Service Level Agreement

A Common Approach in Continuing Public Service Improvement in ASEAN Countries

1. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, a concept of new public management has been spread from developing countries e.g. OECD countries to other countries around the worlds. It has been labeled as a new perspectives and approaches in managing government with the objectives of making the government more flexible, efficient, and responsive to satisfy its citizen similar to the interaction of private corporations to their customers. Many management tools , models and concepts in business has been directly adopted or modified to apply in managing public services. Later, the implementation of the new public management concept has been known as "public sector reform". There are two types of definitions on the public sector reform. The first type of reform was more about reducing the size and scope of government to make market or private-sector-like organizations as the major mode of resource allocation in society and agents of production and delivery of public services. The second type, "civil service reform" held that management systems and skills of the private sector should be introduced in the government so that the government itself can learn from businesses, which were supposed to be more efficient and superior. The latter type is a focus of this article. These shifts in public administration are inherent and evident in the recent reform initiatives undertaken by governments in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S. Following the lead of these developed nations, many developing nations, including Southeast Asian countries such as Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, have introduced similar ideological, structural, functional, normative, and service-related changes in their administrative systems (Hague, 1998).

All of ASEAN countries, the "civil service reform" has been deployed in top-down manner by implementing a legal framework such as Act (law), Executive order, or regulation imposing to all government agencies and in many cases including state-owned enterprises. This public sector reform legal framework has been established throughout ASEAN countries for over a decade. Many services in various countries has significant improvement such as issuing citizen identification or passport. However, the intention of public reform in terms of the quality service and its improvement known as innovation still behind its counter parts in private sector. The obstacle in maintain the level of service for all branches of government agencies throughout the country is very challenging. Not to mention the design of service

to serve its citizens where context is difference. Therefore, this article intends to emphasize the significant of the service level agreement (SLA) as a tool for enhance government services to its citizen. The SLA can be implemented regardless of the legal bodies of "Public Reform" framework such as Good Governance, Citizen's Charter, and Service Improvement etc. Due to its diversity among ASEAN members including ethnics, cultures, and form governments, it will be a very interesting to share experience including obstacles in implementing form service level agreement to enhance public service.

2. Background

2.1 New public management

The new public management has been known as a thinking about public sector reform by practitioners and academics alike. Some considered it as a new paradigm (Hughes 1998). New public management reforms, it was said as a common response to common pressures—public hostility to government, shrinking budgets, and the imperatives of globalization. This common response in regard as a similar approach private sector would take in order to perform its operations. There are differing interpretations of what that common response in public sector consists of. But there is general agreement that key components include deregulation of line management; conversion of civil service departments into free-standing agencies or enterprises; performance-based accountability, particularly through contracts; and competitive mechanisms such as contracting-out and internal markets (Hood 1991). Various authors also include privatization and downsizing as part of the package (In graham, et. al. 2003; McLaughlin, et. al. 2009). There has been a long-drawn-out, ideologically charged debate about the merits and demerits of the new public management, or NPM as it is commonly known. The debate tends to focus on the desirability or otherwise of NPM reforms in principle.

Nevertheless, the concept of the new public management has been implemented in various countries thorough out the world. The successes are also depends on each countries in particular the leading countries such as OECD countries, New Zealand and South Korea. However, for developing countries like most of ASEAN countries, South Asia and Africa. The new public management successes are reported as public reform in sporadic manner rather in a given set of services. Most of reports still insists that the reform of public sector in developing countries need more time and adjustment to mechanism and framework to suit with each country context.

2.2 Result-based Management

Results-based management (RBM) concept is a life-cycle approach to manage organization in which integrates strategy, people, resources, processes, and measurements to improve decision making, transparency, and accountability. The approach focuses on achieving outcomes, implementing performance measurement, learning, and adapting, as well as reporting performance. This result-based management concept is commonly known as "Good Governance" (GG). According to United Nations, it consist of 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into accountant that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. In implementing RBM or GG in public sector, it starts from realistic expected results based on appropriate analysis. Then, clearly identifying service/program beneficiaries and designing service/programs to meet citizen needs. The monitoring progress toward results is necessary as well as resources consumed with the use of appropriate indicators. In addition, the process of identifying and managing risk while bearing in mind the expected results and necessary resources. Empowering public officers by learning lessons and integrating them into decisions and reporting on the results achieved and resources involved (MAMPU, 2007; World Bank, 2010)

As a result, RBM/GG has been a concept in ensuring the continuous reform in public sector in many countries. It transforms the concept of new public management into methodological framework in driving government policy toward better service to citizen. Service Level Agreement is part of tools in implementing RBM/GG.

2.3 Total Quality Management

In private sector, Total Quality Management (TQM) is an approach that seeks to improve quality and performance which will meet or exceed customer expectations. This can be achieved by integrating all quality-related functions and processes throughout the company. TQM looks at the overall quality measures used by a company including managing quality design and development, quality control and maintenance, quality improvement, and quality assurance. TQM takes into account all quality measures taken at all levels and involving all company employees (Liker, 2004). There are abundant of reports cited a success case in improving organization performance and achieve customer satisfaction. Therefore, concept and tools of TQM has been applied into a measure in implementing RBM/GG as well. The tools of Total quality management help organizations to identify, analyze and assess

qualitative and quantitative data that is relevant to their business. These tools can identify procedures, ideas, statistics, cause and effect concerns and other issues relevant to their organizations. Each of which can be examined and used to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, standardization and overall quality of procedures, products or work environment, in accordance with ISO 9000 standards (International Organization for Standardization, 2000 & 2009). TQM tools illustrate and aid in the assimilation of complicated information such as:

- 1) Identification of target audience
- 2) Assessment of customer needs
- 3) Competition& Market analysis (e.g. Force field)
- 4) Brainstorming ideas
- 5) Productivity changes (e.g. PCDA)
- 6) Various statistics
- 7) Staff duties and work flow analysis (e.g. Time study)
- 8) Statement of purpose
- 9) Financial analysis
- 10) Model creation
- 11) Business structure
- 12)Logistic analysis

As a results, TQM tools has been implemented as RBM/GG tools in design and improve public service.

3. Service Level Agreement

A service level agreement (SLA) is a contract between a service provider (either internal or external) and the end user that defines the level of service expected from the service provider. SLAs are output-based in that their purpose is specifically to define what the customer will receive. SLAs do not define how the service itself is provided or delivered. SLAs have developed as a tool to manage the complexity of organizing service delivery between different stakeholders who may have competing interests but who need to find common ground and to recognize their interdependence where there is willingness to work in partnership there is huge scope to explore the creative potential for service development and for synergy from collaborative working. Partnerships may also need to be agreed externally as well as internally and cross sector.

There is a range of interpretations of the term 'service level agreement', indicating the diversity of models in use. These definitions, which can be found in text books, journals, course materials and company documentation, provide an

insight into both the differences and commonalities in the use and purpose of SLAs within organizations. An analysis of a sample of interpretations by Blackwell (2002) revealed that the key difference in the use of SLAs seems to be in their application. For example, service level agreements can either be applied to the provision of internal services by one area within an organization to another (Boyd & Proctor, 1995; Bucholtz, 1999) or to the delivery/receipt of services with an external organization (Rozwell, 2000). When applied to internal service provision, the SLA forms an agreement between the parties while its use with external organizations is often that of a contract (Cooperman, 1995) which is legally binding.

Therefore the SLA should include the following elements:

- Objectives to be achieved in the provision of the services
- Detail of service deliverables
- Performance standards the citizen (customer) expects in the provision of the services by the service provider
- Reporting mechanism for measuring the expected performance standards.
- Remedial mechanism and compensation scheme where performance standards are not achieved, whilst incentivizing the service provider to maintain a high level of performance.
- Mechanism for review and change to the service levels over the course of the contract.

In brief, SLA is a communications tool to ensure that both parties use the same criteria to evaluate service quality. The value of an agreement is not just in the final product; the very process of establishing an SLA helps to open up communications and setting objective to gauge service effectiveness. SLA helps to avoid or alleviate disputes by providing a shared understanding of needs and priorities (Foley, 2008). And if conflicts do occur, they tend to be resolved more readily and with less gnashing of teeth. Moreover, SLA is a living document on a predetermined frequency, the parties to the SLA review the agreement to assess

As a results, SLA can be used as mechanism to control and monitor both internal and external (outsource)services. For public service, SLA provides a clear target at operation level while aligns with agency's strategy. SLA represents a platform in which the performance level is agreed between/ among the relevant stakeholders which includes governmental agency, contractors, and citizens.

 SLA can be an agreement between the government and the contractor to provide a service at a performance level that meets or exceeds the specified performance objective(s). This is common for the ICT service provider which needs to sign the SLA with a governmental agency. This SLA can be described by the term <u>performance-based contract</u>. This is essential in ensuring the quality of the services provided to the general public by a governmental agency.



2. SLA can be an agreement between the two governmental agencies to ensure that the uninterrupted operations or services provided to the citizens. For instance, Defense Logistics Agency or DLA is the Department of Defense's (DoD) largest combat support agency. The US armed forces develop SLA, also known as <u>performance agreement</u>, with SLA to provide logistical support to the military bases located throughout the world.

SLA can be used to describe the commitment of a governmental agency to its goals. This is also known as performance agreement which both General Accounting Office (GAO) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) advocated to all federal agencies when implementing Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.



3. SLA can be an agreement between a governmental agency with its citizens. See the example below.



4. International Practices of SLA

4.1 Denmark

In Denmark, service level agreement as part of contract management was introduced in 1992 as a response to result-based management and framework budgeting which was solely an input-oriented system but not connected to the services that agencies provide. Since barriers to improved efficiency were found to be agency-specific a decision was made to negotiate customized contracts with individual agencies. As a result, critical tasks of an agency are selected and included in the performance. In the beginning, the agreement is a result of negotiation between Ministry of Finance, the agency and the agency's department. Later, the Ministry of Finance has been withdrawing from negotiations and now negotiations are solely between an agency and the agency's department. Changes currently considered or already introduced concern the implementation of budget guarantees in the performance contracts and the use of contract management as a means of strategic control by departments. By putting service level agreement on a selected critical task, helps to ensure the focus and effort in producing the results based on contract requirements (e.g. SLA).

For example, the Ministry of Research in Demark applied a performance management and results-based contracts to research institutions. Risø, a research institute that seeks to support industrial and commercial development, Risø proposed to be evaluated by a series of objectives and targets established by its Board of Governors, known as "RISØ 2000." Risø's overall objective was to create new opportunities for development in energy technology and energy planning; environmental aspects of energy, and industrial production; and on materials and measuring techniques for industry. Research on these three areas and nuclear matters is distributed over 11 program areas, for which targets have been established for the next 5 to 10 years. The 11 program areas are in turn subdivided into 30 subprograms with 3- to 5-year plans. Results are evaluated at the end of each year, partly on the basis of achievement of milestones defined in Risø's research program and partly based on performance on three sets of quantitative indicators: activity indicators concerning personnel resources; communication indicators; and network indicators concerning relations with Danish and international research. Risø submited annual reports on its results and a final report upon completion of the project.

4.2 United State of America

By committing to the service quality that City of San Antonio is expected to provide to its citizens, it is important that this quality improvement needs to be achieved through better efficiency and streamlining work processes. This is due to the budget constraint that the city has to face when providing all essential services to more than 1.2 million citizens. The use of the 311 system was employed together with the integration of four key Departments. The city determined that approximately 95 percent of service requests came to four primary city departments: (1) Public Works, (2) Environmental Services, (3) Neighborhood Services, and (4) Animal Care. Instead of individually receiving phone call requests (which may or may not belong to its jurisdiction; as a result, a request would not be passed on the relevant agency), the new 311 system was implemented to help centralize the incoming call requests. In order to achieve the service level that is expected by its citizens, all four Departments needed to come up with and commit to the SLA that the new 311 system was designed to assist. The city management believed that centralizing access to these services by unifying the departments' call center functions would improve customer service, lower dropped-call rates, reduce wait times, and provide greater accountability via a feedback loop. In addition, they decided that the system should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Before 311 was established, the four partner departments had lost-call rates ranging from 25 to 35 percent. The 311 system set a goal to reduce the number of lost calls to 12 percent in its first year of operation. With the advent of the 311 call center, citizens have a system in place for accessing city services without having to contact their city council member. City council members and staff report that the 311 call center saves staff time and increases overall productivity. They also note that a citizen's concern can be addressed more quickly going through the 311 call center than through a council member's office since the system is set up to direct calls immediately to the appropriate department.

4.3 Australia

Over recent years, Australian governments have advocated a stronger focus on interagency collaboration and whole of government approaches to achieve effective program implementation, seamless service delivery and information sharing. In this endeavor, a 'culture of collaboration' has become a growing characteristic of the public sector. On a day-to-day basis, officials from different agencies work across organizational boundaries to deliver government services, or collaborate in the formulation of national policies. Interdepartmental Committees (IDCs), taskforces, and joint working parties are just a few of the mechanisms used to coordinate substantial cross-agency initiatives. While many agencies cooperate successfully on an informal basis, formal written agreements are frequently used to facilitate productive cross-agency relationships. Usually in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), each document establishes a foundation for a working relationship, setting out essential roles and responsibilities, and defining agency obligations in terms of governance, performance expectations, and reporting arrangements. The agreements also contain agreed specifications for particular services or deliverables, including quality measures and timeframes. Measurement of performance is also an important mechanism for determining the success of cross-agency initiatives and value for money. Performance indicators with clear links to outcomes are particularly valuable. Thirty-four per cent of the agreements examined included performance indicators. 33 Twenty per cent indicated high level or intermediate outcomes, and 60 per cent contained reporting arrangements. Overall, the specification of performance indicators ranged from extremely thorough to nil. Notwithstanding that some agreements were of a particularly minor nature, and did not warrant inclusion of performance measures, there is room for improving this in many agreements.

An aspect of performance measures examined by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) in past cross-agency audits is that of reciprocal performance indicators. This principle basically recognizes that one agency's ability to perform work often depends on the timely action or delivery of policy or other tangible material by the partner agency. Performance measures should recognize such interdependencies. The ANAO's examination of agreements indicated that most large-scale agreements were (in one way or another) addressing this issue. This

analysis was less applicable to small agreements, as the interdependency between agencies was often not apparent through the agreements or not significant. For example, The ANAO Performance Audit Report No.4, 2008-09, The Business Partnership Agreement [BPA], similar to SLA, between the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and Centrelink, noted that the existing performance framework between the agencies did not fully recognise their interdependence, particularly Centrelink's dependence on DEEWR, for example, to provide policy interpretation and clarification. Recommendations of the ANAO report was that the agencies incorporate reciprocal accountability measures of DEEWR's performance in meeting its agreed responsibilities under the BPA. In late 2009, the Department of Human Services (DHS)/Centrelink and DEEWR signed a new Bilateral Management Arrangement (BMA), which replaced the former BPA. The BMA contains a Confidence Framework designed to strengthen the interagency relationship, and Key Performance Measures (KPMs) to provide Bilateral Assurance. In addition to Centrelink-specific KPMs, under KPM 1: Policy Integration, DEEWR is to provide DHS/Centrelink with accurate, timely and clear policy advice to assist Centrelink to meet its KPMs. In addition, under the previous BPA, Centrelink provided an annual assurance statement to DEEWR. This has been improved under the BMA, with the head of each agency required to provide the other with an annual statement of achievement in accordance with the Confidence Framework.

5. Service Improvement: ASEAN Survey on public service delivery

The Office of the Public Sector Development Commission (hereafter, the OPDC) considers quality and value-added important components of its comprehensive efforts to initiate and promote service improvement throughout the Thai public sector. To increase the level of service quality, the OPDC advocates integration of elementary techniques (e.g., Process Flow Diagrams), empowerment of staff, and participation of citizens, all of which are essential for sustaining future improvements in service delivery (Foley, 2008).

Service improvement underlies public sector developmental strategies in the areas of process improvement, organizational structure, financial and budget systems, human resource development and benefits, paradigm shift in organizational culture, government modernization, and people participation in government.

Comprehensive and integrated service improvement programs are based on a background comprising several features. The first feature is a citizen-centered approach, which is an assurance that citizens are viewed as a source to motivate and accelerate the change. The second feature, service integration, is deemed necessary, as citizens' needs can involve interaction with various agencies from the same or even different ministries. The other features deal with the need for more

results-oriented and market-based managerial approaches. A result-based approach in service provision emphasizes improved outcomes. For example, the standard time required to complete a request for a new identification card must be carefully studied and verified. Following actions to realize improvement, results can be made public to garner public confidence and to illustrate the agency's service commitment. The market-based focus helps ensure that a public agency engages more actively with citizens, in a manner similar to the financial sector in Thailand, where most newly-opened bank branches can be found in shopping centers and supermarkets. Finally, given the trends in urbanization and life-styles or living culture of city dwellers (who simply have no time to skip work to contact public agencies during the weekdays), any initiative for service improvement must address these issues.

In the case of Thailand, the 1997 Constitution provided ground for increased citizen participation, enhanced transparency, accountability and decentralization. In 1999, the Thai Government responded by launching an ambitious Public Sector Management Reform Plan which was comprised of several key areas including budgeting and personnel management.

Later, the Public Administration Act of 2002 was issued and prescribed a vital principle in Section 3/1, stating that public administration must be carried out for the benefit and well-being of the people. This "citizen-centered" principle constitutes an effort to change values, paradigm and the working culture of the public sector which aims at resolving problems more effectively and satisfying public needs (Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, 2009).

According to Section 3/1 of the Public Administration Act of 2002, efforts undertaken for maximizing public benefits are to be accomplished through results-based management, with a focus on efficiency, value-for-money, work process and cycle time reduction, rightsizing, and decentralization. Every government agency must adhere to the principles of good governance in the performance of its duties, ensuring that budget allocations and personnel appointments are made consistent with the principle, and providing opportunities for public participation, information disclosure, and monitoring and evaluation of performance (Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, 2009).

Based on Section 3/1 mentioned above, the Royal Decree on Criteria and Procedure for Good Governance was promulgated in 2003 to set the management guidelines and directions for all government agencies (Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, 2003). For instance, Section 6 of the Royal Decree mentioned that the management of public affairs has to meet the following criteria:

(1) Be responsive to citizen demands

- (2) Focus on achievement and outcomes
- (3) Be efficient and provide value for money
- (4) Streamline work process
- (5) Review and revise missions to meet changing environment;
- (6) Provide high standard and excellent services
- (7) Evaluate performance on regular basis.

The OPDC has introduced two important concepts to initiate and ensure large-scale service improvement, the Service Link and Government Counter Services. Both concepts aim to increase convenience for the public by: (1) providing essential information relating to various agencies - acting as a gateway for information dissemination, such as extensions in tax deadlines or changes in health care eligibility requirements; and (2) handling requests requiring multiple approvals, as in the case of district approval for home construction that also requires contacts with public utility providers such as electricity, water, and telephone. Service Links located in government centers provide a single location to make inquiries or submit requests to various public agencies. The Government Counter Services further increase convenience by locating service counters of public agencies that provide basic services (such as identification cards, household certificates, name change certificates, birth and death certificates, and passports) in populated areas, especially shopping complexes and sky-train/subway stations. Thus, all citizens should be able to contact, request information, and apply for permission or approval at a one-stop service center or through the modern e-service facilities (Office of the Public Sector Development Commission, 2009).

The shift in Process Improvement from a focus on individual activity to improvement of an entire process by eliminating non-value-added activities has resulted in shorter, cheaper, and faster processes of government service provision. In 2014, OPDC has developed an indicator for Service Level Agreements (SLA) which will be the agreement between service providers and clients (customers) in order to ensure standardized public services are delivered and meet citizens' needs. There are up to 43 services that have mutual agreed for setting a formal document outlining a service commitment such as Import and Export process, Tax Payment/Refund processes, and etc.

To this, the OPDC extends the scope of service improvement to ASEAN context which is to establish knowledge management platform in managing public service delivery among all ASEAN members as part of ASEAN Economic Community 2015 initiative, by exchanging discussion and sharing experiences will initiate

collaboration and generate ideas among public agencies of ASEAN countries since the context in each country are different.

The objective of OPDC's survey is to establish a common issue in public service delivery among ASEAN member countries. The focus on themethodology in developing public service and legal framework and mechanism to ensure a continuous improvement. The following are the list of questionnaires sent to ASEAN government agencies which involving in public service development.

- 1) To ensure accuracy and consistency in work process, often the processes/workflows are listed in steps, documented and standardized. So, the person involved in a particular process can correctly perform his/her duty. In your country, how many (rough estimation) the processes/workflows of issuing official documentation such as business license, work permit, citizen identification card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc. are standardized and documented in comparison to overall processes?
- 2) To ensure quality in service, often the processes/workflows are standardized with given timeline in each step. So, the customers (citizens) are correctly being service in timely manner. In your country, how many (rough estimation) the processes/workflows of issuing official documentation such as business license, work permit, citizen identification card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc. are standardized and documented with timeline in each activity but only known by public officer (Citizens do not know about given timeline)?
- 3) In your country, how many (rough estimation) the processes/workflows of issuing official documentation such as business license, work permit, citizen identification card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc. are <u>standardized and documented with timeline in each activity</u>? And the process timeline is known by both public officer and citizen.
- 4) In your country, what is the best way to provide information to citizen about service timeline of public service in issuing official documentation such as business license, work permit, citizen identification card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc.? Please list top three ways based on your opinion (e.g. post a timeline at service counter, in advertisement via radio, TV, internet, written in forms or document, in person during service etc.)
- 5) What are the methods to ensure accuracy, consistency and timeliness as stated in standard process document of public service in issuing official documentation such as business license, work permit, citizen identification

- card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc.? Please list top three ways based on your opinion (e.g. reward, tie with agency's KPIs, complaints box etc.)
- 6) What is a method/technique that commonly used in your country to identify the appropriate timeline for each service? Please list top three ways based on your opinion (e.g. survey, time study, process flow analysis etc.)
- 7) In case of timeliness in service, does a specific timeline for a particular service process such as business license, work permit, citizen identification card, safety certificate, tax payment receipt, passport, export/ import license, driver license, etc. been applied to all locations (service in metropolitan area is similar to one in provincial areas)
- 8) In case of timeliness in service, how often the agency who in charge of a particular process change or review its service timeline?
- 9) In your country, do you have any law, executive order, or regulation that demand continuous improvement in public service or ensure the quality of service? For example, Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (Australia), Government Customer Service Improvement Act 2012 (USA) or Administrative License Law of the People's Republic of China – 2003 etc.

6. Conclusion

According to OPDC's survey on public service delivery in ASEAN countries, all of returned questionnaire confirm that most of the government in ASEAN countries have been working for many years to streamline the workflow in service tasks to citizen. These efforts and improvements are an ongoing trend and by legal frameworks such as law (Act), executive order, regulation etc. However, the format of legal framework on public service delivery, there are significant difference among ASEAN countries. Despite the differences in legal framework, the processes in design, delivery, and support at the operational level in public service delivery are quite similar. For example, the design process is based on methodologies in process improvement best practices. In gathering feedback from citizen, many channels are used such as survey, complaint box, call center, website and e-mails. Majority of returned questionnaires mentioned the application of key performance indicator of both the government agency and its executives which is link to the target or quality of any given public service delivery to ensure the continuous attention and improvement on public service delivery.

Based on the survey results, it seems that each ASEAN country is at the same pace in streamline its public service delivery. Therefore, it is interesting to continue in further discussions and sharing experiences on the mechanisms in ensuring the

quality, continuing improvement, and innovating new service in serving citizen and business among ASEAN countries.

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