

RSOG Seminar: “Practical Public Service Leadership”

By

Professor Emeritus Dr Akira Nakamura

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Speakers : Professor Emeritus Dr Akira Nakamura

About The Seminar

Over decades of public administration and governance involvement in Japan as well as Asia, Professor Nakamura observed a pattern of leadership skillsets. These skillsets, or known as the six Ps, are seen as crucial to public sector leaders, especially in light of recent developments in the region. Regardless of level and area of work, public sector leaders need to have a macro Perspective on issues they face at work.

Instead of the ‘look and wait’ approach, they must be Proactive – the ability to anticipate and initiate. Upon recognising issues, public sector leaders must be able to prescribe ideas – Prescriptive. All of this require plenty of Patience to convince the stakeholders of new ideas and alternatives. At times, contestation of ideas may prolong, become widened and further deepened. In such situations, public sector leaders would need to revisit, rethink and refine earlier ideas. This demanding and enduring process requires considerable degree of Persistence, Perseverance and Persuasion.

Summary

Professor Nakamura began the lecture by briefly describing the political leadership in Japan. He spoke about the action and reaction of the stakeholders including the Prime Minister of Japan during the Tsunami in March 2011. He mentioned the lack of leadership displayed by the political leaders and public officials in Japan during the Tsunami crisis. This has caused more uncertainty among the people especially those directly affected by the tsunami.

He talk was centred on the quality of leadership and Six P's that he has advocated as practical concepts needed for effective leadership in the public service. The Six P's are as follows:

Perspective – It is important for managers to have a Macro Outlook on any issue regardless if it is positive or negative. Good managers should be able to manage any challenges in the workplace.

Proactive - It is important for managers to have positive conduct at all times.

Prescriptive - It is imperative for managers to provide/lead the future direction of an organization

Persistence - Being able to be consistent in any action taken.

Perseverance – A Manager has to be patient for the subordinates to carry out a task once it has been delegated to them.

Persuasive - The ability to convince others beyond time and space.

He further elaborated on the role and function of the local government. He mentioned that the local government officials should be highly disciplined, not have any criminal conduct and should focus on helping the citizens especially the elderly and less fortunate. He gave the example of the relief efforts during the Tsunami in Fukushima in 2011. The local government and agencies conducted the aid relief in an orderly manner and prevented any form of untoward incidents such as looting or stampedes. It is imperative for the local government to establish itself as a credible entity to gain the public trust and ensure the tradition of legalism and equity.

Prof. Nakamura gave examples of some of the interesting methods of service delivery adopted by the local government in Japan. Among the terms that he coined is the concept of "A Bath in the Bus". He explained that it is a van that provides bathing services to the elderly and people in need. Another initiative undertaken by the local government is to publish government newsletters to highlight the services rendered to the public.

One of the trends of imbalance taking place in the current society is the revolution of rising expectations. The public demands on the government has risen while government resources available to resolve issues related to the well-being of the people is limited. Prof. Nakamura mentioned that there are several factors to be considered to ensure integrated capacity building in the public service. These include an objective and impartial system of **recruitment**; measures to **retain** the best brains in the civil service; **rewards** that are attractive (wages or benefits); **re-education** to constantly upgrade skills and competencies; and providing opportunities after **retirement**.

He also mentioned that the public service should embody the concept of TAPE, which stands for **Transparency**; **Accountability**; **Participation** (inclusiveness in programs/policies for the people); and **Equity** (any action undertaken by the government is based on the law).

In his concluding remarks, he gave examples of corruption prevention efforts undertaken by the Japanese government. It is divided to either the hard or soft approach. The hard approach include rules and regulations and the establishment of the Office of Corruption Control. The soft approach adopted by the local government in Japan includes maintaining the rule of law, equity and maintaining conduct that does not jeopardise people's trust in the government. He also stated that the government should prioritize a policy or program and include consideration of level of growth, cultural and historical backgrounds. Prioritization is important because it takes into consideration factors such as participation, development and financial health of the economy.

Key Lessons Imparted:

1. It would be beneficial for the public service as a whole if public servants practiced the Six P concept to ensure effective service delivery to the people.
2. Effective integrated capacity building in the public service is vital to ensure quality talent is retained in the public service.
3. The public service should embody the concept of TAPE to establish the trust of the public towards in the governance structure and in the public service.

About the Speaker

Professor Akira Nakamura is Professor Emeritus at Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan. He had served as both Vice President and Dean of the Graduate School of Meiji University for six years until March 2008.

He is presently the Chair of the Program and Research Advisory Committee of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (Brussels) and a former member of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in the United Nations. He is the incumbent president of Japan Emergency Management Association, while he is the member of both the Board of Governance and the international editor of Public Administration Review.