

# ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

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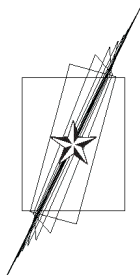
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# From the Editor

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## **Visioning Science, Governance, Whole-of-Government Strategy**

“It’s not part of their governance,” said my colleague, with an expansive worldview, during our night-out conversation on our government leaders in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g., state heads, governors, and mayors) forming public welfare decisions, for instance on poverty, climate change, and health, on account of science, or more specifically its empirical evidence. “Why not?”, I asked. My colleague offered that it has been so, because there is no broad-based norm for it. He further added that leaders usually decide based on what is immediately available to them—their gut feel, perception, emotion, or even whispers from their inner circles. Over some inebriants we two shared that night at a watering hole near a tree-lined park, we proceeded with our kilometeric discourse on the details of these convenient decision-making frames—for instance, about their sources and drivers, and the wisdom of their usage, including the outcome as to whether or not their consequence is a boon/or a bane to public welfare. At the end of our get-together, forward-looking as we are, we proposed that our countries in the region should seek to make our government leaders, among both the current and the future sets, scientific—that is, that they use empirical evidence—in their major decision making.

I nominate a systemic strategy for this vision. Scientific decision-making does not emerge out of the blue (no single country can claim its leaders’ present-day science-based decisions to have stemmed from just nowhere). This enviable asset—of being scientific—is only formed by design, effectively through the whole-of-government strategy. This systemic design is never a happenstance but rather a take-home lesson drawn from the practice in some industrialized countries (e.g., Germany and Japan), where successful governance norms involving almost all aspects of public welfare (e.g., poverty, climate change, and health) have long been informed by science. These countries’ exhaustive examination of the science of and the empirical evidence on public welfare has enabled them to provide an optimal self-actualizing environment for their government leaders. Their established welfare norms are so admirable that these are routinely adopted as the metrics against which the time-bound performance of the world’s less industrialized countries—for example, in achieving the whole-of-society Sustainable Development Goals—is assessed. Globally and internationally, governments, economic blocs, funding agencies, financial institutions, universities, non-government organizations, think tanks, and quality certification authorities are, in particular, employing these norms to ascertain governance quality worldwide (some tempering adjustments are made for resource-constrained countries). There is, consequentially, an external challenge upon our countries to carry out the demands of the science-governance paradigm. As we seek the much-needed external acceptance, recognition, and resources, our countries will need to work more than extra hard to fuse science and governance, or vice versa, to help engender our reputational status in the larger circles of nations.

Crucial in this hard work is the following three-fold systemic strategy. The first strategy shall call for our Asia-Pacific countries to mainstream the norm of scientific decision-making in the public sector governance, into our every development, policy, and legal instruments. In each of these instruments, there should be an explicit articulation at both the national and local level on the robust systematic evidence as an essential element of every major decision by our government leaders, whether in the field of poverty alleviation, environmental protection,

health promotion, among others. The articulation of the norm has to cut across the whole-of-government system, covering all major public welfare areas, with nary any exception. More importantly, the mainstreaming must be legislated for the long haul through which the norm has to remain a pulsing battle-cry of whomever is elected at the top national post. At present, the primacy of science in public governance is sporadic, mainly evident in welfare areas where science is understandably inherent, such as in science and technology, medical science, and agricultural technologies, to name a handful. However, in other areas like public land management, transportation and communication, education, media, and armed forces, the essentiality of scientific evidence is virtually unmentioned. Much of the governance chaos in our midst in these mentioned areas is attributable in part to the near-absence in the rationality of our leaders' decision-making process. The system-wide institutionalization will help shift the trajectory away from this science-less convention as well as help facilitate the advocacy and transformation of the expressed norm into a governance fixture.

To bring it to life, the norm has to be manifested as a must-do throughout the government bureaucracy. The second strategy shall subsequently demand our respective countries to exercise the norm as a generalized, regular practice of governance. From the national to the local governance hierarchies, our leaders—along with their area specialists—will be required to present, as a standard operating procedure, strong systematic data in support of their major public welfare proposals. The whys of proposed decisions shall be at the heart of the procedural interrogation, to query the science behind the planned implementation of public welfare efforts, such as in the case for instance of 1a) the conditional cash transfer as a poverty alleviation intervention, 2b) a kilometer-long dike, including its upper-range efficacy, as a flood control mechanism, and 3c) the lockdown as a containment measure against a viral transmission. The process of demonstrating, witnessing, and learning the standard operating procedure will help cement the scientific foundation of governance decisions, in addition to providing a progressive learning model and experience for the entire government leadership. External oversight is essential to make this second strategy transparent as well as reliable; for this, civil society has to be engaged—in honest-to-goodness terms—in the actual exercise of this norm.

The articulation-to-execution strategy will only come into full fruition if there is adequate infrastructure support. The third strategy shall require our countries to provide government system-wide human, intellectual, and physical resources for data generation. To decide, government leaders must have regular access to sets of systematic evidence. Vast amounts of capital expenditures will need to be put up for a permanent system-wide infrastructure (e.g., data scientists and staff, computers, connectivity, and data banks) to continually design, collect, process, and package empirical data sets on all major public welfare areas. The capital outlay will be worth every penn, because the eventual outcome is a life-long, functional whole-of-government infrastructure. (With such an extensive infrastructure investment, our countries stand to be admire, international, for our world-class, no non-sense innovation. We will be regarded as highly capable, an excellent national identity capital to possess as our leverage to engage in competitive opportunities, such as the all too-important cross-border trade and investment agreements. In the long run, having the infrastructure would bode well for our countries). To be whole and complete, the infrastructure has to be governed—from top to bottom—alongside time-honored scientific values of objectivity, honesty, openness, accountability, fairness, and stewardship, lest its destiny will be endangered in no time.

National solidarity is crucial, too. Each of our countries has to mobilize the entire government bureaucracy—along with the private sector and the general public—into one solid, committed unit, with respect to thinking and acting, in fulfilling this social cause. There is no illusion here that the pathway would be obstacle-free. The greatest obstacle will be the sociocultural mindset that sees scientific decision-making as unimportant, hence, an unnecessary social change. As long as the government bureaucracy is well-decisioned in its pursuit of the goal, the effect of such a doubting mindset can be offset by propagating an authentic mass-based pro-science mindset, through long-term advocacy and education to be accompanied by concrete courses of action, along with their results. For this purpose, our governments have to strategically collaborate with business, education, media, medicine, civil society, families, and the youth to advance the propagation of science as our systemic norm. To help facilitate the process of advancement, our countries have to also further modernize our physical, economic, and sociocultural environments to enable us to elevate our quality of life, thinking, and behavior to optimal levels.



Scientific thinking tends to prosper as a national way of life if the requisite environments for actualization are made very conducive. Fundamentally, our countries' work to mainstream science has to transpire alongside our countries' corresponding work on whole-of-society transformation.

The whole vision sees the social sciences—armed with systematic, in-depth evidence on leadership, innovation, and social change—as our countries' partner to help realize scientific decision-making in our public leadership. There are numerous aspects worth exploring here—the attitudinal dimension alone, which is at the crux of any major innovation—demands a great deal of research and behavioral modification efforts. Furthermore, the range of adjustments that various leaderships across the government bureaucracy have to make, in view of the scientific decision-making goal, will be another staggering agenda for the social sciences. Ultimately, the social sciences will be a mainstay partner when this vision of science, governance, and whole-of-government strategy is pursued as a norm in our countries. The documentation and the writing of the role of the social sciences in the entire processes, complexities, and outcomes, which are scarcely performed in many other national development efforts undertaken in our region, will be of great interest, especially for us at the APSSR.

In the past three years (2016–2020), the APSSR had published 183 articles, for which it garnered 117 citations as per Scopus report (see <https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/18800156723>). We hope to see these numbers go up in the next year.

Keep your good submissions coming. Our website is at <https://apssr.com>, and our submission platform is at <https://mc04.manuscriptcentral.com/apssr>.

Most importantly, I wish all of you, dear readers, the most joyful yuletide season and the most generous, blessed 2022 for all of us.

**Romeo B. Lee**

