

Democratis Values Require New Strategies

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Abstract

For more than 30 years Indonesians were ruled under “*Demokrasi Pancasila*” favored by the Suharto administration. In spite of the fact that Indonesia enjoyed economic stability, freedom of expression voicing an opinion not to the administration’s best interest was not tolerated. The nation knew only general elections where participating politicians were nominated by one of the three political parties. Public executives were appointed by the ruling party. Demonstrations were repressed through various security regulations, if not by means of force. Being part of *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia), the police depended heavily on the military’s support in restoring public security. One-way communication was the order of the day. It was an easy life indeed for the public sector. Obviously, the monetary crisis which hit the country in mid 1997 brought revolutionary changes into the life of Indonesians too hard for the public sector to believe, never mind to accept. All of the sudden they saw political reform that introduced real democracy. The implementation of regional decentralization brought a lot of confusion and frustration. As public security became the sole responsibility of the police, the military’s duty should be handling defense matters and providing assistance in emergency situations only. Presidential election was held directly. Everything is subject to mass protest and demonstration staged throughout the country. Suddenly, the public sector had to adopt new values. They were simply not prepared for the new realities. Wanting to do things the easy way, top managements of the public sector realized that it needed to address the new challenge accordingly. Thus, empowering the internal stakeholders became their priority before communicating with any external stakeholder. How? *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), *Kabupaten Kebumen* (a level II Administration) in Central Java, and *Garuda* (a State-owned airline) had their experiences for us to share.

Key words: Public Sector, Public Relations, Democratic Values

Introduction

Indonesia’s present problems are a result of the economic crisis that hit Asia in mid 1997 when, one by one, Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea fell victim to that crisis and came to face serious economic problems and uncertainties. Unlike the other two, Indonesia is yet to recover --despite the best intentions and efforts of concerned fellow Indonesians, global financial institutions, and international aid agencies. It hasn’t been for want of trying but it should be recognized that the economic crisis also

triggered political and other problems, which, in turn, touched off major changes unprecedented in Indonesia’s history.

For more than 30 years Indonesians were ruled under “*Demokrasi Pancasila*” favored by the Soeharto administration, more popularly known as the *Orde Baru* (New Order) era. In spite of the fact that Indonesia enjoyed economic stability, freedom of expression voicing an opinion not to the government’s best interest was not tolerated. The nation knew only general elections where participating politicians were

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nominated by three political parties. Public executives were appointed by *Golongan Karya* (*Golkar*, Functional Group) the ruling party. Demonstrations were repressed through various security regulations, if not by means of force. Being part of *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia), the police depended heavily on the military's support in restoring public security. One-way communication was the order of the day. It was an easy life indeed for the public sector.

What were the new realities brought by *reformasi* into the public sector? Demand for transparency. Increasing public awareness about democracy, law, and human rights. The elimination of *korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme* (KKN, corruption, collusion and nepotism) that had been voiced a few weeks prior to Soeharto's downfall will continue.

New Challenges

Obviously, the monetary crisis brought revolutionary changes into the life of Indonesians which were too hard for the public sector to believe. Never mind to accept. All of the sudden we saw a political reform that introduced real democracy. The implementation of regional decentralization brought a lot of confusion and frustration. As public security became the sole responsibility of the police, the military's duty should be handling defense matters and providing assistance in emergency situations only. Suddenly, the public sector had to adopt new values. They were simply not prepared for the new realities. Yet, the show must go on. The public sector's top management was making sure that their internal stakeholders would be empowered with new strategies, namely new skills and new tools.

For the purpose of our discussion, I wish to quote the thoughts of our gurus in their well-known textbook "Effective Public Relations." Quote. "Internal relations deal with publics concerned about or involved in the workings of the organization, such as employees, families of employees, and volunteers. An organization's most important relationships are those with employees at all levels. The term internal public

represents the organization's greatest resource, its people. Two factors are changing employee communication and enhancing management's respect for this part of the public relations task: 1) the value of understanding, teamwork, and commitment by employees in achieving bottom-line results, and 2) the need to build a strong manager-communications network, one that makes every supervisor at all level accountable for communicating effectively with his or her employees." End quote. In today's word it is the relations with internal stakeholders, the most neglected stakeholders in our day-to-day work. In my opinion, basic values of the organization, including credos, mission statements, vision statements, and statements of purpose; have to be shared with all internal stakeholders.

What were the Indonesian experiences for us to share? Since the monetary crisis, no political institution in Indonesia has suffered a greater crisis of legitimacy than the military. Theorists argue that civil-military reform is a critical component of democratization. Yet, many Indonesians credit the military with a role in the founding of the Republic and therefore tolerate its often-violent approach to quelling conflict in *daerah rawan* (trouble area). Demands for military reform, such as dismantling territorial command structure, accepting civilian control, and introducing transparency into its budget process will become routine.

The military will have to return to its principal role as the nation's defense force, and should cease to be the tool of any political party as it was before *reformasi* when it sided with *Golkar* in the contest for political power. It will never again meddle in the affairs of the civilian government nor be involved in issues that are not related to national defense. Critics also argued that the *dwi-fungsi* (dual function) doctrine had become the military justification for involving itself in every aspect of running the country: politics, social control, economics, and security, both internal and external. An opinion leader commented, "Unlike in most countries, the Indonesian military, with its peculiar *dwi-fungsi* (holding both the sword and the plowshare)

evolved from being the savior to becoming the scourge of the nation.”

On top of that, it has been predicted that the public will show more courage to criticize and even condemn the military for repressive measures it took against civilians, especially which occurred during the *Orde Baru* era. It will be condemned and there will be calls to account for these excesses. There will be also a demand for the dissolution of the territorial military commands known as *Komando Distrik Militer (Kodim)* and *Komando Rayon Militer (Koramil)* as they were deemed not in tune with *reformasi*.

On the other hand, the military readily accepted to end the *kekaryaan* (secondment), a system that placed military officers in civil post; in fact, many within the armed forces, were convinced that this is in the interest of improving professionalism within the Civil Service. Another early step taken by the military on its own initiative was to cut formal ties with *Golkar* and adopt a strictly neutral position in elections.

These new challenges required empowering the internal stakeholders, rather than permitting them to revert to their former authoritarian practices. The military undertook several reforms in response to all criticism. In April 1999, it announced “*Paradigma Baru TNI*,” the new paradigm and a step to signal reform by changing its name from *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI)* back to their original name since the Independence War: *Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI)*. This name was a source of pride and in a sense reclaimed past glory. Two months earlier, “Law on the Composition of Legislatures” reduced the seats reserved for the military at all levels by 50 percent in the bodies to be formed by the 1999 elections.

Meanwhile there was a continuing seesawing of policy on the military’s withdrawal from formal politics. In a surprise move, *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (MPR, the People’s Consultative Assembly)* in 2000 extended the time frame for reserved seats for both the TNI and *Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia (Polri)* in the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR)*

until 2004, and in the MPR until 2009. But in August 2002, the MPR voted to eliminate reserved seats for the military in all legislative bodies permanently commencing with the 2004 elections.

It has been predicted that civil-military reforms will call also for 1) converting all TNI-owned enterprises into state-owned, 2) having all of them audited by independent auditors, 3) strengthening the political party system and civilian political institutions, 4) reviewing and revamping all legislations “condoning half hearted civilian control over the TNI,” and 5) revising the security doctrine that governs the TNI.

In response to the new realities, a series of nationwide sessions, and various orientation programs were (and are still) held to assure that everyone within the TNI understand and uphold the *Paradigma Baru TNI*. All professional trainings were not exempted. In short, the internal stakeholders had to be continuously reminded that the TNI has to ‘retreat to the barracks’, and abandon its *dwi-fungsi* doctrine which guaranteed it a paramount role in politics.

A Learning from Kebumen

How did a tiny *Kabupaten Kebumen* (a level II Administration) coped with the *reformasi* realities? A young DPR member, won the local election and became Indonesia’s first woman *Bupati*. When she took office, *Kabupaten Kebumen* ranked third (from the bottom!) out of the 23 level II Administrations in Central Java. In the *reformasi* era most Administration Heads in Indonesia are non-bureaucrats without public administration background. Unlike her predecessors, she had a university degree in public administration. She discovered that during the *Orde Baru* era so-called journalists were active in all regions terrorizing Government executives, especially the *Kepala Desa* (Village Head). Negative articles could be avoided through lucrative payments. This was an important factor not to be tolerated. Government executives were then not authorized to give press statements and were never taught to communicate effectively with stakeholders.

For the Civil Administration, the new reality was the demand to implement “Good Governance,” a strange word that in a way is its “10 commandments.” It calls for transparency, supervision, effective and efficient, responsive, public participation, strategic vision, law enforcement, accountability, equality, and professionalism. Furthermore, the enactment of Law No 22/1999 on “Regional Governments” and Law No. 25/1999 on “Revenue Sharing between the Central and Regional Governments”, will require Kebumen Government to ensure that its Civil Service is free from KKN. With the locus of power turned into the hands of the legislators, the Kebumen Legislature will play a more effective role in law making.

In such setting, communication and trust-building skills are highly important for the internal stakeholders to assure an effective communication with the external stakeholders. Government programs and policies have to be understood to receive public support. Aside from initiating face-to-face communication, the government’s media should be upgraded and new ones should be built, as they are vital communication tools. A “*Balai Warta* (News Center) will be built for journalists to meet with Government executives for first-hand information, ensuring public transparency and eliminating counter-productive rumors. For the media to receive a balanced information, Government executives will be required to explain their programs openly and routinely.

Efforts to improve communication facilities should include the upgrading of the government’s “*Radio Indrakila*” to become an FM radio station and the founding of a community television station “*Ratih TV*” to enable government executives conduct an interactive communication with all external stakeholders, especially with those living in the rural areas. Through the two broadcast media, every workday Government executives will take turns to interact and do their presentations.

What about individual empowerment? A special workshop on media relations, which included writing new releases, and doing

presentations were conducted for all Government executives, starting from the *Kepala Desa* up to the *Sekretaris Daerah* (Sekda, Executive Secretary of the *Kabupaten*). Unlike previous practice in which only top management met the media, now they were authorized and instructed to answer question from the media directly or issue statements about their respective responsibilities.

Reformasi and a Vision of the Future

How did *reformasi* challenged a public enterprise? Throughout the *Orde Baru* era, the State-owned PT Garuda Indonesia had the monopoly in long haul and domestic trunk line services. Thus, very little marketing efforts were needed. If it previously enjoyed the “seller’s market” concept, *reformasi* brought new realities. Monopoly in airline business is gone. Competing new airlines operated more efficiently by adopting new technology, such as electronic ticketing. In fact, many were able to operate on the “lean but mean” organizational structure by offering personalized services and even gave away prizes. Garuda had no other option but to join the “buyer’s market” concept and aggressively market its services.

In the early days of *reformasi* for instance, Garuda came up with an “On Time Performance (OTP)” marketing slogan based on the awards presented by Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport. A slogan that no other Indonesian airlines were able to challenge. When the advertising campaign was about ready to be launched, it was discovered that the OTP slogan had not been communicated properly to the internal stakeholders. The campaign had to be delayed for a few months to allow Management inform and discuss with everyone involved in the departure as well arrival of Garuda flights, especially front liners, about the new slogan. And that everyone in Garuda should be entrepreneurs, rather than just a Government employee. The President Director himself took time to meet them in each session.

Indonesia’s snail-paced recovery program was proceeding in the face of almost insurmountable odds: violent currency

fluctuations; market volatility; a badly shaken bond market; hitherto unimaginable levels of corporate and foreign debts that caused the assets of major corporations taken over by the *Badan Penyehatan Perbankan Nasional* (BPPN, Bank Restructuring Agency); a devastated banking sector; unprecedented massive natural disasters: tsunami, earthquakes, land erosions, floods and forest fires; outbreak of pandemic diseases: bird flu and polio; and national assets subject to physical threat (Exxon in Aceh and Cepu, Newmont in North Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara, and Freeport in Papua). Everything is subject to continuous mass protests and demonstrations staged throughout the country.

Allow me now to update you briefly about Indonesia in its early years of democracy. In 2004 general election was held to elect legislators, and three months later, for the first time ever, Indonesia directly elected a president for a five-year term. The power to choose our leaders is now in our hands. We had eight general elections since 1955 but only two really count as meeting the basic requirements for a free, fair and democratic poll. We saw a new tradition when presidential candidates campaigned across the country for one month. They explained their platforms at length, made multiple promises and interestingly enough, entertained the people as a way of winning votes.

Reputation defined all election candidates more than policy differences. All of them had promised to reduce poverty, create jobs and end endemic corruption, while offering scant details of how this will be done. But they were at least correct in identifying economic issues as the country's key challenge. With more than two million young people entering the job market each year, economists say Indonesia's GDP must grow by seven percent annually if those citizens are to find work. Indonesia's list of problems is so long it makes one wonder why anyone would even want to be its president.

While his *Partai Demokrat* (Democratic Party) won only seven percent, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, popularly known after his initials SBY (as-bay-yay), won 33

percent at the Presidential election. Wiranto who was endorsed by the *Golkar* Party and Gus Dur's *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (PKB, National Awakening Party) should have won more than 30 percent of the vote but won only 20-plus percent instead. In short, the way people voted defied the political power distribution reflected in the legislature elections. It shows the Indonesian voters were rational and mature.

Today, eight years of a chaotic and sometimes violent democratic transition following the ouster of Soeharto in 1998, has many Indonesians indeed longing for the good old days of stable, authoritarian rule – minus the economic plunder and human rights abuses. Various surveys showed that 45 percent of the public wanted SBY to take center stage, and the presidential election's first round confirmed such demand. SBY was one of the two contenders in the runoff election, and became Indonesia's first directly elected President. Indonesia can take pride that it is contributing to making democracy work. It became not only the world's third largest democracy after the USA and India but at the same time, a country with the largest Moslem population embracing democracy.

Change of great intensity is indeed taking place in Indonesia at a fast and furious pace and as the nation searches for a new sense of destiny and a new image, communicating this new paradigm is in the hands of fellow public relations practitioners. They must be capable of transcending the dichotomy of reform, otherwise they might be perceived as mere agents of a prevailing status quo. They must proactively search for ways to manage change; otherwise they will lose their credibility as they try to usher in the future. Above all, they must be able to develop a vision of the future for themselves to pursue and for others to appreciate. Democracy is in Indonesia to stay, and we certainly do not wish to trade it for anything despite the unpleasant teething problems.

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