



Defining Service Delivery :

“SUSTAINING QUALITY in the SARAWAK CIVIL SERVICE”

(RAKAN Sarawak's series of interviews with the State Secretary)

RS RAKAN Sarawak : The Sarawak civil service started its quality journey way back in the late 1980's, and it was given a real boost during the 90's. Where are we now in our quality journey?

YB DATUK AMAR WILSON BAYA DANDOT (STATE SECRETARY):

Today, we have gained significant strides in our quality journey since most of our departments and agencies have attained quality standards certifications such as ISO 9000s, or have implemented quality management approaches such as the 5S, Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard. Some of our departments and agencies and statutory bodies have also earned recognition by winning quality awards, both at the State and national level competitions.

These are all well and good, and are worthy accomplishments for the Sarawak civil service. And I commend those who have done well in the implementation of their quality management approaches in their respective departments.

But we all know that quality is a never-ending journey. We cannot, and must never rest on our laurels, and say that the job is done. The challenge is always to be able to do better today than yesterday and better tomorrow than today.

Has this spirit of continuous improvement permeated our civil servants' consciousness so much so that in every task they undertake, they will seek to outdo the last best performance that they were able to deliver? That's the question that we must ask at this stage in our quality journey.

And so, we have reached that stage

in our journey when reinforcing and sustaining quality consciousness and the spirit of continuous improvement in our organization has become of paramount importance.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : How does this "quality consciousness and spirit of continuous improvement" manifest in the day-to-day life of a civil servant?

STATE SECRETARY : I think that the litmus test that we can apply to see if anyone of our civil servant has truly ingrained that quality consciousness and spirit of continuous improvement is if we can spot him or her in a crowd, and can say for sure that he or she is a civil servant.

Civil servants must be individuals who can stand out in a crowd, not because they are celebrities or are flashy in their appearance, but because they carry themselves with that dignified and humble demeanor and they appear to others as someone that anyone can confidently approach for assistance, for direction or for counsel. When people meet a civil servant for the first time, their first impression of him or her should be that he/she is someone respectable, approachable, friendly and sincere. Civil servants must be able to inspire trust and confidence in the people they deal with, and they must always be seen as credible and trustworthy whenever they give out their advice, recommendation or counsel to the people who come to them for help or assistance.

Maintaining and strengthening that fundamental nature of being a civil servant is the main reason why we have embarked on our

quality journey. Our quality journey is not just about us getting awards or recognition because we have done well in achieving internationally accepted standards. More importantly, it is about us walking on the familiar path of service, and yet continually breaking new grounds in the manner that we provide that service.

For instance, if previously we were able to provide a service in one week, then we should start looking at how we may be able to cut it down to 3 days, with the aid of all the tools, resources and technology at our disposal. A good example of this is the Immigration Dept's achievement in being able to reduce the number of days to process passport applications, and now, they will soon be able to provide a paperless passport application processing that even reduces the length it takes from 1 day to just a matter of minutes. This improvement in their system meets two important indicators of quality performance that we are looking for in our civil service operations—firstly, it saves time and is cost-efficient for both the department and the customers; secondly, it is an environmentally-friendly system because it reduces the use of paper, and, of course, makes for a clean, uncluttered work place.

Internally, we must no longer have within our ranks those who still wait for instructions all the time from their superiors even though it is very much within their scope of duties and responsibilities to act on a certain matter. An individual in the employ of the civil service should be able to demonstrate creativity and ingenuity in performing his or her tasks, a mark of a quality employee.

RS RAKAN Sarawak :

Speaking of first impressions of civil servants, how do we acquire the traits that will bring the kind of first impression that you spoke about?

STATE SECRETARY : One of the impressive lines that I have heard spoken of was that of the actor, Sidney Poitier's, who said "I am who I choose to be" in reply to the question, "Who are you?"

Relating this to our vocation as civil servants, the moment we made that decision to join the civil service, we have, in effect, chosen to carry within us the fundamental nature of the organization that we have chosen to become a part of. We have chosen to be identified and associated with an institution that is revered, respected and relied upon by the people. As civil servants, we have agreed to carry the torch of servant leadership, which requires us to think, behave and carry ourselves in a manner that speak of dignity and humility.

Dignity coupled with humility are the two core traits of a civil servant that will define us as people of quality, which in turn will lead us to provide quality services to our customers – the people. Quality works and performance emanate from quality people.

As we know, dignity is that condition of being worthy of respect, esteem or honour while humility is that quiet and gentle character that makes people feel at ease in our company. I can best explain it with this example. Picture a scenario in, say, the Kapit wharf and the Resident of Kapit happens to be there, waiting to board an express boat for Sibuluan. The people around him should be able to identify him as a senior civil servant (if not the Resident himself) with the way he carries himself – he is well-articulated, well-presented, and he has a ready smile for anyone. He does not appear aloof or distant, in fact, he has this friendly demeanour that says "it's okay for you to approach me if you think I can help you with something". Or he himself will unhesitatingly approach someone who appears to be confused, or is in need of some assistance. While he commands respect because of the way he carries himself, he



is also humble enough to extend a helping hand to anyone or to engage in a conversation with anyone. He doesn't put on an air of arrogance or aloofness just because he is a high ranking government official. In fact, the last thing we would expect a civil servant to have is a sense of lofty superiority to anyone. That will totally run counter to the true character of a civil servant.

This is how we should intrinsically measure the success of our quality journey. Can we confidently say that the fundamental nature of our vocation has been enhanced by the methods or approaches that we have chosen to apply in our organization?

When we applied our 5S approach, for example, do our staffs fully understand how this method helps in enhancing those dignified and humble quality traits in our civil servants? Making our workplace environment clean, pleasant and visitor-friendly, is one of the expected results of the 5S approach. If we succeed in doing that, we have created an atmosphere where people can transact their business with us with a sense of dignity. Seen in that context, our 5S approach can then be seen as successful.

RS RAKAN Sarawak : What should be given more emphasis in this stage of our quality journey?

STATE SECRETARY : The quality management processes we have so far adopted have helped us in identifying and eliminating steps that are counterproductive or causes delays. We have also adopted new systems and processes that help us reduce defects, repetition, and rework in our operations. And now, we must aim higher. If we were able to reduce

A conversation with SS

the number of defective work, we now must aim for zero defects. We must also increase the rate at which we are able to do our tasks right the first time.

And as I have mentioned earlier, what is needed now is

to reinforce and sustain our efforts in achieving a high performance culture in our organizations through quality. We can do this by intensifying the monitoring and evaluation functions of our organizations. We must now be able to introduce and apply quality measurement systems, such as statistical measurement tools that will help us accurately document the improvements resulting from our continuous improvement efforts. We must also intensify efforts to promote quality awareness among all civil servants across the board; and highlight our successes so as to encourage us to step up and sustain our efforts. We must also be more daring in benchmarking our efforts with the best practices in other countries. This is the only way we can move up the ladder of the global quality movement, and be recognized internationally as a quality-managed civil service organization.

We must also get more actively engaged in harmonizing and coordinating quality initiatives from the public and the private sectors, ensuring that these are aligned with our Chief Minister, YAB Pehin Sri's Dr Hj Abdul Taib Mahmud's "Second Wave of Sarawak's Politics of Development", which encapsulates the state's effort towards achieving our country's Vision 2020.

As pointed out by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, "We need to multiply our efforts towards achieving greater success in order to build a civilization that will elevate the nation's dignity".

A quality managed civil service organization, whose staffs are imbued with dignity and humility, is an important pillar that supports our overall efforts in ensuring our country's rightful place as a well-respected member of the developed world.