

RSOG Seminar

“Critical Thinking and Innovation: The Role of Leadership”

with

Dr. Aida Idris

When : 19 January 2015
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Dr. Aida Idris

About The Seminar

Innovation requires critical as well as creative thinking, and usually thrives under a certain style of organizational leadership. The extent of critical and creative thinking of the members of an organization is often related to its capabilities to produce innovative and effective solutions to organizational challenges. Despite the importance of innovation, it is not easily implemented as organizations and agencies are constrained by factors such as financial capacity and learning orientation. This session is aimed at exploring the power of critical and creative thinking in enhancing innovation through effective leadership.

Summary

Innovation in management are novelties or improvements in areas such as production, purchasing, marketing, and general administration. Innovations add value, solve organizational constraints, reduce operating cost, penetrate market, and facilitate sustainable development. Despite the importance of innovation, they are not easily implemented as they are often curtailed at the macro-levels by regulations, national economy, as well as societal values. On a micro level, they are often pared down by financial capacity, human capacity, learning orientation, and organizational leadership. According to Dr. Aida Idris, it is important that a balance is achieved between regulations as well as the ability to transform and promote innovation. Though regulations are crucial in that they promote a general order, they should not discourage innovation.

It was noted that cultural values as an important factor in breeding innovation, though they are not always the determining factor. She noted that in more individualistic cultures like the United States where individual success is highly valued, innovation thrives better compared to a more collectivistic cultures. Power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance as well as time orientation are also factors that can contribute to innovation and critical thinking. Countries with low uncertainty avoidance, for instance, survives more by changing and adapting to new situations. This then, breeds innovation. In relation to the importance of cultural values, she noted that individuals play an important role in shaping those values. More often than not, the aggregate levels of individuals' values will translate at the national level. Though there is no existing model that we can carve out, it is important that each country choose their own path for their own economic and political success as each country is unique.

The leadership-innovation model was utilised to explain the role of leadership in innovation. The speaker emphasized the role of leaders in providing the vision in aligning their followers. Some of the leadership characteristics needed for innovation include ingenuity and creativity. She stressed that leaders need to provide incentives and inspiration towards innovation. With leadership shaping an environment that promotes creativity and supports risk-taking activities, the culture of innovation will prevail.

Issues Raised

- Motivation to innovate is one of the major issues raised. In regards to the public sector, it is important that incentives are provided to the public servants, especially in vital areas that concerns transformation of the country and brain drain.
- The role of culture was asked in relation to the extent of critical and creative thinking required in an organization. Though individuals play a huge role in shaping and driving innovations, cultural values that promote innovations should not be underestimated.
- In terms of the public sector where rules and general orders are prevalent, it is important to find the right kind of balance so as to not stifle innovation.
- One of the major traits that differentiates a great leader is integrity. It is human nature to accept leaders with a sense of integrity and humility.

- The role of transformational leadership is to provide inspirational motivation, hence the need for institutional and organizational change.

About the Speaker

Dr. Aida Idris obtained her Bachelor of Science in Engineering at the University of Aberdeen. She received her MBA from Ohio University, before completing her Doctoral Degree (PhD) in Entrepreneurship at the University of Malaya. Before joining UM, she had been working as a product engineer at SGS-Thompson Microelectronics Johor, and management consultant at Arthur Andersen & Co. Dr. Aida Idris is now an associate professor at the Department of Business Strategy and Policy at the Faculty of Business and Accountancy, UM. She is also the Director of Academic Development Centre (ADeC) at the same institution. She is a researcher for the Centre of Malay Excellence, UM, an associate editor of the Asian Journal of Business and Accounting, and a member of the advisory board of the Oxford University Press. Her scholarly interests revolve around international and cross-cultural management, as well as SME development.

Contact

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