

# Getting The Basic Right: A Case of Problem Framing in the Public Sector

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## ABSTRACT

*The Global Innovation Index or GII was launched in 2007 has provided a great emphasis on measuring the climate and infrastructure for innovation and on assessing related outcomes. One of its sub pillars is to reflect on perceptions of the quality of public service and the quality of policy formulation as well as implementation and in the last three years; 2019 – 2021, ranked Malaysia at 37, 30 and 33 consecutively. Despite being the third highest country among her ASEAN counterparts, after Singapore and Brunei, the country is still ranked low in the political, regulatory and business environments indexes, consistently at number 40, 40 and 41. Hence, this paper is to explore the nature of problem framing process in designing policy within a Malaysian government institution through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Data of this paper is gathered qualitatively from one of the Malaysia's public agencies through a series of in-depth interviews with its group of policy makers to showcase the lived experiences of policy makers in the process of designing and formulating policies. This paper is to illuminate the process of how a problem framing is done in a public agency in Malaysia by adopting a set of frame creation model designed by Dorst (2015), the key challenges faced by the policy makers and key recommendations to improve the design and process of policy making in the public sector to ensure better implementation. The research provides a set of structure the problem framing process of the agency.*

**Keywords:** Public sector, Framing, Design strategy, Malaysian public agency

## INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of framing in the review of the literature. For a start, Bardwell, (1991) defines it as a concerted effort in understanding of a problem through a set of structure and process. Schon and Rein (1994) consider framing as a

way of selecting, organising, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality in order to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading and acting. While Benford and Snow (2000) refers to it as the schemata of interpretation which help individuals organise social reality and make sense of their experiences and actions' in which it entails the processes of constructing the meaning occurrences within the social world. Dorst (2019) defines it as an organisational principle of a coherent set of statements that are useful to think with. Head (2022) explains that it refers to how an issue or problem is defined and presented to wider audiences, as part of the process of setting policy agendas and priorities. Hence it is suffice to note that framing is a form of systems thinking which provides new ways of seeing the world, focusing attention on the relationship between elements in complex systems and the spaces in between (Lamont, 2020)

Framing is not new in policy design. Frame is a concept which was introduced by Gregory in 1972, in which it is intended as a conceptual structure to organise an outlook. It is a term used in reference to the social construction of a social phenomenon by media, political resources, specific or social movement organisations (Reese et. al 2003). Framing is an essential element of problem setting in reflective practices such as design (Bijl-Brouwer, 2019). Cairney (2012) claims the process of problem identification begins at the agenda setting stage in which policy makers identify problems which require government attention, decide what issues deserve the most attention and define the nature of the problem. Birkland (2019) supports the idea that problem identification begins at the stage as the policy process owes a great deal to systems thinking.

The term systems thinking, however, has been defined and redefined in many different ways since it was coined by Barry Richmond in 1987 by Arnold & Wade, (2015). Zokaei, et al (2011) explains there are two key features of systems thinking in which (i) it emphasises on effectiveness thinking compared to efficiency thinking, and (ii) it is a powerful way of workers' engagement as they are involved and responsible in the design and redesign of a particular system. Zokaei et al (2011) further adds that action learning, which is a form of normative educative, is the heart of systems thinking in which it facilitates towards finding appropriate, context rich solution. Jones (2018) describes it as a design-led method that incorporates discussion in co-creation, sense making, and decision-making. Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm (2020) believe that combining parts of systems thinking with elements of design has aided in the development of an area of practise known as systemic design, and that problem framing contributes to generating a systemic perspective on problem situations. Another key feature which is addressed by Blomkamp (2021) is that both design and systems led approaches often result in a reframing of the problem before any potential possibilities or solutions are explored.

One of the systems thinking tool is a set of frame creation model by Dorst (2015). This frame is used in the study in order to discover and illuminate the process of problem framing activity taken by the agency. The model entails a nine steps of how framing is created and these nine steps are:-

- (i) Archaeology is a step to delve deeper into a problem as well as earlier or previous practice to solve it. One of the key features of this phase is not only to investigate what already happened, but also (i) what could have happened as well as (ii) what would have been different if one had

chosen another path. Dorst (2015) claimed that this phase provides the insight into the role of the problem owner has had in creating the problem situation.

- (ii) Paradox is a step to investigate the initial problem definition itself.
- (iii) Context is a step for identifying the inner circle of essential stakeholders involved in the problem situation, as well as those who would likely be required participants in any potential solutions.
- (iv) Field is a discovery and exploration step which identifies and investigates all participants who may be involved in the problem or solution at any point in time, whether actively or passively, or even by sheer influence. The players are taken into account based on their power, interests, values, and behaviours, all of which help to drive the problem in a new direction.
- (v) Themes is a step to analyse the needs, motivation and experiences of the field stakeholders/players.
- (vi) Frames is a step for deconstructing the larger field and themes from the original paradox. A written template, such as this one, 'If the problem situation is approached, as if it is ...' can be used to create the frame.
- (vii) Futures is a step to evaluate phase to seek assurance that the frames created can lead to realistic and viable solutions.
- (viii) Transformation is a step to evaluate the frame if it is feasible in the short term or for a longer period of time.
- (ix) Integration is a step to ensure that the new frames and the development initiated are integrated in the broader context of the organisations.

Dorst (2015) further adds that frame should be actionable that they are capable of leading to realistic solutions. A good frame entails a wide range of issues and may also draw in issues which are beyond the original problem. Another characteristics of a good frame is that it is original, inspiring, engaging and lively.

In the context of Malaysia, systems thinking is not new. In 2009, the government of Malaysia, inspired by the essence of the Blue Ocean Strategy developed by Kim and Mauborgne in 2004, introduced and subscribed to the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS) as a framework to guide the Malaysian National Development Strategy (MyNDS) in developing and crafting the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan from 2016 until 2020. MyNDS focused on rapidly delivering high impact on both the capital and people economies at low cost to the government. Two main concepts were introduced which were (i) the capital economy and (ii) the people economy. At the end of 2018, 90 NBOS initiatives had been successfully implemented to address a wide range of economic and social issues. Outcome based budgeting was also introduced to all ministries and agencies in 2016 as an integrated approach that required all stakeholders to examine economics, social and environmental costs and benefits prior to project selection (Tam, 2013). The Economic Planning Unit stated that the new waves of innovation policies contained in the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, would drive the public sector to be more people-centric (Ramli et al., 2017)

NBOS was reported to break down bureaucratic silos through the engagement with related stakeholders in order to create new ideas to solve the identified problems or issues. The selection and design of each NBOS initiative was based on two key aspects which were (i) to enhance the level of public welfare and being by narrowing the social distance between groups in the society, and (ii) deliver high income through economic growth and integrated development (Chan Kim, 2017). One of the most celebrated and well publicised NBOS initiatives to date is, the Community Rehabilitation Programme (CRP) which stems from the issues of rising crime, overcrowded prisons and high recidivism case. Instead of building more expensive prison on tax payers' money, CRP centre is created for petty criminals on the military bases' idle land. CRP offers a solution to overcrowding that can be solved through cheaper and quick way. The inmates are taught technical skills as part of the government's approach to life-long learning education. Since its inception in 2011, the recidivism rate for petty criminals has dropped around 90 percent. It is apparent that there is a systematic process in coming up with the initiative which is done through a system-thinking tool process called Blue Ocean Strategy. The strategy composes a view of the two types of oceans (markets); red oceans and blue oceans (Chan Kim, 2017).

However, despite all this, the country still ranks low in its indicators for accountability, impartiality and the transparency as well as openness of its public service (The World Bank, 2019). Although the country is doing better than others in South-East Asia, there is still a very big gap in the performance of the civil servants compared with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (The World Bank, 2019). The report is also supported by the latest Global Innovation Index Report in 2019-2021 which ranked Malaysian institutions, comprised of political, regulatory and business environments indexes, consistently at number 40, 40 and 41. The report is also echoed in 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2021-2025), Chapter 13, a dedicated chapter to focus on strengthening public sector service delivery to transform the public sector to be more people-centric, effective and productive. It was reported that during the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, various efforts were implemented in order to improve the public sector, however, due to adverse external environment, slower economic growth, low rate of digitalisation, relatively high perception on the incidence of corruption as well as slow improvement in the public service delivery, the transformation remains to be seen (Economic Planning Unit, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

The study employs a phenomenological approach in order to gain greater context of how problem framing is done by the agency. This is in line with a claim made by one of the prominent scholars in qualitative research; Merriam (2009) who explains that a study on phenomenon involves an understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population.

Three research questions proposed are as follows: -

- (i) What are the lived experiences of the policy makers pertaining to the problem framing in the policy design?
- (ii) What are the key issues and challenges in the case of problem framing of the agency?
- (iii) What are the key recommendations to improve problem framing in the policy design?

As the nature of the research is to capture the lived experiences, phenomenological approach is employed to answer the three questions above. The theoretical framework used for this study is from the perspective of one of the phenomenological scholars; Heidegger in which the approach is known as hermeneutic phenomenology. As far as the approach is concerned, there are three major dimensions which are elaborated by MacKey (2005) as follows:-

#### **Fore-structures**

This term refers to the context-dependent knowledge, opinions, and experiences which the researcher and participant brings to the research. Heidegger meant the term in a much more comprehensive sense, to acknowledge that interpretation already exists fully formed, but in need of expression.

#### **Time**

It refers to the context of an understanding gained through a series of interpretation.

#### **Space**

It requires the researcher to listen to participant's descriptions of the phenomena situations, experiences that are brought close, or into the foreground of their attention.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important to elucidate aspects of the study that are assumed but cannot be established as fact (Peoples, 2020). In this case, the assumption lies on a preconceived assumption that the agency is equipped with a series of problem framing process in the policy design and by looking at the current issues on the policy implementation of the agency, there seems to be an issue on how a problem is framed. Therefore, a combination of data collection methods was employed to find answers to the three questions above which include (i) reviews of policy paper proposals (documentary data), (ii) a series of an in-depth interviews, (iii) observation on a number of policy design and policy discussions and (iv) problem framing simulation practice involving a group of public service officers (7 of them) who have had an experience of more than three years in policy making as well as the five-year Malaysia Plan.

The chosen of seven public service officers is considered the delimitation of study and it is due to the type of analysis ; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in which Smith et al., (2009) claims three and six participants can be a reasonable sample size for a research using IPA and cautioned that too many respondents may put a researcher in danger of being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated.

## RESULTS

### **Agency's framing practice**

Through a review of approved policy paperwork by the agency from 2019 to 2021 by its board and/or special committee, out of 230 paperwork presented to the board and/or special committee, 23 were policy in nature, which were approved by the board and/or special committee. When probed further on the dominant type of framing found, a set of beliefs surfaced in which most respondents indicated that any policy formulation is tied up to the cost of implementation in which the process of cost estimation is a crucial step within the framing process which allows them to consider the extent to which policy objectives and strategic orientations are feasible and affordable. Hence the framing must also include the element of cost estimation or future financial implications in relation to the policy being designed.

### **Agency's case of problem framing:**

#### **Designing of remote learning policy**

The establishment of Junior Science Colleges by the government through the agency is to provide access to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) education to students from the background of the bottom 40 percent of the household income (B40). Currently there are 55 colleges nationwide with more than 36,000 enrolment on yearly basis. When the pandemic hit the country in March 2020, the education world, around the globe, was shocked. Those education institutions which had already operated in a hybrid mode; online and offline prior to the pandemic were doing fairly better in adjusting but those which relied on one to one and physical attendance, were scrambling for options and unfortunately the agency's junior science colleges was one of them.

#### **Archaeology**

A group of officers from the strategic planning and secondary education division took on the issue quickly by embarking on an online survey with two main objectives: (i) to identify the readiness of the teachers and students in embracing what seemed to be the new normal in teaching and learning remote learning based on the household income status, and (ii) to recommend new strategies through the findings. 14,198 respondents comprising 39 percent of the entire population which include; the school management (the principals, deputies and the heads of department) as well as teachers and students. Three groups of household cluster based on income background were identified and they were; (i) Bottom 40 percent made up to 51 percent of the respondents among the students followed by (ii) 22 percent of the medium 40 percent household income and (iii) 27 percent of the top 20 percent household income. Based on the survey, two major groups (A and B) were identified. Group A is consisted of those students with shared devices (with other family members) which involved the B40 and the lower M40 group and Group B consisted of those with own devices (not sharing) which is comprised of the 20 percent of the M40 and the T20 group who claimed to own devices without having to share.

The very concept of the archaeology phase is to investigate not only what happened but also what could have happened, and what would have been different

if the group had chosen another path (Dorst, 2015). However, based on the interview and documents reviewed, the step only covered the first part of the problem situation. There had been no extension to look into elements (i) what could have happened and (ii) what would have been different, embedded in the agency's archaeological process. The role of an archaeology stage is to delve deeper in the world of the problem, and this was not observed.

A simulation was conducted with the actual team, as a focus group, who designed the policy by addressing the two major questions. The revisit activity was able to brainstorm and derive three main themes from a list of 'what could have happened' which were: (i) Connectivity, (ii) Training, and (iii) Strategic collaboration. Among the three themes listed, only one was considered as beyond the mandate of the agency which is the connectivity. Three respondents out of the actual seven, claimed that the process was an eye opener as it enabled them to explore the problem further. *'This is different from what we usually do, normally we will think about the solution options right away.'* (R#1, R#3, R#4).

The respondents further added the themes derived from the session, was very useful and facilitative towards designing comprehensive and better policy.

### **Paradox**

Through a series of interview and document review activity, it is suffice to note that there has been no clear indication that this stage was ever attempted by the team. All of the respondents were in an agreement that what was done however was considered as the usual practice in the agency i.e. the process involving tabling of the insight, the team formulated a policy draft and had set aside financial allocation to respond to the issue of the implementation of remote learning. In this case, the policy was drafted to ensure that students from the B40 background were to be allocated with a tablet each, to reduce the dropout rate.

Given the fact that the team missed out on the crucial step of a frame creation process, a simulation was conducted with the team in order to establish the core paradox.

- (i) Because of the school shutdown due to pandemic, the teaching and learning (T&L) is interrupted and had to be conducted online
- (ii) Because the T&L is to be conducted online, parents are worried about the quality of online teaching and learning on their children (students)
- (iii) Because parents are worried, the government/agency has to respond.

During the simulation, all of the respondents agreed by establishing a paradox would open up greater focus on the investigation of the problem. Many agreed that the paradox established can be one of the many, and one respondent thought that: *'It is rather enriching to explore the problem this way.'* (R#1)

All of them reiterated that during the policy design stage, the usual practice is not so much looking at the problem holistically but to push for solution which is usually tied-up to financial allocation, despite the fact that, it may or may not provide a sound solution. Nevertheless, five of the respondents (R#1, R#2, R#4, R#6, R#7) preferred the archaeology process to gain a sense of broader view of the issue. Instead of referring to the paradox, they believe that understanding the process of archaeology gives more clarity. One even claims that:-

*'I don't know if I really understand this stage, because I feel like the first stage really opens up how we should look at the problem. This deal with paradox creates some confusion, so I don't refer to them, I refer to the first stage instead' (R#2).*

### **Context**

During the existing framing done by the agency, the context was solely on the parent; their concern over the quality of online learning. Ensuring that no student would be left behind, the allocation was approved and a set of tablets was distributed to the target group. However, many issues were raised by teachers when it came to pedagogy training of online learning. The issues were not covered in the policy. Teachers were left to their own devices in a literal sense, thus affecting the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Should all stakeholders is covered during the archaeology stage, this issue could have been easily avoided.

The simulation session also revealed that during the stage, it is important to not stick to the paradox as it can be many iterations to it based on the perceptive. For example, if the respondents only focus on parents and students as per input in the paradox, the context would only involve the two groups only. By digging deeper, the respondents managed to list out four group of stakeholders as follows:- (i) Parents, (ii) B40 students, (iii) Non digital native teachers, (iv) Digital native teachers.

All respondents felt that if they had the time and training to really work on the problem framing, the policy formulated would have been quite comprehensive.

### **Field**

Unlike the context phase, this field-phase is associated with the broader social context of the problem. The study identified that it is not covered in the framing process of the agency as the process stopped short by identifying the obvious stakeholders only which were (i) parents and (ii) student. However during a simulation, the extension of the field were identified which are; (i) Related government ministries & agencies, (ii) Telecommunication (telco) companies, (iii) Government Linked Companies (GLC), and (iv) Alumni.

Related government ministries and agencies covers issues on the existing connectivity (infostructure) in the country. Despite access to internet in 2020 being reported at 91.7 percent, there is a need for improvement in terms of its speed. In 2019, the country has established its five-year plan to spearhead development of digital infrastructure and increase competitiveness through the National Fiberisation and Connectivity Plan 2019-2024 (NFCP).

A number of programmes were introduced during the start of the pandemic to ensure that no student is left behind. Some of the programmes were (i) government subsidies to purchase devices and subscribe to internet for the B40 group (ii) Free daily 1GB internet data, (iii) Special telco package for selected group of students particularly the B40 group, and (iv) Crowdfunding devices initiative by telco companies for the B40 group and many more. However, none of these programmes actually addresses the key issue at hand which was the speed until an initiative called JENDELA was introduced during the tabling of 2021 budget to address it by year 2024.

It is interesting to note that, despite the programmes introduced by the government at the start of pandemic, there is no single collaboration ideas put forth

during the agency's framing stage, found in the study. However, only during the simulation which took place as part of the study, the collaboration idea was mentioned by the respondents and when asked to deliberate further for the exclusion, one respondent pointed at the timing in which the respondent admitted that *'It was really an oversight because we did not have the luxury of time during the design stage.'* (R#4, R#6)

The simulation also revealed that there is an absence of a structure to guide the group in the process of framing a problem. The existing process involves the team to brainstorm stakeholders in the agency's ecosystem instead of looking at it from a whole chain of government machineries that may be available. At one angle, although the agency can be considered as proactive in taking up the responsibility to ensure that no student is left behind during the shutdown of the schools, the oversight on collaboration indirectly triggered a silo approach.

### Themes

The study also made a discovery on how themes were explored as far as framing is concerned that; it is explored differently compared to the concept of frame creation model by Dorst (2015). Theme is explored on two platforms in the practice of the agency which are (i) based on any surveys' insights, (ii) focus group discussion /workshops with selected group of people, in which the latter platform is the most popular platform by the agency. The selection of group is usually homogenous involving a group of senior officers of more than five years in service. In this context, the officers are from the secondary education division, selected school principals as well as the deputies and a number of expert teachers. The discussion was conducted via Teams (an online platform by Microsoft) and discussion was led by the secondary education division, deputy director of policy. What is interesting to note here is that, because of the team actually skipped the core elements of frame creation model i.e (i) paradox , and (ii) field, and the themes derived were solely based on the preliminary survey conducted online. The existing themes derived based on the discussion of the survey were: (i) Support, (ii) Time management and (iii) Assessment. The details are as follows:-

#### (i) Support

The theme is solely referred to the target group which is the B40 students. It was important for the group to work on this particular type of support because the survey data revealed despite 70 percent of them were not ready with online classes in which 60 percent of them had to share a smart phone with other family members who would also be attending the online classes.

One respondent revealed that what transpired from the discussion was to procure a certain amount of tablets for the affected students. The identification of the students were based on the recommendation of the schools' counsellors.

#### (ii) Course management

Having dealt with the first theme, the findings of the survey led the team to work on an allocated hour required for online learning. The team decided that due to unknown circumstance of the reality at that time, only two subjects were allowed per day, with an hour allocated for each. Consultation or feedback session with teachers were to be done through a chosen instant messaging communication.

#### (iii) Assessment

Due to the nature of the pandemic, all type of assessments will be done digitally through mechanisms at the discretion of the school.

The design is very focused on the students. This is because the data is all about the students. Therefore, policy preparation checklist is needed to help the policy makers of the agency to design a comprehensive policy which will provide the support to all affected groups, not just the students. Although they are the major stakeholder in this case, greater exploration is needed to ensure effective implementation.

A simulation was conducted and the study found out more themes were derived throughout. These themes also includes the sub-themes as follows:

Theme	Sub theme	Target Group
a. Support	(ai) Pedagogy Training (includes teachers' feedback) (aii) IT Skills	Teacher
b. Support	(b-i) Devices (b-ii) IT skills (b-iii) Campaign/awareness programme	Student Parents, student
c. Course Management	(c-i) Digital platform (c-ii) Accessibility	Teacher, Student
d. Time Management	(d-i) Online Timetable (d-ii) Rotation	Teacher, Student Teacher
e. Monitoring & Assessment	(e-i) Weekly Report on attendance / issues (e-ii) Daily report on attendance (e-iii) Repository (Question bank) (e-iv) Digital platform	Teacher Student Teacher Teacher

### Frames

The study discovered that there were patches of evidence in terms of frame creation established by the agency. However, all of the respondents emphasised that as far as framing a problem is concerned; *'We have yet to delve deep into the problem as detail as what the simulation has shown.'*

As mentioned previously, time is a factor in which the respondents were all in an agreement that:- *'What seems to be a basic or common sense process/practice of discovering a problem, it has become a luxury that we cannot afford due to its lengthy process.'*

In the context of the agency, the policy usually works on a top-down approach and the central agency in which where the allocation is tied-up to, provide a timeframe of less than a week to propose the budget as claimed by one respondent; *'Hence we usually have to make do of what we have.'* (R#5)

One can argue that the duration of discovering a problem is subjective. The study found out that the practice of problem framing is different in the agency as less time is allocated to explore more on the problems because they have to quickly work on the budget paper to support the policy. One of the respondents highlighted that:- *'It will be no use if we did not follow (meet) timeline for submission because everyone will be sending theirs.'* (R#3)

The guiding principle for existing framing was to acknowledge the school shutdown and it was imperative to deploy/provide the devices to the target group of students. However, a simulation was conducted in relation to this study, based

on the new themes identified with the group and below is a list of frames created during the session:-

- (i) If the problem situation of the quality of remote learning is approached as if it is a problem of providing support to teachers, then the quality of online learning should be...
- (ii) If the problem situation of the quality of remote learning is approached as if it is a problem of providing support to students, then the quality of online learning should be...
- (iii) If the problem situation of the quality of remote learning is approached as if it is a problem of course management, then the quality of online learning should be...
- (iv) If the problem situation of the quality of remote learning is approached as if it is a problem of time management, then the quality of online learning should be...
- (v) If the problem situation of the quality of remote learning is approached as if it is a problem of monitoring and assessment, then the quality of online learning should be...

As there has been no frame applied in the previous framing practice, only the guiding principle on the deployment of device to students, the simulation session above has led the group to work on realistic solutions. One respondent highlighted that; *'I now can work on a thinking forward based on the frame founded.'* (R#1)

Another respondent added that:-

*'I was not quite sure where this is all heading but trying out the frame ideas is clearly something that we've been missing and that may have compromised (affected) the effectiveness of the policy implementation.'* (R#4).

More time was allocated during this stage as the respondents were dealing with framing a problem at hand. Many had explained that they had to repeat the process of questioning and reformulating the initial problem at a number of times and how quickly some of them decided to cut to solutions instead of exploring the problem. They believed they were tend to narrow it down to a solution, most of the time, because in their opinion, that was what matter at the end of the day. They found it quite a struggle to explore the problems because they were trained to think for the solutions instead. It was also stated that the aspect in problem exploring and framing a problem are not something that is addressed as part of their day-to-day activity hence they do not have the necessary skills or techniques to deal with it.

### **Futures**

As part of a thinking forward process, the existing guiding principle created by the group was meant to resolve the issue on the devices. However, in the interest of this study, the deliberation of this stage and the remaining processes; which are transformation and integration will revolve around the new set of frames created during the simulation.

Five main frames were created which were directly incorporated from the new themes derived based on the simulation. At this point, the group decided to explore all of the frames extensively and to choose any frame which is in the category of

quick-wins. Two sessions of brainstorming activity were implemented to address the frames to determine its term/timeline.

Out of the five main frames created, four were considered as 'good to go' and the most viable as frame associated with time-management was combined with course management frame and it was similar as claimed by the respondent. *'Course management is the bigger picture and time management frame can be subset of it.'* (R#3).

### **Transformation**

It is important to note that the study is only concerned with the process of problem framing in the agency, hence any solution ideas generated are not included as part in the study. This stage in particular is to evaluate the feasibility of the chosen frame in short term or on a longer period time.

For example, Frame #1 is concerned, providing support for teachers is considered a short term as it needs to be done right away. A series of strategies is then drafted to match as well as improve the sub themes under the support for teachers as per the previous table which includes; (i) pedagogy training and (ii) IT skills. Among the strategies involved were (a) blended or hybrid learning, (b) collaborative approaches to knowledge building and (c) Utilisation of multimedia and open education resources and (d) Mentoring.

### **Integration**

During the integration stage, the frame created will be integrated in the broader context of the organisations. For example, frame #1 entails providing support for the teachers, in which training can be considered as one of the key supports. Training initiative is actually under the purview of the Human Resource Department (HRD) and in the integral part of the framing, HRD will be part of the integration as well in terms of allocation and the type of training/consultation required.

One key issue highlighted by the group after the simulation is done was who gets to approve the process 1-9, prior to the next step which is budget application to the central agency. This is because, public sector is known for its bureaucratic procedures which can be either good thing or otherwise. In this case, policy design is usually tied-up to a budget proposal at the end of the day, hence there is a need for the process to be validated by the management. One of the respondents raised the issue of validation; *'We need to ensure that the management is ok with what we did here or all is wasted.'* (R#4)

Another respondent echoed the same sentiment in which it entails the followings:- *'As this will be turned into a policy paper to be presented to the board eventually, we need to get this endorsed and validated.'* (R#2)

By looking at the current model, it seems like it does not accommodate the bureaucratic nature of a public sector particularly the agency.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper explores the process of problem framing in the public sector in which through a number of research instruments utilised, it identifies a set of findings which contributes towards the practice and the theory aspects.

The study confirms the assumption that the agency, to an extent, is equipped with a series of problem framing process in the policy design. However, the idea of a problem framing is not understood by a set of policy makers of the agency. Two major factors are contributing towards it which are: (i) Absence of Systems Thinking Model, (ii) Competency. Evidently, there seems to be a process in the problem framing, there is also an apparent absence of a prescribed systems thinking model either adapted or adopted by the agency which indirectly justifies the lack of knowledge on the practice. With the absence on a model, the guiding principle of problem framing is ambiguous and the group has ended up looking at things the same way as before which will have a detrimental effects towards policy implementation. Through a series of engagement with the focus group, it is also obvious that training is crucial to enable better participation on framing a problem. In the case of the agency, the group is able to analyse the overall structure of a problem but is unable to compute a holistic view of a problem due to lack of knowledge on the framing practice.

From the theoretical aspect of it, the study also found out that in the case of the agency, the current frame creation model by Dorst does not support the bureaucratic nature of the agency. An additional process on frame creation model is needed as to match with the situation of a public sector. As deliberated previously, there are indeed nine steps for the frame creation model propagated by Dorst (2015) which covers problem identification to its integration aspect. In the case of a public sector, an endorsement by the management is a crucial step, to validate and approve the framing work done. The study is to suggest that this additional, which is validation process, to be considered as a form of adaptation to the model and to be regarded as the final process of the fame creation model.

As the research only covers one public agency in Malaysia, thus the study cannot be generalised to other agencies in the public sector. Therefore the finding only captures the lived experience of a particular agency. However as problem framing in decision making is important and generic in nature, some aspects of the findings may be insightful for other agencies.

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