FINDING INDIGENOUS VALUES BEHIND FILIPINO LEADERSHIP

by:
Perlie Ann R. Torres
Project Development Officer I

Over the years, leadership was defined by many scholars in different perspectives. In some books and other publications, writers defined leadership in relation to the behavior and traits of a person, other defined it as a relationship between the leader and the follower, and some scholars associate leadership to how a leader can influence his/her people. Theories about leadership also evolved through time, from the Great Man Theory which argued that great leaders are “born” and not made and gives importance only to men (Australian Public Service Commission, 2011) it has evolved in to more dynamic and critical view of leadership such as the Servant Leadership which is rooted in the idea that a leader should be a servant first (Robert K. GreenLeaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016). Despite these efforts of scholars to define leadership and establish a recognizable school of leadership, In the Philippine context, how do we explain leadership?

Sikolohiyang Filipino (Filipino Psychology), a movement that started in the 1970’s and now a school of thought which studies psychology based on the experience, ideas and cultural orientation of the Filipinos, identified several indigenous Filipinos values (Yacat, 2013). Some of these values are Hiya, Pakikisama at Utang na loob. These values are rooted to our core value which is Kapwa. Virgilio Enriquez, the father of Sikolohiyang Filipino, defined Kapwa as a recognition of inner self with others or shared identity (Enriquez, 1978). Given that we have identified values that are indigenous to the Filipinos, how do these values manifest in the workplace especially to the type of leadership of Filipinos?

In South East Asian countries specifically in the Philippine context, although we give so much emphasis on the authority and established order between the head and the subordinates, harmony in the organization is also important. This is what we called Paternal style of leadership; although there is a need for order and compliance, harmony needs also to be considered.
Avoiding conflict and keeping the harmony in the organization is rooted to the aforementioned indigenous Filipino values, because there is a strong shared of identity (no sense of “others”/hindi itinuturing na ibang tao o taga-labas) between the people in an organization, leaders always take into account the wellbeing or welfare of their people. They also tend to listen to their followers’ feedback and opinion thus, decentralizing the power from person in authority.

Although these values are the reasons why leaders give importance to their relationship with their followers, it can also propel some negative behaviors for the leaders. Because these values are imbued to our identity and character as a Filipino, in any interpersonal interactions, leaders often tried their best to prevent other people to describe them as Walang Pakikisama, Walang Hiya and Walang utang na loob. This notion is one of the roots of the current Padrino system or patronage in our Filipino culture wherein one gain favor, because the Padrino, the person in authority, will grant favors because he/she is a friend or family of the person asking for favor and not granting the favor means he/she is “walang pakikisama” and “walang hiya” and in some cases the person in charge is indebted to the one who is asking the favor thus not accommodating the request mean he/she does not have “utang na loob”.

As public servants and leaders, it is important for us to understand the roots of our action and decisions. If these values weigh more to the extent that it can result to irrational decision, that’s when problems arise. A good leader knows how to use “Pakikipagkapwa” for the improvement of relationship within the organization and not for the interest of the people to be compromised.

References:

