

# **RSOG Seminar**

## **“The Power of Dialogue: Leading in Complex and Changing Times ”**

with

**Peter Nixon**

**When** : 5 September 2014  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Peter Nixon

### **About The Seminar**

Leading, managing, negotiating, resolving, persuading and inspiring: they all require dialogue to succeed. The ‘Dialogue Gap’ occurs when the quality of the dialogue falls short of what is needed to overcome challenges in the organisation, at home and in society.

In an era of increased complexity and constant change, effective dialogue is an important attribute of a good leader. Dialogue Leaders are those who can garner stakeholder-wide collective thinking to achieve common and aligned goals.

In this seminar, Peter Nixon explored and discussed the importance of effective dialogic skills for public sector leaders, as well as enlightened the audience on the various dimensions of dialoguing and the barriers to effective dialogue.

To quote the speaker from his book, Dialogue Gap, “To survive the twenty-first century we need to rediscover how to dialogue, not just to live peaceably and sustainably on this planet, but also to lead our organisations through the turbulence and into a successful time”.

### **Summary**

The Speaker began by elaborating on the four key areas of a complex and changing world:

## 1. Internet Freedoms

Due to the advanced reach of the internet and its freedoms, today people can choose values and ways of life equal or unequal to that of their parents and ancestors. Furthermore, the dramatic impact of opinions presented or of acts filmed and disseminated via the internet on the perceptions of different communities around the world have created many divisions between communities, generations and individuals.

## 2. Global Markets

China's influence on the market of goods wiping out domestic production in many countries; and global shifts of markets and destinations are affecting economics wellbeing, lives and livelihood

## 3. Climate Change

When the effects of the climate change and environmental degradation are upon people, nobody cares about its origin but they would have to survive the consequences. In such circumstances, action indeed trumps words.

## 4. Wealth Gap

Different communities with 'haves' and 'have-nots' face very dissimilar life experiences and therefore very different levels of wellbeing and satisfaction

The speaker proceeded to enlighten the audience on ways for leaders to cope with the complexity. He suggested the following:

1. Achieve goals on time and on budget - this requires the right amount of resources and the failures to achieve is often blamed the lack thereof.
2. Shepherd followers from A to B - this is the responsibility of leaders, not just in time of ease and when things are straight forward, but especially in adversity
3. Keep your self current - its not about how old or young one is but how connected they are to what is going on around them and in the world
4. Keep yourself healthy - health applies to physical as well as mental health. The latter indicates having a balance view on subjects and an informed view as leaders.

Peter Nixon, through his research and experience, believes that in all of the above, dialogue is potential tool to strengthen a leader's effectiveness in facing such complex changes. Hence dialogue holds tremendous power.

A good dialogue requires trust and respect. As such, it is imperative for a leader to identify the right issues, engage the right people, and utilise the right time and space to achieve the optimal outcome of a dialogue initiative.

It is the leader's responsibility to keep stakeholders moving in line with one another towards achieving agreed optimal outcomes. This is especially imperative for Malaysia to remain competitive in a complex and changing world. In order to achieve optimal outcomes, dialogue must also be conducted in the right way. Effective dialogue requires presence, respect, expression, the suspension of opinions, absorption and understanding; - or what Peter Nixon terms as the P.R.E.S.A. model.

### **Key Lessons Imparted**

1. leaders must take personal action in order to achieve optimal outcomes through dialogue
2. And awareness of oneself and how one deals with others is crucial in order to leverage on strengths, alter counter-productive behaviour and balance over-done traits with alternative approaches
3. A keen awareness of the environment in which one operates, as well as an understanding of the various stakeholders to an area of concern is also instrumental in tailoring the dialogue approach

### **Questions Raised**

**Q1.** What is an ideal environment for dialogue? It was noted that the more informal the setting the more open people will be.

**A.** Presence that one has and the environment created to either reward or challenge people to open up. Respect for the views of others

**Q2.** How do you start and prolong a conversation with a stranger?

**A.** Ask questions with genuine interest. Start with opener questions and move on to the deeper and tougher questions. The Singapore conversation – staged dialogues to understand people's sentiments which eventually leads to dissatisfaction being voiced

**Q3.** Is dialogue necessary for every issue or are SOPs sufficient, especially in situations where time is of essence?

**A.** In situations that are familiar and lacks grey areas (not really issues) they can be managed with limited conversations, assuming an understanding has already been achieved.

**Q4.** What is the difference between dialogue and town-hall meetings or informal discussions?

**A.** There are 50-60 methods of dialogue where different methods serve different purposes and several have some degree of overlap

**Q5.** How might one measure dialogue effectiveness?

Look at the optimal outcome and determine how close you have come

**Q6.** What are the experiences in life that make you believe that dialogue is important

Every time you step out of your comfort zone you become more confident. Professional exposures and experiences that makes one realise that vast differences exist in the world.

### **About the Speaker**

Peter Nixon is faculty member of RSOG's Senior Leadership Programme: Dialogue Leadership, as well as Managing Director of Potential Limited, a Hong Kong-based consulting firm on change management. He specializes in the facilitation, negotiation and implementation of change through dialogue. His international recognition arises from his philosophy of "The Solution is in the Dialogue".

Peter is the author of the highly-acclaimed book, "Dialogue Gap". His work builds upon the research of Erich Fromm ('Man for Himself', 'The Sane Society') and Elias Porter ('Relationship Awareness Theory'). He has previously worked with Behavioural Science Systems (BSS), UK. His client list includes some of the top organizations in the world such as CitiBank, the Asian Development Bank, ABN-AMRO, PwC, Morgan Stanley and the Marriott Group.

### **Contact**

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