

Creating leaders, not followers

TO thrive in the future, we need good leadership today. The question is: What does this leadership look like?

With workplaces becoming a mixed bag of cultures, generations and values, being a leader today requires a sense of intuition and agility to navigate an increasingly complex landscape.

What leadership means

Good leadership can be hard to pin down. On one hand, with technology driving a dizzying pace of change in the world, you need transformative leadership.

This is a leader who innovates and turns organisations

The next generation must take us to a better future

ASMA ISMAIL
educate
@thestar.com.my



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around, and is someone who can cultivate growth mindsets – the key to any form of successful change.

On the other hand, leadership is also about instilling soul into that same team. There is no point in achieving excellence without soul.

It is where values and ethics live and where you build the qualities of empathy and kindness.

This can only be achieved

through humanity-centric leadership that prioritises the well-being of both people and the planet.

It is a holistic view that requires us to see the impact of our actions on a wider and long-term scale, and recognises that our wealth and health are intimately tied to the sustainability of the earth.

Hybrid model

The two types of leadership may seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Transformative leadership drives key performance indicators (KPIs) such as sales, revenue and other tangible factors, while humanity-centric leadership looks at key intangible performance (KIP), such as the happiness index.

Which is more important? Neither. You need to find a balance between the two, and one that suits the workforce that you are leading.

For example, according to a study by global advisory, broking and solutions company WTW, millennials and Gen X make up 70% of the Malaysian workforce today (*The Star*, Aug 8, 2024).

This younger generation is one that values work-life balance and flexibility. While we need to keep an eye

on KPIs, we also need to lead with empathy and instil a sense of purpose in their work.

If we don't, we will find ourselves facing quiet quitting – where employees come in to work but never give their all.

By ensuring an environment that challenges them while supporting their mental, physical and spiritual well-being, we can keep people motivated to deliver.

Cultivating empathy

As an educator, I am most concerned about how a leader today builds the leaders of tomorrow. How do we ensure that we cultivate empathy in the next generation?

The digital era has greatly impacted real-world interactions, and one cannot be humanity-centric if one lives only through the screen.

Here's where educational institutes can play a crucial role. We cannot teach empathy in theory in lecture halls, through forums or workshops.

Empathy needs to be experienced and we can do this by integrating community engagement initiatives into our curriculum.

This is where students can really interact with the communities they serve – whether it is with patients or

with residents of a particular neighbourhood.

It means going to the ground to understand someone else's social issues, struggles and challenges. Through this, we not only impart knowledge and create awareness, but also drive people to act. Education, after all, is a key that bridges knowledge, awareness and action.

Future impact

One can measure success in many ways. For me, it ultimately means creating leaders, not followers, wherever I go. This is how I believe I can leave a lasting impact even in my absence.

To do this, I remind myself that I too must embody the kind of leadership qualities that I want to see in the next generation. Today must be led with vision, empathy and purpose so that tomorrow, others can take us to a better future.

Academician Emerita Prof Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, vice-chancellor and chief executive officer of IMU University, is also the chair of the Planetary Health Action Plan for Malaysia. She was Malaysia's first female to serve as higher education director-general, Academy of Sciences Malaysia president and National Science Adviser to the Prime Minister. The views expressed here are the writer's own.

