

From Conflict to a Professional Bureaucracy in Ambon City

Presenter

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Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2002) wrote that the most important personal qualities a leader can bring to an organization are “passion, conviction and confidence in others.” Inspirational leaders help others to understand the legacy of their organizations, create a vision that is stimulating for the future, building community feeling in the team between those who may be different, and help develop a common meaning and aim.

This is what has been achieved by M.J.Papilaja, when he began his term as Mayor in a city full of conflict. At that time the conditions and psychological situation in the municipal government bureaucracy were not conducive to creating an organization and filling positions in accordance with UU No 22/1999.

This became an opportunity for Papilaja to consolidate the municipal government bureaucracy. It wasn't merely a physical consolidation, but also a consolidation of perceptions and views of professional bureaucracy. A professional bureaucracy must begin with a process of recruitment from within the bureaucracy itself. “If the process of bureaucracy recruitment is not based on an appropriate system, bureaucratic professionalism is just an illusion,” he said.

The former head of the Ambon city legislative is convinced that the embers of conflict would still be alive if process of bureaucracy recruitment had continued to use an inappropriate system. Therefore, with the support of the Deputy Mayor, Papilaja tried a new initiative with the implementation of a Merit-Based System for Recruitment for the Municipal Government of Ambon from Echelon II to Echelon IV.

This smart initiative garnered support from many stakeholders, including from the bureaucrats themselves as well the community. This support made it easier to uphold the principles of justice and equal rights which were key demands from the people of Ambon at that time. The merit-based system opened opportunities and access to all civil servants who fulfilled the basic criteria in an open and healthy competition for each position based on the competency of each candidate.

The merit-based system policy is also believed to have reduced the negative presumptions of the bureaucrats and the community regarding unjust and discriminative practices in awarding positions, especially in public office which was, at one time, a key source of conflict.

This great idea was not instantly successful; the process was long and involved many stakeholders, both internal bureaucracy and outsiders, including university staff and other experts who were active in sharing their knowledge and consulting from the planning stage, to implementing the system.

All stages of recruitment were conducted transparently and began with the recruitment of the Municipal Secretary. The recruitment included public announcement of registration, publicizing the results of the administration selection, a psychological test and even a public exam. The entire process was made public through mass media in Ambon city. Recruitment for other echelons followed and all referred to the merit-based system as the one and only framework.

An interesting result from the merit-based system was the rise of a number of women to key positions in Ambon city. This indicated that the merit-based system can help realize gender balance in the ranks of the Ambon city bureaucracy.

One successful female candidate was dr H.J Huliselan, who was chosen as the Secretary of Ambon City. Before the implementation of the merit-based system, she thought the highest she could go was the Head of the Health Department of Ambon City. Playfully, this woman also known as dr Nona, said, "I actually asked for them to reconsider choosing me as the City Secretary, but the Mayor convinced me that the choice was made using the merit-based system and was right. This gave me motivation to work hard and learn quickly to prove my competence."

In relation to this, the most astonishing result of the merit-based system is the budget efficiency. There has also been a change in the behavior of the bureaucracy which is more positive. It's been acknowledged that the merit-based system is an incentive structure which has changed the behavior of bureaucrats to a more competent and prestigious orientation.

Another effect of the merit-based system is the rebirth of arts and sports in the civil servants of Ambon's government. The awkward atmosphere post-conflict has begun to thaw. This proves the merit-based system has been able to bring about a consolidation of feeling among the civil servants.

Today, the civil servants are carrying their work out with better spirits. All are driven to perform better and better their capacity through training and higher education, in the programs provided by the government and private programs. Not only that, but the civil servants of Ambon have been able to become agents of reconciliation in their families and workplaces.

In the end, a smart practice like this can provide new hope and be an inspirational lesson regarding professional, just, and wise governance.

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