

RSOG SEMINAR

Leadership and Islam

with

Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak

When : 21 April 2016
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Professor Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak

About the Seminar

In modern leadership theories, charismatic, transactional, transformational and servant leadership style are widely being discussed and practiced. Such thoughts are greatly influenced by western-centric ideas and concepts that we willingly accept as our reference. In today's complex globalised world, implicating scientific and technological advancement, ecological deterioration, the notion of human and natural capital, integrity and social values, to name a few, have raised the issue of relevance and balance in the understanding and implementation of contemporary leadership. Ethical considerations indicate the need for some gaps to be closed by bringing back the "soul" to leadership with more focus on faith-based paradigms that have been sidelined as old-fashioned. From an Islamic standpoint, leadership takes different dimensions in a balanced way converging on delivering justice and wisdom, universally defined, as its main focus in rooting all that is good and defeating all that is evil (*amar ma'ruf dan nahi munkar*). In this seminar, the speaker will explore some of these.

Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been formulated to purposefully address regional challenges, including poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, gender disparities, child and maternal mortality, access to safe drinking water and the gap between rural and urban areas as well as between the rich and poor. Transforming society and the world's economy to a sustainable model is arguably the 21st century's most significant challenge. Therefore, the idea of transformational and sustainability leadership model has been developed for the nation to be more just and sustainable. Both models emphasize on high ethical and moral needs, values centric, inspire the "whole" being, moving towards a collaborative network, and more sustainable worldview that encompasses humanity. However, these models have minimal spiritual involvement from the Islamic point of view.

The Guest Speaker proposes that the similarities in both models can be enhanced into a better leadership continuum to counter this state of imbalance. He believes that Leadership in the Islamic context – how Islam puts sustainability, balance and development – can play a key role in addressing these challenges. He also thinks that an Islamic worldview and way of life can provide a fresh insight with respect to the human environment and economy to reform the current leadership model.

In Islam, achieving balance and moderation has always been one of the objectives of the spiritual masters of the past and will remain so in the future. Thus, the worldview in Islam encompasses the view now and also hereafter. Leadership in the Islamic perspective is a “trust” (*amanah*) and with that comes “responsibility” (*taklif*) and “accountability” (*mas’uliyah*). It is not just about managing changes, but more importantly, to manage life as a whole with full realization of what is permanent and unchangeable (principles). Islam believes everyone is a leader, and each of us will be held responsible for his leadership. All Muslims need to be empowered with a mandate and responsibility to channel the spiritual and moral force of Islam towards the building of sustainable human civilization and a resilient future. Therefore, Muslims are accountable for what he is doing today, or tomorrow – hereafter. Hence, the idea of balanced leadership in the context of Islam is not neglecting the *dunya* and also focusing on *akhirah*.

The Guest Speaker suggested that the Balanced Leadership Model involves all of the Islamic traits of a leader and is a form of extension to the current leadership models in Malaysia. According to Al-Ghazali’s Balance (*Mizan*) principal virtues, all human traits constitute branches of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. When the wisdom is balanced, it brings forth discretion, excellence and an understanding of the subtle implications of actions and the hidden defects of the soul. On the other hand, courage gives rise to nobility, endurance, dignity and suppression of rage while temperance is a quality that gives rise to generosity, modesty, patience and tolerance.

The equilibrium of these principal virtues is how all good traits of leadership proceed in the service of Justice. In this leadership continuum, the concept of justice in Islam does not only refer to relational situations of harmony and equilibrium existing between one person and another but far more profoundly and fundamentally. Hence, it refers in a primary way to the harmonious and rightly-balanced relationship that exists between the man and his self, and in a secondary way in which the *Adab* that exists between him and another or others. *Adab* refers to all guidelines about words and deeds that are considered proper, mannerly, ethical, and morally correct in Islam. Consequently, *Adab* is the purposeful act by which Justice is actualized.

In addition, *Adab* also reflects all virtues in balanced leadership – wisdom, courage, temperance and justice – that constitute in *Qalb*. In the context of Islam, a leader should understand where leadership starts which is from the heart. This *Qalb* is called heart, and sometimes *nafs*. The heart is the seat of Divine understanding. This heart is not a physical heart, it is a spiritual heart, a heart that is eternal which consist of *Nafs* which means soul. There are two kinds of leaders, one whose *Nafs* has overcome them and led them to ruin

because they yielded to it and obeyed their impulses. The other kind are those who have overcome their *Nafs* and made it obey their commands.

The Balanced Leadership Model proposes that humans control their *Nafs* of inciting ego (*nafs al'ammarah*), self-accusing ego (*nafs al-luwwamah*) and to retain self at peace (*nafs al-mutma'innah*). Leadership will be balanced once a leader can control himself from incites to commit evil (including being “unjust”), realizes his weaknesses and aspires to perfection to be firm in faith and leaves bad manners behind. The balanced leader requires his physical, mental and spiritual presence whereby the inner and outer being - the soul and body - are able to conform to the requirements of his *fitrah* and the objectives of the Law (*shari'ah*).

The balanced presence includes all characteristics and theory of Transformational, Sustainability and Balanced Leadership Models. Therefore, framing the Sustainable development issue from a Balanced Leadership perspective can be done as the five elements in the model – life, intellect, offspring, wealth and faith complete the principles of 4 “pillars” in sustainability which are economy, social, culture and ecology. A key feature of the post-2015 agenda offers a framework for responding to the emerging needs and challenges in an integrated approach that combines economic, social and environmental sustainability with the principles of good governance, human rights and equity. Again, this Balanced Leadership Model encompasses all values and even more traits to address sustainability challenges.

In his concluding remarks, he stressed that the Balanced Leadership Model was created for humankind to enable them to live “naturally” at peace in a just, equitable and balanced world. He suggested that the leadership in Islam is a kind of vehicle that takes one person to another place which is better and moving together towards excellence in *dunya* and hereafter. At the same time, Muslim leaders have a responsibility to open this discourse to the public, through the notion of global citizenship in Islam, or the ‘median community’ to fulfill the concept of a balanced whole being – *“The energy stored in the seed draws from other energy sources in the soil, the sun, the air and water from the rain – and begins to form a plant. Similarly, that of balanced leadership”*.

Issues raised

1. Success, performance, or accountability are tangible and its accuracy difficult to measure. The purpose of measuring is also vague in definition as Albert Einstein stated that “not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts”. In the history of Islamic perspective, there has been no measurement in anything as Islam believes that the most important thing is to measure ourselves. *Muhasabah* is always a key to measure our *fitrah*. For instance, in measuring performance, the intangible parts are actually important because how you do it is more important than how you attained it. Therefore, it is the things that needs changes and some form of intervention that matters because at the end of the day, we are all accountable for what we do.
2. On an individual basis, to start leading in an Islamic way, one should do a checklist of what he has done right and wrong. It is important to understand what we do wrong, to do better tomorrow. It is an ongoing assessment of ourselves until we arrive at

inner peace within ourselves. This relates to the value of humility in leadership in which you should fix yourself first, before leading others.

3. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has defined education as the pillars of learning to do, learning to know, learning together and learning to be. At this stage, Malaysians are considered hopeless at learning together and learning to be. It is important to know who you are and at what point we have educated ourselves. Learning to know and learning to do is our current practice for the sake of employment and for production of human capital without any balance. Thus, the education system in Malaysia must start to look into these 4 pillars to improve the system and shift our mindset to have courage to change for the better and achieve balance in life.
4. Learning to be together is a challenge in Islam, it is always being misinterpreted with faith, and religious matter. Learning about leadership in Islam is consequently learning about Islam. In the context of sustainable development goals, there is very minimal articulation from the Islamic countries. It is also a challenge to articulate the Islamic leadership context because there is no good example of a Muslim country that has applied the Islamic leadership.
5. A leader should be a little bolder than others to take a stand and state the principles between loyalty and courage to change the road. There is no expansion of mind, not because we lack it but we are too lazy and fearful. We need to speak up and be assured of our faith in Allah. We need to believe that God will determine where you are and what you will be.

About the Speaker

YBhg. Prof. Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak is currently the Chair of The Board of Governance at the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) and a former principal fellow at the Faculty of Leadership and Management in the same university. He was the inaugural holder of Islamic Leadership Chair at USIM (2014-2016). Currently he is the 14th President of the International Association of Universities, a UNESCO-based organisation in Paris. He is a member of Global Leadership Initiative, School of Frontier Sciences, University of Tokyo, and member of the Hamburg Transuniversity Leadership Council, a think-tank. He is an Honorary Professor at the University of Nottingham. He also sits on Board of Trustees of RSOG, and Higher Education Leadership Academy Advisory Board. He served as the 5th Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) from 2000-2011. He is a weekly columnist since 1995.

Contact

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