

Short Research Article

Bureaucratic Culture in Asean

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Abstract

The bureaucracy has a structure that breeds its own administrative culture. In Thailand bureaucratic culture had developed for a long time ago since the era of King Chulalongkorn. From this time onwards, Bangkok appointed bureaucracy was instituted, control over the Buddhist Monkhhood (Sangka). While in the Philippines, the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo announced her goal of building a strong republic which has a strong institutions and strong bureaucracy and free from corrupt practices and nepotism. A lesson from USA introduces “minimal state” during the Reagan Administration and “reinventing government” by the Clinton Administration.

Keywords

Bureaucratic Culture, Thailand, Malaysia, National State, Reinventing Government

1. Introduction

Culture is the reflection of the economy and politics. The dominant and newly emerging forces in the economy and politics are also embedded in culture. However, culture is neither simply the ideological reflection of current forces nor the contra distinctions in the economy and politics. It is also the accumulation of notions, customs, habits and the like which dates back to prehistory, and persist in current circumstances as long as there are transmitters and they are part of the social and psychological make up of people within local sites.

The bureaucracy has a structure that breeds its own administrative culture. Incoming political leadership often reacts to the bureaucracy it inherits by instituting personal purges or reorganizing or both, either to cleanse the old system and reorient It to the needs of the new dispensation, or to reshape the administrative culture and values in facilitating targeted policy and program objectives. Consequently, a new political order carries its own political culture to the regime-bureaucracy relation. As the bureaucracy accommodates and eventually trusts the new regime, an administrative culture supportive of the political leadership ensues.

The biggest hurdle to administrative reforms, however, appears to be the role of politicians in

controlling the bureaucracy. Political leaders in a party-run polity are unlikely to appreciate the importance of political neutral civil service. They also may not be adequately restrained from pursuing extraneous goals in and through the bureaucracy. Indulgence by dominant-party politicians has also resulted in wide spread political interference in administrative decision and the politicization of bureaucracy decision making (Note 1).

Another factor which contributed to the success of the administrative reform is the role of leaders. The implementation of change in public services require highly persistent and visionary leaders. Therefore, there has to be quality leadership that will provide guidance and inspiration for the whole community, especially in the bureaucracy as the government's machine. Leadership is thus a necessary but insufficient condition for institutionalizing, public sector reforms. Leadership is the key element in reforming the office and, in a larger sense, in achieving and engaging and performance driven civil service within a challenging and globalizing world (Note 2).

The discussion of administrative culture which is affecting the bureaucracy performances are different among countries. In ASEAN countries which is mostly Influenced by the Eastern's Culture; reflection of the administrative culture are very dominant in the practices of the administrative culture are very dominant in the practices of bureaucracy.

2. Countries Experiences

In *Malaysia*, ethical guidelines play prominent part in the life of civil servants. Civil services ethics shape the behavior and discipline of Malaysia's civil servants and reinforce good values as well as enhance efficiency at work. To date, three major established sets of values have been identified as those which represent civil services values in Malaysia. The formula advocated is based on "Bersih", Cekap, dan Amanah (Note 3). There should be optimal doses of "Bersih" best translated in the form of clean management practices, optimal doses of "Cekap" to ensure the highest level of productivity, quality and efficiency, and very strong commitment for incorporating "Amanah" to ensure that the public sector deliver its services free from corruption practices. This "Amanah" concept demands the civil servants to love their nation. The civil servant is therefore expected to incorporate these values into the job. This become important when dealing with a more liberalized world of present, since a clean and efficient civil service is needed for establishing a good governance and facing globalization competition.

The Malaysian government is concerned with effective and efficient administrative performance, especially with low ratings by external evaluators due of the country's open economy and increasing transparency in public service in Malaysia. Prime Minister DR. Mahathir Mohamad one time has stated that "although the civil service in Malaysia, is more efficient compared to those in other developing countries, there is still much room for improvement" (Note 4).

In Thailand, the new bureaucratic culture was introduced by King Chulalongkorn who understood the demand of his time, opening the way for administrative reforms, systematic modernization and absolute royal control. From this time onwards, Bangkok appointed bureaucracy was instituted, control

over the Buddhist Monkhood (Sangha) established, general education introduced and a modern communicators network built up. In the process, the corves system was abandoned and the slaves emancipated (Prizzia, 1986), However, official political culture is preoccupied with teaching morality. If everyone knows manners and behavioral conduct, the external world consisting of the wider society will be in good order. In bureaucratic manner, responsibility is specified in within six categories of duties, namely the obligations to oneself, to the family, to the school class and fellows, to the school, to the community, and to the nation-state. There are then specified in sets of six rules to follow. For example, the duties to the nation state are: (1) to respect the law, (2) to pay taxes, (3) to assist the officials in maintaining national stability, (4) to be loyal to defending the Nation Religion-King, (5) to preserve national independence, Thai arts and culture, and (6) to let the good of the nation prevail over self-interest (Bunsong, 1991).

The Thai bureaucracy is highly institutionalized with will-established norms and values and designated bureaucratic behavior. Human relationships in the bureaucracy are based upon certain established patterns. Then, a bureaucrat's advancement in the system tends to depend largely on the favoritism; the art of currying favor with one's boss has been developed over the years. When a person is promoted rather rapidly in the bureaucracy, the term normally heard is "Iiakeng", which literally means "good at licking" a Thai analogy to a domestic pet which learns how to please its master by licking (sucking up) (Note 5). A generous comment would be "khao chao khao nai kent" (he knows how to smoothly approach his lord and master). Therefore, there is a general impression that the Thai bureaucratic system is plagued with personalized or patron clientelism. Even though it might not completely true, a study of the attitude of a group of 300 public officials who underwent a training course at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in 1977 supported the fact (Note 6). From the study, 95 percent of the respondents believed that professional advancements in the bureaucracy depends on a patron client relationship; 82.7 percent believed that it depends on money, and 93 percent on knowledge and ability.

In the Philippines, existency of the corruption is a consequence of the feudal relations that have persisted for centuries, in which kinship and other ties play a leading role in official's, in which the rules and colluding with private individuals. While the tendency is to limit government official misconducts, private individuals are often involved as partners, co-conspirators and beneficiaries. Families and extended colleagues and relatives are an important factor in corruption in the Philippines. In her July 2002 address to the Nation, The former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo announced her goal of building a strong republic for the Philippines (Note 7). The government which has a strong institution and strong bureaucracy and free from corrupt practices and nepotism, Arroyo's anticorruption drives signaled her intent to make the state "autonomous of dominant classes and sectors, so that it represents the people interest".

On May 2004, she announced that the government's attack plan against graft and corruption will be in three fronts. *First* is "the promotion of values formation among government employees and officials".

Second is the lifestyle check which would prosecute those who abuse their positions and *third* is minimizing opportunities for graft through computerization and deregulation of government transactions (Note 8). Lifestyle checks and minimizing opportunities for graft have been initiated before; making these measures just re-launched a reinvigoration of the drive. The third approach—the promotion of values is an innovation.

To “promote values”, President Arroyo issued Executive Order (EO) No. 314 (Note 9). Which was signed on April 30, 2004 only ten days before the presidential elections. Through the EO 314, the Presidential Commission on Values Formation was created. Therefore, from here on, it is an order to follow the values. The Government announced that “value formation” was in line with the approach because corruption cannot be solved by “simply enforcing of laws”. It should be noted that one of the President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s campaign platform for her second term in 2004 was a “corruption free Philippines” (Note 10). The Presidential Commission on Values Formation (PCVF) shall be the lead agency “in the establishment of a strong foundation for moral value initiatives in the government bureaucracy” (section 3). And that it shall be supervised and controlled by the Office of the President (section 2). On 3rd August 2004, Malacanang announced that the President appointed herself as chairperson (Note 11).

The “preventive approach” of President Arroyo’s anticorruption campaign is being designed to instill patriotism or love of country (Note 12). However, it was grounded on the wrong foundation which is attracting foreign investment, capital and money, thus leading to more corrupt practice inside the government. At the end of the day, the victims are the masses. Corruption in government, the most common form of corruption in the Philippines, may be defined as the use of public resources for private ends through the violation of state laws, rules and regulations, as well as mandated processes. Bribery of a policeman, or of high government official, is its most common form.

3. Lesson from the West

As for the administrative reform or so-called “governance reform”, administrative reform was directed towards the “trust deficit”. The “trust deficit” can be reduced only by creating a government that is efficient and also just. In the United States, this paradigm has stimulated rethinking about what government is and how it should function. Among the products were two theories of government administration which surfaced under two great presidents. One is the “minimal state” role, a form administrative strategy used by the Reagan Administration, whereas the other involved “reinventing government” during the Clinton Administration.

The minimal state theory is similar to school of thought that have roots in the work of Frederick A. Hayek and Milton Friedman and draw intellectual sustenance from the work of William A. Niskanen, Gordon Tullock, Nobel Laureate James M. Buchanan, and other members from the school of public choice” (Note 13). During the Reagan’s Administration, minimalism was implemented through various means that sought diminished expectations of government; budgetary restraints and centralized

decision making; a leaner and more responsive political establishment; and a focus on a few objectives of overriding natural importance (Carrol et al., 1985, p. 807).

Reinventing government. on the other hand, takes the inspiration from the experience of practitioners such as David Osborne, a journalist, and a former city manager (Note 14). Ted Gaebler (1992). Ideas posted by Osborne and Gaebler had the enthusiastic endorsement of President Clinton when in 1993 has requested Vice President Al Gore Jr to review the performance of the federal government of the United States of America. The purpose of the review, as the title of the report that was submitted in the same year indicates, was to create a government that is result oriented, works better and cost less (Gore, 1993). The report notes that only 20 percent of the American people trust the federal government to act rightly most of the time. To reduce this “trust deficit” then becomes an important objective of the administration at that time.

In spite of the strategic differences among the two reform movements, there is a common theme: the urge to de-bureaucratize government administration. Several innovative public programs that have broken free of the constraint of bureaucratic procedures were introduced. In order to understand the debureaucratizing agenda in these two reform movements, comparison of them with regards to four dimensions of public administration namely: purpose; personnel, organization, and management procedures, is summarized in Table 2 below. These dimensions address the question of why, who, what, and how public administration ought to be conducted (Note 15).

This summary is accomplished, of course, at the risk of over simplifications. Nevertheless, it provides a sense of the potential for and content of debureaucratization agenda. The debureaucratization movement as an administrative reform is more than political act. It is an act of cultural change, reflecting and challenging basic social values. As James Q. Wilson (1989), has commented. “The way in which a bureaucracy operates cannot be explained simple by knowing its tasks and the economic and political incentives that it confronts. Culture makes a difference (Note 16).

Table 1. Characteristic of the Bureaucratic Paradigm in Two Reform Approaches

No	Characteristic	Bureaucratic Paradigm	Minimal State (Reagan Administration)	Reinventing Government (Clinton Administration)
1.	Purpose of Government	Execution of the will of the state	Provision of public goods and expectations Services	Meet citizen expectations
2.	Nature of public services	Neutrally competent	Rational, selfinterested, budget maximizes setting	Entrepreneurs
3.	Management approach	Close supervision; Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)	Cost-minimizing; Consumer-oriented management	Facilitative management; total quality management (TQM)

Source: Compiled and modified from many resources by the author.

4. Conclusion

Expanding economic activities demand civil servants not only be fully equipped and trained for great tasks, but that higher echelons adopt orientation and motivation towards good governance. This orientation is promoted almost in every selected ASEAN's countries studied to equip public servants in undertaking complex tasks and creating the necessary environment. It also ensures that professionalism within the civil service is always required in the modern administration. The merit-based hiring and promotion system should always be incorporated to enable the most qualified and competent applicant obtain the best position in government and subsequently deliver the surest possible service (Note 17). A) In order to have all of these qualifications, bureaucratic culture as well as professionalism should be well maintained. All of these steps is required to have professional bureaucrats.

Ensuring that civil servants give high priority to honesty, responsibility, and integrity with regard to their routine duties can be accomplished through well planned human resources development. Human resources development for civil servants starts with their recruitment and continues until they leave government service. Recruits should undertake job requirement analyses before undertaking recruitment activities. Furthermore, to allow the civil service to select the best candidates, the recruitment process should be fair and open. As far as it can, the use of Information and Technologies (IT) facilities should be practiced.

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Notes

Note 1. This kind of politicization in bureaucracy was branded as "bureaucracy polity" In Thailand (See: Fred Riggs, "Thailand: The Modernization of a bureaucracy polity", Honolulu, East West Press, 1996). And "Dominated Bureaucracy" in the Philippines (See: Ledivina V. Carino, "A Dominated Bureaucracy": An Analysis of the Formulation of and Reaction to State Policies in the Philippine Civil Services" Occasional Paper No. 89-4, National College of Public Administration, University of

Philippines, 1989).

Note 2. The Malaysian Prime Minister's had a vision 2020 and establishing a "Malaysian Incorporated", while Prime Minister Thaksin Shiniwattra of Thailand introduced the "CEO Manager" style for Thai Civil Service. Since the birth of the Philippine Republic in 1946, civil service reform has been undertaken during the administration of President Roxas, President Quirino, President Magsaysay, President Marcos and Presiden Aquino. In Indonesia the late President Suharto had reformed the civil service system in 1974. Since then no major changes in public service system occurred in Indonesia. Only recently, in the last month of 2013, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) had introduced establishment of so-called "Senior Executives Services (SES)" in the new Civil Servants Law.

Note 3. Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy. See: "Dasar-Dasar Baru Kerajaan", Departement of Information Malaysia, Second Edition, Kuala Lumpur. Rina Publication Sdn. Bhd. For Government Printers, 1987. It was modified to become: "Amanah (honesty), Bijaksana (Wisdom), Cekap (efficient), Dedikasi (dedicated), and Efektif (effective)" or in abbreviation of the principle of "ABCDE" by Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Former Prime Minister of Malaysia and presently is on trial for corruption allegation. See: New Strait Times, 26 January 2008.

Note 4. New Strait Time, 8 May 1999, daily newspaper in Malaysia.

Note 5. This kind of a so-called "bureaucratic culture" is also similar to the Indonesia's Civil Services which practiced "*Asal Bapak Senang (ABS)*" means "as the boss wishes".

Note 6. Thinapan Nakata. "Bureaucratic Corruption in Thailand: Incongruities between Legal Codes and Social Norms", Monograph in Public Administration, School of Public Administration, NIDA, Bangkok. April 1997. pp. 31-33.

Note 7. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2002), "Towards a Strong Philippine Republic", State of the Nation Address at the opening of the 2nd Regular Session of the 12th Congress, July 22, 2002, Manila: Philippines.

Note 8. See: <http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/archives2004/mav17htm> The campaign was later reduced to two approaches, the first being punitive while the second is a change in values or the values formation approach. See: <http://www.ops.gov.ph/archieves2004/oct06.htm>

Note 9. For more information. See: http://www.ops.gov.ph/recordsleo_no.317.htm

Note 10. More information can be found in: <http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/archieves2004/mar19htm>

Note 11. See: <http://www.news.ops.gov.ph/archieves2004/aug03.htm>

Note 12. To change the culture of corruption, the government will mobilize the country's formal and non formal educational system, the media and civic organizations to rally societal reform. Value formation will also be reinforced by inculcating positive values to the youth, at the onset, such as "delicadeza", "palabra de honor" "patriotism or love of country, excellence, transparency, efficiency, accountability, integrity, selfrespect, self-reliance, peace advocacy, and pride in being a Filipino". see: NEDA "Medium Term Philippine Development Plan 2004-2010".

Note 13. William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*”, Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1971; Gordon Tullock, *“The Politics of Bureaucracy”* Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1965; and James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *“The Calculus of Consent: Logical. Foundation of Constitutional Democracy”* The University of Michigan Press, 1962.

Note 14. David Osborner and Ted Gaebler, *“Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector”* Addison-Wesley, 1992.

Note 15. This a modification of the approach used by Hood and Jackson in their study of administrative doctrines. See: Christopher Hood and Michael Jackson, *“Administrative Argument”* Brookfield, vi :Dartmouth, 1991, p. 17, p. 179.

Note 16. James Q. Wilson, *“Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do”* Basic Book, 1989, p. 203.

Note 17. Professionalism is difficult to be maintained if incoming political leadership often institute personnel who are supporters of the new regime. The recruits, the political appointees were perceived to be arrogant and ignorant of the government working environment, culture and procedures, since many of them come from the bureaucratic-sector. Discussion is held with Dr. Karina Constantino-David. A former chairperson of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) on Wednesday, July, 2, 2008, at the University of the Philippines (UP) Campus, Diliman, Quezon City.