

KRIENGSAK CHAREONWONGSAK

President of the Institute of Future Studies for Development; former Prime Ministerial Adviser, Thailand

In order to understand why it is necessary for the government and the private sector to build relationships with each other, one fundamental question that should be addressed first is: “Who should be responsible for social problems?”

Basically, the overriding answer would be that the government has the main responsibility for society as a whole. Other sectors, such as civil society, would act to remedy some of the social issues and problems that occur within it; and the business sector would, usually, in its own way, think of the concept of production of goods and services as a contribution to society rather than a clear role in working together for societal well being. In other words, most people think that either the public sector alone or the government is “solely responsible” for social well being. Furthermore, they think that other sectors may not have such responsibility at all, or, at most, only “partial responsibility”. This view also probably maintains that the business community and the civil society have just “additional responsibility” compared to what they already have, or even go further to think that the business community has an “optional responsibility” that it can choose whether it is involved or not.

However, there is a new paradigm I would like to call “Neo Social Contract or the new social contract”. The main idea is that all sectors, public, private and people, should collaborate fully to take charge of social well being. Therefore, it is a “joint responsibility” that the public sector, the private sector and the civic sector work together and integrate their responsibilities into this joint responsibility. This is the way it should be because each sector has its own strengths and weaknesses. For example, the public sector is led by the state through each government which usually has legal power, civil servants or public servants who are well equipped at its command, a budget allotted to it, and, a legitimacy having been given the right to govern. In contrast, the private sector is normally known for its efficiency in management and execution. Moreover, workers in private enterprise are usually very talented, highly motivated and well paid, whereas those in the civic sector are more idealist, usually have flexibility in the operation’s approach and understand the society and the social problems very well. In doing so, obviously, some have a “primary role” while others may have a “secondary role”. Some may take a “senior partnership” role in the efforts to achieve their goal and others may take a more “junior partnership” role depending upon the issues. To bring the three sectors together in this collaboration of relationships, a lot of social problems will be solved efficiently and effectively and a more complete picture will be visible rather than just business and government relations alone.

In order to build trust, to work together between the three sectors, and to maintain their relationship, one important ethic which all of them must have is “integrity”. This concept comes from the Latin word that means “wholeness” or “integral wholeness”. If the public sector, people sector, and private sector have integrity in their relationships with each other, then they will have responsibilities in the way they think, what actions they take and the consequences that come with it. For example, when the public sector sets policy that harms some businesses or people, with or without knowing and by doing so it’s not their fault. A government with integrity would naturally wish to compensate those who are adversely affected by that policy.

Still, integrity goes further than just responsibilities. It also covers “meritocracy”. Often there are a lot of conducive relationships between businesses and the public sector that help one another in their work. The relationship between the public and private sector can be in the form of cronyism, nepotism, or many words of that kind and in many societies patron-client relationship might come with it in governance. However, meritocracy calls for openness and proper code of conduct. It would, therefore, help very much in evading the negative issue of patronage.



Another aspect of integrity is “transparency”. It is an issue that has been very much affected in governance. Frequently, the government says that everything is confidential or very confidential unless it is forced to reveal it. However, the proper way should be in the opposite approach. In other words, that everything must be open and transparent except when the need for confidentiality can be explained. There must be good and reasonable justification in “the new social contract” that everything, that who so ever uses public confidential information, needs to be clear that it has gone through the system of justification and rationalization. All information should be able to be explained as to why it has to be confidential?; Why it cannot be transparent?; or why can’t the people you govern know what you’re doing?, etc. Things that can’t be justified for confidentiality must have transparency. So that it could allow others to look at it legitimately and look at the whole issue properly.

In conclusion, inclusivity is most essential in the relationships between the public sector, the private sector and the people sector. If all three sectors, not just the public and the private sector, are more inclusive and act with integrity, then the controversial issues and problems that we face today could be more readily moving towards clear solutions.