TRANSFORMING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES' CIVIL SERVICE: THE MAJOR HURDLES FOR REFORM IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Reformasi dalam mesin pemerintahan sangat diperlukan saat ini ketika pertama, mesin-mesin tersebut diharapkan dapat beradaptasi secara tepat terhadap perubahan yang terjadi di masyarakat; kedua, administrasi publik sebagai jantung mesin pemerintahan dapat 'membentuk' masyarakat. Dalam negara berkembang, administrasi publik yang tidak respek pada pembangunan dan perkembangan begitu mudah dikenali untuk dijadikan titik awal reformasi. Meski disepakati oleh berbagai pihak bahwa reformasi secara institusional pada administrasi publik atau birokrasi pemerintah diperlukan tetapi kontraversi disekitar apa yang harus dirubah, nilai-nilai apa yang perlu diadopsi, dan bagaimana strategi perubahannya masih terjadi. Tetapi yang paling mungkin dilakukan saat ini adalah bagaimana memecahkan teka-teki disekitar pelaksanaan reformasi. Untuk hal itu, banyak analis berpendapat bahwa pelayanan publik hendaknya menjadi prioritas utama reformasi khususnya pembuatan aturan-aturan baru yang lebih menyederhanakan pelayanan dan berpihak pada masyarakat banyak.

Artikel ini mencoba mencermati pelayanan publik dan berbagai kendala yang dihadapi ketika reformasi tersebut dilaksanakan terutama di negara berkembang. Diatas semua hirukpikuk janji reformasi, tidak ada satupun yang bisa mengklaim bahwa proposal reformasinya adalah yang paling baik untuk diterapkan tanpa memperhatikan aspek lingkungan, kontek, strategi, dan dinamika masyarakat. Bagaimanapun juga kesadaran akan pentingnya aspek-aspek tersebut terkadang rentan dan sering mengabaikan terhadap perubahan di tingkat kemauan politik dan administrasi penyelenggara negara. Akhirnya, tulisan ini diakhiri dengan menganjurkan bahwa reformasi pelayanan publik hanya akan berarti bila ada penciptaan good governance dengan pelibatan semua pihak.

Keywords: Civil service reform, transform, hurdle.

INTRODUCTION

The 1980s and 1990s are viewed as very challenging and meaningful decades for civil service reform in most developing countries. The global wind of change that questioned the growth of public bureaucracies, coupled with increasing inefficiency and loss of confidence in the civil service hitherto, posed a serious challenge to different governments to quest for a meaningful civil service

reform,[1] the cornerstone for building effective governments. For examples, the economic crisis experienced by the government of Indonesia in the early 1980s had played a very significant implication in the reformation of state administration (Dwiyanto 1996; Tjokrowinoto 1998; Legowo 1999). Similarly, the economic problems that are happening in the Sub-Saharan African countries have contributed so much to the current World Bank–sponsored civil service reforms.

AIMS OF REFORM

Numerous studies have examined factors and the necessity for civil service reform in most developing countries. For example, Jones and Brunt (1993) investigated that the need for public organizational development and change is very urgent because little is known on reform, which is anticipated to bring about efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector. This study concluded that sometimes, reform approaches tend to reflect the western oriented agenda. Consequently, reforms contain elements that are quite irrelevant to the real context. Williams (1993) examined that since 1987, Mainland Chinese departments have been experimenting with western style civil service system. The guideline called for the creation of professional administrative class to be hired by open recruitment at the central and local levels. This study concludes that the reforms were stimulated by the need to modernize the civil service in order to make it economically competitive with the growing private sector. However, the reforms are too limited to make a substantial contribution to this goal.

In the recent research conducted on the local government reform (Wiseman et al 1994), it is argued that rural areas are often characterized as lacking in professionalism and capacity necessary for confronting the variety of problems that must be addressed at the local level. The public administration perspective is often recommended to enhance efficiency with which these agencies do things, thereby increasing their capacity to manage their affairs. Well meaning reformers often take for granted the fact that constituents of the reform – targeted governments also recognize the need for change. In practice, the opposite may be close to the truth. Resistance to structural change of county government is largely a factor between the public officials versus rural citizens and those who live within incorporated municipalities. It is concluded that reform efforts are important for improved governance in local agencies, but their success or failure may depend on how accurately we assess the sociopolitical environment in which these reforms are introduced.

Research on CSR conducted in Africa (Morgan and Shin 1995) reveals

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[1] This concept, which is not broader in scope than administrative reform, has been defined differently depending on the political context. It is clearly associated with the desire to cope up with mödernization. In this paper, however, it is referred as the process within the public service of making changes in procedures, structures or institutions that have become out of line with the expectations, values or wishes of socioeconomic and political environments. Civil service reform, in this paper is sometimes used interchangeably with bureaucratic reforms, which ideally, relates to the use of administration system as an instrument for political and socio economic transformation.

that whether or not an unfettered market is the best solution to the problem of efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, the public service are both the subject and object of reform. It is an arena for policy change and adjustment in economic management and the locus of struggle over principles and patterns of administrative practice. Accordingly, the function and the performance of the civil service are part of that *problematique*. Related to these studies and many others, therefore, factors or aims of civil service reform are highlighted.

One important aim of civil service reform is to contribute to the change, development and dissemination of promising management approaches in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and performance in the public sector's productivity.

Secondly, the properly implemented reform can rationalize the institutional organs through reorganization, redistribution and consolidation of similar activities, eliminates small, inefficient and competing units, reduce overlapping and duplication and generally simplify working processes.

Thirdly, reform reduces ever-increasing flow of paper and regulations generated by bureaucratic red tape. It can cut down on resources; time and energy spent on processing paper and release personnel perform themselves more profitably. Reform can help to search for alternative ways for delivering public services through other mechanisms involving direct public participation. In this way, it paves the way for public service institutions to be more representative

of the people it serves (Caiden 1976, 1982; Burns 1993; Badamdorj 1998).

There are many specific variables in the civil service, which link its relationship to individual behavior and how their interactions may influence reform within the civil service.

First, technological advances can pressure civil services to change their structures, procedures, goals and methods of operations. It is widely observed that with the information technology (IT) revolution, many public organizations have been compelled to moderate reorganization and restructuring in order to increase power shifts and concerns for information sharing, which are time-honored areas in modern public sector management (Campbell 1980; Kettl et al. 1996).

Second, increasing costs and scarcity of resources in the bureaucracy are imperative variables, which can also influence reform. Some bureaucracies, especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Wescott 1996) have reduce their workforce through downsizing because they are faced with macro economic crisis (Collins 1993).

Third, higher levels of education and training in the labor market may also influence transformation in the civil service.

Fourth, new organizational strategies and public servants' attitudes and behavior may also count as contributing factors for civil service reform. One good case in point can be justified from the current efforts in the implementation of wider regional autonomy and decentralization in Indonesia and most developing countries. It is reckoned that autonomy

requires a fundamental change in the cultural behavior of local and central government officials. Experience shows that most local and regional authorities are used to functioning as agents of central government in communicating its instructions. In this perspective, nonetheless, behavioral reform is quite inevitable.

To deal with change, bureaucracy, once it realizes that it faces these challenges, employs two major ways to justify the need for reform. *First*, the bureaucracy may react to the signs that change is needed, making piecemeal modifications on dealing with particular problems as they arise. In actual fact, this kind of response is simpler and less expensive. Ironically, anticipated reform package may include, among other things, new operating rules for government institutions. In some political environment, public institutions could for long be operating without unwritten rules, thereby allowing bureaucratic misconduct (Williams 1993) such as corruption, inefficiency, betraying trust, multiplying red tape, blocking each other, cheating superiors and subordinates, and generally, suppressing democracy. Bureaucracies, employees and the public would benefit from new reform proposals: competence standard, performance standard and a code of conduct.

Second, the civil service may develop a program of planned change, making significant investments in time and other resources to alter the ways on how the bureaucracy may operate. On the other hand, this is the deliberate design and implementation of a structural innovation, a new policy or

goal, a change in operating philosophy, climate and style. However, such a response is appropriate when the entire civil service or a major part of it, must prepare for or adapt to the transformation process. All these indicators are very important to understand because in one way or another they are related to individual behavior, which may ultimately influence change in the civil service system (Corkery 1995).

Despite realizing all these conditions, however, in developing countries, the bureaucratic reform process has not always been a smooth deal. The question is whether our bureaucrats are ready for and committed to civil service reform. Analysts argue that the meaning of reform has been muddled (*The Jakarta Post*, 13 August 1999) by technocrats.

In developing countries, the greatest threat to bureaucratic reform sometimes comes from the *status quo* group, which resists change for its own reasons. In the process of achieving reform, resistance to change has originated from higher- ranking public officials who are uncertain of their future managerial posts and their jobs[2]. Occasionally, public servants have feared becoming victims of downsizing and retrenchment. Why is this so?

First, the uncertainties on the cause and effect of change have set most bureaucrats into stages of fearing reform. *Second*, it is feared sometimes that reform may disrupt existing relations and patterns of behavior, like the institutionalized *Korupsi, Kolusi & Nepotisme (KKN)*.

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[2] See the author's "Third world strives to carry out bureaucratic reform" in *The Jakarta Post*, 17 September 1999.

Third, reform is suspected to threaten an individual's status and financial rewards. *Fourth*, awareness of weakness in the proposed change, that is, doubts regarding the technical feasibility of the proposed reform. Nonetheless, the influence of a group of norms and values that oppose change makes bureaucrats fear reform.

Fifth, the threat of having to retrain and acquire new skills in order to cope with altered working methods is an important consideration. Here, the argument that is advanced by the technocrats is based on lack of financial resources in the implementation of reform. *Sixth*, feeling of personal inadequacy against new technologies, like fear of not being able to understand a newly installed computer system or Local Area Network (LAN) facility have undermined reform efforts.

THE MAJOR REFORM HURDLES

In developing countries, civil services have two competing goals (Wescott, 1996). First, task performance/service delivery and second, political incorporation. The former is the subject of civil service reform, but is often the secondary goal.

The later is often the primary goal, that is, incorporating a politically selected group as a means of political control, on terms that do not give most of them a say in government policies but does give them subordinate place in the hierarchies of political control. Political incorporation through patronage is an effective control tool used by political elite since jobs are limited and as a result, there is pressure

by extended family members, ethnic affiliates, school mates and so forth.

Central features of such civil services include solidarity, the relative insignificance of specialized expert knowledge to bureaucratic roles, important rules neither transparent nor codified, a forgiving attitude to inefficiency and poor performance of assigned task and idiosyncratic bureaucratic careers.

Reform such as downsizing and rightsizing not only threaten the career of civil servants in such setting but also threaten the system of political control and stability. These reforms also threaten the well being of the network of kin, supported by the jobholders.

Clay Wescott (1996) argues that bureaucrats in such setting may take advantage of reform programs (like downsizing) to get rid of political opponents and to refill the positions with relative and ethnic cohorts. This shortcoming, which is common and widely debated in the bureaucratic circles, undermines the civil service reform agenda in most developing countries. Gerald E. Caiden (1982), one of the deans in public administration reform attributes that vested interests have managed to block administrative reform and in this case, public officials have not acted with vigor or boldness to change the prevailing arrangements of the civil service. Nevertheless, this pattern to fail achieving public administration reform is contributed by these factors.

First, the sheer volume of public business in the administrative state makes it virtually impossible for public leaders to deal with more than a small fraction with the advent of big

government. When government was smaller, it was possible for bureaucrats to know much more of what was going on.

Second, the administrative role of the bureaucrats has been transformed from being concerned mainly with details of policy implementation to responsibility for policy initiation and selection, the management of huge, complicated organization and the personification of the government to the governed. Technocrats have assumed heavy obligations and bear great responsibility, which reinforces their traditional cautionary attitudes.

Third, civil services that has been in existence for an appreciable period of time is no longer instrumental but institutional. Bureaucracies are not entirely at the mercy of their external environment for they can control some aspects of it; certainly they can create and manipulate their own clientele just as international organization have deemed to do. In contrary, bureaucracies have developed independent power. They exploit external allies and make alliances with vested interests they serve.

Fourth, bureaucracies have no competitors, no rival and not even the private counterparts capable of replacing them. Despite the current mainstream literature in public administration–cum–management trumpeting much on *reinventing government* (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), the fact remains that it is the civil service that has a virtual monopoly of talent, expertise, experience and knowledge in their jurisdiction. Bureaucracies are the only professionals. Anyone outside who wants to be considered an expert has to

depend on their willingness to supply the requisite information and their accreditation.

Fifth, the subjects of civil service reforms are large-scale organizations that tend to be rigid, conservative, custom, bound and slow moving. The more people that have to be won over, the harder it is to convince them all. Moreover, civil service reform is much harder than it used to be. There are few easy, obvious targets. Past reforms have dealt with the grosser form of mal administrations. Wrong doings, as far as anyone can tell, are nowhere heard to be as bad as they once were. Consequently, much of the passion has gone out of the issue.

Last but not least, the climax of reform failures in developing nations is clearly explained by a lack of finance and limited budged resources. According to the World Bank, for instance, Indonesia's foreign debt stands at US $ 134 billion – about 83% of GDP. Interest payment alone eat up almost a third of tax revenues. Therefore, with the limited budget resources and huge servicing burden imposed by foreign debts, hitherto, the new government will face major hurdles to meaningful civil service reform, the cornerstone for building good governance (*Asiaweek* 2000). These shortcomings have made most governments in developing countries not to be taken serious by the public as committed to the civil service reform agenda.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Most developing countries are repeatedly too adamant to implementing bureaucratic reforms, arguing that this ought to be undertaken after achieving

economic miracles. However, there are simple-to-implement reform proposals (e.g. piece meal modifications to deal with particular problems) that do not necessarily require big financial resources. One fundamental reform package could look at new operating rules for government institutions. As has always been noted, nevertheless, successful bureaucratic reform requires not only political and administrative commitment, but also a clear definition of the reform goals, objectives and strategies.[3] Unfortunately, the current World Bank–financed Civil Service Reform program that is implemented in full-swing in Sub-Saharan Africa despite their connected good motive leave a lot be desired. Some scholars have already doubted (Mukandala 1992; Mutahaba et al. 1993) that in the near future, the reform package might establish a puzzle in good governance: the way in which organizations are run or managed, especially when collective goals are served well, the processes of decision making are observed, administrators perform their functions and exercise their powers properly, and the organization is sustained. What is to be done? Arguably, successful public administration reform should be everyone's business. This calls for joint effort and cooperation from within and without.

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[3] Reform is a process that should be directed and controlled by a strategy. Most bureaucratic reforms in developing countries have failed due to excessive reliance on formal measures and neglect of the process aspects, including preparation of the ground for the formal decision and its effective implementation. See for example, Dror, Y.1976."Strategies for Administrative Reform" in *The Management of Change in Government* edited by Arne F.Leemans. The Hague: Nijhoff. Pp.126-141.

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