

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
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1. I am very honoured to be invited to deliver a keynote address at this Colloquium on the subject of "Malaysian Management Identity".

2. Malaysia with its diverse cultures and workforce is a challenge to any manager to prove his worth. Many of us have been exposed and schooled in theories of management based on Western practices and Western values. But we know that these Western theories and values cannot be applied in totality to our local environment, while ignoring the local culture and values. It would be fatal to transplant foreign practices in toto onto the local setting; it is inviting hostility and failure - simply because some of these practices and values are diametrically opposed to our own. The success of the Japanese is precisely because they have the wisdom to pick and choose the better practices of the West and blend them with their own culture and values, but without losing their own sense of identity. In fact, there is now a turnaround situation where the West is picking up and introducing some of the Japanese and Asian practices into their management styles, the most outstanding of which is the need for teamwork.

3. While the West emphasizes on the hardware of management, that is, the systems and structures are aligned to the organisation to be competitive, to be goal-oriented and result-driven, we tend to place more emphasis on the softer side of management, that is, the human side where building relationships, compromise, and seeking consensus, are important and given due consideration in the quest to meet organisational goals. Our culture of being non- confrontational, and 'giving face' calls upon Malaysian managers to treat their staff with more compassion, concern and greater tolerance. Building relationship and seeking consensus through 'musyawarah' creates an environment of harmony and cooperation in the organisation and helps to instill loyalty and trust in the employees. The Western style of forcefulness, 'speaking his mind' and 'shooting from the hip' and direct confrontation, is actually alien to us, which we would consider as coarse.

4. Our culture and upbringing requires us to be respectful to our elders and seniors, to have a high sense of tolerance and patience, and mutual respect for each other, all of which help to create harmonious working relationships in the work environment. I understand that the practice of paternalism, particularly in Chinese-based organisations generated through the practice of the system of apprenticeship, also inculcates loyalty and respect to the senior members of the organisation. Traditionally, in small business organisations, the employer takes on a benevolent paternal role of providing not only the wages to the employees but also food and sometimes lodging too. He is also like a father, teacher and counsellor to them.

5. Another important skill that our managers should be good at in managing multi-cultural, multi- ethnic organisations, is the ability to communicate with sensitivity and mindfulness. Living in a multi- social society has made us realize that there is a need to be sensitive to the culture, norms and values and belief systems that each of us uphold. All these elements have an impact on the way we communicate, particularly when we work in an organisation that is multi-racial. Managers need to know the art of cross-cultural or inter-cultural communication in order to ensure that conflicts and tensions are not created in the organisation. The successful Malaysian manager must also possess the ability to sense the cultural and social peculiarities of his staff as different, but no less inferior, from his own cultural background and social upbringing, and be mindful of those things that are sensitive and close to their hearts, so as not to hurt their feelings. Effective communication cannot be achieved without the ability of effective listening. Effective listening requires the manager to have patience, respect, concern and regard for the welfare and performance of subordinates. As Confucius said: 'Treat People With Dignity and Kindness and They Will Do Their Best; Raise the Good and Instruct Those Who Are Backward and They Will Be Imbued With Enthusiasm.'

6. We should not go to the other extreme of management by conflict avoidance where all unpleasanties are swept under the carpet. A good manager does not seek popularity - he has the responsibility to do the

unpopular on those who have it coming. Productivity and quality can only be achieved when the manager takes the necessary steps to discipline perpetual poor performers. Respect for managers can only be garnered when he wisely metes out punishment to those who have flouted the regulations, and give reward and recognition to those who have done well in a fair and transparent manner.

7. It is our nature to share, to lend a helping hand to those in need, and to help our fellow workers so that a piece of work can be accomplished successfully. The spirit of cooperation and teamwork is inborn in us. However with the progress of education and Western influence that preaches on individualism, and with the rapid process of urbanisation, we need to see that these values are not eroded away. As managers, what can we do to preserve our tradition of teamwork but yet encourage positive individualism? The Japanese have proven that "cooperation and teamwork" underlies their success, so much so that the Americans are now taking a step back to de-emphasize individual fulfilment and ambition, and to highlight the benefits of team spirit and teamwork for organisational effectiveness. A sharing of organisation vision, common goals, allowing employees to participate in coming up with the strategies on how to achieve the organisation vision and goals, informing them on how the organisation is doing and performing, would create a feeling of belonging and ownership among the employees. With the quality movement, and the clients' charter, spreading in Malaysia, we are on the way to creating a Malaysian identity in these things.

8. Management must support national development.

As the nation goes into overdrive, the thinkers and practitioners of management must contend with the issue of developing the Malaysian management identity to complement the national agendas ahead of us. The agenda of this colloquium should be an attempt to identify management concepts, principles and practices that can be moulded and blended into the Malaysian socio-cultural setting. The result should be a hybrid of the best practices of management, guided by our culture, heritage and tradition. Hopefully, this will evolve into a distinctly Malaysian management identity.

9. Management in Malaysia must have as its cornerstone an obsession for excellence. With excellence as its foundation, management development will, as a natural course, evolve and acquire positive characteristics, practices and traits. Towards developing this Malaysian management identity, I would like to present some ideas on various management practices which I feel should be pursued.

10. Firstly, the primacy of the customer must be the focus of any management identity that aspires for excellence. The Japanese attach the ultimate label to the customer, kami-sama or god. The customer is described as "A god, no less. An unforgiving one, too". The Prime Minister said recently that civil servants are "not a caste apart or Mandarins whom the people must kow tow to in order to procure the service they are supposed to give. The public, that is the nation, must be served and the public service is there to do just that - to serve the public".

11. The Civil Service has recognised the importance of providing service that is customer driven.

Numerous measures have been implemented in this direction. Service counters are being continuously upgraded for the convenience and comfort of the public, counter staff are given training and provided with guidelines. Client's Charter, promising the standards and time frame of services, have been formulated in nearly all agencies.

Innovative customer services introduced include One Stop Centres for payment, advisory services and information have been established by numerous agencies. The innovative use of technology has enabled the Government to offer on-line services to the public using computer networking facilities. Good examples of these services are the Public Service Network, the Electronic Data Interchange and the Civil Service Link. As you are probably aware, the civil service has introduced many reform measures in the fields of quality management and productivity, in financial management such as the introduction of the Micro-Accounting System and the Standard Accounting Systems for Government agencies (SAGA). We are now poised for further improvements in public service management with the decision of the Government that civil service should strive towards the model of ISO 9000 standards. So, we are now engaged in information mapping, developing the procedures, finding out the requisite standards of

services that departments should strive for, and all the certification processes that will move the civil service forward towards a distinct management identity. We are preparing the guidelines for the equivalent ISO 9000 standards relevant to the civil service of Malaysia.

12. To develop a customer driven identity, Malaysian managers must consciously: (i) be sensitive and understand the needs of your customers; (ii) develop your customer base to know who are your customers and potential customers; (iii) constantly evaluate your work processes, regulations, systems and procedures to improve the delivery of value to your customers; and (iv) most importantly, empower your frontliners to further delight your customers.

13. Secondly, we have to remind ourselves that the simplest definition of management is "getting things done with and through people". Therefore, a good manager always take into consideration such factors as attitudes and assumptions; individual beliefs and values; aspirations and challenges; and interpersonal relationships and social structure which an employee brings with him to the workplace. This has an inherent influence on motivation, work ethics and performance. A Malaysian manager must, as a prerequisite, be able to recognise and understand the characteristics of our diverse workforce. He must be sensitive to different cultural nuances, beliefs and traditions. He should be able to identify their particular strengths and weaknesses. Only then is he able to bring out the best from his subordinates and harness them into a shared corporate culture, that will not only promote performance and productivity but maintain harmony and goodwill within the organisation.

14. Thirdly, there has been much concern lately about the many undesirable results due to the lack of accountability and unethical practices in our society. Environmental and ecological destruction, labour abuses, unwarranted price hikes, copyrights infringement and shoddy workmanship frequently make headlines. To quote Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Pearle in their book, *The Power of Ethical Management* "...everywhere we turn today there are signs of ethical deterioration". But the authors believe that a strong code of ethics and morality in any business is the first step toward its success and that "ethical managers are winning managers".

Managing ethically is not only limited to doing things within the confines of laws, rules and procedures. In management, ethics would involve principles like trust, discipline, accountability, diligence, dedication and other similar noble values. In the corporate world, ethical management will dictate that corporate leaders continuously focus on "conduct becoming of a corporation" and strike a balance between corporate and societal welfare. Making money and profit should not be the sole purpose of businesses. Management's total commitment to the maximisation of profit is an obstacle to achieving higher standards of ethical practices. An adequate corporate strategy must include non-economic goals. Business is part of the social system and we cannot isolate the economic elements of major decisions from their social consequences. Therefore, good ethics must be deliberately propagated. It must be studied and taught in management schools. In organisations, behaviour must be guided by clearly stated code of conduct and ethics. The development of code of conduct within organisations, within sectors and industries and within professions will snowball towards a management identity where ethical practices becomes the norm and unethical practices are shunned upon.

15. Fourthly, one identity of management from the macro perspective which should be pursued and developed with greater zealousness is enhancing the synergy of collaboration and cooperation between the public and the private sector and between management and workers. The ability of managers to form these strategic alliances will go a long way in sustaining the comparative advantage of Malaysia over many other countries. Public and private collaboration is best exemplified by the concept of Malaysia Incorporated. On our part, the Civil Service has continued to deregulate and relax rules and procedures to meet changing needs. Miles of red tapes have been cut and this consequently bring out the creative spirit of the business community. The close collaboration between public officials and the private executives however must be nurtured within the confines of accepted ethical and moral behaviour to avoid any abuse of power.

16. As a concluding remark, may we be reminded that the search for a Malaysian management identity is a never ending one. Organisations and the environment in which it operates in is never static, so too are

the practices that are needed to manage it. This colloquium marks a very important chapter in the evolution of management in the country. The search for a Malaysian management identity will form the platform for which Malaysian managers can strive further in their pursuit of excellence.