

## **Responsible actor or irresponsible agent?**

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My regular followers and readers know that I use this column to develop and express my views about a pet 'Theory R,' which I am developing about leadership living in the public arena.

I call such a general topic and concern 'Public Leadership' and there is much literature on this topic on the net. It has been an emerging topic since the beginning of the 21st century, especially related to the field of Public Administration.

In Theory R, I posit that the starting point of Theory Right is Revelation, as my first R. It is all about the idea that all truth matters to all human beings. It also begins with the premise that all truth belongs to God.

Unless and until we can agree axiomatically that truth matters to all human beings, there is no real truth of any matter, other than my truth and your truth; or pluralistic truth. That is almost an oxymoron. Objective truth needs to be posited and we need to agree how to determine and define such a truth.

The second R is Responsibility or our ability to respond to the truth that matters. The concept of responsibility and therefore accountability is not problematic to most if not all. Then what remains as the only unanswered question is: Such a responsibility to whom or what? This is where our understanding, appreciation, and definition of truths begin to matter.

In the world of modern science all truth can be verified by scientific methods. But, this is only related to "matters of scientifically verifiable matter" (pun intended). One must fully appreciate that in modern science only matter does matter. What is non-matter is immaterial and therefore does not matter. But, the word immaterial is a judgment and not a verifiable scientific fact.

Therefore, through my doctoral thesis, when I needed to argue the dignity of human beings, as an axiomatic definition for relationships in the workplace, some members of the faculty at the School of Business and Public Administration at the George Washington University had problems with my starting point.

They argued that there are no absolutes in modern science.

Thankfully, with the encouragement of my chairperson, Peter B Vaill, I was able to invite SH Nasr to sit on my doctoral committee, as his mere presence redefined the conversation that we had. He had presented the Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh in 1981 on 'Knowledge and the Sacred'.

Now, given that there is less disagreement for the 'truth of human dignity in workplaces', and world places of lived life, it is my interest to now extend my learning and theory building towards the Public Leadership models as the world is beginning to see the degradation of all values and ethics; as the greed and ego of humankind defines all else.

The third R of theory R is Role Representation. All of us who assume some type of public roles which is lived in public life of leadership; often transparently and openly affecting all others in the field of local governance and legal jurisdictions. A citizen of a political nation-state assumes such a role, always. This public role of leadership which we all can assume, I call role representation.

All publicly appointed hierarchical leaders in such roles also only have two choices really: to assume the role of an Agent, i.e. representing some formal or legally defined roles or, as a mere Actor in the public spaces of life, even if only as a citizen; which may only mean representing one's own truth consciousness and personal views and values on a subject.

One can make such a view public via a statement, and therefore becomes a Responsible Actor's views on that specific subject. When we do this we are called civil society actors.

The premise of stewardship

Please allow me to relate all this theory-building towards the Bersih 3.0 sit-in to happen on Saturday.

The mayor of Kuala Lumpur seems to be in mixed minds related to whether to give Bersih 3.0 permission to hold a sit-in at Dataran Merdeka, or Merdeka Square. Now, some simple questions of principles can be deployed for our review?

Does any Independence Square anywhere in the world "belong to the respective City Halls?" Did Tahrir Square belong to the Egyptian regime of the deposed president? Does the Independence Square in Washington DC belong to the District of Columbia government or the mayor of DC? We have to get away from the false premise of 'ownership' to the premise of 'stewardship' to understand the real issues.

Now, some further questions to help my good friend and ex-Intan colleague KL Mayor Ahmad Fuad Ismail (right) as he seeks to do "the right thing in the right way for the right reasons and with the right attitude". That 'right language' is another simpler translation of the Theory R; it is all about doing the right things always, in the right way, and for the right reason.

Your choice, my dear mayor is: either to be a Responsible Actor or an Irresponsible Agent. And, yes, for those who are theory minded individuals who want to test and verify my logic system; it is an either or choice, with really no middle ground of a compromise, unless the entire logic of discourse is raised to an even higher unit of analysis. I will stand corrected, if anyone points out my error in the argument.

A responsible actor will consider all the public interest issues related to good stewardship and good governance for all stakeholders and do what is right without fear or favour. An Irresponsible Agent will take views and opinions from "outsiders" with no legal authority or responsibility for the law of 'specific governance of the particular jurisdiction,' and blindly follow such orders.

This is usually labelled 'in the national interest'. But one has to pause and wonder whether the public interest is not a higher consideration than even the national interest; as only defined by the government of the day.

We do not really need the Arab Spring to teach us such clarity of goals and roles. We have had these in our past history; but, unfortunately, we are today corrupted by the twin driving forces of the rest of the world; the abuse of power and money with self-interest which greed drives all else today.

Bersih 3.0 is a legitimate concern of citizens like me, and many informed others. Therefore, I really believe that the Merdeka Square is the right place, given the context of the changes not made, and worse still the bad changes made.

Bersih 3.0 is not a partisan movement, but rather a movement motivated by ordinary and moderate Malaysians from the middle ground to express why we cannot call ourselves a democracy if do not have clean and clear voter lists, clearing all doubts and uncertainties.

Follow-up to Tunku's cry for Merdeka

Therefore, I view the Bersih 3.0 as the most natural follow-up to Tunku Abdul Rahman's cry for true independence which we call Merdeka, Merdeka and Merdeka. In most scriptures and traditional writing, a three part cry is a sincere and truthful plea.

tunku abdul rahman 290809The Tunku (right) stood for many values that are today discarded, and therefore, we the people now have to take to the streets to state them again to a group of people has lost

our Bapa Merdeka's vision.

As this year is also the centenary of the late Tunku's birth; perhaps it is time for us to make Merdeka become a reality in true blue democratic terms. There is no other place in Malaysia we can do this better than in KL and on Dataran Merdeka. If we are not heard, then

I propose that we consider another Bersih 4.0 but make that it happens on Sept 16, 2012; either in Kuching or Kuala Kinabalu for the 50th year of Malaysia's birth.

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