

SOME THOUGHTS ON STATE MANAGEMENT

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This essay discusses the ideal system of governance for the Filipino nation. It seeks to address the question on what type of affairs management may be appropriate for the state which in form and in essence is an organic body.

The issue in question goes beyond the sole competence of academicians, politicians, economists, social scientists and quantitative scientists. It is therefore an issue that must be analyzed not only in terms of political rhetoric, economic calculations, and social prognosis but also theoretical, pragmatic and conditional measurements.

Systems of governance can either be borrowed from another nation, or evolved through a process of adaptation, modification and innovation or a combination of both. Most modern countries, particularly those that emerged during the era of colonization, fall under the former type of governance. Still many post-colonial nation-states wear the governance cloak borrowed from their colonial masters.

The other type of governance, on the other hand, is the product of evolutionary process and, for one reason or another, experimentation.

In the case of the Philippines, the remnants of colonial tutelage in state management and its influence in the art of governance have barely faded away. After independence, we adapted the republican system of government — centralized and theoretically unified in the control of state affairs and governmental functions. For purposes of effective administration, the physical as well as geographic boundaries, marked by the Spanish and American colonial governments, are still operative with seemingly very few modifications. It may even be said that the provinces, cities and towns were created to suit the colonial masters' convenience at the time. The legacy of the colonial past in the management of nation-state affairs is not only confined to the physical boundaries. The socio-cultural map of the Philippines was drawn to a great extent by the standards of Spain and later, the United States. Thus we refer to such terms as Moroland, Ilocandia and Christian or Muslim areas, to designate physical boundaries. These labels have been the basis of government policies in education, political participation, and even in the exercise of civil rights.

For better or for worse, we just pulled on the cloak of governance that was imposed upon us. Apparently, we were helpless during the early phase of our rise to nationhood. And for that we did not have a better choice.

There is no doubt that the evolution of a system of state management — the governance component — is very vital to the pursuit of nation-building. In this sense,

the formulation of and search for a viable system of managing state affairs is indispensable. In fact, any effective system of governance must logically precede nation-building for the former to be an instrument in the attainment of the latter. The search is an ongoing process.

THE PECULIARITIES OF THE PHILIPPINE SETTING

It is clear that the evolution of a system of governance fit for the Filipino nation is a goal, and/or an instrument for nation-building and development. That we are a nation still developing and strengthening the various social, economic and political institutions implies that the goal of establishing stability is an end worth considering, and being recognized as equally important as the issue on national development. In other words, the system of governance is an integral part of the national being and the character of the former definitely reflects that of the latter.

When we ponder on the kind of system we have to adopt, it becomes necessary to consider the Filipino nation-state in its physical and non-physical dimensions, which demands the balance between material and social components. The preliminary consideration, therefore, is that the system of governance, whatever it is or however it is called, should embrace two aspects — the pragmatic aspect and the non-material, philosophical aspect. We shall try to discuss the two in the light of the realities and conditionalities or dynamics of the Filipino nation-state.

Physical character. The physical character of the Philippine nation-state determines the form of the system of state administration as regards its reach and effectiveness. Given the approximately 7,100 islands, a system of governance that can effectively and efficiently penetrate every nook of the archipelago is a fundamental concern of nation-state management and development. The very nature of the physical geography demands a kind of government control entirely different from that adapted by a nation in a continental location.

Hence, a system of governance, more than any other form of state administrative device, is a vital invisible bond that should hold the Philippine domain. It is imperative, therefore, that the instrument, literally and otherwise, be fashioned like a garden tool to cultivate and stimulate the dynamics of archipelagic development and advancement.

Non-material or non-physical factors. The second dimension of the Philippine nation-state that is a determinant of the state management style are the non-material, non-physical factors. These refer to the socio-cultural and spiritual totality of the Filipino nation. The discussion of this aspect obviously leads us to the abstract plane of administrative functions of state affairs. But the socio-cultural and spiritual characteristics of a nation cannot absolutely be detached from the geographical dimensions. In fact, the two mutually influence each other. Within and beyond the confines of the socio-cultural and spiritual, the system of state management treads on extremely complex grounds.

Philippine society is composed of various social systems, and diverse cultural heritage. Viewed from a compartmentalized cultural prism, a system of governance that can be super-imposed on the map must be equally sophisticated, diverse, and sensitive to the Philippine nation-state. This second factor is one rationale for a distinct system of government. In other words, this is the "temperament" factor of Filipino nationhood that demands a distinctly Filipino governance system and style. Some sectors of Filipino society, for example, can be subjected to authoritarian, autocratic rule. Others prefer to be independent and autonomous and some will be comfortable with a rigidly structured and hierarchical form of government. In some cases, a highly centralized mode of control may be preferable. The point here is that there is a great degree of flexibility since there is a wide range of social diversity.

In such a situation, a government system that should perform the function of social unification and at the same time maintaining the cultural identity and distinctive character of the various cultural communities is a consideration. A system having the least partiality to a particular cultural group is in every way an ideal one.

Balance Between the Physical and the Social Components. The third factor is the maintenance of balance between the material and the social components as they relate to the system of governance. Pragmatic considerations of the tangible as well as intangible elements in the society to match the kind of system of governance are inevitably complementary to the two preceding factors.

Obviously, the failure of many nation-states in the management of their affairs is due to the lack of balance between pragmatic realism and extreme adherence to the tenets of bureaucratic tradition, tinged with ethnic rigidity.

Long- and Short-Term Perspectives. That the system of governance is a tool and a goal brings us to the issue of relevance of the mode of governance from the long-term and short-term perspectives. The function of the governance system as an instrument for solving immediate national problems falls under the short-term perspective. But in this case, such a system may outlive its usefulness if and when the problem it intends to solve is long gone.

The adaptation of a problem-solving-oriented system of governance can be disadvantageous in several ways: (1) Oftentimes it is difficult to shift from one system to another because it is financially, politically, as well as socially costly; (2) There is a high possibility of missing general objectives and latent concerns of nation-state management because of the specificity and focus on certain manifested problems only; and (3) There is the risk of ineffectiveness as a result of the limitation of system over time, place, and situation.

On the other hand, the long-range perspective of a system of governance transcends even perhaps the limitations referred to above, and those that arise in the course of time. However, the conditionalities for the adoption of such a system has nothing to do with the present, past, and future for its *raison d'etre*.

RATIONALE FOR AFFAIRS OF STATE MANAGEMENT

The delicate task of balancing the multifarious elements and conditions found in the Philippine setting is a major concern of state management.

In this regard, the Philippine nation-state, has to design its system of governance considering the following factors: 1) Geographically scattered physical components; 2) Socio-culturally and ethnically diverse populace; 3) Nation-state in the process of being built respond to the people's ideals; and 4) The volatile and ever-changing regional and global environment.

The above factors considered in terms of their interaction with each other will determine the final form that may be called a Philippine model of governance. Therefore, understood from a pragmatic point of view a truly Filipino state-management model that must be developed the factors enumerated above being the points of reference towards relevance and applicability. In other words, state management necessarily has to be tailored to meet the needs and dynamics of the Philippine nation-state. In this connection, when we speak of a 'truly' Filipino model of governance, the question of what kind of state management style comes to fore. But that is not our concern at the moment.

Concerning management of state affairs, two "filters" have to be put in place if management is to be efficient and effective — that is, geographical and socio-cultural filters. These filters have quantitative and qualitative components.

Geographic Filters

One test for the appropriateness hence effectivity of a system of governance is the depth of its reach within the society. The Philippines, being an archipelago is divided into 13 regions, consisting of provinces, subdivided into municipalities and further segmented into barangays poses enormous challenge for Philippine state management.

Access to each of these units affects the capacity of the state to govern. Bodies of water, mountain ranges, valleys, and other barriers act as filters in the flow of governance.

The uneven level of development in various islands, provinces and municipalities is evidence of continuing contact with the system of governance. Not surprisingly, this is influenced by the extent of telecommunication and transportation systems that obtain in the country.

It is indeed, a fact of state governance that concentration in "central" regions/cities/municipalities effects a two-way traffic between the central and local governments. On the other hand, when central state governance and management loses intensity as to effect only trickles towards the direction of outlying provinces,barrios or barangays, the expected development is almost imperceptible.

What are the implications? If the system of governance is the efficient conduit for social services' reach to all the geographical units, inevitably the system has equitably delivered to the governed regardless of whether a barangay is in Batanes, in the hinterlands of the Cordilleras, or the highlands of Mindanao as well as Sitangkai in Tawi-Tawi.

The system of governance benefits the Filipino if it overcomes the seemingly difficult geographical barriers that separate the different regions of the country. Ideally, the system of governance are the vital arteries that distribute the essence of democratic state rule and authority within the domains of the Philippines to all levels and units regardless of the physical distance from the political, economic, social, cultural centers of authority in state governance. With the realization of this ideal follows the maintenance of peace and order, and economic and cultural development achieved on the national level will inevitably spread throughout the archipelago. A more basic state function, the provision for social welfare, for example, flows through the artery of governance to every barangay in the Philippine state. In effect, the system is the chain that binds all territorial components.

Socio-cultural Filters

Another element that the system of governance has to deal with is the socio-cultural component of the Philippine nation-state. This factor presents another "filter" that is invisible, and oftentimes beyond comprehension and measurement. However, it cannot be denied that the cultural diversity that obtains in the country, and more evidently by the geographic condition of the Philippines, indeed complicates the state of governance. Compared to the geographical factor, the socio-cultural dimension, because of its inherent subtlety, demands a system of governance that overrides all perceived complexities.

Recognizing the existence of more than a hundred different cultural groups inhabiting the various regions implies the need for an equal number of cultural considerations at once. Socio-cultural differences as manifested in community life, the distinction in languages, conduct of leadership, individual affairs, etc. cannot be ignored in the overall management of a unified nation-state. Countries that are culturally homogenous like Japan, Israel and Germany are observed to have confronted the general issue of what type of governance to be adapted, this being more of a political than an ethnic issue. In these countries, once a system is adopted by the state, it is unlikely that the clamor to switch to a different system (or modify the existing state-management system) arises from socio-cultural justifications and/or ethnic discontents. This can be considered a luxury for the leadership in those states that are ethnically and culturally homogenous.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of a Filipino state governance system is a dynamic instrument of development. As such, its definition, much less the nominal label (centralized, federalism, unicameral, parliamentary) of the style of state management is a peripheral concern. Indeed, it is only when we are able to stabilize a system that has successfully passed

through the geographical and socio-cultural “filters” can we concern ourselves with the labelling of that system distilled for the Philippine nation-state.

Thus, without defining it, we can discern the essential requisites of the system that we can envision for the country such as the following:

1. As a function, the system should serve as the link for national unification. It should unify the geographical dispersion of the Philippine nation-state. It must suit the archipelagic nature of the country.

2. Equally important as a function of Philippine governance apparatus is the function of enhancing and promoting the ideals of “unity in diversity” as regards the various socio-ethnic composition of the nation. This means that the governance structure and essence must be of the quality that is flexible, acceptable and sensitive to the Philippine socio-cultural terrains. The system must be a device that will bridge the distance between the various cultural groups.

By the very nature of systems of state-management, the appropriate one for the Philippines can be a potent instrument that can guide in a smooth manner all cultural directions towards one national direction without subjugation and without damaging the social and cultural heritage of the Filipinos. Aside from the integral function, the governance system can enrich the national culture through the interactions of the various cultural communities.

3. Related to the above, the role of a Philippine governance system must have the quality of an open, broad, and non-exclusive impartial system. Since it should serve as the conduit of the flow of state authority to all units of the nation—political, economic, cultural and social— an ideal Philippine state management system must be above partisanship, ideology, creed, beliefs and ethnic or racial identity.

4. From the perspective of being an instrument for nation-building and one of the most vital foundation blocks of the process, the Philippine state governance system should be development-oriented. In this context, the concepts of economy, rationality and effectivity must be the basic concern of the system.

In an analogy to the flow of communication and transportation criss-crossing the entire breadth of the Philippine archipelago, the system of governance should in the speediest manner, reach every barangay with the least cost of governance. This implies that the management system will be through various “layers without barriers”. Depending on the requisite for the best quality instrument in the delivery of government services throughout the country, some of the best elements of centralization and decentralization and other tested systems of managing nation-state affairs can be incorporated, but not necessarily en toto. Theories and practice in Philippine public administration ought to constantly sharpen the system.

5. At this point of Filipino nationhood, the era of globalization or internationalization is a phenomenon that has enormous impacts on the domestic affairs. There is no doubt that while national institutions are evolved and strengthened, regional and international developments, theoretically and literally, inundate national borders. So much so that no nation can afford to be isolated. In the light of this, the Philippine system of governance, while it must strive to maintain its independence and originality, must also be equipped with accurate radars to monitor regional and international changes. It must be a system that can spot opportunities in the international arena, can maximize these opportunities, and can also exude outputs towards the international community as it plays its proper role in international relations.

Finally, the success of a system of governance for the Philippines lies in the unity of all the Filipinos.