

RS RAKAN Sarawak : In one of your earlier speeches shortly after you became the State Secretary, you mentioned several challenges facing the Sarawak Civil Service. There was one challenge you mentioned that we thought was never mentioned before. This refers to the challenges posed by the “blending of generations” among the staff in the civil service. Can you elaborate further on this?

YB DATU WILSON BAYA DANDOT (STATE SECRETARY) : When I mentioned the “blending of generations”, I was referring to the mix of staff within our civil service organization who belong to three major population cohorts (in statistical and demographic terms). A cohort is a group of subjects — most often humans from a given population — defined by experiencing an event (typically birth) in a particular time span. This mix includes those who are usually referred to as the “Baby Boomers” or those born from 1946 and 1964, the Generation X or those born from 1965 to 1979 and the Generation Y who were born from 1980 to 1994. Later, we will have the Millennium Generation. These groups of people have different exposure and experiences, skills set and competencies.

This situation is not unique to our organization. It is a situation that most organizations are facing now, and which poses a challenge to management on how to take advantage of this situation. Each group of people bring a set of qualities, skills and competencies that will be useful to each other if they learn to appreciate and value what they can each contribute to the organization.

In the context of our civil service organization, there are two things that portends well as far as this significant composition of our manpower based on their demographic cohorts is concerned.

One is the fact that all of us share only one calling, and that is the call to service. The other is the fact that all of us are functioning and living well in the digital age, although we might have different levels of skills and exposures in the use of ICT tools. We cannot deny that the “baby boomers” may be lagging behind in competence in the use of ICT tools compared with the Generation X’s and Y’s among us but the former group share the same acceptance and appreciation of the importance of ICT in our world today as the two latter groups.

These two things that they all share in common will be able to break down barriers among these three generation.



(RAKAN Sarawak’s series of interviews with the STATE SECRETARY on DEFINING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY)

“Sense of urgency to duty and service: the lifeline of the civil service in the digital age”

Firstly, the desire to serve bridges all generations. Anyone, regardless of age, gender, religious beliefs, cultural ties, ethnic origins, can do and offer acts of service for others. And in today’s digital world, we are afforded the means and the tools to provide our services with great speed and in real time efficiency.

I am reminded of the call that our Chief Minister, YAB Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, once gave us to “*continually breathe life into the civil service by not overlooking the fact that our sense of urgency to duty and service is the lifeline of the civil service especially in the digital age*”.

When we ponder about these words of our Chief Minister, the more we will be able to see clearly how the three different demographic cohorts within our civil service organization can work seamlessly together.

The **sense of urgency to duty and service** remains the basic and essential foundation of the civil service organization. For those of us who began our careers during the early years of the full-pledged Sarawak civil service (within the Malaysian federation), this was a fact that we had to embrace and be committed to through all the toils and turmoils that we had to go through then. It is this passionate commitment to service and the wisdom that we have gained through the rich and varied experiences and exposure we had to go through all these years that we can now share and impart to our younger colleagues. I am in this category as I joined the State Civil Service in early 1973. In much the same token, our younger colleagues’ wide exposure to and knowledge of the

digital tools, technology and systems is a very useful asset that they bring into their jobs.

These combinations of qualities, skills and expertise among its manpower— such as complementing wisdom with fresh knowledge, and combining familiarity with geographical landscape with dexterity in navigating cyberspace, - make for a dynamic civil service organization that is well-rooted in the early foundations of the culture of service while adjusting well in the rapid changes and challenges of the present digital age.

RS : What do you think is a major advantage that the Sarawak civil service now have in the digital age?

STATE SECRETARY : We are so privileged to have a leader - YAB Pehin Sri Hj Abdul Taib Mahmud- who had the foresight to direct our civil service leaders, most notably Tan Sri Hamid Bugo and Tan Sri Aziz Hj Husain before me, to develop and set up the ICT infrastructure and infostructure and institutions, more than a decade ago. Now, I believe that we are adequately prepared to meet the challenges brought on by the ICT revolution in terms of the facilities and systems that have been put in place over the past decade or so.

What needs to be reinforced and strengthened now is the capability of our civil servants to make full use of ICT in the way we conduct our day-to-day work. For example, I am thankful that the ICT tools and systems at our disposal, are a significant help in my task of formulating, recommending or analyzing policy matters or issues. When I need to assess world

trends and issues on, say, economics, I only need to get on the Internet and do a search of relevant web sites such as those of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, etc. I am also quite pleased whenever I receive a quick response via e-mail from anyone of our civil servants who is replying to my inquiry about some matters I need to decide on immediately. And, of course, if I have more questions, we can easily continue to communicate via e-mails until I get the necessary clarifications. It is also easy for us to put everyone who is involved in the subject we are discussing in the "loop" for follow-up discussions or information, thus making sure that everyone is informed of the progress. When we have meetings, we can immediately record and document the discussions and decisions made at that meeting, save it on our "pen drive" and bring it back to our office and save it on our own computers. This practice is, of course, environmentally friendly as well since we cut down on the use of ink and paper.

Today, there really is no excuse for civil servants in Sarawak, especially those who are in the upper echelons of management, not to be able to cope with the challenges of being competitive and innovative as required of us in the digital age. Our competence in the use of ICT in our day-to-day tasks is, as our Chief Minister has once said, **"our passport to the globalised world"**.

RS : What about the challenges that the Sarawak civil service face in the digital era?

STATE SECRETARY : The digital age ushered in a culture of speed, of real time response that brings with it an even greater sense of urgency in the way we must fulfill our tasks and assignments. Our jobs, indeed, has become easier in the digital age as we enjoy significant levels of comfort and ease brought on by our economic progress. Information can be sourced and shared at the click of a mouse. Documents can be drafted, corrected and printed out in a matter of minutes. We can even have a meeting with people from other places without leaving the comforts of our office via video conferencing.

However, this prosperity, comfort and convenience can also lull us into thinking that everything is fine, and lead us into a fragile sense of security. For example, an employee might be thinking "our security alarm systems are in place, and we have proven that they have worked well in the past. So, tonight, why should I bother to run a check-and-review procedure?" And

then, as fate would have it, it was that one particular evening that the building was broken into and the agency lost valuable documents that could lead to significant damage to the government if they fell into the wrong hands. Now, imagine if an IT-savvy thief gets hold of a contract document that he scans onto his computer, modifies with some software, and then posts on the net claiming that a certain government official has committed corruption, and showing that "modified contract" as proof. The government and the official concerned might be able to prove that he is innocent eventually, but the damage has already been done because of the widespread reach that the Internet afforded the people who have malicious intentions to destroy and defame other peoples' reputation and tarnish their image.

And so, while the digital age has afforded certain privileges and advantages in performing our duties and responsibilities, it has also made our positions more and more tenuous because of the closer scrutiny, and widespread exposure that we are now subject to. Our movements, our decisions and our performance, collectively and individually, can now easily be monitored, and opinions and sentiments of the public about what we do and how we do things can easily be posted on the internet, picked up by the media and highlighted for all the world to see.

RS : How can the civil servants protect and guard themselves from possible negative and damaging exposure in this digital age?

STATE SECRETARY: YAB Pehin Sri has also given us this advice, that *"Our concern, in the absence of both internal and external threats, is that we get complacent and too comfortable. We must be aware that complacency can be our No.1 enemy"*.

The malady of complacency can be our undoing, especially for us who are in the public eye by virtue of our positions. Complacency smacks of conceit, smugness, self-importance, even vanity or haughtiness. It sets in when we start feeling invulnerable and invincible, thinking that nothing can go wrong because we have been doing it for so many years this way, and nothing bad has happened anyway.

In the digital age, the Internet has also become a powerful leveraging tool for people. Practically just about anybody can upload any information, article, idea, images into the net through their web sites, blogs, and chat rooms. And so, people in our positions are now as vulnerable as anyone out in the open sea.

Which makes it even more vital for us all to conduct our affairs with the **highest standards of professionalism and integrity**. When we are able to rise above the temptation to use our public office for private gain, and when we perform our responsibilities to the best of our abilities, we need not fear of the possible exposure of our actions and decisions and performance through the internet. In fact, we can relish it because the internet can be our tool to highlight our achievements and accomplishments.

The digital age that we are now in provides us the means to be more efficient and effective in carrying out our tasks, and to be more open and transparent in our systems and operations, allowing us to create a leaner, cleaner and more responsive civil service.

We - from the top officials to the support staff - must harness the power that the digital age affords us. When all of us within the civil service organization are all tuned in, and wired into the digital world, making full use of the information we can source and share with each other, we will have an almost endless reservoir of creative ideas that can effect positive change, not only within our civil service organization but in the general society as well.

