

## Articles on Public Sector Management Reform in *Jakarta Post*

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### Using ideas as weapons for mass improvement

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Using ideas as weapons is as old as democracy itself. Ideas are far more effective and lasting than bullets because they change people's minds, which leads to changing their behaviour, and this can result in better living. This article provides some ideas for improving Indonesian government and governance. Actually they are not my ideas, but mostly other people's ideas, but that is what consultants are about – selling other peoples ideas as their own.

Howard Gardner in his brilliant new book *Changing Minds; the Art and Science of Changing Your Own Mind and Other People's Minds* - shows us that changing minds is seldom an epiphany or blinding revelation. It is a gradual process that is in part determined by growing up, but also how we respond to the 'levers' of change - reason, research, resonance, redescription, real World events, rewards and resistance. When people start changing their minds collectively, we arrive at a 'tipping point' of reform. This can happen for countries, within organisations and most importantly to ourselves when we change our own mind.

Indonesia is at the tipping point. Most public sector managers we have been speaking to want to change. They do not like corruption, they do not want unworkable systems and regulation and they do not like being dependent on other people's thinking, relying on aid money or being regarded as a basket-case country. These managers are perfectly capable of running good governments, and in some cases are showing outstanding leadership qualities. What everybody needs now is consistent direction from political leaders in finding a better way.

To get the public sector to deliver better performance requires a whole of government management improvement program. This does not necessarily involve great cost, but it does involve changing many minds, and being strategic.

Obtaining support for and implementing changes on a whole of government basis is never easy. Eisenhower complained that when he was commander in chief of the Allied Forces during World War II there was instant compliance with his orders, yet as President of the United States he kept pulling the levers of power and nothing happened. Such is the frustration and challenge of good governance – how to get large teams of people working together in a common cause.

For Indonesia, which now has one of the biggest, diverse and most widespread systems of government in the World, there are many special challenges to be overcome and hurdles to be jumped, but none are impossible.

For example, much Indonesian regulation is totally meaningless in terms of improving performance and helping protect people's rights. This is even before deciding whether those laws are duplicated, conflicting or indeed necessary. Part of the public sector reform process should be about reviewing all legislation to see whether it contains requirements that prevent improvement instead of assisting it. Australia undertook a similar exercise for their *National Competition Policy* implementation, and now has one of the World's best performed economies.

A whole of government public sector management improvement program would help all governments do a better job. Central agencies need to develop and communicate good policy and guidelines, and not try to keep their hands on everyone else's operations as they are presently trying to do. Regional governments need to accept responsibility and be accountable for delivering results or outcomes; not just seeking bigger and bigger Budget allocations.

Public sector organisations and managers need to be responsible and accountable for their own performance and that of their teams. Reporting of finances and performance needs to be transparent and comprehensive. Evaluation of performance should be about learning and self-improvement, not just form-filling like so many present central government requirements.

The process by which good governments achieve better performance includes getting managers to apply strategic thinking and planning to their activities, not just blindly following out-of-date rules and regulations, or by requiring other people to do their thinking for them.

Answering the question of who is responsible for what and when, and whether a process, institution or regulation is helpful in acquitting this responsibility, is the basis of performance review. Where a process, institution or regulation is not helpful; get rid of it.

Indonesia is at an important stage of development. The election of a new President and new governments is an appropriate time to address change and reform strategically.

The President has already signaled a business-like approach by having his Ministers complete performance agreements. The next step will be those Ministers obtaining similar agreements and commitments from their agencies and managers, and so on.

The outcomes of good government and good governance for Indonesia will be a high performing economy, a sustainable environment and a fairer Society. The path towards these goals is through developing good public sector managers. The success of this strategy will depend on changing minds, because this is where all real reform starts.

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