

# **“LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS”**

with

**Dr. Andrew White**

**Associate dean of Executive Education, Said Business School  
University of Oxford, United Kingdom**

**When** : Thursday, 10 January 2013  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Who** : Dr. Andrew White

## **About The Seminar**

One of the most important attributes of a leader in the 21st century is ability to lead in times of crisis. Rather than just an unpleasant business challenge, leaders often face unexpected or sudden predicaments, changes in technology or industry trends that are well beyond their control. This seminar presented invaluable insights into why the pitfall of a leader is often the mishandling of a crisis, and not the crisis itself. Similarly, the leadership displayed throughout this process differentiates the organisations that thrive following a crisis from those that do not.

## **Summary**

Dr White began by relaying a personal experience where he was in a boat sailing the English channel that was caught in a bad storm where water in the bottom deck had risen waist-high endangering all on board. He noted that people who were most expected to handle the crisis retreated not knowing what to do, while those who were considered less experienced passengers steps to the fore.

He then applied the S-curve concept looking at the S&P 500 companies in 1957, where 40 years later only 74 remained on the list. Among the 74, 84% of them performed under the average. In that 40 year period, major changes had taken place such as shifts in industry patterns from industrial to technological and there was the rise of new economic powerhouses such as Japan. Many of the original S&P 500 could not adapt or were stuck in an old paradigm. Polaroid was used as a classic example. In 1999, when digital photography was already well established, polaroid still made a statement of belief that hard copy is still required. In 2001 the company went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Dr White then went on to describe leaders who are able to withstand crisis and change as the ones Jim Collins referred to as 'Level 5' leaders based on his research on the 11 best performing Fortune 500 Companies over a 15 year period. 'Level 5' leaders bring together the paradoxical combination of deep personal humility with intense professional will.

Such leaders subjugate their own needs to the greater ambition of something larger and more lasting than themselves. For those people, work goes beyond acquiring the fame, fortune, power and adulation. Work is about what they build, create and contribute. Most leaders, however, fall into the 'Shadow' trap of either being 'Narcissistic Tyrants', seeking dominance and attachments; or having an 'Imposter Syndrome' having dysfunctional conflict, no confidence and leading to withdrawal. Dr White stated that more women than men fall into the latter category, where they feel they are not good enough to be in their leadership position. On the other hand more men fall under the former category, and are often not as good as they think. Having said that, most leaders, at one time or another manifest both states of being.

The development of the necessary characteristics to lead at 'Level 5' requires a deep level of insight into one's self and one's impact on others. It also requires the recognition, nurturing and harnessing of diverse talents in the organization to enable the leader or the organization to most effectively manage crisis and bring about lasting success.

### **Questions, Complaints & Comments Raised**

- 1 Can a leader fluctuate between a Narcissist and an Imposter?
- 2 What is the role of the leader in harnessing self worth in themselves and in others?
- 3 Examples of crises being either managed very badly or very well?
- 4 Is crisis management better left to a single leader or a team?
- 5 What is the difference between public sector responses to crises and the corporate sector's

### **About the Speaker**

Andrew White is the Associate Dean of Executive Education and a Fellow in Strategic Management at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. His background is in the research of innovation management – a topic of increasing importance in a competitive and fast-changing world. The successful management of disruptive technologies and discontinuities have been at the heart of his work, these are key factors in today's highly fluid organisational environment. Dr White's work has been published in the Financial

Times, he is a contributor to the European Journal of Information Systems and the Future of Business Schools. His research interests focus around inter-organisational information systems and technologies and how companies can successfully manage innovation.

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