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LEADING WITH CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE¹

By Nur Syahira Nordin

Leaders who can build a long-lasting, collaborative team is about living in deeply held value². According to Barrett, the values and beliefs of the current leaders and the institutional legacy of the values of past leaders that are embedded in the structures, policies, systems, procedures, and incentives of the group. This explains why organisational transformation begins with the personal transformation of the leaders – If the leaders don't change, the culture won't change. This proves that leaders shape the way people think and behave because leaders are viewed by others as role models, and employees look around to see if their behaviour is consistent with the organisation's adopted values and philosophy. Leaders indeed must be value-driven to instil meaning in the organisation.

However, the expected norms and practices have a strong influence on the way people behave. Inspiring a values-based culture can be a challenge. As much as leaders must find the common purpose and universal values that unite highly diverse people, permitting individual identities to be expressed and enhanced is equally essential. Leaders may oftentimes lack the common language to even start dialoguing about culture, which brings about uncertainty on how to develop initiatives to drive behavioural changes in the people. In the long run, the comprehensive performance management systems that have been used to measure behaviour is often challenged for not always driving effective performance or behaviour change³.

¹ Cultural Intelligence is a person's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity

² Richard Barrett, *Values-Based Leadership: Leading from the Inside Out*, Web. 20 March 2017. <https://www.valuescentre.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Values-Based_Leadership_0.pdf>

³ Lorri Freifeld, *How to Build A Values-Based Culture*. 2 December 2017. Web. 20 March 2017. <<https://trainingmag.com/content/how-build-values-based-culture>>

Instead, they seem to be serving merely an administrative purpose.

After all, leadership requires actions and strategies, as well as beliefs to meet the challenges with a deep understanding of the identity and impact of the culture to manage people. In communicating and promoting the organisational ethos to employees, their acknowledgement and acceptance of it can influence employees' work behaviour and attitudes. By the same token, one has to understand the culture of the people beforehand to adjust strategies and ideas, because for a team to work effectively, all employees must understand and embrace the culture of the group and business in order to build a high performing community.

On the other hand, a leader must establish the expected behaviours while adapting the culture and values of others. Correspondingly, the values and beliefs that a leader holds are automatically transmitted to responsibility through words, behaviours, and actions. When the interaction between the leadership and employee is good, the latter will make a greater contribution to team

communication and collaboration, and will also be encouraged to accomplish the vision and mission of the organisation.

Leaders must appreciate that organisational culture governs how people behave. The core values of an organisation begin with its leadership, which will then evolve to a leadership style⁴. The leadership style influences the behaviour of employees to develop a strong integrated value and beliefs of organisational culture. Maintaining an organisation's culture would in return ensure consistent behaviour between people, reducing conflicts, and creating a healthy working environment for employees.

As culture is socially learned and transmitted by others, it provides the rules for behaviour within organisations internally and externally. Hence, culture and values matters in leadership to adapt the cultural interfaces⁵, to adjust different environments quickly, and to work with various stakeholders and employees of different cultures without neglecting their own culture. On the other hand, organisational values that are moulded by its leader must be congruent and harmonised with

⁴ Tsai Yafang., *Relationship between Organizational Culture, Leadership Behavior and Job Satisfaction*. May 2011. Web. 23rd March 2017. < <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3123547/>>

⁵ A cultural interface is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organization

individual and cultural values. Thus, leaders must understand their own cultural values to become equal contributors to develop and review managerial practices, which are compatible with local norms above all levels of cultural experience.

Nonetheless, leaders must become conscious of their values and how they should learn to relate appropriately. Therefore, a culturally intelligent leader is one who should fully understand their own cultural values and can articulate and translate them in the sense of productivity, quality, and excellence to look inwards at their underlying assumptions of values and

culture to develop practices that work best for both. According to Arkadi, behind every successful leader is a vibrant culture that engages and energises employees that has been defined, shaped and personified by the leader to build a distinctive, dynamic culture. There is no doubt that today, a leader's success depends on how they mould and develop that culture⁶. Thus, in a globalising world, it will bode well for leaders to be more alert to as many cultural nuances as possible.

Article

ADAPTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

By Hal Mahera Ahmad

In *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, Albert Camus¹ wrote, ***“Men express themselves in harmony with their land. And superiority, as far as culture is concerned, lies in this harmony and nothing else. There are no higher or lower cultures. There are cultures that are more or less true.”***

Looking at Malaysia, a country with rich tradition and history, the discourse about living in a multicultural society might not be as widely discussed 50 years ago as compared to today. In fact, Vision 2020 outlined as one of its challenges the need to establish a united Malaysian nation with

⁶ Arkadi K., *Culture-Driven Leadership*. April 2010. Web. 23rd March 2017. <<http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/culture-driven-leadership/>>

¹ French philosopher, author, and journalist.

a sense of common and shared destiny. Today, with other forces of change and the primary trends that are affecting the world, the rise of information technology, demographic shifts, legal environment, and socio-political climate has created challenges for new managers. They need to define their roles and competencies for the organisation's long term viability and sustainability. One of the important discussions in this context includes diversity and inclusion as globalisation allows people from different countries and ethnicities to move from one place to another for work. Often when diversity is discussed, it always relates to the ability of the people to make sense of culture.

GLOBALISATION AND CULTURE – THE DEBATE

Globalisation has made it increasingly difficult for one to define culture as it traditionally had been. Many scholars have attempted to define the idea of global culture as many things are becoming globally connected. Some argue that cultural uniformity cannot be achieved due to lack of homogeneity; it contradicts the idea that culture is tied to a locality and from an anthropological perspective, it was even used to refer to differences between

groups. Douglas Goodman, who wrote many articles on globalisation, suggested that a new definition of culture should not just define its meaning but a system of meaning. Culture, if looked as a system, would suggest the new definition to include coherence and structures of differences. This is also supported by Francis Fukuyama², where he views globalisation as having an opposite effect towards homogenisation but the positive impact allows nationals of one country to actively take part in another country's cultural, economic, and political life (Mishra, 2008).

Political scientists have argued that globalisation has strengthened the dominance of world capitalism, leading to the erosion of local cultures and traditions with the emergence of global culture or Westernisation. During the process of global interactions, it has created tensions between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation. In developing countries, this situation poses a problem. Others have argued that what is happening instead is the liberalisation of local cultures. The ongoing globalisation has enriched people culturally by bringing them closer to the knowledge that they previously did not have access to, such as when a person

² American political scientist, political economist, and author.

wants to enjoy music and movies without having to spend a lot of money and time due to the existence of technology. Mario Vargas Llosa³ believes that the festivals, rituals, customs, and ceremonies are progressively disappearing or confining themselves to the minority sectors and people are opting for modernisation as a personal choice. While this demonstrates an example of how a culture can easily change, a society must be cautious about the desire to achieve freedom through globalisation because it also gives new meaning to people's identity. People must be able to recognise distortions and imbalances due to globalisation. What the world needs to reduce is the cultural divide and the widening gap that might make poorer states further left behind (Mishra, 2008, Appadurai, 1996).⁴

Recognising the impact of globalisation, a UNESCO World Report on cultural diversity published in 2009 stresses that cultural diversity exists in a form of distinct cultures and is becoming a major social concern. States are looking at ways to respond to global issues by taking into account cultural diversity as a common interest for a renewed understanding. In UNESCO's 1982

³ Peruvian writer, politician, journalist, and recipient of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, culture was defined as the 'whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group' which includes 'not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs'.

The need to understand cultural diversity was based on a few considerations such as the cultural nature, the identifications of constituents of cultural diversity i.e. civilisation, its people, and the relationship of cultures with change. The challenge for UNESCO at this juncture is to define policies which discovers and embraces differences as an incentive to continue to evolve and change. Ultimately the final challenge is to manage diversity.

This journey to understand identity in relation to culture, religion, ethnicity, linguistic, or gender also comes with the threat to current beliefs and lifestyle. Therefore, cultural identity becomes a more fluid, self-transforming process as it derives from multiple sources, with the growing

⁴ An article entitled "The Globalisation and Culture from State of Nature Journal (2008)".

complexity of globalised flows of people, goods, and information⁵.

EXPLAINING THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ORGANISATIONS

In different parts of the world, the word “Diversity and Inclusion” has been widely discussed as part of the discourse in talent management. Apparently, workforce diversity is widely accepted as one of the key factors to a successful business and it could be within the perspective of gender, race, and generation, among others, because of its benefits in ensuring better performance as a result of higher productivity, morale, and profit levels in businesses.

This phenomenon also contributes to the environmental trends on workforce diversity. The workplace is an excellent example of groups of people coming from different cultures struggling to understand the similarities and differences between one another. More businesses are facing challenges with a multicultural force structure due to the fact that more people live and work in foreign countries as a result of globalisation (Seymen, 2006).

Diversity can be defined as a mixture of people with different group identities within the same social system and these demographic profiles of workers are defined based on characteristics including race, geographical origin, ethnicity, gender, age, functional or educational background, physical and cognitive capability, language, lifestyles, beliefs, cultural background, economic category, tenure with organisations, and sexual preferences (Bhadury, 2000). These differences can be both based on a basic dimension (acquired during their life span) or secondary dimension (possessed later throughout their lives) with the latter being more changeable. Cultural diversity falls into the secondary dimension but it has an equally significant impact on attitudes, manners, and perceptions of the individuals.

Considering its changeability, it was also posited that culture can be learned. According to Asma Abdullah⁶, learning culture has a liberating effect; it enlarges ones' repertoire of response skills and enables one to be able to communicate effectively based on the context that they are in. Learning culture also includes

authored *Going Global*, explaining different interfaces of cultures relevant in the Malaysian workplace.

⁵ UNESCO World Report, 2009.

⁶ Dr. Asma Abdullah wrote many works on intercultural and cross cultural management in Malaysia. She

understanding cultural nuances and idiosyncrasies, finding out what engages the hearts and minds of the locals. Such examples include expatriates and diplomats taking extra effort to learn to adapt to the new environment.

Similarly, many successful multinationals have applied cross-cultural perspectives into their businesses. Exxon Malaysia, for instance, conducts regular cross cultural training as part of intervention preparation for American managers to work in Malaysia, as the understanding about Malaysian culture is important to better understand the Malaysian workforce. Many companies around the world are also setting up human resource positions to include diversity and inclusion.. Some companies have created policies and programmes related to diversity but are now incorporating elements of inclusion considering its relevance as diversity is about getting the mix together but inclusion is getting the mix to work together. The whole idea is to explain that while the organisation is built based on many differences - whether race, gender, or ethnicity - acknowledging that they exist, and that these

differences are embraced and capitalised is also important.

UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

While organisations around the world are becoming more similar due to globalisation, the way people do business still varies across cultures. For instance, Americans are seen to value professionalism and ability to perform a task to indicate productivity but in the Malaysian context, most businesses are based on relationships and the social responsibility to help the community and nation to progress.

Malaysia is also a good example of how people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds can work in harmony. One of the exceptional research written by Asma Abdullah is on the 16 Cultural Dimensions: Relationship – Task, Harmony – Control, Shame – Guilt, We – I, Religious – Secular, Hierarchy – Equality, Polychronic – Monochronic, High Context – Low Context. While UK scholar on culture John Holden argues that traditional culture poses a problem rather than an opportunity, in the Malaysian context, companies with multicultural workers have shown to gain

competitive advantage if those cultural differences can be managed effectively.

Our cultural values normally address the “shoulds”, “oughts”, and “musts”. Similarly, values in an organisation are often based on the underlying assumptions which are the internalised beliefs of its members that shapes the way they believe, think, and evaluate the world. Values are transmitted to other members in the society or a particular organisation to ensure their survival.

In *Going Glocal* by Asma Abdullah, the book highlighted that values in the organisation should be treated like profits. It must be embedded not just in corporate brochures and documents but in various training programmes and campaigns and effectively expressed through symbols and leadership. Leaders who can make sense of their own organisational culture, linking it to their values and later translated into programmes and assessed through their

performances are leaders with cultural competencies who knows that the implementation of these elements will contribute to operational effectiveness.

In the Student Leadership Challenge, Kouzes and Posner explained that leaders need to have clarity of values as “the clearer you know about your values, the easier your navigation will be”. In a formal setting such as the workplace, organisational values give meaning to the organisation and serves as guidance and sets standards to shape managerial practices. In order to ensure that these values are shared among its members, training intervention and relevant programmes are necessary. Internalising these values will eventually influence every aspect of life, judgement, responses to others, making decisions, and personal goals. The standards that we have in our value system sets the boundaries for decisions and choices that we make in our everyday life which guides you to say “yes” or “no”.

Article

EXECUTIVE COACHING AND CULTURE

By **Ismail Johari Othman**

Sometime ago, there was a saying that went "Barcelona¹ beats every team in the world, Chuck Norris² can beat Barcelona... by himself". Setting aside the joke, currently the masses seem to find the lone-ranger-herculean kind of pursuit outdated. Lately, success requires a completely different set of recipe, such as teamwork, creativity, courage, and discipline. Often, for such a recipe to work, a systematic coaching process must be put in place to bring the team from its present to a desired state. As early as the 1990s, inspired by the success stories of coaching in sports, the business world applied such an approach – popularly known as executive coaching – which is a learning partnership³ that supports people to achieve their goals in the most fulfilling way through raising their self-awareness to gain courage, commitment, and capabilities. Considering the fulfilling element in executive coaching, its proponents

stress on the importance of the bond between the coach⁴ and his or her coachee⁵.

Like in other relationships, building a rapport is crucial in the beginning. Thereafter, the coach and the coachee must agree on an agenda – what the coachee wants to achieve in the end. Unlike similar methods such as counselling and therapy, executive coaching is committed to bring about changes that the coachee desires. Equally important, if not more, the answer to the change must come from the coachee. The coach is like a sparring partner who will challenge the coachee throughout the process – assisting the coachee to explore options but not in any way directing him or her to a solution or conclusion.

To ensure that an executive coaching session is progressing as intended, the coach needs to continuously probe the coachee – gaining as

¹ One of the most successful football club in the world – plays great football and have won practically every major trophy in world football.

² A famous martial artist who is famous for his toughness, attitude, sophistication, and masculinity – eventually became a popular culture.

³ Corporate Coach Academy (2017). *Certified Associate Coach Program's Learning Notes*

⁴ The person who leads the executive coaching process.

⁵ The person(s) (could be more than one at a point of time) who is being coached.

much insight about the coachee. Powerful open-ended questions by the coach helps the coachee to gain self-awareness and the ability to distinguish between the side and actual issues at hand. To be able to probe effectively, the coach must listen, focus, and be attentive to the coachee's body language.

Perhaps the inherent robustness of executive coaching in bringing about change has enticed more and more organisations to invest in it, especially at the senior leadership level where a considerable degree of personalisation may be required. Some organisations have even invested in building up their own cadre of coaches.

Whilst such approaches are commendable, one area that requires attention is culture. Executive coaching, which has roots in developed countries, may see different experiences in this part of the world. Even famous sports coaches such as Vince Lombardi, Carlo Ancelotti, and Sir Alex Ferguson were reported to emphasise on culture in their respective coaching experiences where the players are of different backgrounds.

The inclination to work as a group, helping each other, and preserving harmony may influence the pace and direction of an executive coaching session in a country like Malaysia. The coach may find it challenging to make the coachee open up and responses received may not be direct but *beralas*⁶ as they may be concerned with the feelings of the person or group that is central to the conversation. To some extent, such inclination may make people see a pledge or contract only necessary in commercial terms, but not for a self-improvement session like executive coaching.

In some cases, the coach could expect the executive coaching to rapidly change into a befrienders-like session as the people are unfamiliar with the concept of the former. They may have thought of it as just an opportunity for them to voice out what they have been content with for a long time. Though one may argue that the method and size is different, the town hall⁷ sessions organised by the former Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia for all ministries has invited more personal consultation rather than ideas. The

⁶ Tactfully.

⁷ Razak School of Government (2012), *KSN Town Hall 2011 – 2012*

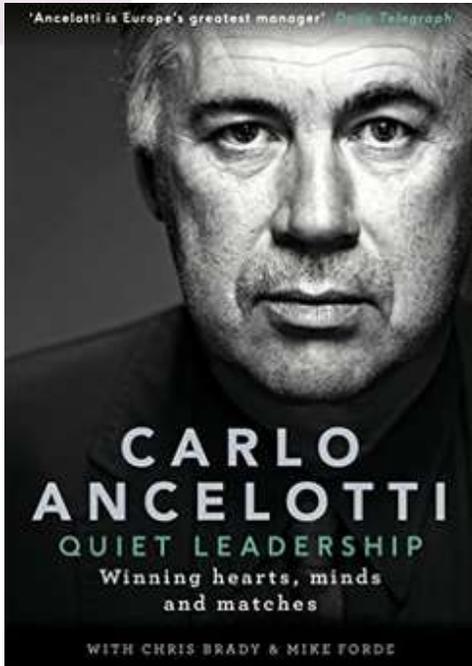
underlying spirit is similar – to seek and exchange ideas to move forward.

On the flipside, coachees may also face coaches who struggle to ask thought provoking questions, not due to the lack of capability or potential but rather due to earlier upbringing that could have inhibited them from displaying curiosity and ability to challenge the status quo – that they are more familiar to listening rather than probing. Having said so, such upbringing may also be beneficial as it can be the foundation of active listening skills for the coach, which is also important in executive coaching.

Going forward, such cultural challenges are expected to improve in parallel with rapid cross-cultural experiences taking place as a result of advancement in communication and transportation technology. At the organisational level, the pressure to stay relevant and competitive may force people to embrace new cultures or face the risk of being left behind.

In conclusion, embarking in an executive coaching programme is effectively self-awareness for an organisation, where the potential or shortcoming in exemplary characteristics cherished by executive coaching may be discovered. Given the

fact that culture takes time to build and dismantle, it would be good for those exemplary characteristics to be embedded in organisational routine. Employing executive coaching in isolation is not only expensive as far as cost is concerned, but its returns could be limited to solving certain problems rather than helping the organisation to leap into the next level. As rightly pointed by former Barcelona coach, Pep Guardiola who is apparently not excelling as expected at his new club in Manchester – *“I have to understand the rules here in England”*.



Book Recommendation

By Ismail Johari Othman

CARLO ANCELOTTI – QUIET LEADERSHIP Winning Hearts, Minds and Matches

*Writers: Carlo Ancelotti with Chris
Brady and Mike Forde*

Football or soccer (in certain countries) is a huge business. The lobbying for the right to host and televise prestigious football tournaments is intense and, at times, controversial. Professional clubs are often organised where multi-disciplinary talent such as physical trainers, psychologists, physiotherapists, and lately data analysts, work together to ensure that the team delivers consistently. Central to the team is the team manager, who often doubles up as the coach.

If one goes to the bookstore, one can easily find books on successful football managers, usually curated as a biography or memoir. Last year, Portfolio Penguin

published such a book but with a different approach. The book under recommendation is about the leadership of Carlo Ancelotti, nicknamed *Carletto* – a retired Italian footballer who is often touted as one the greatest managers in European football. Unlike some of his peers who have achieved repeated success in a single club, Ancelotti has stamped his mark in various leading European powerhouses such as AC Milan, Juventus, Real Madrid, Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain, and Bayern Munich.

This three-part book broadly discusses Ancelotti's leadership acumen from various stakeholders' perspectives – players, "the higher up", rivals, and

subordinates. To the players, Ancelotti is noted for his humility, calmness, and attentiveness with a strong family orientation. His concern for his players is genuine: Players have felt that they are cared for and have someone to look up to as far as good examples are concerned.

As much as Ancelotti loves football with all his heart, he understands its commercial elements. He knows the importance of culture, identity, ownership, talent management and development to a club. He is aware of his locus of control; what is expected from him, his limits, the role of the business executive of the club, and above all, the role of the owner of the club. Like any other job, Ancelotti recognises that the usual cycle of football management is akin to a romantic relationship. It often starts with courtship between the owner and the prospective manager, tying the knot through contract, honeymoon period of feeling good, turbulence, and finally, the inevitable breakup. In Ancelotti's words – *“sometimes a relationship just gets tired and it's time to move on”*.

Two chapters in this book are dedicated to Ancelotti by his peers, one of which is by the legendary Sir Alex Ferguson, the former manager of Manchester United. His excerpt is full of praises, remarking Ancelotti as a gentleman with a purpose, a great coach, and a good listener. Sir Alex admits he had even preferred for Ancelotti to succeed him at Manchester United, after 27 years helming the role. Alas, it didn't quite work out.

According to Paul Clement, his former lieutenant in four different clubs, Ancelotti takes a very strong stance about 'bad attitude' – being unprofessional. It annoyed him if any of the players were disrespectful to the backroom staff – perhaps based on his strong thoughts on the importance of inclusivity in any relationships formed. Interestingly, he is quite tolerant with how his team behaves outside the club as he used to say that he had no control over it.

At a personal level, Ancelotti had a glimpse of leadership at an early age. He learned a lot from his father, a poor farmer about discipline, thriftiness, and the importance of a strong work ethic. He was also exposed to the concept of ownership

early in life as his father had to share his rather considerable harvest with the land owner. Another lesson learned was that sometimes rules are not in your favour, thus the importance of having your own wealth is essential to progress.

This book is highly recommended for aspiring and evolving leaders who want to explore leadership from a different perspective. The book provides numerous

practical examples on how leaders can get team members on board in a tactful yet affirmative way – largely about how the leader shows concern, humility to listen, to learn from others, to walk the talk, and to show the results. A prominent politician could be right when he once said, “do not underestimate the determination of a quiet man”, as Ancelotti is a prime example of this.

CARLO ANCELOTTI – Quiet Leadership – Winning Hearts, Minds and Matches is published by Portfolio Penguin and can be purchased from Kinokuniya Kuala Lumpur and MPH Bookstore at RM71.95

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