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LEADERSHIP STYLE IN THE TRADITIONAL JAVANESE CULTURE (STUDY ON ROMO HAMZAH IN YOGYAKARTA)

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the leadership in an organization in a traditional Javanese culture. Hamzah's business, located in Jogjakarta, is the object of this research. The business pattern of Hamzah, indicating the primacy of traditional Javanese values as well as a good reception by modern society, makes it irresistible to study. The qualitative methodology with an explorative approach and the data reduction analysis technique was used in this study. The results point out how Hamzah combined traditional Javanese values with the needs of modern organizations. *Ewuh Pakewuh* describing the respect for humanity and *Asta Brata* representing belief or guidance of Javanese ideal leader result in the formation of a transformative leadership style consisting of traditional ethical standards of Java.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has various traditional values ranging from Sabang (western) to Merauke (eastern), deeply rooted in the lives of its people. One pattern of how public life is inherent with the traditional value can be seen in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) or called Jogja, for short. Thus far, Jogja is a sultanate and a Javanese way of life which seeps into every aspect of life. As said by Partini (2013), the Javanese way of life is more like a form of abstraction or mental arrangement of life experiences which ultimately develop attitudes toward life that reflects the culture. Not only play a role in everyday life, traditional culture also affects the business pattern in Jogja, primarily the tourism business such as Hamzah Batik (Mirota), The House of Raminten, Oyot Godong Restaurant and The Waroeng of Raminten. Under the flag of PT. Hamzah, those brands turn a finger from the culinary field to the souvenirs place. It is prone to recognize the business branch of Hamzah. Apart from the name of the business premises that are not much

different, Raminten put forward as a central image is enough to attract the interest of a lot of visitors. Raminten herself is a Javanese female figure wearing the typical *kebaya* (female traditional costume, found mainly in Java) and *conde* (Javanese women traditional hairdo). According to by Hamzah, Raminten is a figure 'discovered' by accident when he was playing a *ketoprak* (Javanese theater featuring actors acting with traditional music) titled "*Pengkolan*" as a Javanese woman named Raminten. Hamzah fell in love with the character and liked to introduce her to a larger audience (interview with Hamzah, 13/08/17).

However, besides presenting the Raminten, Hamzah is as a leader of his business, i.e. the business based on the superiority of traditional Javanese values. In Javanese philosophy, a good leader should meet several criteria, such as building good communication between managers and workers (Rahman & Mas'ud, 2012) and behaving wisely and transparent (Gani, 2004). The latter is often termed as *Bapakisme* reflecting patron and client styles in the paternal environment.

Besides, Davenport and Prusak (1998) argued that traditional criteria used to define successful leadership are no longer fit into today's modern workplace simply because the leaders need to adapt their leadership style to meet recent developments in both human and technical resources. This study, therefore, examines the ideological assumption of how tradition affects managerial style in Javanese by adopting Hamzah's leadership style. The leadership style showing the appreciation of Javanese values well received by a modern society makes it enticing to study.

According to Bass (1985), there are two contradictory styles of leadership. The first is the transformational leadership while the second is the transactional leadership. Transformational leaders motivate their followers by inspiring them, offering challenges, and encouraging individual development. Meanwhile, transactional leaders stress specific benefits that their subordinates would receive by accomplishing agreed-upon tasks.

In one of his works, Jung (2001) assumed that transformational leadership occurs within a collective culture. But, it is even more exciting when Jung stated that a culture with the pattern of high uncertainty avoidance may be more in need of a transactional leadership style. In a hierarchical Javanese culture, high uncertainty avoidance becomes a pattern that should be found in the style of the leader. Although, on the other hand, the collectivity in Javanese culture does not need to be asked either. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to explore the leadership style of Hamzah through the point of view of traditional Javanese culture.

This study, however, cannot be separated from the complexity related to other focuses such as organizational management, paternalistic environment, gender bias, and modernity. Regardless of them, leadership is the main point of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

Leadership, according to Anoraga (2003), is defined as the ability of a person to be able to influence others through either direct or indirect communication, with the intention to make people understand and be willing to follow the will of the leader.

Kotler in Athoillah (2010) argued that leadership is a set of processes aimed primarily at creating organizations or adapting them to the circumstances. The leadership determines what the future should look like, leads to vision, and inspires to make it happen. Caesar (2016) described leadership as an important factor in shaping corporate culture to gain a competitive advantage.

Sujak in Jauhari, Singh, and Kumar (2017) suggested that leadership is defined as the ability to influence, move and direct an action on a person (an employee or subordinate) or a group of people to achieve a certain goal in a particular situation. Of course, effective leadership will only be realized if it is executed in accordance with its function. The leadership function is directly related to the social situation in the life of each group/organization, implying that every leader is inside and not outside the situation. Leaders must strive to be part of the social situation of the group/organization.

Based on those explanations, it can be said that the notion of leadership is the ability to mobilize, influence, motivate, shape, direct, counsel, guide, instruct/train, order, command, ban and even punish (if necessary) in order to achieve personal or organizational goals effectively and efficiently.

Leadership style is the overall pattern of the leader actions, both visible and invisible to his subordinates/employees. According to Yukl (2013), leadership style represents a consistent combination of the philosophy, skills, and attitudes that underlie one's behavior. It shows a leader's belief in the ability of his subordinates/employees. In the meantime, leadership style relates to how leaders show the pattern of behavior in influencing others. The pattern of behavior can be influenced by several factors such as values, assumptions, perceptions, expectations, and attitudes that exist within the leader (Ardana, Mujiati, & Utama, 2011).

According to Bass (1985), there are two contradictory styles of leadership. The first is the transformational leadership while the second is the transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is typically conceptualized and operationalized via four dimensions (namely four I's): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transformational leaders motivate their followers by inspiring them, offering challenges, and encouraging individual development. Transactional leaders stress specific benefits that their subordinates would receive by accomplishing agreed-upon tasks. The transactional leadership style involves negotiations between leaders and their subordinates and exchange relationships between them. Transformational leaders prioritize the value of collectivity and self-actualization of each member under their instructions, in contrast to the transactional leaders who prioritize rewards based on the fulfillment or absence of a predetermined goal.

Culture

There are so many definitions of culture and it has a lot of meaning in the discipline. But, the notion of culturally-compliant language embodying the theme of how culture and communications relating to it is argued by the Triandis as follows: Culture is a subjective and an objective element called humans in the past, increasing the chances of survival and resulting in the satisfaction of actors in ecological niche, and so among those who can

communicate with each other, because they have the same language and they live in the same time and place.

Geert Hofstede in Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2009) argued that culture is a common programming of thoughts distinguishing members of one group of people from other groups. This is also reinforced by Hall in Samovar et al. (2009) stating that when studying and discussing the cultural issue, it cannot be separated from the name of communication because communication, at the same time, is a cultural reflection. Hall clearly stated that culture is communication and communication is culture. Culture is a comprehensive lifestyle. It is complex, abstract, and broad. Many aspects of culture also determine communicative behavior. These socio-cultural elements are dispersed and include many human social activities (Mulyana & Rakhmat, 2006).

Thus, culture is something that will affect knowledge, and it includes the system of an idea or a construct that is in the mind of a human being. So, in everyday life, culture is abstract. While a cultural manifestation is the object created by human beings - as cultured beings - in the form of behaviors, as well as objects of a real nature, for example patterns of behavior, living tools, language, social organization, art, religion, etc., all of which is entirely devoted to helping human beings in living in a society.

Traditional Javanese Leadership Culture

Javanese ways of life are more like the abstraction forms or mental arrangement of life experience and ultimately develop attitudes toward life that reflects the culture (Partini, 2013). The people who grow and live in Javanese culture feel, on a certain level, that the culture is already ingrained in everyday life. The views regarding the principles, values, norms, emotions to each habit have been interpreted in Javanese cultural life.

The Javanese can learn many things from their own ancestral cultural values of motivation, self-leadership, and even management. Amrih (2010) alleged that leadership, management, and also how the Javanese bring themselves in living with a focus on the Javanese cultural teachings were obtained and learned from the childhood through their families such as customs, norms, and the puppet characters.

In Javanese traditional culture, leadership style is inspired by the leadership of the Java kingdoms, including the kingdom of Mataram, Majapahit, Singasari, and others which are currently scattered in the *Kasultanan* and *Kasunanan* across the Java areas such as Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Cirebon (Partini, 2013).

Then, Susetya (2007) conveyed that Javanese leadership style is inseparable from *Hastha Brata* Science. The concept of *Hastha Brata's* leadership is the science of the behavior of the eight characteristic natures possessed by the great, authoritative, wise and prudent kings of Prabu Rama Wijaya and Sri Bathara Kresna. The models of the eight naturalists are as follows:

a) Earth. Earth's character is steady. For that, a leader must be assertive, constant and consistent. Besides, the earth also offers welfare for all living creatures that are above it. Other characteristics are no favoritism and no discrimination. So, a leader must think about the welfare of his followers or his subordinates indiscriminately and consistently.

- b) Sun. The sun always gives enlightenment, warmth, and energy evenly distributed to all over the earth. A leader must encourage, generate motivation and provide the benefit of knowledge for the people he leads.
- c) Moon. The moon illuminates in the darkness with the light that is cool and not dazzling. A leader must be able to provide opportunities in times of darkness, warmth in times of trouble, provide solutions when problems arise and mediate amid conflict.
- d) Stars. The stars are beautiful directions. A leader must be able to become a role model or example and give direction to the persons he leads.
- e) Fire. Fire is burning. A leader must be able to burn if needed. If there is a risk that may damage the organization, then a leader must be able to manage the risk so it can be very helpful for the survival of the organization he leads.
- f) Wind. The wind is essentially a moving air and the air is everywhere and it moves where it goes. So, the leader must be able to be anywhere and move anywhere, despite the fact that the leader's presence may not be realized. He can be anywhere as needed by his subordinates/employees. The leader is never tired of moving in to supervise the persons he leads.
- g) Sea. Sea or ocean that is roomy and spacious becomes the estuary of many streams. It means that a leader must be roomy in the chest in receiving many problems from the subordinates/employees. Furthermore, a leader must address the diversity of his subordinates as a natural thing and respond with a clean heart.
- h) Water. Water flows from the high to the low side. In other words, a leader must be fair and respect all levels and positions equally. Moreover, the basic nature of water is to sanctify. A leader must clean and be able to purge himself and his environment from the grimy and draggling things.

Mulder (2001) argued that the implementation and understanding of Javanese-Indonesian power and leadership are closer to the doctrine of the royal dynasty than the kinship, although taking into account the strong hierarchical dimension of family functioning. In this case, all members must be mentored and educated so they will behave responsibly, and know their obligations and places.

In the New Order era, the focus of culture was 'shy' and 'ewuh pakewuh'. This culture, obiter, is marked by the existence of a state that loses authority, a ruler who loses ethics, a society that loses the institutions, and nature that continues to bear disaster. Javanese power culture has long been applied to ewuh pakewuh model, and even Javanese phrase ngono ya ngono neng aja ngono (meaning outrageous). It means, we can reveal the culpability of others by keeping considering the person who will be revealed, whether meritorious or not (Endraswara, 2013).

Ewuh pakewuh is one of the cultures that still is attached to the Javanese society. According to Tobing (2010), *ewuh pekewuh* is a basic manifestation of the rule of life of Javanese society. It is a form of a feeling of uneasiness almost resembling a sense of shame. The feeling then causes someone to feel worried if his behavior or speech will offend someone or not.

Soeharjono (2011) defined *ewuh pakewuh* as a hesitant attitude or a sense of reluctance and form of respect to superiors or seniors. Amrih (2010) added that *ewuh pakewuh* can also occur in differences of opinion and point

of views within the organization/company between the leader and his employee. While Wiwien (2010) argued that *ewuh-pakewuh* culture is a pattern of polite attitude in the bureaucracy done by subordinates/employees who hesitate or express their opinions that may be contradictory, in order to avoid conflicts and maintain good relationships with the superiors or seniors.

Ewuh pakewuh is a value in the Javanese society consisting of several principles closely related to the aspects of harmony and respect principle (Tobing, 2010). On the other hand, the culture of ewuh pakewuh forms a subtle and high-level person in the aspect of keeping the feelings of the person (who has a higher position), but the other side of the ewuh pakewuh also limits the freedom in expressing opinions and truth. The alteration of ewuh-pakewuh culture is only possible if the superiors or seniors are willing to implement an egalitarian work culture. The most important requirement to guarantee success for a cultural change among workers is a strong leadership, both in leadership ability and in the sharpness of the vision.

Javanese ideology, revealed and held firmly in the ideal Javanese leadership, is *ewuh pakewuh*. This Javanese ideology, *ewuh pakewuh*, is the fundamental foundation of leadership that is pivotal. It means that a leader applying *ewuh pakewuh* will automatically be wise in the lead.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research uses a qualitative analysis under the explorative approach. Arikunto (2006) argued that an explorative research is a study aimed at exploring extensively the causes or the things affected by the occurrence of something. This research aims at exploring the information about how culture influences leadership style. A case study was chosen in this study considering the specification and the context of the object (Cresswell, 2007). The case study aims at obtaining a detailed description and a comprehensive understanding of leadership style in the traditional Javanese culture. Data were collected from observation and in-depth interview. Once all data were gathered, the data were analyzed using the technique of data reduction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ewuh Pakewuh and Its Complexities

Ewuh pakewuh is the attitude and behavior of the Javanese leader reflecting the feeling of being tolerated and worried if his behavior or speech will offend other people. Based on field research to Hamzah business, most of the employees are from Java areas, primarily from Yogyakarta. As stated by the employees, they try to work meticulously and painstakingly in order not to bring conflict with superiors. In addition, a meticulous and painstaking work culture can be associated with a sense of togetherness so as to create harmony in life.

To maintain harmony in everyday life, employees and superiors use polite words. In Javanese philosophical terms, it is called "ajining diri soko lathi" which means that one's self-esteem depends on mouth, speech, and language. The eloquent, sweet, and "empan papan" (high sense of belonging to the circumstances) words are pleasing. Both leaders and employees have the similar obligations to use polite language. The words considered inferior will be avoided because these can create discomfort and unpleasant circumstances, interfering with the harmony in working space.

Speaking with preamble is a hallmark of the Javanese culture, in which in many modern companies, it is considered ineffective but still preserved in Java areas. The study also found that the workers generally know the levels of Javanese language, such as *Kromo* words as the highest level, *Madya* words as the middle level, and *Ngoko* words the as lowest one. The workers are mostly able to speak Javanese in those three levels. When they are dealing with the customers or guests, they use at least *Madya* languages. They even use *Kromo* language if they know the customers come from Java. Moreover, both in vertical and in horizontal communication, they choose to use language in *kromo* level expressing great attitudes.

Basically, *ewuh pakewuh* is focused on the ability to manage emotions. In terms of conflict, a leader is expected to have the ability to set the right time called as "*angon wayah*" for resolving the problem.

When employees make mistakes, Hamzah sees them as a learning process. He encourages the employees to resolve them. A warning will be given in a polite manner so that employees feel appreciated. In relation to transformational leadership, this act reflects the dimensions of leadership (Bass, 1985), namely intellectual stimulation (fostering problem-solving), inspirational motivation (providing encouraging directions), and individualized consideration (paying attention to employee's personal problem).

Asta Brata and Its Embodiment

Yogyakarta, one of the genuine places in the heart of Javanese culture, has adopted the traditional culture into every aspect of its life including leadership management. According to Victor and Soutar (2005), leadership style ought to be influenced by the leader's immediate and extended family, clan and tribe. As explained earlier, the tendency of transformational leadership is the evidence of the business practice of Hamzah. Now, we need to step up to highlight how Raminten a.k.a Hamzah leadership is influenced by Javanese culture.

Sarsito (2006) stated that in Javanese social context, the leader (a personification of 'King') is the 'mediator between people and their god'. It means a leader must have a higher quality than the *kawula* or people. More than that, since Jogja was the center of Hinduism development in the past, the belief in the gods has been mixed with the local culture. The main doctrine about the leadership upheld by Javanese traditional culture is *Asta Brata*.

Asta means eight and Brata means ascetic or fulfilling obligation. Asta Brata is interpreted as the duty of a wise leader for leading multicultural people. In a leader dwells eight gods, namely Betara Indra, Yama, Surya, Chandra, Anila, Kuwera, Bharuna, and Agni. The key to a leader's success is the mastering of those divine authorities (Endraswara, 2013). Using Asta Brata as the main value of Javanese leaders, the figure of Hamzah and his leadership style will be explored in detail into collaborating points from Endraswara (2013) and Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014).

The first god is the moon or *Chandra*. It means a leader must have the character of the god of the moon. He is expected to give light in the dark and create an atmosphere of happiness and peace. Oyot Godong Restaurant is one of Hamzah's business branches which shows his concern for the

marginalized people. In the restaurant, located on the third floor of Hamzah Batik building on Malioboro Street, he facilitates a cabaret show performed by ladyboys. The main purpose of his action is to ensure that they have positive activities and avoid prostitution. This act, in relation to transformational leadership, suits the dimension of inspirational motivation. Hamzah encourages marginalized people to be better respected. While in The House of Raminten, another restaurant located nearby the central railway station, Hamzah provides jobs both to the elderly and to young people who commonly do not have special expertise. He stated that the restaurant is not managed by a chef or an expert but by anyone who is eager to learn. In fact, the restaurant is always crowded, especially on a weekend. That is for bringing light to darkness as the moon embraces, Hamzah makes it as one of his business philosophies.

The second is *Surya*, the sun representing the authority. A Javanese leader is expected to be the just, authoritative, populist, selfless and loyal person to the nation. The focal point is justice without discrimination. Several religious symbols appear in every corner of Hamzah's business, primarily in The House of Raminten. For Hamzah, the symbols are aimed simply to accommodate the needs of its most Catholic and Muslim employees. As for the offerings and myrrh, they are not the reflection of Hinduism, but the palace culture or Keraton. The combination of religious and cultural values is common in Indonesia, especially in areas with a royal government style. Often, it is even difficult to distinguish whether a particular ritual is meant as a religious ritual or a cultural ritual. Hamzah, however, clearly shows the authority that appreciates both.

The ideal Javanese leaders must also be able to well position themselves. The Star or *Kartika* relates to a leader's sensitivity to circumstances. Even though he is considered as a wealthy person with businesses ranging from restaurant to souvenir place, Hamzah calls himself as "*Abdi dalem Keraton*", which is the title for someone who is devoted to the conservation of the palace's values. Hamzah also considers that his businesses cannot be synchronized with the palace, but indeed he is inspired by the culture within the Palace of Yogyakarta.

In addition to sensitivity, Javanese leaders must also be down to earth depicted by patience, submission, and willingness to accept everything as a form of responsibility. Hamzah's submission is reflected by the leadership pattern he has been carrying out. The opening of a new business unit or branch is not seen as a goal to be accomplished, rather than as a natural development. The proposals for the franchise in other cities were also rejected as they would be inconsistent with the initial spirit of business establishment based on the traditional Javanese culture. However, when viewed from the study Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) about the uncertainty avoidance, the reluctance of opening franchise branches in other cities is also a manifestation of the strong value of uncertainty avoidance certainly influenced by the local culture.

The fifth is *Agni*, symbolized as fire. This principle assumes that the leader must be able to rule wisely so as to avoid mass chaos. Hamzah states that some conflicts do not need to be addressed, for example, the one related to the performance of cabaret played by ladyboys. Aside from positive feedbacks, some people criticize it because it is assumed as the support for

social deviation amidst a cultured society. But, as long as the protest was never publicly disclosed, Hamzah said the leader did not need to respond it. The tendency to avoid conflict is one of the hallmarks of Javanese culture that prioritizes social stability and tranquility.

The next is *Tirta* which is defined as the wisdom following the nature of water. Water is believed to have the properties of purifying the problem. Thus, the leader is expected to be a problem solver. Related to this principle, Hamzah applies it through the pattern of employee recruitment. Basic education and special expertise are not his main considerations in accepting employees because he has the principle that everyone deserves to be given the opportunity while he or she can learn over time. That is why employees at Hamzah's business have unique variations, ranging from age, educational background, and economic level. It is not improbable to meet the mothers aged 70 years and above working on the day and night, as well as a ladyboy and youth without proper basic education. This is because Hamzah, as said by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), emphasizes the sense of kinship in the Javanese culture.

Maruto or wind is the value of the seventh wisdom. As a good character from the wind, the leader is expected to be fair to achieve all benefits. Basically, Javanese leadership is known for its smooth and non-vulgar problem-solving style (Endraswara, 2013). It is also possible because of the existence of patron and client patterns in which the leader and subordinate are required to be able to assign themselves properly in accordance with the position they have. Positively, it will alleviate the task of a leader related to employee obedience behavior. On the other hand, if there is no democratic flexibility, the flow of communication will go one way, resulting in the leader unable to do self-correction and subordinates unable to utter their opinion.

The last concept of Asta Brata is the Ocean that obliges the leader to be a progressive figure. Innovation and changes are required by the organizations to keep being competitive. Thus, the collectivistic culture must be combined with transformational leadership (Caesar, 2016). In today's modern workplace, Yu and Miller (2005) argued that effective leaders need to move away from hierarchical position-based influence to a more knowledge-based influence. Hamzah himself, apart from the hierarchical Javanese culture, uses a humanist approach based on trust towards employees. Even for the financial affairs, Hamzah entrusts all of his technical affairs to his employees. In a cabaret show, Hamzah admitted not to interfere with the financial matter of both expenditure and income. With the trust he provides, employees are encouraged to think critically yet creatively. Employees see themselves as associates of the organization rather than employees. This is also in line with the concept of transformational leadership. As stated by Nurcahyo, Della, Irawan, and Polla (2018), employees' organizational commitment can be influenced by transformational leaders encouraging them to think critically using novel approaches. However, in a larger context, Hamzah still prepares his business to be continued by his closest family as it is commonly practiced by a businessman in Asia.

CONCLUSIONS

Hamzah's leadership is a manifestation of Javanese traditional culture merged in open-minded character toward modernization. There is no doubt that transformational leadership is a more prominent style of Hamzah's leadership. Jung's (2001) concern about the collective culture that upholds a high uncertainty avoidance is also evident. However, the high uncertainty avoidance value does not make Hamzah adopt a transactional style because it is neutralized by the value of *Ewuh Pakewuh* and *Asta Brata's* wisdom. *Ewuh Pakewuh* describing the respect for humanity and *Asta Brata* representing the belief or guidance for Javanese ideal leader result in the formation of a transformative leadership style consisting of the traditional ethical standards of Java.

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