

Lack of communicative ability biggest leadership gap in Malaysia

The Edge Financial Daily, Wednesday 2 April 2014; Home Business; pg 6

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KUALA LUMPUR: Lack of communicative ability and emotional awareness are the two biggest leadership gaps in Malaysia, according to data from the Asian Leadership Index (ALI).

The study, conducted by the Iclif Leadership and Governance Centre, found that 24% of Malaysian respondents viewed communicative ability as the biggest leadership gap, followed by lack of emotional awareness (23%), need to develop others (19%), need to be more empowering (15%) and visionary traits (10%).

The report on the study's findings was released yesterday.

The study, which spanned 18 countries in Asia, involved interviews with almost 3,500 selected senior and emerging leaders, and it was about ideal leaders and what was missing in them.

Singapore, Myanmar and Vietnamese respondents chose "emotionally aware" as their leaders' biggest gap, while those in Indonesia, Korea, Japan and Thailand chose "visionary". Respondents in China, meanwhile, ranked "develop others" as their key leadership gap.

The study found that "visionary" topped the list across Asia as the most valued trait of an ideal leader, with 40% of the respondents rating it at number one.

Iclif head of research Kate Sweetman said although it was the most highly valued trait, not all respondents felt the same way.

"For example, the results from China indicated demand for 'technically competent' and 'trustworthy' leaders, compared to the Australians who mostly valued 'communicative'."

She said Malaysian respondents tracked regional trends in choosing leadership values. Although "visionary" ranked the highest, "emotionally aware" emerged as one of the top two most ideal traits for a leader when the scenario changed from ideal to real leadership.

During a discussion following Sweetman's presentation of the report, the panellists agreed that the results were not surprising.

Chair of the leadership initiative at Harvard Business School Prof Linda Hill said leaders who have an emotional connection with people are also important.

"No matter what our definition of leadership is, it is always about an emotional connection. People are looking for a stretch and something that has a meaning for them. The challenge for a lot of leaders is that the people that they need to build connections with are not people they will meet," she said.

Telekom Malaysia Bhd chief executive officer Tan Sri Zamzamzairani Isa highlighted the differences between leadership styles in the East and West.

"I think there is a perception that [Western leadership] is very much focused on short-term goals, which doesn't necessarily augur well with my value system. Asians tend to look at stakeholder management over the longer term.

"At the same time, Western styles have been changing and there is a range of softer leadership aspects that have come through," he said.

PricewaterhouseCoopers managing partner Sridharan Nair said due to a strong sense of community and culture in Malaysia and the rest of Southeast Asia, leaders naturally displayed a sense of humility.