

# RSOG – JPA Young Leaders Colloquium 2016

**When** : 17 November 2016  
**Where** : The Everly Putrajaya  
**Theme** : Digital, Diversity, and Emotional Engagement

A playwright once wrote, *“Where is the Life we have lost in living?... Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?... Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”* 82 years on, this quest for meaning still holds true despite considerable advancements mankind has undergone through inventions and innovations. Earlier this year, the Founder and Executive Chairman of World Economic Forum suggests that the world is undergoing the fourth industrial revolution, a step further from the steam and water power (mechanisation), electricity and assembly lines (mass production), and computerisation (automation). Despite this progression, challenges persist where the complexity lies in its fluidity, rapidness, diversity, and disconnectedness, mystifying public leaders and policymakers’ search for a response, if not a wholesome answer. Considering these challenges are fast becoming a global phenomenon, Razak School of Government (RSOG) and Public Service Department (JPA) Malaysia undertook the responsibility of hosting a day-long Young Leaders Colloquium 2016. A total of 13 speakers from various lines of expertise and sectors shared their thoughts around the apt theme of Digital, Diversity, and Emotional Engagement through two sets of inspiring talks and three panel discussion sessions.

## **PETRONAS – A Quest for Sustainability by YBhg. Datuk Wan Zulkiflee Wan Ariffin, President and Group Chief Executive Officer of PETRONAS**

From a national oil company to a global energy champion, PETRONAS remains one of the household brands that embraced transformation. Incorporated in 1974, it transitioned from a domestic regulator to become one of the biggest domestic players in the nation before achieving international presence in the oil and gas industry. The steps undertaken to embrace the changes were not only based on the need to ensure survivability of business and sustainability of momentum, but also ensuring that the organisation has the right talents to undertake challenges in difficult periods. Technological advancements are embraced within PETRONAS in the pursuit of maximum efficiency. Among the initiatives implemented by PETRONAS include paperless and virtual meetings to connect employees, as well as utilising big data in integrated operating centres to ensure real time data from all facilities around the world are accessible.

Recognising that its responsibility is not solely on developing oil and gas resources for the country, its drive to create a sustainable pool of skilled and competent workforce includes providing an enriched experience for its talents. This is done by ensuring that each employee is given the opportunity for professional development, rewarded based on merit and performance, and instilled with trust and a deep sense of belonging to the organisation that promotes diversity and equal opportunity. Although it has been in existence for 42 years, the

company maintains a youthful workforce with a reported 55% below the age of 35 and an average age of 37 years. In addition, one in every three employees are women and one out of five employees are non-Malaysian. This reflects its diversity and the importance of talent sourcing, instituting cultural beliefs through development programmes, and monitoring performance through talent reviews that would ensure PETRONAS consistently groom visionaries and strategists that leads PETRONAS to greater heights, whatever the challenges may be.

### **The Digital World – What is Changing?**

The upside of technological advancements is that it offers democracy for those with access. It allows freedom of choice, such as whether one chooses to drive or decides to be chauffeured. It also encourages new dimension of digital services that can make communities work better, such as easing traffic congestion through traffic data. Thus, technology and digitisation do not only liberate the individuals' freedom and opportunity, but it benefits the larger society in the utilisation of real-time data. Recognising that these dramatic advances have enabled dynamic companies such as Uber and Alibaba to be successful and its potential to uplift the betterment of community living standards, the government is transitioning into embracing these new trends.

Nevertheless, there are numerous challenges that exists within the Government context, such as resistance to transparency, lack of openness in data-sharing, and segmenting digital connectivity to a specific generation (i.e. tech-savviness is confined to millennials while baby-boomers are confined to orthodox methods). The overreliance on technology may also lead to ignoring the importance of the human aspect in the analysis of collated data. Whilst the rise of Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and autonomous systems is a natural progression, neglecting the development of human capital would be disastrous in its management and the subsequent progress of technology. Similarly, when one pigeon-holes an entire generation with stereotypes instead of embracing the diversity of ideas, it limits the opportunity of ensuring that talents in the digital world thrives.

### **Two Heads Are Better Than One – But How Many is Diversity?**

Malaysia is no stranger to diversity; it has been a meeting point, an entrepôt, and has attracted many different people throughout its history. Nevertheless, the discourse on diversity continues and it is not confined to ethnicity alone; elements of gender, age, physical abilities, and even acquired diversity such as cultural fluency and generational savviness through education and experience are incorporated. Oftentimes, the discussion centres in highlighting its merits as it remains in the equation of productivity and innovativeness, and at times on how to manage it successfully – issues of merit, competence, and tokenism.

A study conducted in 2013 by the Center for Talent Innovation found that diverse organisations stands to be 45% more likely to improve market share as they can best understand market segments and different needs of end-users. While this highlights the need for diversity in innovation and improving performance, it also emphasises on how policymakers need to consider the nuances of different cultural sensitivities, peculiarities, and norms in the public policies introduced. Equally as crucial in inclusion strategy is unlocking the capacity as well as managing the diverse and multicultural teams to fulfil its utmost potential. Leaders can manage this by ensuring one is equipped with adequate cultural competence, managing own prejudices, and employing effective communication.

## **Bringing Everyone on Board – Stories from Incitement by Zikry Kholil**

In any action, it begins with purpose; what leads to one wanting it, and why one does it. In Malay, purpose and intent is termed as *niat*, with roots of Arabic – the will of the heart. Despite the many technological resources available in this day and age, the world still faces many shortages: approximately one in nine people lack access to safe water, one in four people live without electricity and 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic personal sanitation. Against this backdrop, Incitement Global prides itself as an organisation that focuses on action-based approach in cultivating innovation, encouraging participants to create and lead their own movements. The company boasts a young talent force and empowers each employee to self-motivate themselves. Within five years, Incitement has managed to grow its international presence to over 45 countries with thousands of proactive volunteers.

But how does one inspire people to act? The speaker suggests that it requires the shift from thinking about it alone towards talking about it with other people to get different perspectives, and to finally act with individuals who relate to your idea(s). This is evident with Incitement's partnership with the Litter of Light project, a social impact project initiated in the Philippines which builds lights from recycled bottles for people with no access to electricity. The success of these collaborations act as a bridge to connect social causes to the enthusiasm of the youth and impacts the community in a positive manner.

## **The First Duty of Love is to Listen**

Engagement may be divided into two – one that is rational (dealing logically), and one that is emotional (dealing with matters of the heart). Regardless, it requires meaningful interaction between two or more communicators who are involved in both imparting and receiving messages or information. As policymakers, listening is crucial as it signals to stakeholders and citizens that the government engages, understands, and attempts to act on the information received. Listening requires unveiling ones' "ego-shield", which often prevents listeners from understanding the motive and the context in which the message is delivered. More importantly, effective listening requires trust, emotion, and empathy.

Research has also shown that humans are inherently wired to have mental shortcuts (heuristics). These shortcuts are not merely designed to encourage human errors, but serves a specific purpose in managing volumes of information. While it safeguards our ability to conduct our daily lives with minimal fuss – such as movement, coordination and simplification of decision-making processes, it can limit us into our own context and biases. For instance, decisions can sometimes be made based on how one wants to be perceived and on what others do or expect (socially acceptable norms). Understanding that humans essentially have two systems of decision-making (fast, automatic, emotional, subconscious, stereotypic vs slow, effortful, conscious, logical) can help in policymaking. Thus, non-verbal cues and the context in which communication takes place must be observed and understood as it can sometimes provide more insights, if not supplement, to the process of meaningful and effective engagement.

In 2013, Melinda Gates shared, *"Technology is just a tool. It's a powerful tool, but it's just a tool. Deep human connection is very different. It's not a tool. It's not a means to an end. It is the end—the purpose and the result of a meaningful life—and it will inspire the most amazing acts of love, generosity, and humanity."* While it may not directly answer what was posed by T. S

Elliot 82 years ago, perhaps the quest for meaning remains to ensure that humanity keeps progressing and advancing despite the challenges that lay ahead.

### **Issues Raised**

- Generational labels are often used as signifiers of each generation's values, attitudes, behaviours, and expectations. However, these notions can lead to stereotyping and prevents one from looking at any incidence objectively.
- Change is equated with risk that often involves possibility of loss. It is likely that one is not resistant to change, but are instead uncomfortable at the prospect of loss.
- While technology enables availability of information at the tip of anyone's finger, it can somehow cocoon one in their respective biases. Human capacity to gather, manage, and process information is constrained by their own predispositions. Thus, awareness that these biases exist help mitigate biases.

### **About the Speaker**

The Young Leaders Colloquium 2016 is a collaboration between Razak School of Government and the Public Service Department of Malaysia, intended as a platform to share experiences, exchange views, and enhance networking among emerging leaders in the public sector. With the theme Digital, Diversity, and Emotional Engagement, a combination of inspiring talks and panel discussions were utilised as a means of imparting knowledge, extracting wisdom, and boost collaborative relationships.

### **Contact**

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at [programmes@rsog.com.my](mailto:programmes@rsog.com.my)