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Link up govt data silos

I REFER to “Can our public service still deliver?” (*The Star*, Aug 20) where it is argued that the next wave of civil service process entails working across boundaries and adopting glasnost-style governance.

A seamless flow of information within, and among, government agencies must occur as a prerequisite towards achieving higher value-added productivity.

Information flow is important to integrate activities, data, knowledge and facts that are already fragmented within our organisational silos.

Information flow is the life blood of an organisation and it must go exactly where it should.

Today, the flow of progress reports, statistics, activity calendars and performance feedback within government ministries and between its own agencies is irrationally selective or non-existent.

All organisations are required to devise reasonable levels of “Chinese wall” to inculcate better responsibility and accountability in information handling.

However, having greater control, security and authority can lead to unnecessary hoarding of information, which hinders value creation in the civil service.

More often than not, hoarding information is not a personal choice, but a part of a common organisational culture and environment.

Ineffective information flow can also lead to organisational failures, such as corruption, untimely policy decisions and poor performance evaluation.

Based on the annual Auditor-General’s reports, the common denominator of financial leakages in government projects and activities are mostly due to ineffective information flow in the context of poor monitoring and supervision system by the relevant authorities.

As such, we need to take a closer look into our existing rules and regulations that restrict effective information flow and match them with proactive enforcement in combating bureaucratic corruption in this country.

Ineffective information flow can also lead to untimely decisions, which can subsequently lead to poor performance appraisal.

A civil servant has to be resourceful. Thus, an organisation with a restricted information flow will hamper his/her performance, including producing better results.

Carrying out official obligations alone cannot guarantee high value-added results. Productivity at such a level requires extensive information sources within and among government agencies.

Clear information flow within the Government will create a greater sense of inclusiveness presented in the spirit of transparency.

However, change is never easy.

Adopting socio-economic theories alone is scant to cushion the impact of mindset change among rigid, yet timid, civil servants. Encroaching into individuals' comfort zones may result in feelings of anxiety and frustration.

Of course, effective information flow should be needs-based.

Information flow restrictions must be justified. A needs-based paradigm of information flow must supersede the existing organisational culture of hoarding information within the hierarchy.

The shift towards a responsive civil service must go beyond working outside organisational silos and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

Effective information flow is the string that binds.

The passion for work excellence and thirst for knowledge should also be nurtured for change in service quality. If a job is worth doing it is worth doing well.

Generating a buy-in effect among civil servants will take time.

Nevertheless, it has to start now and just as the saying goes – all good things come to he who perseveres.

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