaborative governance become a major feature of the functioning of public agencies? Is collaborative governance an unintended consequence of Pemandu's need to deliver on the NTP goals? These are the questions that this paper attempts to address.

To examine Pemandu's role in collaborative governance, this article will draw on various case works on Pemandu. The cases provide detailed account of Pemandu's role in delivering the NTP goals. They are also rich in information as they highlight the views of Pemandu's officers as well as various stakeholders involved in Pemandu's initiatives. The article will also draw on interviews conducted with senior civil officers with regard to Pemandu's role.

The paper is divided as follows. The first part of the paper will provide various definitions and discussions on collaborative governance. The next part will discuss the role of Pemandu and how its various processes have unintentionally laid down the importance of collaborative governance in the Malaysian bureaucracy. The third part of the paper will provide discussions on whether collaborative governance could an institutionalized feature of the Malaysian bureaucracy.

Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance is a response to the rise of "permeable structures in which people can link across organizational functions and boundaries"(Macquire(2006). Definitions on collaborative governance are varied but the main difference between the various definitions large rest on the range of actors included in collaborative activities. Ansel and Gash (2008) sees collaborative governance as the relationship involving public agencies and non-stakeholders describing it as "an arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-stakeholders in a collective decision making process that is formal or consensus-oriented and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets." Donahue (2004) provides a wider definition to the term describing collaborative governance as "an amalgam of public, private and civil-society

organisations engaged in some joint effort.” Emerson et. al (2011) provides a slight nuance, describing collaboration as the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished.”¹ Emerson et.al’s (2011) definition is a refinement of Gray’s definition that sees collaboration as a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.²

Two schools of thought come to mind when conceptualizing collaborative governance. The liberalist tradition views collaboration as the pursuance of private interest by individuals or actors. It is the process that aggregates private preferences into collective choices and this is achieved through self-interested bargaining.³ The republican tradition however views collaboration as an integrative process. It takes the view that differences of resource endowment and opinion amongst actors form the basis of collaboration in order to achieve “mutual understanding, a collective will, trust, sympathy and the implementation of shared preferences.”⁴

To help us make better sense of the dynamics of collaborative governance, various models have been developed to give a schematic understanding of the elements necessary for collaborative governance. Wood and Gray’s (1991) model see discussions on collaboration in terms of an antecedent-process-outcome model. They argue that while there are many discussions on antecedents - resources, preexisting levels of interdependence resource scarcity - and policy outcomes, there is little discussion on the “process” segment of collaborative governance. The process segment involves elements like government, administration, organisational autonomy, mutuality and norms of trust and reciprocity. Wood and Gray (1991) argue that “process” is an important consideration because it involves dynamics like constant interaction, negotiations and commitments on the part of stakeholders.⁵ The lack of discussion in this segment could be due to the opaqueness or impermeability of public bureaucracies when it comes to information. Ring and Van de Len (1994) provide refinement to Wood and Gray’s (1991) parsimonious breakdown of collaborative effort, arguing that the collaboration

¹ Kirk Emerson, Tina Nabatchi, Stephen Balogh (2012)

² (Gray, 1989. Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty problems, San Francisco: Jossey Bass p. 5).

³ Thomson, Ann Marie and James Perry (2006). Collaboration process: Inside the black box. Public Administration Review 66: 20-32.

⁴ Thomson, Ann Marie and James Perry (2006). Collaboration process: Inside the black box. Public Administration Review 66: 20-32, March and Olsen 1989, 126

⁵ Ann Marie Thompson and James Perry (2006) Collaboration process: Inside the Black Box, Public Administration Review, Vol 66

should not be seen as a linear- oriented process but one that is cyclical and iterative in nature. An interesting point raised by Ring and Van De Len (1994) is their suggestion that for collaboration to be sustained there is the need to rely on informal institutional structures rather than formal ones. Indeed, In other words, Ring and Van De Len's (1994) argument invokes the importance of personal relationships, psychological contracts and informal understanding and commitment in explaining collaborative governance.⁶ More recently, Ansell and Gash (2008) came up with a more refined model of collaborative governance. The model provides the complexity of collaborative governance by providing a comprehensive array of variables and causal relationships. There are four variables - starting conditions, institutional design, leadership and collaborative process - with the collaborative process forming the core of the model.⁷ The model is a versatile one because it incorporates variables and sub variables that are crucial when explaining collaborative governance across different contexts. Indeed, elements of institutional design, starting conditions and sub variables like trust, mutual recognition and participatory inclusiveness are helpful in explaining the Malaysian example. More recently, Emerson et.al (2011) produce an equally comprehensive model of collaborative governance. The integrative framework, as it is called, consists of three dimensions and they are: the general system context, the collaborative governance regime (CGR) and collaborative dynamics and actions.⁸ Similar to Ansell and Gash's (2008), the model pivots on the need to understand context to explain how collaborative governance operates. Understanding the system context – political, legal, socioeconomic - help locate drivers that are essential for collaborative efforts such as leadership, incentives and interdependence.⁹ Besides system context, the model highlights another important dimension, the collaborative governance regime (CGR). By this, the model means the “sets of implicit and explicit principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectation converge in a given area”. CGR accentuates the importance of evaluating particular modes or systems to better understand the decision making process across different sovereigns.¹⁰

The above frameworks are useful in that they highlight the importance of context when assessing collaborative governance. As an exploratory study of collaborative governance in Malaysia, the paper will incorporate the rich array of variables mentioned in these frameworks to emphasize the importance of context when evaluating collaborative endeavor. In examining collaborative

⁶ Ann Marie Thompson and James Perry (2006) Collaboration process: Inside the Black Box, Public Administration Review, Vol 66. P. 22

⁷ Ansell and Gash (2008) p. 50

⁸ Emerson et.al, 2011, p.5

⁹ (Emerson et.al, 2011: 5)

¹⁰ Emerson et.al, 2011: 5).

governance in Malaysia, the paper will highlight the importance of context, for instance considerations on leadership, rules and norms, decision-making procedures as well as the political and bureaucratic environment.

About PEMANDU

PEMANDU (the Performance Management and Delivery Unit) was established in 2009. Pemandu's operations is inspired by the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Delivery Unit (PMDU) which is a unit set up by then Prime Minister Tony Blair to look into delivering various public policy concerns. The idea of a delivery unit could also come from the private sector where there is increasing use of "reform teams" to bring about corporate turnarounds.

Indeed, the setting up of delivery units like Pemandu is part of new public sector management practice, one in which governments are placing greater emphasis to deliver effective and quick results and not be overly concerned with institutional or bureaucratic considerations. Manning and Watkins (2013) describe this new public sector management practices as TRDM, which means "targeting results, diagnosing the means." There are various approaches to TRDM. One of the approaches is called "deliverology" which is an approach that involves establishing a delivery unit that has direct access to the head of state. PEMANDU's operation follows closely the "deliverology" approach, one where the unit is tasked to define problems, target and track improvements, and employ various measures to lock-in the performance improvements.

Pemandu's establishment in Malaysia's bureaucratic space is unprecedented. Even though it is an administrative unit in the Prime Minister Office, its Chief Executive Officer reports to the Prime Minister and not to the head of the Malaysian civil service, the Chief Secretary of State. Operational wise, Pemandu is given the flexibility to manage its resources. Pemandu has its own human resource department which is in charge of hiring and talent management. About 80 percent of Pemandu officers came from the private sector. These officers have different remuneration packages than the ones offered in the civil service. In terms of organizational structure, Pemandu has several divisions with each division taking charge of a particular NKRA's. Each division is headed by a director. When it comes to reporting, Pemandu CEO reports directly to the Prime Minister and not to the chief secretary of the civil service.¹¹ In sum, even though it operates in the public sector realm, Pemandu is an autonomous unit, just like a unit in the private sector. The idea of having a delivery unit that lays

¹¹ Xavier John Antony, Noore Alam Siddique and Mohd Zin Mohamed (2016) The Government Transformation Programme of Malaysia: A Successful approach to public sector reform, Public Money and Management, 84

outside the mandate of the civil service is a departure from Malaysia's previous administrative reform efforts.

Pemandu's unique organizational set up, its broad mandate and special access to the highest chief executive, the Prime Minister, invites a mixture of envy and skepticism among civil servants, the chief among which is that the unit only adds to a bloated bureaucracy. Senior civil servants we spoke to, especially higher civil servants, expressed that Pemandu's existence was redundant. They felt that its role is duplicious to that of other prominent agencies in the bureaucracy which they felt were equally competent to bring about change. These agencies include the likes of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), the Ministry of Finance, the Malaysian Administrative and Modernisation Planning Unit (MAMPU) and the Implementation and Coordination Unit (ICU). The officers also took the view that that there are competent officers in the bureaucracy who could do the tasks that Pemandu is mandated at a much reduced costs.¹² In responding to the uneasiness among civil servants, PEMANDU's chief executive Idris Jala made known that Pemandu was not duplicating the roles of any government agencies. To appease his critics, Idris reiterated that Pemandu's life span is fixed and the unit merely serves as a facilitator to coordinate efforts to the NTP and realise Malaysia's vision 2020.

Pemandu and its Collaborative effort

PEMANDU started from a collaborative endeavor. The idea to set up a delivery unit came from a series of dialogues, workshops and retreats that involved the prime minister, the cabinet ministers, consultants, various public and private agencies and members of the public. They were tasked to identify key result areas to improve public service delivery and map a plan to accomplish Malaysia's vision 2020 goals. Idris Jala, Pemandu's CEO played a huge role in the sessions that eventually led to the formation of Pemandu.

An important derivative of the workshops was they helped forge inter-ministerial cooperation which would form the basis of Pemandu's collaborative efforts. Obtaining buy-ins from cabinet ministers was a challenge. The ministers were skeptical of the effectiveness of the workshops. To facilitate them to come up with policy goals, the ministers were assisted by consultants and provided with information from surveys and dialogues sessions that was obtained from members of the public and the private sector. The ministers were tasked to identify critical policy concerns and come up with key policy goals and urged to look beyond individual ministry's concerns. The exercise inadvertently forced

¹² Such comments are common among the officers we met - new officers, senior officers as well as retired senior officers and skepticism was more apparent during the early stage of Pemandu's existence.

them to look at the collaborative imperative across ministries.¹³ To assist the ministers in formulating policies, the conveners asked ministers to work “backwards”, that is, to first identify policy goals and then work backwards to find various ways that could best achieve the policy goals. They then asked the ministers to design a collaborative effort with different agencies for optimal policy outcome. For maximum impact, the ministers were constantly reminded to be unrestrained with their ideas and keep to a lively discussion of ideas. To create greater confidence, a blind voting system was used whenever ministers were asked to vote for the various policy options. Indeed, the blind voting technique helped to prioritize areas of concerns and make for better consensus.

The six- week long workshop attended by the cabinet ministers laid the emphasis for collaborative work. The prime minister’s presence in the workshop was also crucial. His commitment to the project naturally induced reciprocal commitment on the part of the cabinet ministers. Indeed, by the end of the workshop, the cabinet ministers bought into the idea of collaboration. They began to understand that the broad goals set out in the National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) could be better achieved with collaborative efforts involving the different ministries. In addressing the NKRAs six ministries were appointed as lead ministries, each in charge of each NKRAs. The lead ministry acts as a coordinating agency with the minister in charge having to report on the progress of the various policy initiatives to the prime Minister every month together with the presence of Pemandu’s chief, Idris Jala.

To ensure better collaboration among ministries, Delivery Management Office (DMO) was set up in each ministry. The DMO functions as a coordinating agency to facilitate the achievement of goals. It is made up of Pemandu officials as well officials from the various ministries, department and agencies (MDAs), whose job is to coordinate and facilitate the stated goals. DMO, for example, is the first touch point to settle bottleneck issues involving the different ministries and agencies. De-bottlenecking issues involves various stages, depending on the gravity of the problem. Issue would be first brought to the technical working group, failing which it would be escalated to the steering committee which is chaired by ministers, secretary generals, directors-general and CEOs from important ministries and

¹³ (Deepa Iyer (2011): 4).

agencies. If the issue remains unresolved, the matter will be brought to the Problem-Solving Meeting (PSM) which is held twice a year and chaired by the Prime Minister.¹⁴

Pemandu's ability to convince the various MDAs and cabinet ministers on the merits of collaboration is unprecedented in Malaysia's public sector reform efforts. Besides convincing cabinet ministers on the merit of collaboration, there is another facet of Pemandu's operatives that helped consolidate the message of collaboration. We turn to this next.

Pemandu and the collaborative design

In structuring change, Pemandu employs an "Eight Steps Transformation" programme where three of the eight steps involve collaboration. These include collaboration among cabinet ministers to establish strategic direction, coordinating bottlenecks and convening social labs involving various stakeholders. Among the three initiatives, Pemandu's effort at establishing social labs warrants attention.

The social labs are aimed at operationalizing the NKRA's set out during the cabinet workshop, which is about translating broad targets of the NKRA's into concrete projects.¹⁵ The labs involved officers from various ministries and agencies. These officers were handpicked and deemed to be the best of their cohorts. They were recruited after cabinet ministers – who were at this point bought into the idea of collaborative projects - gave clear orders to various agencies to send their best officers to participate in the lab sessions.

The lab sessions were intensive and inclusive. Officers were told to look beyond the immediate concerns of their respective ministries and come up with solutions that cut across ministerial boundaries. The sessions forced officers to adopt a holistic approach to policy problems that induced collaboration. The intensity of the labs sessions and the fact that the sessions lasted between six to eight weeks also gave officers sufficient material to appreciate the imperatives of collaborative work. The labs allowed them to view policy problems and prescriptions from multiple perspectives. To make

¹⁴ World Bank (2017) Driving the performance from the Center, Malaysia's Experience with Pemandu. p. 32

¹⁵ World Bank (2017) Driving the performance from the Center, Malaysia's Experience with Pemandu

for effective collaborative effort and better policy prescription, participants were provided with views collated from the public – from interviews, online feedback and text messaging.¹⁶

In the end, the labs became more than sites to develop tangible targets and mobilize resources from different government agencies; the labs became sites for stakeholders to bond and make realistic assessment of each agency's strengths and weaknesses. In fact, participating officers admitted that the labs sessions trained them to decide on socially desired outcome from a collective standpoint.

The manner in which Pemandu conducted the lab sessions also facilitated the collaborative process. During the sessions, participants were told to move from broad policy goals to more specific targets, a process that Pemandu's CEO Idris Jala described as "going from 3,000 feet to 3 feet." This involved "starting with the big picture and sharpening the focus to inspect its smallest detail."¹⁷ To help them make specific targets, participants were told to adopt an iterative and recursive approach. This involved revisiting old assumptions, raising new information and reconfiguring earlier targets and plans.¹⁸ Pemandu officials were on hand to assist the process. Acting as facilitators they encouraged participants to start their propositions with a blank canvass and to revisit initial plans that ended up in lively and open discussions among the participants. The whole process effectively induced collaborative tendencies as "participants come to know and trust one another, they bring to the fore knowledge of problems or solutions that, at the outset, they may have held closely to themselves." (p.19).

For more effective collaborative work, participants in the lab sessions were made to present their detailed plans to senior officials from two key agencies - the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) - to get a more realistic assessment. Called the "stress test" the presentations were meant to impress on participants that policy plans would have to be weighed against the state's many priorities and resource limitations. The "stress test" sessions, which at times were attended by ministers, saw senior government officials querying participants on the rationale and details of their plans. After listening to the presentations, the senior officials would brief participants on the feasibility of the projects when measured against financial and administrative

¹⁶ Deepa Iyer (2011) Innovations for Successful societies, Massachusetts, Princeton University. <http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties>.

¹⁷ Deepa Iyer (2011) Innovation for successful societies. p.6

¹⁸ Sabel Charles and Luke Jordan (2015), Doing, Learning, Being: Some Lessons learned from Malaysia's National Transformation Program, World Bank Report p. 19

limitations. At the end of the sessions the participants made modifications to their proposal after weighing in the various concerns.

Indeed, the labs added to the collaborative process as they did away with hierarchical concerns and promoted more lateral network settings. Pemandu's adoption of the recursive and iterative approach to policy prescription and the informal nature of the lab sessions encouraged members to come up with new policy possibilities. They helped participants make realistic judgement of policies and forced them to look at issues from a multi-sectorial perspective that cut across ministerial concerns. The interactive dialogues and the iterative approach also helped in promoting buy-ins from stakeholders.¹⁹ In fact, the collaborative process saw 50 percent of original solutions to be revised and this was due to new set of information raised by participants. One director of the education NKRA team said that the

“lab is an environment where hierarchy is set aside. We encourage participants to leave their “organisational hats” outside the door. It empowers civil servants, giving them a chance to voice ideas that may have been in the works for years.”²⁰ .

But how much has Pemandu's collaborative endeavor permeated the bureaucracy? Has collaborative governance become a central organizing principle in the conduct of the Malaysian bureaucracy? To demonstrate how Pemandu's processes and ideas on collaboration have permeated the bureaucratic thinking, we describe two examples to demonstrate Pemandu's different role in promoting collaboration. The first, involves Pemandu in a collaborative project with different agriculturally-related agencies and the second, involves Pemandu providing its expertise in the setting up a “delivery unit” within a particular ministry that is tasked to promote collaboration.

¹⁹ Sabel Charles and Luke Jordan (2015), Doing, Learning, Being: Some Lessons learned from Malaysia's National Transformation Program, World Bank Report p. 32

²⁰ Deepa Iyer (2011) p.7

Pemandu and improving Paddy Productivity in the Muda Region

The Muda Paddy project is one example to demonstrate the successes as well as challenges to collaborative governance. The project involves the collaboration of several agencies – Pemandu as the facilitator, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA) and the farmers’ association called *Persatuan Peladang Kawasan (PPK)* – and aims to improve productivity in paddy farming in the Muda region, a rice farming area in northern Peninsular Malaysia. In fact, the Muda project is one of Pemandu’s many initiatives under its Entry Point Project (EPP). To digress, there are 16 EPPs in total involving existing farmers as well as new entrants and covering a range of agricultural activities from seaweed farming, herbal production, farmed fishing, livestock to rice production.²¹ The primary aim of the EPP is to turn traditional agriculture activity into agribusiness activity by incorporating the latest technology to improve output and earnings.

The Muda region paddy project hopes to promote commercial-scale farming, improve irrigation density and accelerate the use of new technologies. To do so the project hopes to amalgamate some 50,000 hectares of paddy fields – about 51 percent of total paddy fields in the country – involving some 27,500 small time farmers. The amalgamated land would be run like paddy estate and centrally management by a private management entity. Under the scheme, paddy farmers are given the choice to either work their own land or lease their land to the management company which would provide the labour. Either way, the management company will provide assistance, such as levelling the land and providing technical assistance to farmers like treating the soil by controlling water and acidity levels. In return for the management assistance, farmers must agree to implement good agricultural practices which involve precision in planting and harvesting, treatment of soil quality, efficient water use and pest control. Farmers will also be trained to adopt the latest technologies across the paddy and rice production chain. They are also taught methods to improve irrigation density and they were introduced to large scale farm mechanization. In choosing the scheme, farmers are given RM10,000 per hectare as incentive and this is disbursed over 5 harvesting seasons.

The Muda region project intends to increase average yields to 8 tonnes per hectare and to increase farmers’ annual income to RM48, 000 by 2020. To ensure that targets are met, Pemandu works closely with the MoA and MADA to monitor the performances of the PPKs. The collaboration - between Pemandu, MoA and MADA - involves making sure that farmers follow through with the proposed plan. Lands are inspected regularly by agricultural officers from the MoA and MADA. They follow the “rice check manual” to assess the performance of rice production and provide necessary feedbacks to

²¹ Adnan, M.N. and Nasiruddin A (2016) Transiting from Agriculture to Agribusiness- A model for inclusivity and sustainability for Paddy farmers, Second World Irrigation Forum, Chiang Mai, Thailand,

farmers. Pemandu's principle and processes are also heavily incorporated in the project. This came in the form of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which are meant to ensure that farmers adhere to common best practices in farming methods and adopt new technologies. A chain of processes is also put in place that mirrors Pemandu's delivery process. They include monitoring, problem solving and learning.²² In the collaborative effort, the PPKs act as "delivery units" by performing the task of a conduit between Pemandu, Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers. These stakeholders would monitor their progress against the one set by Pemandu.

Thus far, the Muda project has produced dividend. A total of RM 2.7 billion has been invested in the project, out of which RM 2.2 billion went for the intensification of irrigation infrastructure. The Muda project also provides steep learning lessons for small farmers. It allows for capacity building, specifically improving local learning through self-monitoring.

The World Bank Report (2011) describes the collaborative effort as "one of the most inventive and audacious of Pemandu's reform undertakings"²³ given the magnitude of the amalgamation and the short time frame given to achieve the goals. Work, however, is still in progress as far as the amalgamation of land is concerned given some outstanding issues. This is discussed below. For now, results show that on the average "participants' income rose by 11 percent and in the strongest performing PPKs yields rose to more than 20 percent."²⁴

Setting up Pemandu-like agency within an agency

Another project to demonstrate the extent of the incorporation of Pemandu's delivery processes is in the setting up of Pemandu-like unit in the Ministry of Education. The "Performance and Delivery Unit" (PADU) is a unit within the education ministry that is tasked to carry out the "deliverology" philosophy

²² Sabel Charles and Luke Jordan (2015), *Doing, Learning, Being: Some Lessons learned from Malaysia's National Transformation Program*, World Bank Report p. 37

²³ Sabel Charles and Luke Jordan (2015), *Doing, Learning, Being: Some Lessons learned from Malaysia's National Transformation Program*, World Bank Report p. 37

²⁴ Sabel Charles and Luke Jordan (2015), *Doing, Learning, Being: Some Lessons learned from Malaysia's National Transformation Program*, World Bank Report p. 38.

and help reform Malaysia's education policies. The unit oversees implementation, manage the interdependencies involving the different units in the education ministry to ensure ongoing improvements in providing quality education. On its website, PADU describes itself as a unit to "facilitate, support, and deliver the ministry's vision in transforming Malaysia's education system" specifically achieving the targets set out in Malaysia national blueprint for 2013-2025. The unit also describes that it "collaborates with the ministry to develop remedial action plans".

To set up PADU, the ministry of education sought Pemandu's advice. In its design, PADU mirrors that of Pemandu's. Just like Pemandu, PADU is headed by chief executive officer, who has had some years of working experience in the private sector. PADU's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is aided by seven executive directors. When it comes to policy delivery, PADU incorporates Pemandu- like processes, for instance having the weekly dashboard to measure performance and carrying out weekly meetings that involve PADU's CEO and other stakeholders. But unlike Pemandu's case - where the CEO holds weekly meetings with the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers - PADU's weekly meetings involve its CEO, the second education minister and the various heads of unit to discuss progress made.

In delivering its targets, PADU works closely with the various units in the education ministry as well as with various state education departments. One project involved PADU organizing collaboration among senior education officers in the state of Perlis. Working closely with Perlis' state education department (*Jabatan Pelajaran Negara (JPN)*) PADU officials held a series of consultations and in-depth interviews with the state education officers to help them identify the difficulties and road-blocks they faced in achieving the National Education Blueprint and in overcoming Perlis' poor national examinations scores. The meetings with the education officers involved reflection sessions. These were similar to Pemandu's social labs, but this time, it involved PADU officials who aided the discussions by orienting participants to deliberate on issues of high impact that would affect performance delivery. At the end of the sessions, officers identified four key success factors in driving change - collaboration among JPN officers, school leadership, quality teaching and learning in classroom and student attendance – which were then translated into actionable items. PADU's sessions with the Perlis education officers produced results. In its 2015 annual report, the Ministry of Education detailed how the collaborative efforts between schools in Perlis saw the state recording its biggest improvement in the national primary school examination in 2015. An interesting point to note is that when describing PADU's work, the report makes heavy use of vocabularies like "maximum impact", "success factors", "actionable items", "targeted intervention" and "quick wins", vocabularies that are often used by Pemandu to describe its processes. Indeed, the words reflect PADU's attempt to emulate the inner workings of Pemandu.

To sum up, the two cases demonstrate that Pemandu took on different roles at initiating new processes to influence public sector outcome. In the case of the Muda Paddy project, Pemandu played the role of a facilitator in the collaborative effort involving the Farmers' Association (PPK), the Ministry of Agriculture and the Muda Agriculture Development Authority (MADA). In the case of PADU, Pemandu played the role of an advisor, assisting the Ministry of Education to set up its own delivery unit whose organization and processes are akin to Pemandu's. The two projects - the Muda project and PADU's role as change agents - are still on going and they have shown mixed results, which will be discussed below. More importantly, the two examples invite an obvious concern; what are the essential features for collaborative governance to work in Malaysia and could collaborative governance be an institutional feature of the Malaysian bureaucracy? We elaborate this below.

Can collaborative governance be a permanent feature of the Malaysian bureaucracy?

A prime feature of the collaborative efforts demonstrated in the two cases is that collaboration is nested within Malaysia's larger economic and government transformation programmes. Such subordination of collaborative governance to larger developmental goals is apparent when we browse the World Bank's most recent report on Pemandu's role in Malaysia's development experience. Though the report is comprehensive and provide great insights to the various initiatives carried out by Pemandu, a search on the term "collaboration" or "collaborate" or "collaborative governance" saw the terms being mentioned only four times in the 68-page document. This effectively signals that collaboration does not feature as an important policy concerns. To add, in his foreword remark for the same World Bank Report, Pemandu's CEO Idris Jala gave a clear account of Pemandu's role and challenges in delivering outcomes as spelt out in the NTP but gave no mention or hinted on the idea of collaboration or collaborative governance, despite collaboration featuring in many of Pemandu's programmes.

It is partly because of this non-centrality of collaborative governance in policy implementation that this article feels that there are reasons to doubt that collaboration will be an institutionalized feature of the Malaysian bureaucracy. Given the context in which collaborative governance operates it does seem likely that agencies would not invest in setting up permanent institutional arrangements that support collaborative governance.

Even if we suggest that there is a promise of institutionalizing collaborative governance the effort is still work in progress. The Muda region paddy project, for example, demonstrates both the huge

potential that can be obtained from collaborative effort and the amount of work that needs to be done at institutionalizing collaborative governance. This is because despite participating farmers seeing their income improve and yields increasing and despite the fact that the national rice sufficiency has increased from 63 percent in 2010 to 71 percent in 2015,²⁵ the amalgamation rate is still low. The programme targets that come the year 2020, 50,000 hectares of paddy fields in the Muda region will be amalgamated and operated under estate farming method. But by end 2014, only about 20,000 hectares had been amalgamated, about 40% of the targeted goal. Many reasons can be put forward for the low participation rate. One reason given is that non-amalgamated farmers are already seeing increasing yields from using new technology and hence see no need to be part of the project.²⁶ Also, farmers might opt out from the scheme and revert to traditional mode of farming as they will no longer receives a financial incentives of RM 2000 per hectare after five seasons.²⁷

The low amalgamation rate also suggest that there could be other factors at play. Pemandu's annual report suggests that there could be administrative challenges to the implementation of the Muda paddy projects. For instance, despite MADA (Muda Agricultural Development Agency) introducing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for farmers to employ best practices and urging farmers to use new technologies, the report highlights that not all farmers "enjoyed these benefits [higher income] as they did not implement the SOPs." The report also mentions legal and administrative issues highlighting problems in constructing irrigation infrastructure due to issues of land acquisition. The report also mentions that the introduction of a special purpose vehicle to manage the industry's entire value chain has been put on hold as the "state of operational readiness is yet to be established" which, the report admits could "hinder fruitful collaboration."²⁸

Instituting collaborative governance will be a challenge should there be a regime change especially when collaborative governance is nested within larger development goals. In the past, Malaysia's public sector reform efforts had been a function of current leadership's priorities which oftentimes are tangential to previous leadership's priorities. The country's second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak for example, re-oriented the economic reform efforts by the country's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, by giving greater attention to rural development and nurturing development

²⁵ The National Transformation Report Annual Report 2015 p. 284

²⁶ Adnan Mohd and Nasiruddin Abdullah (2016) Transiting From Agriculture to Agribusiness- A Model for Inclusivity and Sustainability for Paddy Farmers, Conference on Second World Irrigation Forum, Chiang Mai, Thailand

²⁷ Under this scheme which will last

²⁸ The National Transformation Programme(NTP) Annual Report 2015, p.241

agencies geared to improving the rural sector. That priority changed with Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad who scaled back state sponsored agencies and introduced large scale corporatization exercise and incorporated new public management practices.²⁹ Mahathir's large scale industrialization drive however took a back seat with a new prime minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Abdullah gave more emphasis to rural development and primary agricultural industries besides introducing greater deregulation. Abdullah's development objectives however changed with the appointment of the current premier, Najib Razak, whose tagline "People first, Performance Now" places priority on providing a responsive governance.³⁰

Another reason why institutionalizing collaborative governance will be difficult is because of the state's reliance on Pemandu as an agent of change. This is a problem because Pemandu has a fixed time line and is already making exit plans to retrench its role as an agent of change. Thus far, Malaysia's ability to pursue collaborative governance is highly reliant on Pemandu's role in developing collaborative competencies - from identifying stakeholders, designing delivery processes to facilitating group dynamics. Pemandu's unique organizational design has provided it with the ability to deliver collaborative performance between various stakeholders. Its special position in the bureaucracy – its direct access to the prime minister, its independence in terms of recruiting the best from the private sector, its attractive remuneration packages that are outside the civil-service pay structure - is path breaking in the Malaysian context. Such a position provides it with greater latitude to manage its agenda and not be bound by institutional compliance expected of a public bureaucracy. Pemandu's CEO unique position in the bureaucracy is another factor worth mentioning. By doubling up as a cabinet minister for six years (2009-2015), Idris Jala, was able to attend cabinet meetings, engage cabinet ministers and win over ministers' confidence when it came to the need for collaboration. Idris himself admitted that being made a minister was his precondition to head Pemandu without which, he felt, his initiatives at making change would be harder. There is of course the possibility to replicate Pemandu's role in the civil service, but as it stands Pemandu's unique arrangement has proven to be a critical ingredient that has helped produce initiatives and promote policy buy-ins from relevant stakeholders. It is this unique arrangement that differentiates Pemandu from other delivery units, which the World Bank report admits would be hard to replicate.

²⁹ Xavier, John Antony (2013) The World Bank Approach to Public Sector Management 2011-2020; Lessons from the Malaysian experience, International Review of Administrative Sciences Vol 79, no.3, p. 430

³⁰ Xavier, John Antony (2013) The World Bank Approach to Public Sector Management 2011-2020; Lessons from the Malaysian experience, International Review of Administrative Sciences Vol 79, no.3, p. 430

Pemandu's unique design and special role in collaborative governance is apparent when one compares Pemandu's ability to effect change with that PADU, the unit that hopes to mirror Pemandu's achievement. A missing piece in PADU's delivery process is the unit's lack of direct access to the top leadership, the Prime Minister or even the Minister of Education. Unlike Pemandu's case - where the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers were personally involved in various delivery drives - PADU reports to the Second Minister of Education, not to the Prime Minister or the Minister of Education. PADU's position in the organization hierarchy also makes it difficult for it to execute collaborative work. In the education ministry's hierarchy, PADU is one of 37 units which means that despite assuming the position of Chief Executive Officer, PADU's chief is of similar rank to other department heads. PADU's span of control in the organization also makes it difficult for it to be a facilitator for change. Given bureaucratic politics and the cultural code of the Malaysian bureaucracy where grades and positions define individual's mandate or scope of work, there could be occasions when heads of department would refuse to take the advice of PADU officers, especially those officers of lower rank. PADU's embeddedness in the ministry of education and the civil service structure is its Achilles heel. Its inherent challenges to institute change is not unlike the experience of many change agencies within the Malaysian bureaucracy. One case in point is the challenges faced by Malaysia's Administrative and Modernisation Planning Unit (MAMPU), an agency that is tasked to carry out administrative reform. A study by Noh (2013) on MAMPU show that officers might not be able to initiate change because "they are still persuaded by fear that a perceived act of insubordination would jeopardise their promotional prospects."³¹ PADU's challenges are confirmed by stakeholders in the education ministry. In their assessment of PADU's performance, officers in the education ministry have expressed doubts on PADU's ability to deliver the education blueprint. One of the officer highlighted his concern that PADU directors are new recruits to the civil service with little or no background in educational services. The officers expressed doubt that the new PADU recruits might not know much of on-the-ground operations. They also expressed concern that PADU is a small unit and that it may be overwhelmed by the scale of the blueprint.³²

The example of PADU demonstrates that replicating Pemandu's operatives must be done in its entirety and that there is a need to appreciate the ecosystem in which Pemandu operates. This special aspect of Pemandu is often lost among non-advocates of Pemandu. One often cited criticism levelled at Pemandu's officers is that of their "non-civil service" status and their more attractive remuneration

³¹ Noh, Abdillah (2013) *Institutions and Institutional Change: The Case of Malaysian Bureaucracy*, p. 97

³² Charles Sabel and Jordon (2011), *World Bank*, p. 42

packages. But the argument overlooks the fact that given the Malaysian context it is this ability to stay out of the civil service and not be directly bound by the civil service code and having direct access to the highest executive in the country that made it possible for Pemandu to perform its goals.

Another impediment to collaborative governance effort is the presence of trust deficit between the government and the governed. Just like other modern states, Malaysia is experiencing a deep crisis in trust between citizens and their governments and such crisis may be the deepest. The Edelman Trust Barometer for 2017 revealed that 52 percent of Malaysians have lost faith in the institutions. Although the deep mistrust on institutions among Malaysians follows the broad global trend, the level of trust placed by Malaysians on its government has shown sustained decline. To put into context, the ruling regime is facing its biggest legitimacy test since it assumed power in 1957. The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) is suffering from waning popularity and a crisis in trust, if we go by the results of the 2008 general election and the 2013 general election. This waning popularity and trust deficit is weighing down on change initiatives. Trust deficit fosters public apathy, one where citizens would choose to be passive participants in the collaborative process. The psychological contract that comes with trust may be lost which makes any collaborative endeavor a challenge. Though, the setting up of Pemandu, the drafting of the ETP and GTP documents are government's answers to improving the trust deficit, there is yet no conclusive evidence that such efforts have restored trust in the country's institutions. It is indeed a tragedy that continued efforts at collaborative governance, so needed in dealing with an increasingly complex system, could be impeded by political imperative and deep mistrust in institutions.

Conclusions

This article takes the view that Malaysia's attempt at collaborative governance is still at an early stage. While it is indeed true that Pemandu's role in delivering the Malaysia's developmental programmes is centred on collaboration, collaborative governance is not a systemic feature of Malaysia's administrative reform effort. As a result, efforts at collaborative governance are seeing mixed results based on a number of reasons as spelt out in the paper. Malaysia's attempt at collaborative governance, is at best, an unintended consequence of the government and economic transformation programmes. Pemandu's role in delivering the state's ambitious programmes makes it an accidental champion of collaborative governance.

The Malaysian example also points to the importance of state-society structure in promoting collaborative governance. Pemandu has been able to carry out numerous collaborative projects

because of the huge mandate it enjoys. Its unique organizational design, direct access to the prime minister and its exclusive recruitment and talent management programmes that lie outside the civil service structure made it easier for Pemandu to drive programmes and to attract critical stakeholders to buy-in on its various collaborative endeavor. This arrangement is difficult to replicate elsewhere. As the World Bank report suggests, few countries would tolerate a unit, like Pemandu, that enjoys exemptions from the civil service salary structure.³³ (World Bank, 47).

Trust is another consideration in the Malaysian case. Even when there are positive results obtained from collaboration - as demonstrated by Pemandu's performance – there is the issue of shared motivation that touches on concerns like mutual trust, legitimacy and commitment.³⁴ The low rate of land amalgamation in the Muda project and public officials' skepticism of Pemandu's mandate to drive the NTP are cases in point.³⁵

The non-centrality of collaborative governance means that institutionalizing collaborative governance will be a challenge. This is made more so given that the instruments and institutional design that support collaborative governance would be dismantled once the developmental objective is served. As it is, Pemandu is already making its exit plans. In January 2017, it announced its plan to retrench some of its mandates and hand over some of Pemandu's task to the public service. It also announced that it would transfer its National Transformation Programmes (NTP) agenda to the civil service.³⁶ Though it is still early to assess how the changeover will affect collaborative governance, the mandate enjoyed by Pemandu would be the missing - perhaps the most important- factor in Malaysia's collaborative governance endeavor.

³³ World Bank, 47

³⁴ Emerson et.al (2011) An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol 22, pp 1-29.

³⁵ Emerson et.al (2011) An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol 22, p. 13

³⁶ The Edge Daily, January 23, 2017.

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