

## **Effectiveness and Problems of Municipal Headhunting**

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No.263 (reference number of Akira Tamura's bibliography)

Akira Tamura: *Jichitai Headhunting no Yukosei to Mondaiten, Chihojichi Shokuin Kenshu*, pp.45-47, Nov.1987. (original in Japanese)

Akira Tamura: Effectiveness and Problems of Municipal Headhunting, Training for local government officials, Training center of public officials, pp. 45-47, Nov. 1987.

Some people say that I was "headhunted" into the City of Yokohama. It was in April 1968, so the term headhunting was not yet in use at that time. However, if you put it that way, it could be called a headhunting by the City of Yokohama, since I was asked by the city to join the newly created Planning and Coordination Office (PCO) as the Director of the Planning and Coordination Department.

The PCO's main mission was to promote six major projects as a strategy to revitalize Yokohama City, which was in disarray at the time, and to coordinate the various departments to achieve the strategic goals. The Director of the Planning and Coordination Department played a central role in this process. When I was promoted to the position of Director-General of the PCO, I lost the title of Director of the Planning and Coordination Department, which means that I am the first and only Director of the Planning and Coordination Department in history.

In my case, there are some nuances that are a little different from what exactly constitutes headhunting. The term "headhunting" tends to focus on the "head," in other words, the brains. In my case, I was belonged to a private think tank that was commissioned by the city to develop a plan for the city's revitalization. That plan became the city's six major strategic projects. These included what is known today as "Minato Mirai 21" to strengthen and reorganize the city center. These strategic projects are called the project method, and they are intended to change the conventional formulaic framework of municipal operations into a proactive, comprehensive, and thoughtful approach based on new ideas. The city was to play a central role in the planning of these projects, but it was also to bring together not only the power of the city, but also the power of the national government, public corporations, public agencies, private enterprises, and citizens for the revitalization of Yokohama. In addition, each of these projects was a major undertaking by the city, though people saw them impossible to accomplish. Nevertheless, they were necessary to revitalize the city.

I had to demonstrate that my proposal was feasible and indispensable for the revitalization of Yokohama. Furthermore, the major part of making plans was done when I was at a private think tank, and my task in the city was to put them into practice rather than to act as the head. If we only make plans and proposals, we could do these as an outside consultant, no need to join the city. But implementing the plan is a completely different work. It is a job that needs to work within the city and face a variety of problems firsthand. From the day I joined the city, my job was to change an already-authorized elevated motorway plan to an underground to create a boulevard park, which was a very practical matter to tackle.

The other background is that I moved from one ministry to another of the central government, then to a private company, in search of what I consider to be my true calling. A few years before the offer from the city, I decided regional planning and Machizukuri (town making) my calling. Thereafter, the city offered me a place to practice my vocation. That might be a "headhunting" from the city's viewpoint, but for me it was a "calling hunt," a search for the job I originally wanted.

There is a theory that "headhunting" is one way to strengthen the policy-making capacity of local governments. Japan has traditionally had a system of lifetime employment, not only for local governments. Lifetime employment creates a kind of family-oriented mentality and is likely to fall into an exclusive and fixed way of thinking. This was once called "Japanese-style management," but it is a problem. As to biology, the inbreeding among close relatives clearly leads to the decline of a

species. Therefore, it is important for an organization to engage in crossbreeding. Headhunting plays a role in crossbreeding. The same is true of modern biotechnology. Such occupational mobility is supposed to invigorate companies and society.

However, as mentioned before, the policy capacity needed by local governments is not only brains, but also the ability to put them to use through practice, or rather, to create the necessary plans and policies through practice. Therefore, simply using brains, as one does in a private think tank, is of little use in a municipality. Moreover, they will be despised as visionaries who lack the ability to implement.

Municipalities need to put things into practice. As for a "headhunter" to be effective, he or she must have both practical skills and brains. Such people may not be available at a moment's notice, and it may be difficult to get people with such abilities to join a municipality. It is not useful to just gather brains. If the "headhunters" are fully aware of the above and have systems, organizations, and leaders in place that allow these abilities to be utilized, even those who do not have sufficient skills are hoped to have opportunities to demonstrate their abilities in the municipality.

The Planning and Coordination Bureau of Yokohama City was such an organization when I was there. There were people who came in from outside the city administration, and they were able to demonstrate their abilities in a cross-fertilization of people with different characteristics. A comprehensive organization that provides constant feedback between planning and implementation is necessary. If such a forum is secured, good guidance is obtained, and there is a natural willingness to make use of this guidance, fresh people with different opinions who come in from the outside will be an effective force for the municipality.

Moreover, it is important for municipalities to constantly provide concrete, practical work, rather than simply putting these people in the "head" or "brain group" category. If we end up with only abstract discussions without actual work, there is no point in joining municipalities.

In addition to "headhunting" from the private sector, there can be "headhunting" from other municipalities, as well. There should be more cases where municipalities pull out people who are doing well in other municipalities, and there should also be think tanks that temporarily pool such people. Currently, there are personnel exchanges between municipalities, but these are on temporary use basis, and are likely to have only the effect of training. There should be more "headhunting" between municipalities to make the most of their abilities.

Furthermore, it is necessary to eliminate prejudice regarding job transfers, both from the private sector and from one municipality to another. It is required to change the closed family system, and to ensure that pensions and other welfare systems do not disadvantage such job transfers. In addition, it is necessary for both municipalities that "headhunt" and the people who are "headhunted" to be prepared for the following. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, one must not think that he or she only needs to use his or her brain. Municipalities are the field where an attitude of providing feedback between the field and the brains is necessary. Secondly, even if there is freedom of occupational mobility, people do not have much confidence in persons with half-hearted attitude. We must show our preparedness to stay at the new office forever. Thirdly, we need to be lively, frank, cheerful, and joyful. We need to say clearly. The way of speaking and interactions with a human warmth is important. Fourth, we must have the humility not to flaunt our abilities. There are many people in municipalities who have unknown abilities, and people who know things in practice that are not written in theory and are unknown to academics and people in the central government. We need to have the humility to listen to the voices of these people.

There are many examples from the private sector who have joined municipalities. The first category is those who serve as the brain of the municipality head or as political secretaries. In this case, they are mainly assisting the political matter of the head. This is a different category from the "headhunting" referred to here. In the second case, the person enters the municipal administration. In my case, I

belong to the second category, because I was called to the city as an urban planning specialist to create a new organization, and was responsible for managing it as its head, as well as having direct responsibility to the city assembly as an administrator.

The "headhunting" that I know of has more examples in the first category, but there are few limited cases that experts of city or autonomy are invited to a city. Nevertheless, from now on, people who come in from the outside to work in the second case will become more important for municipalities. Municipalities should make such efforts and innovations for it in the future. I have met interesting people in municipalities, and they have been in the private sector for a year or two when they were young. They have returned hometowns to join the municipality due to their health or family reasons. So long as they have experiences of the private sector firsthand, they pose different atmosphere to the office. This case is not "headhunting," but it tells that bringing people with outside experiences into a municipality may be meaningful.

I think that municipalities, especially at the city level, are the secretariat of their citizens. Therefore, it is natural for municipalities to interact with the private sector. In other words, municipal employees are thought to follow a kind of volunteerism. It may be ideal that ordinary citizens join the city administration as temporary workers, then after a while return to original positions as citizens. However, in contradiction to this, municipalities cannot be satisfied with volunteerism and need to be specialized and professional. Municipal officials need to have both sides of this contradiction. To make this possible, it would be helpful to bring in completely different type people from private-sector or freelance as the municipal staff. They will contribute to restore interaction with the citizens, to get rid of the bureaucratic mindset, and to awaken professionalism at the same time.