

RSOG Seminar : **“Distributed Leadership and The Public Service”**

with

Professor Dr. Alma Harris
Institute of Educational Leadership, University Malaya

When : 7th August 2014
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Professor Dr. Alma Harris

About The Seminar

The founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates once said “as we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others”. A rapidly changing environment demands that leaders are adaptive, flexible and highly responsive to external and internal changes. Leadership in the future focuses more on professional collaboration, talent, capability and solutions. It is a shift away from the present hierarchical, fixed and problem based environment. This seminar explored the concept of Distributed Leadership; mobilising leadership at all levels in the organisation, and not just relying on direction from the top. However, there are factors to consider before rushing headlong into Distributed Leadership especially in the public service such as micro-politics, power-distance, culture and structure.

Summary

Introduction

Distributed Leadership is a concept that is growing in popularity. It recognises that there are multiple leaders (Spillane et al, 2004) and that leadership activities are widely shared within and between organizations (Harris, 2007).

Prof. Alma began the seminar by stating that the West can learn from the East on the different aspects of leadership traits and characteristics. What is Distributed Leadership? Distributed Leadership is exercised by a range of people within an organization, extending to those with no formal leadership status in the hierarchy. She further explained that Distributed Leadership is about delegating roles and responsibilities to subordinates and it is a form of empowerment. It is a process that emphasizes the aspect of working together as a team and collectively instead of the top-down approach practised by most organizations. It is no longer about command and control, and instead it involves social interaction and building powerful social processes.

She added that this form of leadership involves the distribution of accountability and responsibility and it provides the opportunity for people within an organization to lead. This is one way of developing leadership traits in a person to lead the organization in the future. According to Prof. Alma, studies have shown that organizations practising Distributed Leadership have reported that performance of staff have improved, morale of subordinates have increased and has given individual self-confidence a boost.

In addition, it provides an opportunity for a leader to innovate and change and to steer people to the direction of stability in the organization. Stability in an organization is an important factor for continuous progress and development. Prof. Alma added that one of the most important elements of Distributed Leadership is to place trust in a person to effectively lead an organization. A distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders.

Prof. Alma concluded the seminar by emphasizing the importance of practising Distributed Leadership in an organization. She added that successful organisations have widely and carefully distributed leadership. In essence, effective leaders grow and manage other leaders.

Issues Raised :

- Distributed Leadership is exercised by a range of people within an organization, extending to those with no formal leadership status in the hierarchy.
- The core focus of Distributed Leadership is primarily concerned with the social processes that influence organisational development and change.

- The effects and impact of distributed leadership on organizational outcomes depends upon the pattern of leadership distribution.

About The Speaker

Dr. Alma Harris is Professor and Director of the Institute of Educational Leadership at the University of Malaya. Since 2008, she has been the Professor and Pro-Director (Leadership) at the Institute of Education, London. Her research work focuses on organizational change and development. She is internationally known for her work on school improvement, focusing particularly on improving schools in challenging circumstances. Alma has written extensively about leadership in schools and she is an expert on the theme of distributed leadership. She is currently seconded to the 'Welsh Assembly Government' as a Professional Adviser and is currently assisting with the process of system wide reform.

Contact

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