

On Professionalism with a Changing Role and the Skills for High Performing Civil Service

(RAKAN Sarawak's series of interviews with the STATE SECRETARY)

RS RAKAN Sarawak : In your Civil Service Address this year, you focused on the theme of "Professionalism with a Changing Role". You spoke passionately about the transformation that we need to see in the Sarawak civil service. Would you reiterate to RAKAN Sarawak readers the points you raised on the reasons why it is imperative for civil servants to change?

YB DATUK AMAR WILSON BAYA DANDOT (STATE SECRETARY) : In this globalised, interlinked and highly networked world, there is an increasing competitiveness and liberalization. For example, in this day and age, we are no longer talking about things in the superlative as in "super fast, or super structures". The world can now only be amazed by the "mega capacity" of man's abilities or capacities, such as in the construction of "mega structures".

With everyone being exposed to information through the global penetration of mass media channels and the Internet, we are also facing a growing volume and sophistication of customers' needs and expectations.

And so, the challenge for us in the civil service is to sharpen our edge as professional civil servants by using change to our advantage. We must have that sharp edge in our thinking prowess to understand, or even predict, trends in the global market place. Moreover, we must have the ability to generate and capture new knowledge and be able to access, absorb, process, share and use information, data, knowledge and communications.

We must strengthen our position in this knowledge-based society as a provider of services that facilitates the establishment and strengthening of dynamic R & D capability, as well as the bridging of the income gaps and the digital divide while preserving local culture amidst the onslaught of external influence brought on by globalization and high technology.

We must have the ability to and be creative and innovative. One of the means that we can do this is by leveraging our ICT advantage to transform the Sarawak Civil Service.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : With around a hundred ICT applications for various work processes that have been developed and implemented in the SCS, have we achieved what we have set out to do when we ventured into the e-Government platform?

STATE SECRETARY : I don't think that there is an end to that journey. e-Government is a continuous process. Change has always been the one constant in this world, and especially more so in the area of technology where obsolescence is at such a high rate.

What we must keep on doing now is to consistently benchmark our efforts with the best practices in other countries. We must also maximize the use of all these high technology tools at our disposal. For example, we are looking at setting up an ICT conference room as the Ops Room for Video Conferencing before June 2008. This will facilitate meetings and communications among civil servants

statewide. With such a facility in place, we can be in touch with even the most remote sub districts in Sarawak.

We will also continue to expand the linkages within our SarawakNet, which is presently connected to 229 SPS offices statewide. Improving and updating our government websites will also be a priority this year. We will monitor government websites and take note of good and bad website examples. We want all agency heads to take personal responsibility in ensuring that their websites are updated. Websites must be updated at least weekly or when any activity or change happens in the agency. Websites update status will be published monthly on SarawakNet. All websites must publish relevant information and services of the agency, including calendar of activities and events, and visitors' counter services.

One of the first events that we are organizing this year is the International Information Management Conference. We are also conducting a study on the establishment of State Intellectual Property management section within the ICT Unit, and will soon be doing a 9MP Mid-Term review of all our ICT projects. All these show the concerted effort that we are giving towards leveraging our ICT advantage.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : You also spoke about the "Entrepreneurial Government or the The New Public Management" in your address. Could you elaborate further on this topic and how the civil servants should position themselves in this "entrepreneurial government".

Leveraging ICT Advantage to Transform
the Sarawak Civil Service

SERVICE

RS RAKAN Sarawak : You spoke about the "Entrepreneurial Government or the New Public Sector Management" in your Civil Service address last month. Could you elaborate further on this topic?

YB DATUK AMAR WILSON BAYA DANDOT (STATE SECRETARY) :

Through the years, we have seen the changing facet of government – from the bureaucratic structure in the past to the more recent corporate culture that we adopted under the ambit of the Malaysia, Inc idea. And in this day and age, public servants are increasingly being regarded as experts, not only in public policy formulation and development planning and implementation, but in a whole lot of other specialized fields, thus giving impetus towards a "Technocrat Culture" within the government. There is now a distinct shift from the days when the service was seems as bureaucratic.

As such, we are beginning to see new dimensions of the Sarawak civil service emerging in the light of this new work culture that we are compelled to adopt, if we are to remain relevant.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : How should our civil servants position themselves in this "entrepreneurial government"?

STATE SECRETARY : As technocrats, civil servants must now necessarily be equipped with expertise in areas such as

corporate affairs, finance, economics, law, marketing, investment and public relations. Gone are the days when civil servants need only be equipped with administrative skills in order to carry out their functions.

Today, civil servants true to their calling must be able to see the big picture and must be able to apply strategic thinking in every task he is assigned to. These civil servants are competent "knowledge managers" who are able to source, process and share information in order to facilitate the accomplishment not only of their own tasks, but also of others in their teams or groups. They are able to rise up as leaders in whatever situation they may face, able to assemble necessary resources at a moment's notice mainly because they know how to maintain and nurture a vast network of contacts at national and international levels.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : Sounds like a tall order for any civil servant to fulfill these expectations. How do you think Sarawak civil servants can rise up to these expectations?

STATE SECRETARY : On top of all these that I mentioned about the qualities of a true professional civil servant, we must add the qualities of "drive and determination". Anyone who will have the drive and determination to succeed will certainly rise up to whatever challenges is placed upon him or her.

To explain my point, I'd like to tell you about a report published in The Los Angeles Times sometime in the early 90's. The report was about a study done on 120 of America's top artists, athletes and scholars. Benjamin Bloom, a University of Chicago

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education professor, who led the team of researchers, said: "We expected to find tales of great natural gifts. We didn't find that at all. Their mothers often said that it was their other child who had the greater gift." The study concluded then that the key element common to all of these successful people was, surprisingly, not inborn talents, but an extraordinary drive and determination.

The success of Sarawak will depend on people who have decided to achieve and make something of themselves. We are fortunate to be here, as civil servants in a country that is blessed with abundant resources, enterprising individuals and peace and stability. We have to decide to make the most of what we have, and lead others in our State to the paths of success and progress in the global market place.



Drive & Determination