

RSOG Seminar: “ASIAN STYLES OF LEADERSHIP”

with

Professor Dr. Patrick Low
University of Brunei Darussalam

When : 17 October 2012
Where : Razak School of Government
Who : Prof. Dr. Patrick Low

About The Seminar

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. The different styles of leadership are influenced by different cultures, theories and concepts. The Asian style of leadership is often overlooked compared to the western leadership as the Asian way of governance have often been criticised by Western thought leaders as antecedent to the liberal democracy and individual freedom advocated by the west. This seminar is focused on providing answers to the concept of Asian leadership and its characteristics compared to the Western leadership and further explore the pros and cons of this Asian leadership style.

Summary

Prof. Dr. Patrick Low began the session with a phrase ‘know yourself’ which is translated as indentifying our individual persona and characteristics is a key aspect in developing our leadership styles. As Asians, our leadership style is anchored by our values as opposed to the western style driven by open and liberal applications. Prof. Low further noted that in an Asian perspective, the family institution and child rearing is a key factor in determining our thoughts and behaviours. Asian parents tend to infuse stories and examples to teach their children about life lessons and to evoke a sense of responsibility for our actions.

The Asian school of thought is based on societal and cultural norms, beliefs, and values. Furthermore, the Asian style of leadership is driven by mutual obligation, sense of brotherhood, and loyalty to a leader. In this regard, leadership in the Asian context leans favourably towards the paternal or father leadership model. This is a common Asian trait or value of respect for the elders and senior citizens.

Prof. Low quoted Confucius who said “A good man does not give orders, but leads by example”. The quote best describes the core of the Asian leadership styles focusing primarily on the modern terminology of ‘soft power’. Asians tend to follow a leader as a source of direction to lead the country or an organization to greater heights. In this regard, Asian leaders have a prominent role especially in leading the nation. Famous Asian leaders such as Tun Dr. Mahathir and Sukarno are examples of successful leaders who demonstrated the father leadership model. It was concluded that the Asian style of leadership is unique with its signature traits that is embedded in the cultural norms of the Asian society. Although Asian society comprises of various races and religions, they are driven by similar beliefs and values that translate into key leadership traits.

Questions, Complaints & Comments Raised

- 1 Common perception that the Asian leadership style is “introverted” and “conservative” as compared to the western style of leadership which is more extroverted, open and liberal.
- 2 The Asian style of leadership has evolved to accommodate the shift in economic development and political climate in the region. The achievements of Singapore and Japan have been cited as success stories of the ‘Asian Way’ of governance.
- 3 The Asian leadership style is embedded in societal norms, values and is heavily influenced by the upbringing in the family.
- 4 Asian cultures share a common theme of “idealising benevolent paternalistic (father) leadership and legitimizing dependency”. There is a common understanding on mutual duties and obligations. Leaders have a duty to care for the people and the people are obliged to follow. There is an element of compliance which is based on the Asian trait of respect for elders.

About the Speaker

Professor Dr. Patrick Low Kim Cheng holds a Ph.D. in Management and International Business from the University of South Australia. Apart from being a resident professor at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, he is also Professor of Management and Marketing at the Kazakhstan Institute of Economics and Strategic Research where he was awarded the prestigious Researcher of the Year award in 2004/05.

Having worked in areas of corporate governance, banking and civil service for more than 14 years, Prof. Patrick Low is an expert in human resource management and development. He has done extensive work across many Asian countries. His research interest has focused on the different strategic leadership and governance styles in Asia,

and his publications on the theme give a contextual understanding of the 'Asian Way' of leadership. His academic work, among others, includes the Tao and Confucius styles of leadership, the Malay leadership perspective and leading the Mahatma Gandhi way.

To date, Professor Low has authored 14 books and countless other academic publications. He will share a unique perspective on leadership very relevant to Malaysian leaders, especially in world where western concepts of leadership predominate.

Contact

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at programmes@rsog.com.my