



RAZAK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

INTEGRITY. COURAGE. INNOVATION. CHANGE

RSOG INSIGHT

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RSOG conducted internal needs analysis and identified five focus areas for public sector leadership – Strategic, Transformative, Agile and Adaptive, Authenticity, and Executive Presence. RSOG Insight will feature a series of articles that aims to unveil some general ideas of what these focus areas are and what it means to leadership development. This issue continues with Agile and Adaptive, written by Ismail Johari Othman, with reference to the world's most celebrated sport. Also, in this issue, Umar Zainol contributes two articles – one focusing on how trust deficit may be addressed based on a leadership framework and another, a review of the symbiotic nature of satire and society.

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WHAT MAKES PEOPLE LIKE FOOTBALL?

Ismail Johari Othman

By the time this article goes to print, a new World Cup champion would have been crowned. Since mid-June, millions – if not billions – of people could have had their sleep and daily routine interrupted to catch up with the world’s most liked sport¹. Football, or in some places soccer, is estimated to have 3.5 billion fans worldwide. The number of FIFA (the Fédération Internationale de Football Association), the governing body of this sport’s national-level members even exceeds the United Nations 193 strong member states. What is it about football that attracts such a huge following? This article identifies three possible attributes that football as a sport has, which could be the reason for its likeability.

The first attribute that football has is simplicity. It is an easy sport to play. One could use effectively any body part except their hands to play football. The ability to use hands is reserved for the goalkeeper if football is played as a team sport. One would just need to kick the ball, stop its movement when necessary, run after the ball, and use ones’ head if the ball goes higher. It is so easy that one hardly hears about people forgetting how to play football even after years of not kicking one. Football is also easy for people watching it. Generally, there are two opposing teams that try to put the ball into each other’s net within a stipulated time frame. The more goals they can put in the better as the team that ends with the most goals wins. Apart from playing and watching, its simplicity tends to attract people to teach or coach football to others. It may be likely that equipped with some imagination and soft skills, casual footballers like Arrigo Sacchi² and André Villas-Boas³ went all the way to become successful football coaches. In all fairness, the technicalities that come along with football today, as observed in the recently concluded FIFA World Cup such as the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), exists when the stakes are high. This is often driven by commercial considerations and can be observed in other sports too.

The second attribute is the versatility that football has to offer. Ideally, football is played by two teams comprising of 11 players each on an area of 7,140 square metres on a green pitch, with one main referee and two linesmen. As for the players, each team wears different coloured shirts, shorts, socks, and boots. To distinguish themselves from the rest of the team, the goalkeepers wear a different coloured shirt along with a pair of gloves. A football match is divided into two halves of 45-minutes – each with 15-minutes break in between. Each team can make a maximum of three substitutions throughout the game. Red and yellow cards are brandished should players breach the rules. That said, would the teenagers in the favelas⁴ of Rio de Janeiro, the back alleys of Barcelona, and the dusty pitches in Cairo care about the technicalities? They are simply carefree and somehow found ways to adapt football within their limitations. No iconic

¹ Once in four-year’s, an international football tournament namely the FIFA World Cup 2018 took place in Russia from 14 June to 15 July 2018.

² An Italian football coach who has won numerous international honours with AC Milan in late 1980s.

³ A Portuguese football coach who has led famous clubs like Porto, Chelsea, and Tottenham Hotspur from 2010 to 2013.

⁴ Brazilian Portuguese for slum areas

black-and-white Adidas ball? No problem! A crumpled old newspaper or flattened drink can would make a decent substitute and can always be kicked around joyfully; most of the time in torn rubber shoes, slippers, or even barefoot. One of the more popular ways to differentiate the two opposing sides is for one team to play shirtless. Goal posts can easily be substituted with small stones or even school bags – more importantly, to enjoy the game!

The versatility of football could have caught the eye of entrepreneurs who would always find ways to capitalise on people's liking to suit their lifestyle and existing limitations. Futsal is one of the variants of football that has become a growing business in Malaysia. This scaled-down version of football requires fewer players, adopts shorter playing time, and is played indoors – which offers a huge advantage in terms of weather (rain or shine), time (round-the-clock), availability (advanced booking), and privacy (public areas on sharing basis). The least one needs to do with the football is to juggle it. Many years back there was a Malaysian football player by the name of Titus James Palani⁵ who was remembered more for his ability juggling a football (a total of 5,680 times in 1999 – a Malaysian record).

The next attribute is affordability. Unlike certain sports, football at its basic requires minimal investment – no equipment like a stick, bat, club or racquet. The ball is durable; so are the attire and boots, if required. There is an abundance of online materials relating to football if one is looking for an audio-visual example and inspiration from the greats. Perhaps in urban areas, where space is limited and expensive, the affordability of football could be a challenge especially when it is intended to be played in numbers. Yet, for those who are interested only in watching football, with a glass of teh tarik⁶, one could indulge with top flight football games screened live at outdoor stalls. The mass that football commands also attracts government intervention. For instance, the Government of Malaysia decided to live screen 27 from a total of 41 FIFA World Cup 2018 matches for free.

Of course, there will be arguments that passion for football in certain locations is due to legacy or based on cultural exposure. For example, people in this part of the world may be into other sports had the British not brought football with them then. Such early inroads could have helped football gain first mover advantage and indirectly built a barrier to newer sports gaining footing. There is merit to such argument but conversely, the British also brought rugby, cricket, and hockey. In other instances, Thailand was never colonised, yet they like football more than other sports. Meanwhile in the Philippines, football is thriving despite the advantage that basketball has.

To conclude, people are generally drawn to football because of its simplicity, versatility, and affordability. It is easy to understand, difficult to forget, and entices newcomers to try. Evidently, football is so agile and flexible in terms of scale and purpose. Such agility and flexibility could have made it business-

⁵ Malaysians abroad: The first millionaire to the player who never returned (2016, August 27). Retrieved from <https://www.fourfourtwo.com/my/features/malaysians-abroad-first-millionaire-player-who-never-returned?page=0%2C2> (Accessed Date: 9 July 2018).

⁶ *Teh tarik* (literally "pulled tea") is a hot milk tea beverage which can be commonly found in restaurants, outdoor stalls and kopitiam within the Southeast Asian countries of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore.

friendly. Being cost efficient, football commands influence in term of numbers. Like other areas in life, football is exposed to competitive elements that could have led the sport to become more technical and complicated as it goes to the subsequent levels where the stakes are higher. Perhaps the said attributes about football can be a source of inspiration for leaders when it comes to policies and programmes. In light of the increasingly challenging playing field out there, leadership responses, if any, should be simple, versatile, and affordable enough to gain acceptance from the masses. For instance, affordability encourages ownership and participation, which is crucial to the implementation of public policies and programmes. While it is easier said than done, in reality, as rightly pointed by the legendary Pele, “everything is practice”, and there is always a start for everything.

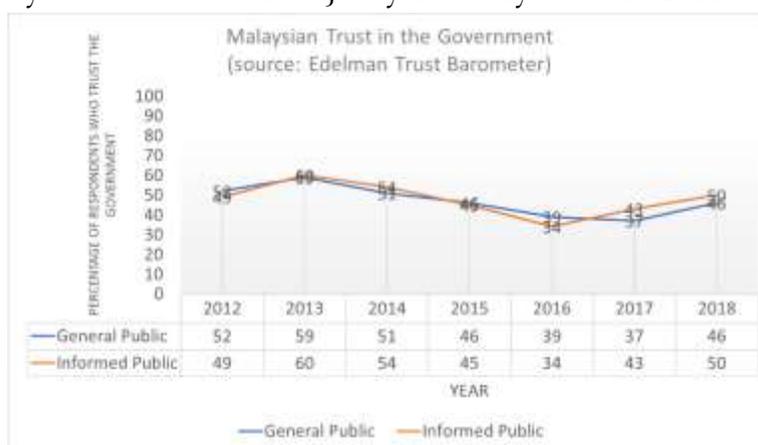
Zand’s Leadership Triad: Regaining Trust in the Public Sector

Umar Zainol

Malaysia’s 14th General Election was a wake-up call. After more than 60 years, Malaysians ushered in a new era by taking to the polls.

The outcome shocked many, but there were signs that foreshadowed *Barisan Nasional’s* downfall. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, a survey measuring public trust in institutions since 2000, trust in the government had been waning among the general public of Malaysia over the last 5 years. The 2018 survey did report a 9% uptick from the previous year, but 43% of respondents in that year still believed that government was the most broken among all Malaysian institutions¹². At the local level, the growing calls for transparency and accountability inferred that the majority of Malaysians had become disillusioned and opted for an alternative.

In fairness, it is hard to fault the predecessor: That they were able to govern for over 60 years proved that it was worthy of the people’s trust at some point. Even in its loss, *Barisan Nasional* still managed to secure 34% of the popular vote compared to *Pakatan Harapan’s* 48%³, indicating that over 4 million Malaysians still support the coalition.



¹ Toh, Billy, and Neily Syaifqah Eusoff. “Malaysians’ Trust in the System Plunges to All-Time Low.” South China Morning Post, South China Morning Post, 14 Mar. 2017, www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2071381/malaysians-trust-system-plunges-all-time-low-according.

² Reid, David. “US Suffers Record Drop in Public Trust as Faith in China Surges, Survey Says.” CNBC, CNBC, 22 Jan. 2018, www.cnbc.com/2018/01/22/davos-2018-edelman-barometer-reveals-record-drop-in-trust-from-us-public.html.

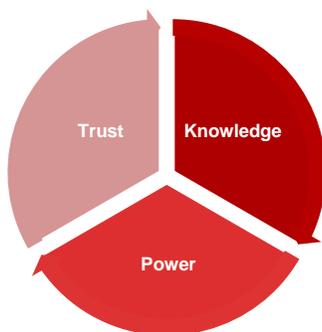
³ Malaysiakini “GE14 Malaysiakini Live Reports and Results.” Malaysiakini Live Reports, live.malaysiakini.com/ge14/en/.

However, *Barisan Nasional* was seen to be too set in its ways; it is likely that their ultimate detachment from reality and the grassroots in recent years had cost them when it came to the “father of all elections”⁴⁵.

The symbiosis in governance is well known: Governments need people to put them into a position of power, and people need governments to enact policies that benefit the people. The role of trust is fundamental in this relationship, but many recognise that it is something that you cannot buy nor gain in a short time-span. Its nature is complex, and especially in today’s VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environment, its concept becomes more complicated. The question is: how do leaders gain the trust of their constituents?

In his book *The Leadership Triad*⁶, Dale E. Zand explains how leaders need to be trustworthy in return for the people’s loyalty and commitment. Based on his definition, leaders with high trust must first accept that they are in a position of vulnerability to a person/party that they cannot control. They must also come to terms with the fact that they are in a position of loss should that person/party abuse their vulnerability. Thus, a leader with high trust understands that by trusting others, their potential loss in a given situation is greater than their potential benefit. As a consequence, leaders must show trust first before it is reciprocated by the followers.

Once a leader accepts that trust is dependent on vulnerability, they can show trust through information, influence and control. A high trust leader must therefore understand its three tenets. The first is that leaders with high trust share information with others in an accurate and timely manner. Secondly, a leader who shows trust accepts influence from others, be it their superiors, peers or subordinates. Finally, a leader with high trust exercises minimal control over others.



However, a lack of trust isn’t the be-all and end-all. Zand posits that the triadic leader must balance knowledge, trust and power akin to three horses pulling a chariot: all forces must be coordinated and managed equally. In the big picture of a triadic leader, the role of trust is to give people the confidence that they are able to exercise their knowledge and power correctly. In the context of public sector leadership, the government should have a realistic vision of what must be done and use their power appropriately in delegating or directing others.

⁴ Singh, Rajvinder. “Khairy: We Should Have Told Najib about Lack of Support.” *TheSundaily*, 15 May 2018, www.thesundaily.my/news/2018/05/15/khairy-we-should-have-told-najib-about-lack-support.

⁵ Shagar, Lokshana. “Ismail Sabri contesting Umno VP post” *The Star Online*, 9 June 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/06/09/ismail-sabri-contesting-umno-vp-post/>

⁶ Zand, Dale E. *Triadic Leadership: Knowledge, Trust, and Power*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Howbeit broad, Zand's model of triadic leadership is one that manages to encapsulate significant components of leadership across the public-sector. Whereas the responsibility of building trust falls largely on political leaders, top officials in the public-sector could pull their weight by providing the knowledge and power that Zand hypothesized. Among this is to build a culture where knowledge can be challenged while having a strong foundation for legitimate power so that leaders are given the environment to manoeuvre in their decision-making. The vision of the triadic leader can thus be accomplished when political leaders work closely with government agencies.

Going back to the Edelman Trust Barometer, it could be that previous leaders' failure to address the three elements of trust contributed to the loss in GE14. With respect to Zand's theory, the negative trend of the Edelman Trust Barometer suggests that the public perceived leaders at the time to have withheld information from them, refused to accept influence by others and/or exercised heavy control on the public. Even internally, interviews with UMNO members reveal signs of disunity or that members were too afraid to speak up against the leadership⁷.

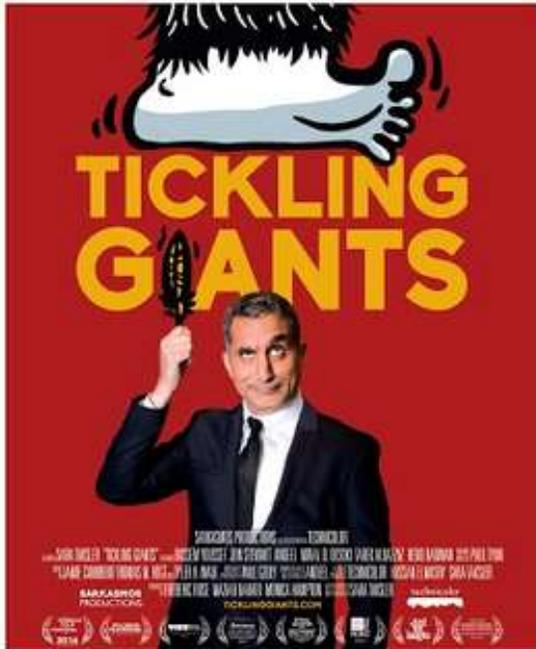
Only time will tell if the current government will fare better in gaining Malaysians' trust. So far, it has acknowledged the importance of information sharing by holding frequent press conferences, thereby giving some semblance of transparency. There is no shortage of hope among Malaysians as the new government finds its footing with the promise of Malaysia *Baharu*⁸, and they can surely capitalise on Malaysia's current period of transition to stress the importance of trust in nation-building. Before *Pakatan Harapan* becomes too complacent, it will be wise for them to heed the other two elements of trust, as well as to consider the role of power and knowledge in the leadership triad.

⁷ Timbuong, Jo. "Khairy: Barisan Not Well Trusted, Needs to Get Its Act Together." *Nation | The Star Online*, 7 June 2018, www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/06/07/khairy-barisan-not-well-trusted-needs-to-get-its-act-together/.

⁸ <http://www.thesundaily.my/news/2018/05/10/people-hope-new-government-will-fulfill-mandate>

Changing Society through Laughter – A Review of Tickling Giants

Umar Zainol



Tickling Giants follows the story of Dr. Bassem Youssef, an Egyptian cardiac surgeon who gained prominence as a political satirist during the tumultuous Arab Spring of 2011. After 13 years as a heart surgeon, he turned down an offer to work as a doctor in the US and remained in Egypt to comment on the “hypocrisy” and “brainwashing” that was happening in the local media at the time¹. Youssef’s popularity grew through an online satirical show called B+, which attracted the attention of Egyptian TV networks. This led to the broadcast of *Al Bernameg*, a show created by Youssef which at its peak was seen by 30 million viewers a week.

He soon learned, however, that fame is a double-edged sword as his comedy eventually landed him in the crosshairs of then Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi. Youssef was arrested and interrogated by authorities for telling jokes, which ironically cemented his popularity with the Egyptian people as a voice of the counterculture.

While publicly mocking authorities was considered taboo in Egypt, political comedy itself is not a new idea in the West. In the UK, the television show *Yes Minister* was a humorous take on the nuanced (and frustrating) government bureaucracies brought to light by Jim Hacker and Sir Humphrey Appleby. Political comedy in the US also has a long history: The White House Correspondents Dinner, an annual event celebrating the free press, has featured a comedian who pokes fun at the President since 1983. Perhaps its most recent surge in popularity can be attributed to the mass media coverage of the 2000 Presidential election and the George W. Bush Administration, which provided fodder for the *Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. Its success and influence sprouted a legion of satirical comedy shows that continued the legacy left by Stewart², with Bassem Youssef himself crediting the *Daily Show* as an inspiration. With Youssef’s comedic delivery at *Al Bernameg*, it is easy to see why he is widely known as the “Jon Stewart of Egypt”.

Like the *Daily Show*, *Al Bernameg* is as entertaining as it is scathing towards its media and politicians. But underneath the jokes, Youssef is passionate in fighting for what he feels is a just society: one that is not

¹ RT America (2016) *Bassem Youssef: Trump Fervor a lot like pro-Islamic Rallies in Mideast* [Video File], Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H8Z4vgRw2c>

² Alumni of the *Daily Show* have gone on to launch the *Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*.

ruled by fear and intimidation. For him, sarcasm and humour are perfect to suppress fear. He tells the 2014 Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum of his experience:

“Satire was our weapon to dissect through the lies and rhetoric that were used to control the people”³

Youssef maintains that the point of *Al Bernameg* was about “holding authority accountable, regardless of who is in charge”⁴. Indeed, satire is about bringing to light the differences in society and to celebrate it rather than condemn it. Just as in the US and the UK, political satire can even be appreciated by politicians themselves if tastefully done: Even the “Iron Lady” Margaret Thatcher herself claimed to be a fan of Yes Minister.

However, many longstanding cultural factors must be taken into consideration before satire ever gains traction. For instance, a hierarchical, high power-distance society like Malaysia might find it harder to accept the satirist. This idea of how culture effects humour is also addressed in *Tickling Giants*, where the viewer is left to wonder whether the satirist is still relevant in Egyptian society given the rise of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

If anything, the documentary proves that satire isn’t for all. Bassem Youssef continues to be a divisive figure in Egypt, but his experience chronicled in *Tickling Giants* reminds viewers just how powerful a tool humour can be especially as a means of check and balance. In a sense, good political humour allows society to laugh while it re-examines itself. It may have been easy, once upon a time, to dismiss the role of a comedian as just another idiot. But in today’s landscape of social media where everybody is given a voice, it may be wise for leaders to give more respect to the satirist and to reconsider their role, however small, as nation-builders.

Tickling Giants is available to stream via Netflix

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³ Nickel, Susanne (2016) *Bassem Youssef: Fear Has No Future*; Retrieved from www.dw.com/en/bassem-youssef-fear-has-no-future/a-17747272.

⁴ Taksler, S. (2016) *Tickling Giants*