Leadership and Organizational Success: A Study of AirAsia

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is one of the key success in management. The study aims to examine the link between leadership and organizational success in the context of AirAsia. The study collected data from secondary data like journals, articles, books, research papers and internet articles to find the content about leadership in this airline company. The result shows that leadership plays a key role in the success of an organization. Leadership is one of the key success factors of AirAsia. Besides, the studies discussed about the characteristic of leader and the performance management. Lastly, this study managed to provide the transformational leadership that happen in AirAsia Bhd by the leader of that airline company.

Keywords: Leadership, organizational success, airline company, AirAsia

INTRODUCTION

A process which an executive can direct, guide and influence the behaviour and work of others towards accomplishment specific goals in a given situation is called as leadership. Muadzam, Olowesu and Shourouk said that the effective leadership must be able to motivate their subordinates to do their best and exploit all their potentials in the institutions to meet the job satisfaction among the employees (Olowesu, Muadzam, & Shorouk, 2019). Without a good leader, the company cannot be established for 26 years and through the business world ups and down. The company that we choose for this report is AirAsia Bhd. AirAsia Bhd is a well-known low cost airline that bring a tagline of “Now Everyone Can Fly” is been admired by the big business in the world. Navahandi said an effective leader will influences followers in a desired manner to achieve desired goals. Different leadership styles may affect organizational effectiveness or performance (Nahavandi A., 2002). The most admirable leader in AirAsia Bhd is Tony Fernandez. He is a CEO of AirAsia Bhd that bring the name of AirAsia rise up to the one of the popular airline in the world. The success of AirAsia brings many awards and nominated in the World’s Best Low Cost Airline in 2009 and 2010. This is shown how big the achievement of AirAsia Bhd in the airline industry. One of the reasons this company can bring this big name is because of the leadership that they implemented in the company. Muslim L. said a leader can influencing and delegates others to act to carry out on the specific objectives (Mullins L., 2004). Under the Tony Fernandes, the vision is to be the largest low cost airline that will bring three billion people to fly across the region. Hence, the mission is to be the top company to work in where employees are treated like family. From the mission itself, the shadow of the best leadership will bring the healthy environment in the company. In the business world that are always fluctuate,
leadership is one of the important things to make your company establish in the business world. AirAsia has failed to attract enough passengers from its competitor to establish in the market before year 2001. On that year, Tony Fernandes made a new strategy by enrolled low cost airline experts to restructures the business model to AirAsia that boost up AirAsia profit and makes that company establish until now. The characteristic of the leader to transform the Airline that full of debt and his leadership style that bring the company stable again is admired by all of the leaders in the business.

In this study, the leadership style is studied in order to see how the organization is operating in today’s era. This is because the correct leadership style will make the working environment be the better place to work for. Besides that, the characteristic of leadership also will be discuss in this study focus on the characteristic of Tony Fernandes in approaching his employees. Moreover, the study will also discuss about the commitment of employees that will bring the success in AirAsia Bhd. Finally, the study will discuss about the transformational leadership that implemented in the company. From this study, we can detect the reasons on how the leadership leads to success in the AirAsia Company.

Literature Review
This literature reviews looks at the previous research on successful leadership in AirAsia. The review was implemented from the successful on the organization. Special attention to give for the report is the leadership style that have been used in AirAsia that are unique from other company (Pusiran, Arif & King, Brian, 2013). Next, the literature review that being reviewed on the characteristic of leadership that has been followed and make the employee emotion in working environment of Tony Fernandez. Another topic that should be discuss in the commitment of the employee on the weightage of the employees work in the organization. Leaders who possess good leadership qualities will act as a role model to the employees, promote equality among staff, and plan towards development of the institution (Kamisan & King, 2013). This will show that the key and essential part of an organization was found to be a leader who act as a cornerstone between top management and bottom-line workers (Alnajem, Mohamad & Dhakal, Hom, 2012)

RESEARCH METHOD

The study is collecting data from secondary data like journals, articles, books, research papers and internet articles. The study also collect data from the annual report, company website and other websites like news website. The table shows the research findings and methodology from the journal listed.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper is discuss about the leadership style, characteristic in management, performance management and transformational leadership that are focus on Tony Fernandes in AirAsia Bhd company. This is because one of the key success of AirAsia is leadership that they implemented in that airline company.

Leadership Style
Leadership is huge aspect that a company need to emphasize every time because as a leader has many responsibilities for make sure company in the right way in order to achieve company goals. A good and effective leader led their followers in a great way to achieve common goals. Each style of Leadership can influence the effectiveness or performance of the organization differently (Navahadi A., 2020). Air Asia has very strong and unique leadership styles shown by their leader, Tan Sri Dr. Anthony Francis Fernandes (Tony Fernandes).

AirAsia now days are a well-known airline brand in the Asia and world. AirAsia will never be in this stage without a strong leadership that implemented in the way to achieve in this stage. Tony Fernandes is a big name who bring what AirAsia achieved today because the leadership style used by him giving a huge impact on the rise of Air Asia company. He managed to create a good organizational culture in Air Asia's working environment. Tony Fernandes was much highlighted about the important to work as a team, not individual. Tony Fernandes is a big leader for more than 10 000 of employees and he treat them in a very good manner which he is very approachable and friendly with all his employees. He is also easily accessible to all his employees when needed. Organizational leaders play a vital role in establishing an organizational culture that emphasizes the behaviours, rules and values critical to achieve an organization's mission and strategy (Schein, E. H., 2004).

Tony Fernandes also is a leader that always influence and motivate his staffs to become extra ordinary person who can produce creative ideas, products, services and solution that will give the positive impact in the company. Richard Branson, a British business magnate, said the ability to inspire is one of the most important leadership skills. A leader's ability to instill energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and connection with the mission and direction of an organization is essential in any growing company. Tony Fernandes has influence all his followers by showing many good example to be creative and innovative person. Tony was famous with lots of thoughtful ideas and innovative business strategies such as its innovative way of introducing no-frills airlines, zero-cost fares and well-known tagline used by Air Asia, “Now everyone can fly”. Most of the idea by him have been a strong and competitive business strategy for his company today. By this good example showed by Tony Fernandes as a leader indirectly motivated and inspired all Air Asia’s team to act and think like Tony Fernandes.
Tony Fernandes has a unique way of managing his staffs. He was not implement bureaucracy in his work environment. All staff working in his office are allowed to come in to his room if there is any urgent matter that needs to be discussed and resolved promptly (DesiAnwar, 2013; Siva, 2009). This Tony Fernandes’s act has made a big impact on the performance of the company as employees also happy and work hard to achieve company goals. All Air Asia employees are treated as a family and they are very proud to be working at Air Asia. Ideas contributed by the staffs also will be heard very well and accepted if it will be benefit for the company. Other than that, the outstanding ideas also will be rewarded. Tony Fernandes believes that having a lot of bureaucracy can hinder business growth because of business now days were very competitive. So as a leader need to make it simple and trying to make everyone happy to doing work and move forward together in the same direction in achieving company goals. This is shown that AirAsia are using participation leadership style.

Characteristic of management in AirAsia
Manager is someone which will motivates furthermore as affecting individuals and groups within a corporation to attain their targets (Kamisan & King, 2013). They ensure work are completed, concentrate on on their every single tasks and handle others activities and effective leader provides vision and direction for employee development (Souba, 2011). The characteristic of the managers is vital to create continuous in organization because managers are someone who are clo to the employees. One of the key success in AirAsia is leadership that management team implied in the company.

The first characteristic of the manager in AirAsia is they are good at leadership skills; the management skills and leadership skills are something that slightly different in terms. This is because when management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right thing (Peter F. Drucker). Both management and leadership major in give influence to people in organization and working to achieve vision and goals, (The Guardian, 2013). As mentioned before in his interview, Tony Fernandes said that as a leader he believes in transparency in managing the organisation which has trust and ethics. In his interview with Desi Anwar (2012)“..... I like openness, I like transparency, I like the staff to know everything then there is no secret.......” said Tony Fernandes to support the statement. The charismatic leadership as demonstrated by Tony had influences and enhance trust and respect from most of the employees in AirAsia and support by construct of transformational leadership (Nahavandi, 2009). This is shown that AirAsia are always implemented leadership skills for the organisation. The previous owner of AirAsia that is Tony Fernandez are not just bring the flight service to the customer, but they are also brigs hotels, activities, lifestyle, e-commerce and more products to bring in the company “selling plane tickets beyond e-commerce is one of AirAsia aims to expand ” (Elffie Chew and Kyunghee Park, 2019). This means that AirAsia is the company that open-minded and not just focus on one service only.

Besides that, the manager in AirAsia are also innovative and motivate employees. Motivation attribute moves for us to do rather than do nothing” (Lai, 2011). In organization, Tony Fernandez motivate employees by provide with lots of innovative business strategies and brilliant ideas in showing a good example as an innovator such as introduce ‘zero’ fare strategy, no-frills airlines and famous tagline ‘Now everyone can fly’ that have become AirAsia competitive business strategy . AirAsia Chief Executives officer Datuk Tony Fernandez said “company's most valuable asset are employees and to make them identify with the company are every effort should be
made” (The Star, 2005). This shown as a leader, Fernandes values his employee and motivate them to have the passion and dream in working. AirAsia also attains the competent work of their people by implemented intelligence of emotional and apply it in a way that. Thus, it shown in the management team of AirAsia that are Anti-hierarchy and highly motivated.

Finally, yet importantly, management is a dynamic function and continuous process. All the function that management are perform continuously like planning, organising, staffing, controlling and dynamic to be able analyse and manage opportunities the alternatives with their intelligence are perform all the time. This is important when the company are facing crisis, multiple stakeholders often affect (McDonald et al., 2010) which is some of stakeholders did not consider to be an important stakeholder before the crisis happened in organization. Unexpected conflicts and difficulties can be led from it (Alpaslan et al., 2009; Acquier et al., 2008; Quarantelli, 1988). The proven that the AirAsia has facing going concern are when the airline company has facing the crisis when one of the aircraft QZ8501 crash due to the storm (Sadho Ram, 2015). Tony Fernandes said, “The reason why I give them credit is to make they didn’t keep insisting which is important for us that the families agreed we go on forever” (Sadho Ram, 2015). This shown the management team are trying their best to makes the company stable back like giving compassion to the family that get involved and trying their best to take trust from the customers back. In this case, three phases is considered in the management to overcome their crisis; the phase of prevention, the phase of response, and the phase of recovery (Hale et al., 2005)

Performance Management
Tony Fernandes’s philosophy stated that all criteria of business must be clarified so that the goal, vision, mission and objectives should be acknowledged by all stakeholders, mainly the employees and customers (AirAsia, 2010b). Part analytical and part emotional (Hashim, 2008). Maintaining the decision-making and high accessibility to the community of media and investor is his management approach. In addition, he reiterates that communication between the management and employees must be constant of the brand. Attempting to promote the employees about the sense of loyalty and commitment to the company has become a daily interaction of Tony Fernandes and the application of being vigilant at all times to protect AirAsia’s image. Thus, he is constantly developing the employee’s satisfaction and employees’ development in the workplace. Tony Fernandes implementation of performance management also focus on the treatment of employees, its culture, and the way AirAsia is branded and marketed to the public with an air of friendly atmosphere.

From Anthony and Govindarajan (2007 p. 6) state that, “the process of managers influence other members of the organization to implement the organization’s strategies is management control”. With the focus of employee’s performances, Tony Fernandes have faith in talents within the organisation and motivating employees to achieve employee’s satisfaction. The treatment and teamwork of all his employees is firmly believed in the view of Tony Fernandes. In the interview of by Harvey, (2012) Tony Fernandes quoted that “In AirAsia, we reckon ourselves primarily as a dream factory. We slowly and knowingly with a decision of requiring or wanted a company for people to pursue their passion and talents while utilize all the skills and tools that we have internally. The culture of requiring openness and the desire for people to be creative and passionate about what they do, resulting in their commitment towards the company, AirAsia. To achieve that, motivation or inspiration must be conducted by the
managers or leaders of the company." This method emphasises the importance employee’s relationship and values that can be described as a transformational approach. From the interviews (DesiAnwar, 2012; bfmvdo, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Sutha, 2012) whereas stated that there are some characteristics of transformational dimensions in his management.

Next is AirAsia's culture, innovation, openness, youthfulness, an impudent sense of fun, and a never-say-die attitude are the characteristic of culture shown in the company (Ahmad, 2010). The supportive of and requirements by the commitment of the organisation is the clarification of work structures, the practices of transparent performance management, and the empowerment of employees. The culture created by Tony Fernandes can be describe as a constructing a strong, team-orientated corporate culture, thus the employees recognize and support to the organisation’s key strategy and focuses on maintaining a low costs and high productivity AirAsia to motivates its employees by rewarding bonuses based on the contribution of each employees to AirAsia's productivity, and assuming of an increase loyalty (AirAsia, 2010c). Thus, he demands transparency in decision making purposes and encourages loyalty.

The performance management on manners of AirAsia is branded and marketed, based on the view of the tagline "Now Everyone Can Fly" assuming to be a trendy image that can develop the communication. In the social network field, which is an advance in communication can create more awareness internationally. As a further testament to the trend of its communication style, AirAsia is recognised as the world’s best airline for replying to tweets, responding to more than 40% of the tweets it receives (Lim et al., 2009). In the world of sports too, AirAsia has a great network with sponsoring the Football club's Queens Park Rangers and William’s Formula 1 racing team. Hence, the manner of AirAsia is publicly known with its communication. The terms 'people's airline' can be shown as a competitive advantage from the practise of low-cost strategy airlines and the performance management of employee-oriented practices, a culture of supportiveness and the manner of communication of its brand.

**Transformational Leadership**

Burns study said that transformational leadership need to involve the inspiring followers to commit to a share vision that provides meaning to their employees to perform beyond expectation (Burns, 1978). The transformational leaders will motivate their employees to do more than their expected when doing their work. By the risen consciousness of employees in the organization about the important of vision and mission in the company, the employees will stay motivated in doing their job. By this, the confidence level of each employees will rise, and it makes the company achieves their goals easily. In the study of Bass, Avolio & Bass and others said that there are three conceptual and empirically derived factors of transformational leadership that can be implemented in a company (Bass, 1985, 1990; Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass & Avolio, 1989; Hater & Bass, 1988). The leader if AirAsia that is Tony Fernandes has implemented transformational leadership in their company to rise. Their mission that is allow everyone can fly with the trademark of “everyone can fly” around the world has been mission for his employees too.

First, the transformational leader is more charismatic and inspiring to all the employees. In the study of House, charismatic leaders must have great referent power and influence, inspire loyalty to the organization, command respect, and have an ability
to see what is important in the organisation (vision) (House, 1977). The behaviour of Tony Fernandes when he is dealing with the shareholders or the employees in the organization, he intends to be humble by ask around and share his phone number to his employees when they need something to deliver. This behaviour will increase their motivation to share the same vision and mission and try their best to achieve company’s goal. This is proving that charismatic leaders are arouse, excite, and inspire subordinates (House, 1977). Bass and Avolio study said that charismatic and inspirational qualities have been observed at all levels of organizations (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1989).

Secondly, transformational leadership is individualized consideration. In the individualized consideration, involve behaving ways that help followers achieve their potential through couching, mentoring, and development. In AirAsia, the employees can show their talent directly to the founder of AirAsia that is Tony Fernandes when they are having unique ideas or have any complaint to make in the organization. The openness style of leadership makes the employees feel comfortable and respect him. When they are having the ideas, he will try to make their dreams comes true. Based on Bass and Avolio study, the company will continuous follow-up and feedback and, perhaps more importantly, links an individual’s current needs to the organization’s mission and elevates those needs when it is appropriate to do so (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1989) that will increase their motivation in doing work.

Finally, yet importantly, intellectual stimulation is the last component of transformational leadership. It involves behaving in ways that challenge followers to be innovative and creative by questioning assumption and reframing old situation in new ways. Tony Fernandes showed his intellectual stimulation when he was handling the for example the crash of flight QZ8501 in ava Sea off Borneo shortly after take-off on 28 December 2014 with no survivors. When Tony heard about this news, he immediately wished his console in his Twitter and compensated his employees that involved with the crash. This is shown that the company are always ready when the things that are not expected happened in their company. Based on BBC news, Tony are going to the site of the crash plane as soon as he knows that incident happened. Based on Bass and Avolio study, the leaders are willing and able to show subordinates the new ways of looking at old methods (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1989).

This is shown that AirAsia is implemented transformational leadership in the company. There are three empirically derived factors and theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1990; Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass & Avolio, 1989; Hater & Bass, 1988) that is charismatic and inspiring, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. These could be supported by analysing his statement about the transformation of leadership in most of the interviews (DesiAnwar, 2012, bfmvdo, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Sutha, 2012) where he mentioned several aspects of transformational dimensions in terms of leadership.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, leadership define as the use of power and influence to direct the activities of followers toward goal achievement. This project has discussed on the leadership of the CEO of AirAsia, Tony Fernandes on the leadership styles, leadership characteristics, performance management and the application of transformation leadership.
Under the leadership of Tony Fernandes, fundamental skills and fixated towards the environment is what he mainly refer to on his style of leadership. This study provides the acknowledgment of leadership and mostly towards practical more than theory. The successful progression of this organization is because of the organization motivates and maintain its employees together with training employees development to incorporate values required to manage an organization. This organization values the employee’s view on philosophies and culture in difficult situations in the generation of constant change and improvement in advancement of variety aspects that is needed essentially to achieve a sustainable business in the airline industry with the low cost strategy implementation. The leadership strategy style led us to have a vision of leadership to an effective leader that is able to influence the behaviour of others without being autocratic (Mullins 2013). Besides that, every individual is unique; therefore, I would also like to practice situational leadership so that I am able to effectively lead various people of different levels.

Next is the tenacity or hunger to improving the organization that is influenced by the leadership characteristics. From the various researches such as the interview from Desi Anwar, 2012 and Nahavandi, 2009, stated that behaviour or characteristics of Tony’s leadership can be define as openness, which is one of the key to leadership that describes as developing a strong connection with your teams. With a hypothesis that shown the stronger the interactions, the higher the teamwork of your teams will be, to accomplish the objectives or goals of the task for the organization. Besides, an approachable leader is characterize as an openness, which gives people the mind-set and affection that they are working with you, together and not for you. This will be resulting an affective commitment to be occurring. This also can improve the relationship between managers and employees and the job performance will be impressive.

The low cost strategic positions is suitable with performance management systems where there is a conservative culture, centralised organisational structure, formalized and financially-based strategic planning, specialised and formalized work procedures, more emphasis on financial data, cost efficiency, tight budget control, individual evaluations emphasise performance to budget targets, output control, incentive systems that are formulaic and financially focused, and training and employee development focusing on specialisation, task efficiency, and cost control (Adler, 2011; Anthony and Govindarajan, 2007). Further, Langfield-Smith (1997) finds that there is a level of consistency between the performance management characteristics of organisations following low cost and defender strategies.

Lastly, conducting this types of elements together which are, of innovative, entrepreneurial, charisma, ethics and transparency in piloting their companies competing in the international market is describe as a transformational leader who Tony Fernandes is also known of (Tracey & Hinkin, 1994; Gill et al, 2010). Having a moderate positive relationship with job performance and has a strong positive relationship with organizational commitment is known for transformational leadership. Means that this approach is provided to the nature of the workforce because has stronger effects on the outcomes of the process. AirAsia is constantly adapting to the global environment with their leadership style and performance strategy to accomplish their goals and surviving in this airline industry.
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Why Great Leaders (Like Richard Branson) Inspire Instead of Motivate, Available at: https://www.inc.com/marissa-levin/why-great-leaders-like-richard-branson-inspire-instead-of-motivate.html