

Leadership for the times
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True leadership is the art of setting new directions and then creating the environment for that vision to become possible; not just plausible. Nurturing the right climate for ideas and ideals to flourish is just as important as the new directions set. MCPX

Follower-ship consequently is the discipline of acknowledging visionary leadership and the requisite obedience to new and shared directions.

Together they make up what is called a purpose-inspired life of leadership and follower-ship. Peter Vaill, my doctoral chairperson, calls this 'Managing as a Performing Art' (also the title of a book).

umno 2007 agm primary 051107Unfortunately, within Umno, the current models of leadership and managing are what I have in the past referred to as 'cat or dog loyalty models of blind obedience'.

Frankly, both models are only partially relevant under current conditions of rapid, turbulent change; when small ripples become tidal waves of change being washed in, and without any human ability to control them.

Allow me to give 'my three sen' worth of advice to Umno leadership on differing styles of organisational leadership models that appear to be practised.

As early as in 1998, the local government and housing minister predicted that by 2005, more than 70 percent of the electorate would be living in urban areas, and that the future governance of the country would be decided on modern and urban issues. That was enough reason for a predictable and fundamental change in scenario and landscape.

The information age contributed to a fundamental and radical change in people's expectations and perceptions. Urban voters were concurrently informed, misinformed and dis-informed. But, it appears like no one from the government either heard or really understood the minister's message.

Today, all of that is water under the bridge in urbanised Penang, Selangor and Perak. These are so-called developed states in urbanisation terms. The arrogance and abuse of power in most state administrations and local governments ensured the outcome: five states have opposition-led governments and Kuala Lumpur is also in opposition hands.

Models of leadership

With this as the context, allow me to reflect on the two most prevalent models of leadership visible within all organisations, whether in the corporate or political world or civil society.

The one demands what I call 'the cat loyalty syndrome'. A syndrome is almost like a theological conviction about a truth that the beholder believes in and expects from the rest of the world. The cat loyalty model demands the symbolic and implicit obedience and loyalty of a cat to the house. This model of leadership demands that the person is loyal to the

home or the institution that one belongs to, and claims full cat-like commitment to it.

Most cats are in fact comfortable in the house even after the owners move out. They simply can carry on with life even with the new owners. To the cat, that house is its home and there is little or no loyalty to the master or owner of the house. Owners can come and go.

nazri abdul aziz looking to the right muhammad mohd taib mat taib This appears to be the prevalent model of leadership in Umno headquarters, demanding absolute obedience to the party and its current leader. Ministers Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz (left) and Muhammad Muhd Taib (right) appear to have been rewarded for blind loyalty to the party and its leader. Questions over their morality and ethics are a secondary matter.

The 'dog model of loyalty' puts a premium on loyalty explicitly to the master, but not so much to the house or organisation. But the more important question is: who is the real master? If one served long with Dr Mahathir Mohamad, then one must always be almost loyal to him, in spite of differing circumstances or different worldviews one holds.

It is a lifetime personal loyalty to the person and relationship, and not so much to the authority or the position of the person. The result is almost blind loyalty to all instructions of the master and almost zero public disagreement with that person. Any disagreement must be handled in the privacy of the relationship.

radzi sheikh ahmad Maybe Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as a strong Umno-type, also expects this kind of blind loyalty from cabinet ministers. Two victims of 'non-loyalty' appear to be Rafidah Aziz and Radzi Sheikh Ahmad (photo) who, I hear, made their views known at the post-election Umno supreme council meeting. They may feel they were showing true cat-like loyalty to Umno, but the party president and his advisors may feel that 'dog loyalty' is paramount during this period of turbulence.

Under conditions of turbulence, old-style captains cannot expect blind obedience. Truth is what will help all to move forward. Under whitewater conditions of extreme turbulence, what we need is a newer model of leadership, not that of a calm captain of an ocean-going vessel.

Vaill would argue that all leadership today is currently operating under whitewater conditions. Because of the Internet and the convergence of new technologies, leadership models must change to reflect new realities. He might ask, for instance: What is the real meaning of leadership under whitewater rafting conditions?

Isn't Abdullah under the most severe crisis of leadership that the country and Umno has ever faced? Has Umno ever faced a crisis of confidence from Barisan Nasional partners, including those in Sabah and Sarawak?

Message for Abdullah

Robert Greenleaf's 'servant leadership model', which emulates the 'work with me and not for me' motto is actually the right one. Abdullah started out on the right note but forgot the change agenda he promised. There were many good speeches and slogans but things were done wrongly on the ground.

rafidah aziz You need the Rafidahs and Radzis of the world; their experience can tell you the truth about what is happening on the ground. You need to work with them and not ask

them to work for you. They will not and cannot do this as they are personalities in their own right. And they have as much if not more experience to provide leadership under whitewater conditions.

The 'servant leadership model' requires one to become chairperson of the board but not try to lead like an Old Captain. The person does not table papers but listens to ideas and steers the discussion towards a consensus decision. Peter Drucker calls this 'wise leadership'.

My three sen worth of suggestions for Abdullah:

- Don't allow papers to be tabled in the guise of Nota Kabinet. Please go back to the drawing board and ask the chief secretary to fully implement the traditional Cabinet Paper model of old; with zero exceptions.
- Although you are also the finance minister, don't allow papers to be filed in the name of the PM. Let the Finance Minister II table papers and justify these on the basis of logic and rationality.
- Let ministers Zaid Ibrahim and Amirsham Abdul Aziz ask any question they choose and encourage open dialogue.
- Do not protect anyone, let each carry their own weight or sack them if need be. Ask all your ministers to sincerely work with you and not for you.
- Sack all your fourth floor 'advisors'.

You are starting out right with good intentions, by making everyone declare their assets publicly. But why is this the ACA's responsibility, when it should be assigned to the head of inland revenue as someone has written? Let the ACA look into only exceptions, if there appear to be violations.

abdullah ahmad badawi looking ahead into the futureThe people will again judge you in the next five years by what you do and not just what you say.

Integrity, the word you popularised, means both - doing what you say and then preaching only what you have already practised.

Let me end with a quote from John F Kennedy, who in his first speech as US president said: "Ask not what the country can do for you but ask what you can do for the country."

Umno should review both the cat and dog loyalty models, and try to distinguish how every public servant and elected official can serve first the public and national interest (defined as the interest of all the people of Malaysia, not just any one group regardless of how we carve the cake).