

Past, Present and Future Leadership

Written by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah

Wednesday, 23 March 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 19 September 2011 18:07

The Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia has chosen the topic of Past, Present and Future Leadership for me to speak on tonight. It underscores the concern of all right thinking Malaysians on the need to define and reassess the issue of leadership.

2. I would like to congratulate **The Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia** in promoting a discussion of this very important issue. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of

The Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia for giving me this opportunity to talk on this daunting topic.

3. My focus will be on political leadership that involves essentially the quest, retention and management of power. Nevertheless, in some areas, as this is a gathering of alumni of a world-renowned business school, I will refer touch briefly on leadership in a business context.

4. The purpose of politics is to secure power: power over the instruments of coercion as well as over the institutions that enforce them. That to my mind is what politics is all about: power exercisable over others, inducing them to behave in certain prescribed ways.

5. The power to do good, has as its opposite the power to do bad. So the eternal question about leadership is how to ensure that we put good people at the levels of power.

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6. In order to identify good people, it is no longer just sufficient to lay down a laundry list of traits that are must haves; it is now mandatory too, to have leaders committed to and adopting enduring values and principles.

7. So when I was asked by **The Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia** to speak on the issue of

Leadership: Past, Present and the Future

, I set about to look for the common denominator which links leadership across the time continuum and space. More narrowly, I set about to look for the requirements of good leadership.

8. I arrived at the conclusion that leadership is always associated with the retention and continued re-affirmation of enduring values and principles. Good leadership pre-supposes the emergence of good people who are committed to enduring universal values.

9. Throughout history, from the time of Prophet Muhammad, that I am using as my starting point, right up the present day and into the future, all right thinking people were, are and will be committed to one universal principle - The Principle of Liberty. One person should be free from the tyranny and transgression over his person and property by his fellow being.

10. This fundamental principle and other values continue to under-score the thinking and actions of those who lead and manage.

Consider the political leader.

11. The political leader exercises pure leadership and management skills. He leads and manages his state. In doing so he is guided by certain principles. These principles are applicable in almost all political systems and variants. The leader who dispenses away or ignores the underlying principles and values risks turning his power over others into tyranny and authoritarian rule.

12. Ideally the best leader is one who can combine pure leadership skills with management

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skills driven by values and enduring principles. We shall discover shortly the values and enduring principles.

13. In modern times, this is almost impossible, unless the leader in question has god like qualities, having omnipotent capabilities. A person would have to be a prophet.

14. Accordingly, by your leave, I would like to structure this short talk along the following lines.

15. As I have mentioned a prophet, I would like to trace the leadership issues by taking lessons learnt from the leadership of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH). His leadership would represent the leadership of the past.

16. On leadership of the present, we have only been into our 11th year of the 21st century; I would therefore like to discuss the leadership of notables such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. They represent the present. Their leadership will show that political leadership does not have to descend to micromanaging political agenda.

17. As for the future leaders, we need to examine the influence of pull factors whereby the political leader recognizes that sources and impetus for change are no longer monopolized by relationships characterized as top to bottom.

18. That seems to be the approach taken by our leadership for some 22 years whose impacts, perhaps disastrously so, are not yet fully realized. Many of us would like to move on from that phase, and expeditiously so.

19. Where indeed the sources, pressure and impetus for change come from correctly reading what the public now demands and to accordingly configure as it were, the leader's behavior accordingly.

20. So when our PM during his visit to Sarawak asks the Twitter and Facebook generation to

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trust him, he is recognizing that the desire to change is no longer his monopoly. This is what I mean by a shift from predictive to non-predictive demands. I will give a short comment to that approach later.

Past Leadership

Muhammad the Prophet of Islam.

21. Why Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)?

22. Let me repeat what Professor John Adair said in an interview.

“Surprisingly enough there has been no book known to me of any substance on the leadership of the Prophet, and yet we live in an age when the importance of leadership , both in politics and in management is universally recognized. All too often that means that only Western - and in particular American--voices are heard on the subject. Muslims need to return in their minds and hearts to the leadership which was shown in the words and life of Muhammad(PBUH) and given to them as an example to follow. They need to go back to the fountain.....”

23. In speaking on this topic, my focus like that of John Adair’s, is focused narrowly on the leadership shown by the Prophet and not on other aspects of his life and mission, supremely important as they are to Muslims. I suppose those aspects are best left to the experts in that field.

24. I believe that there is a universal body of knowledge about 'good leadership and leadership for good'. What I see in the leadership of Muhammad is a living and compelling expression of these truths or universal principles about what works when it comes to leading other people. All these qualities were shown by Muhammad as a leader. But the most important quality of all is integrity (Al-Amin). That is the foundation of all good leadership throughout the world. But we may also see in him, that most rare and beautiful quality of leadership we call humility - a

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complete lack of arrogance and self-importance

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25. In a much talked about recent memoir of a rather distinguished Malaysian, we saw a direct assault on the values exemplified by the Prophet. That would however be the subject matter of a separate talk.

26. In *The Leadership of Muhammad*, Professor Adair discussed the ideal leadership and the essential attributes of a leader such as courage, integrity,
practical wisdom, and moral authority and humility
. We cannot be the Prophet, but I believed it is the responsibility of any given leader to proximate these qualities.

27. What can present and future leaders learn from the leadership principles of the Prophet of Islam?

28. During twenty-three years of delivering the message of Islam through his talks and his actions (Sunnah), the Prophet(PBUH) emphasized the notion of values and Principles of Islam. These extraordinary values when combined with transformational leadership values identified by scholars are the necessary traits for leaders to be successful.

29. The primary values of a transformational leader as described by JM Burns (1978) that include such elements as liberty, justice, equality and collective well being can be possessed by any given leader.

30. Therefore, the most salient point is the opportunity, provided if they are committed, to re-learn the Prophet's principal tenets of leadership with regards to the articulation and adoption
of values of liberty, justice, modesty, and politeness and of those qualities written and stated by Professor John Adair.

31. These remain the enduring values that no leadership of the present day and of the future

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can ignore. Unfortunately, these enduring principals appear to have been sacrificed in the name of more prosperity. In our haste, these are sacrificed or even trivialized and mocked.

32. Muhammad(PBUH)'s leadership demonstrated that he sought to see all humankind from the lens of kindness, modesty, moderation, justice, liberty, gentility, generosity and love.

33. The world today is far from modest. Political factions and all sorts of social and economic discrimination have segmented the human race. People now think more in terms of class, group and the most dreaded of all, tools of differentiation and exclusion - race. If you do not belong you can neither be heard nor seen.

34. Muhammad(PBUH) teaches us that a good leader is one who combines political skills with moral skills. The good leader is a pillar for change. He stood like a change agent for all humankind because he blended spirituality with politics and governed from his heart, soul and head.

35. Hart (1978) listed Muhammad(PUBH) as the most influential individual in the history of humankind because he ***“was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels”*** (page 3). ***“In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests, he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time”***

(page 9) :

Hart, M. H. (1978). The 100 : A ranking of the most influential persons in history. New York : Kensington Publishing.

The Present

36. Allow me to further quote Professor John Adair who said:

Ultimately, if you want to embed strong leadership principles within your business, you have to recognize that strong leadership is more about everyone else in your organization than it is about you.□ "The secret to becoming a successful leader is recognizing the greatness that lies

in others," he concluded.

37. This statement implies that a political leader is not absolutely required to micromanage the agenda he has set forth. Indeed, there are many ways to show leadership outside of micro-managerial roles.

38. Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela had a one-off leadership impact on their respective governments without being members of those governments and having no authority within them.

39. What are the lessons for present day leaders?

40. What these present day leaders show is that the meaning of leadership may need to change for a more dynamic, less hierarchical, fluid and increasingly complex world. Pure leadership means showing the way for others, either by example or by explicitly promoting a new direction. Whenever you take a stand in a meeting and your colleagues accept your argument, you have shown leadership without you actually taking charge of the group.

41. People can show such leadership without either the talent or the inclination to manage those who follow. Such leadership is pure influence and it comes to an end once followers buy the proposition. Implementation is a separate phase that can be managed by others.

42. Fewer traits are required to show pure leadership than what it takes to be an executive. All you need is an idea for a better way, however small and local, the courage to promote it and the influencing skills to get people to listen.

43. However, courage and influencing skills are as situational as the idea itself. They are not to be treated as overwhelming requirements. Their requirement depends on the magnitude of the change, the strength of resistance and whether the merits of the proposal can be demonstrated. Advocating greener, but expensive, practices for example, does indeed require courage, sharp influencing skills and strong evidence of benefits.

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44. This example illustrates how leadership can be shown in some circumstances without any special skill beyond having a great idea, where content really is king! While you need courage and polished influencing skills in other situations, the fact that such traits are not universally essential shows that leadership cannot be defined in a way that requires them.

45. We, therefore, have two kinds of leadership for the present day. One involves being in charge of a group. The other is a one-off act of influence which can come from any direction, bottom-up as well as top-down or from outside the business.

46. Martin Luther King had a leadership impact on government when his demonstrations against segregation on buses led the U.S. Supreme Court to ban such discrimination.

47. In other words, leadership - doing the right things—is deciding the best course of action to take. What are the things we should be doing to get us to where we want to go? What direction or course of action should we take? Where do we want to be in the end?

The Future Leader

48. For leadership of the future, allow me to make an analogy from the present day business world. In today's challenging global economic marketplace, the investment community for example, is demanding more differentiated and sustainable solutions to growth creation. Underlying this demand, a profound shift is taking place within the commercial environment that also requires a radical reassessment of leadership behavior. The shift in question is from predictive to non-predictive demand – from push to pull economics and methodologies.

Allow me to expand.

49. Push organizations tend to have a top-down design. They have centralized controls and clear procedures. They are resource-centric and efficiency-focused and they restrict participation and involvement in decision-making.

50. Pull businesses - where the leadership recognizes that demand is highly uncertain – are demonstrably different.

51. Leaders must become aware of this emerging trend.

52. How will the awareness of the shift affect leadership of the future? It does so by the influence it has on emerging political behavior. It calls for a political system that must be highly decentralized

, promote independent initiatives, is people-centric and encourages open decision-making.

53. But not only do they have a different design, they also have a different language, one that replaces 'military' with 'human'- regimentation and authoritarian and discretionary giving way to freedom and democracy, and rule of law. In the future, the following trends are expected to take place.

1. ***Organizations become organisms***
2. ***Workforce becomes talent marketplace***
3. ***Divisions become creative nets***
4. ***Hierarchy becomes community***
5. ***Instructions become tacit interactions***
6. ***Procedures become ideas***
7. ***Bullet points become stories***
8. ***Metrics becomes dialogue***
9. ***Winners and losers become inter-dependents***

54. So the 'new' language detailed above must not just be spoken, but experienced.

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55. In this 'quiet revolution', actions speak louder than words. And the leader's first action should be to ask two fundamental questions: who are we and where are we going? What are our Values and what is our Vision?

56. Within that Vision and Values framework, a leader can engage their core team in defining the country's purpose and key strategic platforms that will lead to sustainable growth.

57. How can future leadership succeed in a non-predictive environment? The answer it seems, with how it deals with the most non-predictive component of every business – its people. This leads to a very important question being asked – not by the leader this time, but by public.

58. It seems to me, the approach taken by our PM may not be correct. The request he asks from the Twitter and Facebook generation should really be the other way round. He should have stated that he trusts the judgment of the people and have faith in the people.

59. If he had done that, then as a leader he has begun a process that unleashes the human potential of the country. In so doing, he as the leader liberates the human capital in the business of running a country and answers the question the community has been asking persistently. How do you create differentiated and sustainable growth in an environment where demand is non-predictive?

60. The way to prepare for the future is to promote behavioral change in both the leadership and people. In my mind, there are three distinctive phases leaders have to take their people through in order to achieve their collective goals in this environment. All the three phases strongly suggest that the leadership of the future behave in a more open manner, act with integrity, engages the governed as wholesome individuals who do matter.

61. The first, '**Re-Adjustment**' phase, can be ugly, but the leadership must be big enough to sponsor criticism and give vent to emotions – otherwise there is no legitimate progress possible. People have to get past the myriad of frustrations or politics before being able to look forward. They must be treated as adults and wholesome human being with something of value to say right from the start.

62. The second, **'Value' phase**, invites individuals to define their personal Value in the terms described previously, and then to share it with their peers in the form of a story.

63. This again helps to communicate complex issues; allows others to identify with and give feedback to each individual; embraces emotion as a resource to be valued and brings 'the whole person' into the political environment.

64. It also allows the individual to 'hear' their own story and how others interpret it. The complete process is powerful and motivating and helps each individual 'lock -in' their Value with the country's Vision and Values.

65. Finally, the **'Implications' phase** moves beyond 'speech' to 'action'. It is where 'individual accountability' is generated to a degree and with an integrity that no annual goals and assessment programme ever could achieve. This breeds the interdependency from which a new sense of collaboration, unity of purpose and community are created. These are the foundations of a 'pull' organism.

66. This in turn begins a process of 'influencing up'.

67. By taking responsibility for that which they can (rather than moaning about it as they did in the past), individuals and teams then effectively isolate those issues beyond their reach that are the responsibility of only their leadership to 'fix'. They become co masters of their destiny. All in such a short time frame, in the face of unprecedented competitive and society challenges and without a drop of blood being spilled.

68. Before I end my speech, I would like to add a further observation on this topic of leadership. You can say this is culled from personal experience.

69. Throughout the ages, studying the lives of all great leaders I am always conscious that they made a lot of sacrifices, personal and material. To all the traits and qualities of a leader, we

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must add the quality of selflessness. All are willing to undergo periods of sacrificing personal interests, endure deprivations, possessed of indomitable spirit, steadfast in pursuit of their goals and agenda.

70. Prophet Muhammad suffered persecution in Mecca at the hands of Quraish tribal leaders. He was hounded, stoned and threatened with bodily harm. Yet he remained true and steadfast to his entrusted cause.

71. Martin Luther King went through extended period of racial taunts and segregation and finally made the ultimate sacrifice. Mandela spent 27 years' incarceration on Robben Island.

72. Closer to home, many of us are not aware of the sacrifices, personal denial and deprivations that our own leaders went through.

73. Tunku Abdul Rahman sold off his property and chattels to further the cause of UMNO. He passed on a relatively poor man. Tun Razak had not more than RM 5,000 in his account when he died. He didn't even have a property over the heads of his family save for a piece of inherited land in Peramu, Pekan. The government of Malaysia allowed his widow to stay at a government property in Kuala Lumpur. Tun Hussein Onn, the man who is said to be a straight arrow, was indeed qualified to earn that description. He too died relatively poor.

74. Unfortunately, this trait of sacrifice and selflessness and of humility that we learn from Prophet Muhammad, is lost in many modern day leaders.

75. Leaders today are consumed by personal interests and are overwhelmed by greed. It is not uncommon now to see leaders of today are rumored to have accumulated untold riches and wealth.

76. So in closing, I would like to once again congratulate the Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia for having chosen a very important topic indeed. It re-affirms our belief that in securing the best leadership, we must always be vigilant in the pursuit of finding good leadership. It also reinforces our belief that the quest for good leadership must be won over and

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over again, less the country recedes into decadence and wanton plunder.

Thank you.

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE LEADERSHIP

Speech by YBM Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah at The Harvard Business School Alumni Club of Malaysia Dinner on Wednesday, 23 March, 2011, at 8.00 p.m at the Sime Darby Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur