

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
Tajuk : THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SEVENTH ASEAN CONFERENCE ON CIVIL SERVICE MATTERS
Lokasi : THE AWANA GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB, GENTING HIGHLANDS
Tarikh : 08-10-1993

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be invited to officially close this Seventh ASEAN Conference on Civil Service Matters today. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all distinguished delegates, guests and observers for setting aside your precious time to deliberate on issues related to The Challenges for Innovation in the Civil Service which is the theme of this conference. I am positive that during the last 5 days, you have had indepth and extensive deliberations on innovations in the Civil Service, and that all the papers presented at this conference have provided the spring board for the extremely useful and fruitful discussions and that new ideas have been generated.

There are at least two challenges that the Civil Services in all ASEAN countries have to address in the decades ahead. To my mind, the two most important challenges are firstly, the development of an administrative system that is mission-oriented and has the inherent ability to focus on effective delivery of quality services and products; and secondly, the development of an institutional capacity to promote and sustain a climate of innovation and creativity.

In order to be mission-oriented, it is imperative that the Civil Service clearly establishes the goals for the performance of the role expected of it. These goals must of necessity be premised on the needs of our clientele. If the raison d'etre of the Civil Service is the delivery of services to its clientele, then satisfying the multi-farious customers' needs and conforming to their requirements would ultimately determine its effectiveness.

Consequently, the Civil Service must become more customer- oriented. To be customer-oriented, we must first of all have a clear measurable picture of how our customers perceive quality. The service we provide would be deemed to be of quality, only when it exceeds or meets the value-expectations of our customers. The Civil Service must recognise that we operate in an era where the customer is paramount, and we cannot afford to ignore this or think otherwise. As such, the Civil Service must develop a mindset, which must be characterised by the internalisation of values like timeliness, concern for costs, meeting targets, innovativeness and most certainly, responsiveness to the clients we serve.

The concept of quality management is creating a quiet evolution in the Malaysian Civil Service. The Civil Service in Malaysia, and I am sure in your own environment as well, is operating in a dynamic and growth environment. Civil servants are thus under constant pressure to deliver more services with the prudent use of resources. Civil servants are now asked to analyse and improve their own work processes so as to increase quality, enhance productivity and to reduce costs. We are trying to discover what is commonly called "working smarter" in order to gain a competitive advantage in the global market place. The civil service should continuously improve the quality of goods and services and meticulously and constantly improve the workplace productivity. Traditionally, we have viewed productivity as a function of labour cost, capital and resource utilization, and technology. Advocates of total quality management (TQM) believe that at its base, improved quality increases productivity, and reduces waste in producing, marketing, and supplying products or services.

Government departments and statutory bodies in Malaysia are adopting the TQM approach, which we have discovered to be a simple but revolutionary way of performing work. We are operationalizing the concept, against the background of the following definition of TQM, namely : total, which implies applying the search for quality to every aspect of work, from identifying customer needs to aggressively evaluating whether the customer is satisfied; quality which means meeting and exceeding customer expectations, and management which means developing and maintaining the organizational capacity to constantly improve quality. We are inculcating the belief that a passion for quality must be the cornerstone of the new Civil Service management philosophy.

The Civil Service of Malaysia has identified the unproductive practices. If we can reduce and eventually eliminate these practices, the unsatisfactory ones, and other mistakes, then we can eliminate waste and reduce costs. So we introduce the lessons of quality management in the Civil Service through such measures as the manual of office procedure, the desk file, the Q.C.C., proper management of meetings and government committees, the use of work action form, the micro accounting system, the clients' charter and others.

Some heads of departments may argue that what counts in the end is meeting the productive targets of their departments as they are directed. In my view, it is relatively easy to set a numerical productive target, say how many acres of lands are to be opened, and developed, or how many licences or permits are to be issued etc. All the management needs to do is to pick a number higher than the year's total and "go for it". The tough minded manager holds the staff's "feet to the fire" and simply demands performance. Of course, performance can be measured with surrogate measures of productive or performance indicators.

On the other hand, TQM requires a more profound and substantial understanding of performance than this. The management must get real information in great detail about all aspects of production. For example, if we are looking at the permit or licensing process, we do not stop with a count of the number of licences or permits issued, or even with the average time to issue a permit or a licence. Under TQM, we develop a flow chart and measure performance variation at each step. The aim is to develop standard operating procedures for each element in the production process that reduces variation and errors made at each step.

Obviously, for this TQM approach to be successful, heads of departments must facilitate an almost ruthless analysis of the current levels of performance of their respective departments. They must constantly ask and train their staff to ask: what is really happening here? This requires an extreme degree of honesty in appraising performance. This is critical because you cannot rely on improvement as a way of increasing productivity if you do not know how the process occurs. Once work analysis is integrated into an organization's culture, it is possible to focus an improvement, but first the heads of departments and their staff must learn to define success. What type of changed performance constitutes an improvement? In this context, the government will be issuing the "Guidelines For Establishing Performance Indicators in Government Agencies", on the occasion of the presentation of quality awards tonight in Kuala Lumpur.

I am of the view that the adoption of the TQM concept is a prerequisite for establishing the "innovative culture" in the Civil Service. This is because TQM represents the advent of participative management. It is different from what we normally call the "bureaucratic culture", which emphasise structure and process, or the "supportive culture" that befriends the staff. The TQM will bring about "the innovative culture" which will help to create a creative, results-oriented challenging work environment. In an innovative culture, performance is measured, and feedback is important. An innovative culture must necessarily be participative, both real and mainstream. The staff members will accept change if they are involved in the decision making process where the change is created. This involvement enables the staff members to increase their awareness of the problem, their understanding of the new procedure, and their commitment to its successful implementation. It is a fact that groups are significantly more creative in problem solving than individuals working alone.

Cognisant of this, the Malaysian Civil Service in 1991 introduced through a Development Administration Circular, the Innovation Awards. The underlying philosophy is to create and sustain a climate of innovation and creativity, that would unleash the potential of our civil servants.

Since the inception of this program, we have been pleasantly surprised by the encouraging response from our civil servants. We have been inundated with literally a thousand innovative ideas for improvement, in the areas of technology, work environment, systems and procedures, to name a few. Whilst reward and recognition is a basic motivation, I believe people have come forth so willingly because we have provided them the opportunity to realise their own potential. In my opinion, the psychic rewards far outweigh the monetary.

An avalanche of stories in the past decade picked from the Auditor General's report, proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament and other stories in the mass media has made the civil service of Malaysia very responsive to the demands for innovation in the delivery of quality services. Some tales are indeed examples of waste, expensive overheads etc. To a certain extent, these stories undercut the image of some departments and statutory bodies.

So we introduce a series of innovative measures - the use of new Forms in the Management of Capital Assets, Inventories and Office Supplies; Guidelines for Development Project Planning and Preparation; Manual on Micro Accounting System, and Guidelines on Integrated Scheduling System.

Efforts to improve civil service performance are inseparable from improving public perceptions of Government Departments, Statutory Bodies and Local Authorities. Many of the steps to improve the Civil Service require energy, resources, and trust. All will be in short supply if the public and civil servants begin with cynicism. Securing the public trust requires a consistent, honest and open communication from government officials. It requires government officials to anticipate the way decisions or actions might be viewed and to explain them fully. It requires admitting senior private sector officials into a working partnership with government departments. So we establish the Malaysia Incorporated Committee; we have departmental open days during quality week; the private sector is permitted to judge the performance, the innovations and reforms undertaken by the government departments, and prizes are awarded by them, and a host of other measures which we have undertaken in order to institutionalize the culture of innovation and reform in the Civil Service. The annual reports of the Public Complaints Bureau are circulated to members of the public. The daily newspaper "THE STAR" carries an advertisement on page one entitled "Any complaints against Government Departments?" We are beginning to perceive a change in the culture of work of the Civil Service. Such a change must always begin with leadership by top officials. Much of the tangle which can impede departmental efficiency can only be removed if the top leadership of the Civil Service are themselves innovative or entrepreneurial in nature. There are still a few government departments which are encrusted with rules and procedures from an earlier time that are poorly matched to today's problems. Sometimes, we find ourselves choked on our own rules and procedures. Improved government management will require the development of new tools better suited to today's problems. It is only through innovations that we can discover these new tools.

Developing a supportive organizational culture and incentive system is a prerequisite to get innovations or improvements. It is important to provide a reward even if the pay off will occur months or years later. You may have seen that out of the 18 development administration circulars that we have issued, the Development Administration Circular No. 3 of 1991 entitled "Public Service Innovation Awards" was among the earliest to be issued. We recognize that providing material rewards to top performers and successful work teams is sometimes difficult in government departments.

However, we have deployed a variety of resources, as incentives, such as public recognition and simple expressions of gratitude.

Every practical experience is a valuable source of information for other practitioners. We appreciate your papers and views presented at this conference. Even failed efforts contain very important lessons. In the absence of any formal central repository of information on Civil Service matters in ASEAN, the kind of networking through a conference of this nature creates a corpus of knowledge for everyone of us to use. With these words, I have the noble duty to officially close this Seventh ASEAN Conference on Civil Service Matters.