



When Doing is Believing: Internalizing the anti-litterbugs campaign

Haijon Gunggut, Chua Kim Hing,
Dg Siti Noor Saufidah Ag Mohd Saufia

Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Locked Bag 71, 88997 Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

haijo553@sabah.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

This paper seeks to account for the variations in the implementation progress of the Anti-litterbugs Campaign in Sabah. A total of nine local authorities was studied. Data was mainly obtained from interviews, observations and written sources. The variation in the Campaign implementation progress can be explained in term of campaign internalization among local authority top leadership. Internalization is reflected in the understanding of the campaign and priority of local government top leaderships observed in their actions, choice of words and activities.

Keyword: anti-litterbugs campaign; programme internalization; local government structure; policy implementation

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1.0 Introduction

The surrounding has an important impact to urban residents and have been the subject of several studies (e.g. Collado and Coraliza, 2012; Halimahton, Elsadiq and Mizan, 2013; Laurens, 2012; Mohamed Ikhwan and Masran, 2013; Saripah, Mohd Shukri, Yeop Hussin and Zainudin, 2013; Tiwi, et.al, 2011). Sabah is one the top biodiversity hotspots in the world and an estimated 2.93 million tourists visited the state in 2012 (Bangkuai, 2012). Unfortunately, visitors were often turned off by the presence of litters everywhere. Littering mars the surrounding. The government conventional approach to deal with the problem is carrying out Cleanliness Campaign. However, the government Cleanliness campaigns were ineffective in promoting urban cleanliness in Sabah (Chua & Gunggut, 2012). As a result, the Ministry of Local Government and Housing adopted the Anti-litterbugs Campaign in 2010 (ABC). All local authorities were instructed to implement the programme in their respective areas of jurisdiction. The Ministry of Local Government and Housing appointed Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sabah as the consultant to implement the new campaign.

Internalization of the new campaign is crucial for the success of the campaign. Idea or concepts from outside are internalized through the process of learning, understanding, and acceptance (Scott, 1971). Thus, internalization refers to the process of making something part of one's attitude, way of thinking, and beliefs. The ABC involves a drastic change in the way local government approaches and deals with urban cleanliness. Gunggut, Bagang, Zaaba, & Saufi (2012) traced the origins of the ABC using the concept of policy entrepreneur and policy change, while Chua & Gunggut (2012) compared the ABC with the conventional Cleanliness campaign. Most studies on littering focus on the behaviour of the people (e.g., Bator, Bryan & Schultz, 2011; Arafat, Al-Khatib & Shwahneh, 2007; Sibley & Liu, 2003; de Kort, McCalley & Midden, 2008). Little attention is given to implementing bodies entrusted to carry out anti littering provisions. Moreover, implementing agencies are weak in Malaysia (Hezri, 2011). Changes should first occur in the top management to increase chances of success (Palmer, Dunford, & Akin, 2009). Thus, there is a need to investigate the implementation of the ABC in Sabah. The primary purpose of this paper is to account for the variation in the implementation progress of the ABC in the various local authorities in Sabah.

2.0 Methodology

There were nine local authorities selected purposively in this study to represent the three main types of local government structure in the state; The City Hall (Kota Kinabalu City Hall), two Municipal Councils (Tawau and Sandakan) and six District Councils (Putatan, Penampang, Tuaran, Tambunan, Semporna and Kota Marudu). Data was mainly obtained from interviews with top leaderships of local government and selected members of the public. In addition, the study used data from observations and written sources.

Implementation progress is defined in terms of:

- Launching of the ABC
- Enforcement of anti littering by-laws
- Awareness talks
- Declaration of litter-free premises

- Carrying out other components of ABC (Life, table talk, open letter to smokers, etc.)

Internalization of the ABC was conceptualized in terms local government top leaderships' priority and understanding of the campaign. Actions and words of the top leaderships of local government reflect their understanding of the campaign. Actions and words that appeared to contradict the ABC indicated lack understanding towards the campaign. For example, the organizing of gotong royong to clean filthy areas and frequent used of the word, 'cleaning,' instead of 'no littering,' indicated lack of understanding about the campaign. Activities of the local government indicated its leadership priority. Priority indicated the seriousness of the local government to carry out the programme. Lack of enforcement as well as lack of urgency to carry out the components of the ABC indicated a low in priority in implementing the campaign.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Kota Kinabalu City Hall has made the most significant progress in implementing the ABC. Two factors are easily discernible. First, the former Director General, the originator of the campaign, facilitated internalization of the campaign among the leaderships of the council. Second, prior to the introduction of the campaign, the Mayor has set his three priorities comprising of cleanliness, atheistic and security. Hence, he could easily internalize the philosophy of the campaign. The third Mayor had internalized the campaign even before he became the new Mayor. He was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing who signed a memorandum of understanding with UiTM to implement the campaign throughout Sabah. This situation is re-enforced by the structure of the KKCH, the Mayor is the executive head of the council. The top leadership in Kota Kinabalu City appeared to understand the ABC philosophy well. Anti littering was a common theme in their actions and words. Ridding the city of litterbugs was a priority.

Tawau Municipal Council it is not progressing as anticipated. Although the President appears to be spearheading the campaign himself, he lacks understanding of the philosophy underlying the campaign. In his speech during the event, he appealed to the community, especially the NGOs, to continuously organize gotong royong as a way to keep the town clean. The lack of understanding prevents him from internalizing the campaign (Toyos, 2012). Cleaning was a common theme in the actions and words of the top leadership, but ridding Tawau of litterbugs was not a priority.

In Sandakan, the operation of the campaign is left to a very junior officer. As community participation is one of the strategies advocated by the campaign, one of the councillors enthusiastically initiated arrangement for UiTM Sabah consultants to present a briefing to government officers, school principals, community leaders, hawkers, and shopkeepers, and worked out a strategy for the Sandakan Municipal Council to co-implement the campaign with the School of Nursing in Sandakan. The top leadership in Sandakan did not appear to have understanding of the ABC philosophy well, thus give low priority to it, although some of his junior officers and a councillor were.

The Penampang District Council is the first to launch the campaign on 7th October 2011. The District Council and the District Office, two schools, the office of the Penampang

Hawkers Association, and the Sabah Turf Club office declared as litter-free premises. However, the top leadership does not seem to show high commitment to the campaign. The campaign is left to the junior officers. And because of lack understanding of the campaign, the council organized an event as part of its activities under the ABC, which was no different from the conventional gotong royong picking up rubbish. It was one of the events which perpetuates the throw-first-collect-later syndrome, contrary to the philosophy of the ABC. The organizational structure of the council also prevents any concerted effort by the top leaderships in implementing the campaign. The Executive Officer relies on the District Officer who is the Chairman of the council; the head of the council, to spearhead the campaign. The District Officer, on the other hand, relies on the Executive Officer to spearhead the campaign as he is the executive head of the council. Fortunately, the junior officers made responsible to implement the campaign are quite committed to their work, and they have a reasonable understanding of the campaign. However, due to no meaningful leadership from the top management, the campaign is losing its momentum. The top leadership in Penampang showed zeal, but did not exhibit understanding of the ABC philosophy well. Cleaning was a common theme in their actions and words, but ridding of litterbugs was not a priority.

Tambunan District Council launched the campaign second after Penampang. This shows the priority accorded to this campaign by the District Officer of Tambunan. Its progress is quite encouraging. Three offices and two schools declared litter-free premises. The council also carries out mobile announcements about the campaign on most tamu days. Having attended fully the course on the ABC the District Officer had no trouble in grasping the philosophy behind the ABC. This enables him to internalize the campaign, and he quickly becomes engrossed with it. He is the only District Officer who is able to give talks and briefings on the ABC in schools and government offices in his district. The strength of his commitment and internalization of the campaign enables him to break the structural barrier caused by the organization setup of the District Council. Despite having no executive authority in the council, he manages to engage the staff of the council in related activities. Anti littering was a common theme in the actions and words of the top leadership. Ridding the District Council of litterbugs was a priority.

Papar District Council has made some progress in implementing the campaign. The Chairman showed reasonably high commitment in implementing the campaign, although his understanding of the philosophy behind the campaign may not be comprehensive enough. The council has adopted a campaign strategy of making mobile announcements using loud hailer. However, activity is not sustained as the district is always busy with other activities prior to the 13th General Election. The top leadership in Papar appeared to understand the ABC philosophy but not well. Anti littering was not a common theme in their actions and words. Ridding of litterbugs was not an urgent matter.

Semporna District Council, one of the local authorities that is late in launching the campaign has not progressed very well in implementing it. When the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment named Semporna as the dirtiest town in the state during one State Legislative Assembly sitting, the Semporna District Council responded by setting up 14 sub-committees purportedly to maintain cleanliness of the town. None of these sub-committees are relevant and required in implementing the ABC. This shows that the top leadership of the

council has not grasped nor understood the philosophy behind the campaign, far from being internalized. Despite the constant criticism on the standard of cleanliness of the town, the council has not placed this campaign high on the agenda. Anti littering was not a common theme in their actions and words. Ridding Semporna of litterbugs was not a priority.

Despite being the constituency of the Minister of Local Government and Housing, and the venue for the state-level grand launching of the Anti-litterbugs Campaign by the Minister on 6th December 2010, Tuaran District Council had not made any effort implementing the campaign. Both the Chairman and the Executive Officer of the council do not accord any concern and they have not made any meaningful effort implementing the campaign, which indicates that this campaign is very low on their priority list. This lack of action is worsened by the unpleasant relationship between the two leaders, thus prevent them to collaborate fruitfully. When the Chairman invited UiTM Sabah to present a talk on the campaign to the village folks in the district this shows his lack of understanding of the campaign. It should have been implemented at the town level first before bringing it to the village level. Because the council does not provide rubbish collection services at village level, even if the villagers throw their rubbish in the proper place, nobody will take care of the disposals. Furthermore, it is doubtful if village people will take the town people as a referent as the campaign has not yet been implemented at the town level. The top leaderships did not show understanding of the ABC philosophy. Progress is very poor.

The Kota Marudu District Council has the least implementation progress among the local authorities evaluated. To date the council has not even launched the campaign. Apart from inviting consultants from UiTM Sabah to present a briefing on the campaign, the council has not done anything towards implementing the campaign. The reasons cited by the top officials of the council are natural disaster faced by the district and their busy schedules. They were advised to combine the campaign with other activities in the district to save time and costs, but this advice was not heeded. The town is heavily littered, but this is ignored. They prefer to collect the rubbish, rather than stopping the littering. The top leaderships have lack understanding of the ABC philosophy. The implementation of the ABC was not a priority.

Discussion

The results show that understanding is crucial to internalization. Top leadership that showed internalization of the ABC tend to exhibit good progress in the implementation of the campaign. Understanding may be increased by more training (learning), but priority may be independent of by training. This means internalization is a choice made by individual. Good understanding increases the likelihood of internalization but does not necessarily guarantee full internalization. Priority is mostly an individual choice. It is strongly tied to what one believes as important which is mostly the result of socialization.

Study on programme implementation often does not dwell on internalization of the programme by public officials implementing the programme. Programme internalization is important because it boosts personal support for programme implementation. Since internalization is more likely to occur if the rationale and philosophy of a programme are understood, sufficient efforts to ensure officers of implementing agencies fully understand the programme they need to carry out. For this reason, top leaderships of local authorities

were invited to attend courses on the ABC and its implementation. However, only a few of them attended.

One barrier to programme internalization is the inability to break free from past practice. Many local government practices in dealing with litter focus on cleaning such as more efficient cleaning method and addition of more cleaners. Similarly, people tend to attribute lack of cleanliness on the inefficiency of local authorities to clean. Hence, both the local authorities and people tend to emphasize on cleaning, not prevention.

Lack of interest by top leaderships also contributes to implementation lack of progress. This may be because anti littering is very basic and may be taken for granted by top leadership (or others for that matter). As discussed above, District Officer provides leadership to the council as Chairman but has no executive power He is more preoccupied in promoting rural development agenda than urban administration. In addition, the District Council setup affects the implementation of the campaign negatively. Furthermore, the vastness of a district and the multi roles District Officers hinder greater attention to local authority programme. Some districts have sub-districts under them. For example, the district of Beluran includes the sub districts of Telupid and Paitan. The District Officer also may serve as the district magistrate, assistant collector of land revenue, development officer and others. The executive officer often has to fill the vacuum, but with limited success. Thus, there is a need to look into the local government structure if District Councils are to be effective in carrying out their programmes. In the context of the ABC, internalization of the executive officer of a local government on the campaign alone is insufficient if the District Officer has not internalized the campaign.

The low internalization among most top leadership in local authorities means that the ABC programme will likely not succeed unless the local authority leaders change their priority. This means littering will continue to be rampant.

4.0 Conclusion

Internalization is a crucial theme to explain variations in the implementation progress of the ABC. Local authority's top leaders who internalized the campaign tend to be more successful. Thus, it is important to ensure the top leadership of local authorities fully grasp the philosophy behind the campaign. In addition, they must assume ownership of the campaign. Local government structure affects implementation progress. District Councils faced more challenges to implement the campaign compared to Municipal Council and City Hall. Therefore, programme internalization must be made a priority in the implementation of the Anti-litterbugs Campaign.

Although not all local authorities were represented in this study, the findings serve as a good indicator of how the ABC is progressing in the state. However, more comprehensive criteria for internalization is needed such as the development of an index for internalization.

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