

263 Effectiveness and Problems of Municipal Headhunting

There is a person who says that I was "headhunted" into the City of Yokohama. This 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 of Yokohama to join the newly created Planning and Coordination Office as the Director of the Planning and Coordination Department.

The Planning and Coordination Office'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 original strategic goals. The Director of the Planning and Coordination Department plays a central role in this process. When I was promoted to the position of Director of the Planning and Coordination Office (Director-General), 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 Yokohama City.

By the way, 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, however, I was a private think tank that was commissioned by the City of Yokohama to develop a plan for the city's revitalization, and that plan became one of the city's six major strategic projects. These included what is known today as "Minato Mirai 21" as a means 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 of Yokohama was to play a central role in the planning of this project, 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 for the City of Yokohama at the time. It was said to be impossible to carry out. However, they were projects that had to be undertaken in order to revitalize the City of Yokohama.

I had to demonstrate that my plan was feasible and that it would be a force for the revitalization of Yokohama. In other words, the "head" part of making plans was what I had done when I was at a private think tank, and my main task in joining the City of Yokohama was to implement and put them into practice rather than to act as the "head. If all we had to do was make plans and make proposals, we could have been an outside think tank or consultant without joining the city. But when it came to implementing the plan, it was a completely different kind of work. This is a job that cannot be done unless one joins the city and faces a variety of problems firsthand. From the day I joined the city, my job was to change

an already-decided plan for a freeway to an underground plan to create a boulevard park, which was a practical matter itself.

The other is that I have been moving from one central government office to another, from one private company to another, in search of what I consider to be my true calling, and a few years ago I decided that community and town development was my calling. The city of Yokohama offered me a place to practice my vocation, which may have been a "headhunting" from the city's perspective, but for me it was a "calling hunt," a search for the job I originally wanted. By the way, there is a theory that "headhunting" is one way to strengthen the policy-making capacity of local governments. Japan has always had a system of lifetime employment, and not just for local governments. Lifetime employment creates a kind of family-oriented mentality, and it is easy to fall into an exclusive and fixed way of thinking. This was once called "Japanese-style management," but it is a problem. As shown in biology, it is clear that inbreeding only among close relatives leads to the decline of a species. Therefore, it is important for an organization to engage in crossbreeding. "Headhunting" will play 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 only brains, as one does in a private think tank, is of little use in a municipality. Rather, they will be despised as visionaries who lack the ability to implement.

What is needed in a municipality is, first of all, the ability to put things into practice. In order 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. However, 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 necessarily have sufficient skills will 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 a number of people who came in from outside the city, 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, even if some of them are inadequate.

Moreover, it is important for the local government to always 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 that do not include such actual work, there is no point in joining the local government.

In addition to "headhunting" from the private sector, there should also be "headhunting" from other local governments. There should be more cases where other 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 only for a set period of time, are temporary stools, 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, 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 the local governments that "headhunt" and the people who are "headhunted" to be prepared for the following. First of all, as mentioned earlier, one must not think that he or she only needs to use his or her brain. Municipalities are the field, and an attitude of providing feedback between the field and the brains is necessary. Secondly, even if there is freedom of occupational mobility, people will not have much confidence in a sedentary posture. It is necessary to be prepared to stay here forever. Thirdly, we need to be lively, frank, cheerful, and joyful. It is necessary to say what needs to be said clearly, but whether or not the way you say it and the way you interact with people has a human warmth may be important. Fourth, we must have the humility not to flaunt our abilities. There are many people in the field of local government who have abilities that are not well known, 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 of people from the private sector who have joined local governments. The first is those who serve as the brain of the local government head or as political secretaries. In this case, they are mainly assisting the political position of the head of the municipality, which is a somewhat different issue from the "headhunting" referred to here. In the second case, the person enters the administration of the municipality itself. In my case, however, I think I belong to the second category because I was called to Yokohama City as an urban planner specialist, created a new organization, and was responsible for managing it as its head, as well as having direct responsibility for the council.

So far, the "headhunting" that I know of has involved far more examples of the first category, and there have been few cases where city or municipal experts have been brought to a

municipality. However, from now on, people who come in from the outside to work in the second case will be important for municipalities. Municipalities should make such efforts and innovations in the future. When I meet with many local governments and meet people who are quite interesting, in many cases they have been in the private sector for a year or two when they were young. There is something different about the fact that they have returned to their hometowns to join the local government due to physical or family reasons, but they want to experience the private sector firsthand, even if only a little. These may not be "headhunting," but they are one proof that it is effective to bring people with other experiences into a municipality.

I believe that municipalities, especially at the municipal level, are essentially the bureaus of their citizens. Therefore, it is only natural that there should be interaction with the private sector. In other words, municipal employees are essentially a kind of volunteerism, and the ideal situation would be to return to the general public. However, in contradiction to this, there are aspects of modern municipalities that cannot be satisfied only with volunteerism. In other words, they need to be specialized and professional as municipalities. Municipal officials need to have both sides of this contradiction. To make this possible, it would be helpful to bring in completely different types of private-sector and free people into the local government staff, which tends to become rigid, to restore interaction with the citizens, to get rid of the bureaucratic mindset, and to awaken them to professionalism at the same time.