

## **The Father Leadership Way With Special Reference to Negara Brunei Darussalam**

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### **Abstract**

*Several countries in Asia such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, their leaders and governments practise a benevolent type of leadership, the father leadership style. Paternal or maternal authority captures the expectations of concern and nurtures the belief that people or staff should be treated like the leader's family members, and that the "all-in-the-family" feeling and the leader-followers' bonding/ relationship matters.*

*Desirable qualities in a leader are to be expert and knowledgeable – knowing what to do in a wide range of situations for the people's good. The leader cares and shows concern for the well-being and welfare of his people. In this paper, it is this author's conviction that leading, the father leadership way, can create a competitive advantage for growing transitional economies. Here in Negara Brunei Darussalam, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah's leadership based on the national philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (Malay, Muslim and Monarchy) can, in some ways, be seen as father leadership in action. Father leadership examples are then shown and illustrated in Brunei context.*

**Keyword:** Father Leader, Parental Leadership, Brunei Darussalam, High-relationship, MIB.

### **Introduction & Background**

In Asia, several countries such as India (Brislin, 1993:275; Kumar and Saxena, 1983; Sinha, 1980), Indonesia (Low, 2005), Kazakhstan (Low and Tabyldy, 2007; Low, 2006; Low and Tabyldy, 2005), Japan (Hanada and Yoshikawa, 1991), Malaysia (Low, 2008) and Singapore (Low, 2005), their leaders and governments practise a benevolent type of leadership, the father leadership style. It seems that critics and/ or European and North American readers would probably find the actual term and the explanation of organisational practice of father leadership to be gender-biased. That is, that the wholesale use of the male gender term appears to preclude women who may have these characteristics (and perhaps raises the question 'is there a term such as 'mother leadership' which can be characterised in the same way?). To respond to this, the author has these to say: the term 'father leadership' is used to refer to both male and female leadership and more so, it reflects paternal or maternal leadership. Paternal or maternal authority captures the expectations of concern and nurtures the belief that people or staff should be treated like the leader's family members (Low and Mohd Zain, 2008). Besides,

that “all-in-the-family” feeling is nurtured (Low and Tabyldy, 2007; Low, 2007a; Low, 2006; Low, 2005).

Desirable qualities in a leader are to be expert and knowledgeable – knowing what to do in a wide range of situations for the people’s good. The leader cares and shows concern for the well-being and welfare of his people. In the Asian context, as the leader grows older, all the more (s)he is wiser with his or her expanded experiences (Low, 2002; Asma Abdullah, 1996).

### **The Objectives Of the Paper**

In this paper, the author puts forth two arguments: One, the key style of leadership in Brunei Darussalam is father leadership. Two, leading, the father leadership way, can create a competitive advantage for growing transitional economies such as Brunei Darussalam. In Brunei Darussalam, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah’s (the 29<sup>th</sup> ruler of the sole surviving ancient Malay kingdom in South-east Asia) leadership based on the national philosophy of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay, Muslim and Monarchy) can, in some ways, be analysed as father leadership in action. Father leadership examples are then shown and illustrated in the Bruneian context.

### **National Ideology - MIB: *Melayu Islam Beraja***

National ideology, created to foster national identity, can also serve as a basic source of a particular country’s national culture or values. Examples include the *Pancasila* (five principles) in Indonesia (Sedyawati, 1996: 55; Clammer, 1998: 238) and the *Rukun Negara* (Articles of Faith of the State) in Malaysia (Syed Hassan, 1996: 98; Andaya & Andaya; 2001: 299–300; Clammer, 1998: 238).

In Brunei Darussalam, MIB [*Melayu Islam Beraja* or 3M: Malay Muslim (Islamic) Monarchy] is actively promoted as a national ideology (Hussainmiya, 2006; Omar, 1996: 13–14). With its MIB philosophy and with a small population of less than 400,000 people, Brunei with the Sultan as the Head of State and Government is able to bring about a sort of an all-in-the-family situation; the majority of the Bruneians are loyal to the people-caring Sultan (Low and Mohd Zain, 2008). Much national unity exists, with the majority of Bruneians seeing the Sultan as fatherly, the provider, caring and showing concern for their welfare and wellbeing. Bruneians also enjoyed many benefits and these, among other things, include no income tax, free education and health services.

Besides, one can argue that Islam subscribes to father or parental leadership. Take for example, in Islam, the followers are asked: “what actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry... to remove the wrongs of the injured” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 89). They are then told: “God’s pleasure is a father’s pleasure; and God’s displeasure is a father’s displeasure” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 103). The leader can be seen as a father – after all, “the best of your leaders are those whom you love and they love you; you pray for them and they pray for you” (Low, 2007: 38; Philips, 2002).

“The creation is as God’s family” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 75). “All God’s creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who doeth most good to God’s creatures” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992, cited in Low, 2007). The leader, like the father, “needs to show care and concern to his followers, helping his fellow-creatures in the hour of need” (Low, 2007: 38; Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992).

“Whoever is kind to His Creatures, God is kind to him; therefore be kind to man on earth” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992, cited in Low, 2007). Kindness is therefore stressed, and “kindness is a mark of faith: and whoever hath not kindness hath not faith” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992, cited in Low, 2007). Such care, kindness and doing good to one’s fellow human beings can thus be overall seen as father leadership.

The father leader is normally gentle – after all, it is said that, “whoever hath been given gentleness hath been given a good portion, in this world and the next”. “God is gentle and loveth gentleness” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992, cited in Low, 2007). During the 2002 Brunei Independence Day celebrations (Borneo Bulletin, 2002), His Majesty in his *titah* (official speech and directive) stressed the importance of God-fearing citizens and pointed out that a citizen with strong faith in Allah the Almighty would not steal nor kill others.

As a devout Muslim and a leader of religion in the country, His Majesty has always emphasised that success in this life and hereafter could only be realised if one upholds the Holy Quran as a guiding light. His Majesty pursues a rigorous policy of propagating Islam in the nation; he has introduced Islamic principles and ideas in his government. In order to achieve this, His Majesty has built many religious schools, and centres of Islamic religious teachings/ studies and mosques nation-wide to ensure that citizens and residents are able to continue to learn, enriching their Islamic knowledge and performing piety towards Allah with more humility.

### **People & Culture**

When speaking to various people, it generally appears that the psychological insights and inclinations towards father leadership lie in a person’s perspective; or “boils down to how individual sees the individual’s father. Individuals have different views of his (her) father. Some fathers are good, caring and listen to their children, some are not.” Be it as it may be, “in reality, there is no such thing as a perfect father”, but it can also be argued that national ideology, religion and culture may mould or induce people to accepting the practice of father leadership.

“Father leadership is indeed practised in Brunei, and it’s also reinforced by the people and culture in Brunei Darussalam” [as expressed by one of the several people whom this researcher spoke to]. The Bruneian Malays are also well known for their values such as respecting one’s elders, obedience to one’s parents, being loyal and obeying one’s leaders, as well as showing empathy and being considerate to others. (Haji Abdul Aziz 1992). Such cultural values, along with the national MIB national philosophy, thus reinforce the practice of Father Leadership in the country.

Interestingly, one youth, in her twenties, intimated these [*italics mine*] to the researcher:

The younger generation may not view father leadership as the answer or being effective since they tend to be more rebellious (*an adolescent or growing up issue?*) against the father, just in the family situation. ‘Westernisation’ and even lack of religious knowledge or training may have brought about this phenomenon.

However, this youth added that, “as a Muslim, she would subscribe to father leadership”, besides, it brings about “much togetherness, family closeness among the people as well as unity.” The same youth also expressed her further agreement, indicating that there was a strong link between such the leadership style, respecting one’s elders and the Malay culture. She then cited the Malay saying, “*Orang tua lebih banyak makan garam*”, meaning the elders have more experiences, and they are respected; the saying also implies, “with age comes wisdom”.

Traditionally in Bruneian Malay families, key decisions made are normally vested on the father as the head of the family, and he is the sole authority regarding family matters. If the father has made a decision, the children do not question the decision(s) made; it is more of a one way communication. Nonetheless, nowadays, since the children are more exposed to external influences such as knowledge and exposure gained from formal education, children tend to seek, request and/ or demand the rationale and justifications for the decision(s) made to ensure or take the comfort that the right decisions are made. Yet at the same time, they still obey while respecting the father as the head of the family.

### **Planning & Directing**

Under the reign of the Sultan, the nation has “enjoyed uninterrupted peace and much prosperity for almost four decades” (Asia, Inc.; 2006: 60). The people are happy. Oil and gas export revenues and government income has also made possible for Bruneians to enjoy a standard of living that is among the highest in the world (Asia, Inc, 2006). Policies of economic diversification are also currently effected to generate higher economic growth.

Generally-speaking and in the Asian context, the father leader knows best, and he gives direction to his people. His vision guides his followers. In his *Titah*, the Sultan gives direction to his people. The Deputy Sultan and Crown Prince Haji Al- Mutadee Billah, for example, has urged the people to adopt a healthy lifestyle to avoid a risky lifestyle prone to chronic diseases when he launched the scheme to mark the hundred years of health services in the Sultanate (Han, 2007: 1).

True, some critics may argue that there has been too much planning and directing on the part of the government. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some may even point out that Bruneians may be too scared to talk back or give feedback to their leader. However, proponents’ view that what is critical is that the father leadership ways get things done, and that gives the competitive edge. What’s more, things get done in a fatherly manner – with care and concern in their heart.

### **Providing & Showing Fatherly Care and Concern**

A parent of the father leader is ordinarily gentle, and nurturing. In Islam, it is said: “Whoever hath been given gentleness hath been given a good portion, in this world and the next”. “God is gentle and loveth gentleness” (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992, cited in Low and Mohd. Zain, 2008).

On many occasions, His Majesty visits his subjects to lend a hand, showing care and concern for them. Concerned when several houses in Kampong Ayer were affected by the storms in July 2007, His Majesty – “the Caring Monarch” (Wani Abdul Gapar, 2007: 1) made visits to give a sense of presence while ensuring that repair works and relief to the residents were duly made. “The second visit surprised most villagers, even though some had expected the return of His Majesty to see the progress made.” (The Brunei Times, 2007: 1).

A further example includes the recent 15 February 2008 incident when His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam paid house calls to some badly affected homes by flood in Temburong (Waleed, 2008). He stopped by just long enough to ask villagers and their families the extent of the damage suffered by the floods, taking the time to offer some advice and caring words to several as well as sharing some laughter during light-hearted moments. At one particular house, His Majesty came across an elderly lady, who came forward to greet the monarch. His Majesty enquired, “*Is there anything I can help you with?*”. The old woman simply replied by gesturing with her thumb and fingers to indicate the universal sign of money. His Majesty laughed and mimicked the woman with his own hand and said to her “*Bah, nanti tah mencarikan.*” (Yes, let me go find some for you.) This little episode thus captures the very essence of the caring leader and the close family-like bond between the monarch and his loyal subjects.

His Majesty’s birthday celebrations also usually see His Majesty working since the Monarch every year graces with his district visits and presence in the *Bercemar Duli* in which people of various races, cultures and ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity to meet and greet His Majesty. “His compassion and sincerity for his subjects extends beyond such visits and onto a national level.” (Wani Abdul Gapar, 2007: 1).

Caring and nurturing, the father leader also encourages dialogues from his followers or *anak buah*. Low’s (2007a: 10, *italics mine*) study also shows that “the father-leader can (*also*) encourage openness that can be fostered by allowing citizens (*employees*) to voice goal-achieving ideas and concerns; with such openness, the father leaders’ ears are on the ground”.

The leaders’ benevolent ways and people-centred ways are usually appealing; such ways are ordinarily much appreciated by the people, and the father-leaders are thus able to bring about unity among their people.

### **Giving Presence**

Quintessentially critical, leaders give their presence to the people, and that presence can be assuring and comforting to the people.

His Majesty, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah and the Yang di Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam and in fact, members of the royal family serve as role models. Even His Royal Highness Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, the Crown Prince and Senior Minister at the Prime Minister's Office, gives his presence to the citizens. And among the many examples of his working and industry visits include that of the Water Works Department under the Public Works Department, and the Town and Country, Land Planning Department, the Housing Development Department and several other departments at the Ministry of Development (Abu Bakar, 2007; Ong, 2007).

The key benefits here are that the leader is indeed there for the people, and the leader, humble, serves the people. Akin to servant leadership, the father leaders also "focus on helping people to develop... The humanistic approach... ..also helps build community or a sense of togetherness among the stakeholders" (DuBrin, 2007: 243). Moreover, as in the Fish! Philosophy, the presence of the leader – "be there" can be very motivating for the followers (*stakeholders*) (Pike Place Fish Market, 2007, *italics mine*).

### **Role Modeling, Guiding and Growing**

The leaders set the example, advise and guide; and the followers learn and grow. His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah demonstrated this in his inspiring advice to Bruneian students in the United Kingdom and Ireland. His Majesty called on students to succeed by being single-minded in their academic pursuits and help Brunei become a generation of intellectuals and to turn the country into a great and prosperous nation. (The Brunei Times, 4 December 2007, cited in Low and Mohd. Zain, 2008).

Apart from His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, Her Majesty Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha, through officiating ceremonies, also guides the people of Brunei Darussalam. For example, she has stressed the need for a clean and healthy environment (Abu Bakar, 2007: 1). Here, she speaks of the environment influencing and designing the level of human life and simultaneously, the human lifestyle needs to influence and take care of its surroundings. If an area is clean and beautiful, then ultimately, the entire surrounding area, *kampung* or *mukim* as well as nation will also be organised, clean and beautiful.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Like Singapore, Brunei is also politically stable. The Sultan as a father-leader is bringing about much growth in Brunei so that the Sultanate can attain a higher level of economic growth and achieve much progress. The port facilities at Muara are being further developed and improved upon while the development of the Sungei Liang Industrial Park (SPARK) are being initiated, planned and acted upon.

Interestingly, in the Singapore Case as argued by Low (2005), the Singapore Government provided the necessary infrastructure with a "politically stable" and "conductive

environment for the growth of business”. Singapore’s success is bolstered by the Government’s continuous efforts in laying down the required support, and infrastructure. Singapore has continued to be “the premier hub status in the Asia-Pacific”; in fact, it has won several accolades (Chin and Tongzon, 1998, cited in Low, 2005) including for “Singapore’s Changi Airport . . . one of the best in the world” and in a business-traveller magazine survey, “the best for baggage retrieval . . . ” (Tan, 1992, cited in Low, 2005). With regard to the Singapore port – in spite of competition and cheaper port facilities’ pricing with some players such as Evergreen and Maersk having moved from Singapore to neighbouring Johor Baru, Singapore is seen as “the best port in Asia and it is the world’s busiest container port” (Goh, 2001a). The World Competitiveness Yearbook 1999 ranked Singapore as the most attractive location in the world, apart from the USA, as a manufacturing hub (Institute for Management Development (IMD, 1999 cited in Low, 2005). Additionally, Singaporean children today too are going to better schools than before.

Like Singaporeans, Bruneians are also enjoying a high level of education; they enjoy free education and health services as provided by the Brunei Government. The Sultan’s Scholarships are also given to Bruneian students who obtain commendable results in their ‘A’ levels or equivalent. The Health Ministry is dedicated in “providing the best in terms of products and services to the country’s citizens and residents” (Dewi Mohd Sofri, 2007, cited in Low and Mohd Zain, 2008). Small businesses and entrepreneurship are encouraged, and His Majesty’s Government is also laying the necessary infrastructure such as the building of more roads, highways, and fly-overs to facilitate business and economic growth. The size of Bandar is also to be expanded.

Just like Singapore (its small size, roughly the size of Chicago with the same population, probably provides an overwhelming reason for the success of this Singapore model and this could be a possible attribute for the controlled development and success of the Singapore Government’s paternalistic leadership model), Brunei is also small. The people know each other and it is said that people are usually connected with each other by blood ties and by other ways, and the leaders relate well with the people. Such being the case, one can argue that Brunei indeed has much space in the global economy as niche player with father leadership as the way of ‘business’ processes, and that can give the sultanate the competitive edge. In brief, father leadership has that edge; it gets things done with the leader’s good relationships with the people. Father leadership is both high task and high touch. And what’s more, with the people being united, all-in-the-family, under the Sultan as a father-leader, Brunei can attain a higher level of economic growth and achieve much progress.

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