

Leadership Attributes and Style of an Iron Lady in Security Industry

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Abstract

This leadership case study on Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid, Chairman of Securiforce Group, outlines the leadership attributes and style of an iron lady of Malaysia. The case begins with a brief overview on the involvement of women business leaders in Malaysia. This is followed by a review of leadership attributes and leadership styles. Next, the study focused on Datuk Maznah's childhood years, the initial years of her career, and how she went to become one of the prominent women business leaders in Malaysia. In that process, her leadership attributes and style are unveiled. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Datuk Dr. Maznah herself and her three managerial employees. Gathered data were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Among others, results indicated that Datuk Dr. Maznah is a visionary, determined, having integrity, and ambitious leader. She is described as a transformational leader who has the ability to inspire people with higher ideals and moral values.

Keywords: Leadership attributes, leadership style, business leader

1.0 Introduction

In Malaysia, women have made progress in the wider workforce over recent years. Nonetheless, the percentage of women in senior management is still low at only 24% (Thornton, 2012). Furthermore, the report showed that the percentage of businesses with female Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in Malaysia is only 6%. Realising such unpromising percentage of women's involvement, the Malaysian government has introduced a policy that requires at least 30% of women in top management and decision-making positions in the corporate sector (Yusoff & Ramin, 2013).

While this policy is undeniably a commendable effort, the researchers believe that it is crucial to understand how these 6% of women, who have broken the glass ceiling, have managed to do so. Unveiling the secrets of success of this small but influential group of women, would help to understand what it takes to be a successful woman leader. For that purpose, Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid was chosen due to her remarkable success in the male-dominated industry, i.e., security industry.

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Leaders' Attributes

Many qualities have been identified as important attributes that great leaders must have. For instance, an empirical study of more than 200 European CEOs and their key subordinates has revealed five core attribute sets (Edgeman, Dahlgaard, Dahlgaard, & Scherer, 1999), i.e., great leaders must be (i) tolerant, motivational, inspirational, and supportive; (ii) respectful, trusting, reliable, and fair; (iii) trustworthy; (iv) innovative, visionary, courageous, and confident; and (v) obsessed with new ideas, curious, energetic, and participative. Consistent with that, Tracy (2016) identified seven attributes of good leaders, as in Table 1.

Table 1

Attributes of Great Leaders

Attributes	Description
Visionary	Have a clear and exciting idea of where they are going and what they are trying to accomplish.
Courage	Willingness to take risks in the achievement of their goals with no assurance of success.
Integrity	Always tell the truth to all people and in every situation.
Humility	Having self-confidence and self-awareness to recognise the value of others without feeling threatened.
Strategic planning	Ability to look ahead, to anticipate with some accuracy where the industry and markets are going.
Focus	Ability to make sure that everyone is focused on the most valuable use of their time. Able to focus on the strengths in themselves, and in others.
Cooperation	Ability to gain cooperation of others by making commitment to get along well with each key person

Source: Tracy (2016)

In addition to the above, Forbes (2016) highlighted attributes of great leaders as (i) ability to delegate; (ii) excellent communication skills; (iii) high confidence; (iv) great commitment; (v) positive attitude; (vi) highly creative; (vii) good intuition; (viii) naturally inspirational; and (ix) having diverse approach.

2.2 Leadership Styles

A review of literature showed various types of leadership styles, such as authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, paternalistic, participative, and transformational

styles (Table 2). Authoritarian leadership style stipulates that leaders normally keep strict, close control over followers by imposing policies and regulations. This type of leadership style is normally seen in enforcement authorities, like the police department, schools, etc. The democratic leadership style suggests that leaders normally share decision-making with their subordinates to promote the interests of the group and social equality. Such leaders usually avail the time to allow people to contribute, develop a plan and vote before making final decisions. Laissez-faire leadership style is sometimes regarded as “hands-off” leadership because the leaders delegate the tasks to their followers with little or no direction. They expect employees to be proactive in pursuing the mission of the organisation (Sorenson, 2000), which may hamper its productivity.

The transactional leadership style suggests the use of a reward and punishment system to motivate employees (Bass 1985; Sashkin, 2004). Transactional leadership is based on exercising bureaucratic authority and legitimate power in the organisation, and such leaders emphasise task assignments, work standards, and employee compliance. Transactional leadership styles may also be associated with a leader’s moral and ethical orientation where they share an interest in protecting the rights of others but tend to be more concerned with utility maximisation (Aronson, 2001; Groves, 2010; Kanungo, 2001). Furthermore, transactional leaders tend to be more concerned with structural or procedural justice, and are motivated to comply with existing environmental pressure because it is good for business. In the absence of these external pressures, however, the motivation for transactional leaders to implement diverse practices will be likely diminished.

Paternalistic leaders, on the other hand, act as a father or mother figure, where they portray complete concern for their followers and workers. In this work culture, relationships are arranged hierarchically. The leaders retain all information and decision-making authority; and managers closely supervise employees, giving employees little discretionary space (Hunt, Osborn, & Schuler, 1978). The leaders provide their subordinates with good work conditions and fringe benefits. It is assumed that employees will work harder out of gratitude, and leaders receive complete trust and loyalty of their people. However, this leadership style has been criticised for generating antagonism and resentment among subordinates, particularly those who do not like their interests to be looked after by a “godfather”.

Participative leadership is a managerial style that invites input from employees on all company decisions. The staff are given pertinent information regarding company issues, and a majority vote determines the course of action the company will take. Participative leadership can sometimes be a slower form of decision-making, but it has several advantages that may make it the right managerial method for business. These advantages are, (i) better acceptance; (ii) increased morale; (iii) enhanced creativity; and (iv) greater retention.

In terms of acceptance, the staff would more readily accept policies and decisions that have been reached through general consensus. This cuts down on the resistance that new company policies will experience and speeds up the process of implementing new

ideas. Furthermore, employees are given a personal stake in the success of new company policies by being involved in the process of creating and approving these policies, and that will help the company to adjust rapidly to policy changes. Participative leadership style also boosts staff morale by giving them a voice in the operations of the company, which eventually makes them feel personally liable for the success of the company. Staff morale remains at a high level because there is an appreciation for the chance to be part of the company's decision-making process. Employees will also take a more active role on improving work conditions when they know that they can directly affect the policies that govern the workplace.

Participative leadership style, which encourages employees to give their opinions on company issues, normally has various options to choose from. To be involved in the decision-making process of the company, the staff must be intimately involved in how the company operates. Such empowerment enables employees to use their creativity to develop more productive work processes and make the company more efficient. A participative style of leadership offers employees more than just the opportunity to improve their income through good performance. It gives the employees the chance to be active in determining the future success of the company. Allowing employees to be active in the growth of the organisation encourages the employees to stay with the company to see their plans bear fruit or materialise. This will improve employee retention and cut down on the costs of turnover.

Meanwhile, transformational leaders motivate followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. They define and articulate a vision for the firm, and inspire followers to carry it out (Bass, 1985; House & Shamir, 1993; Sashkin, 2004). Research had shown that transformational leadership embodies four primary dimensions, namely idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Sashkin, 2004). These leadership characteristics are important because they invoke (1) strong responses from followers, such as performance beyond expectation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007); (2) changes in the fundamental values held by followers and devotion to the leader (House & Shamir, 1993; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Sashkin, 2004); and (3) a willingness on the part of subordinates to sacrifice their personal interests for the collective good (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003).

Transformational leadership style may be associated with a leader's moral and ethical orientation. Transformational leaders tend to be fundamentally concerned with doing what is "morally right" and protecting the rights and dignity of individuals (Aronson, 2001; Groves, 2010; Kanungo, 2001). Consistent with this perspective, transformational leaders have been shown to demonstrate higher perceived integrity (Aronson, 2004; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002); greater moral development (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Turner et al., 2002); and a higher degree of ethical behaviour (Aronson, 2004; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Kanungo, 2001). Given the link between moral development and diversity (Demuijnck, 2009; DiTomaso & Hooijberg, 1996; Wilson, 2009), it is

anticipated that transformational leaders will take action more consistent with the spirit of inclusivity and social responsibility (Nishii & Mayer, 2009). Transformational leaders may also be better able to convince followers that managing diversity is an important moral obligation and not simply an issue of legal compliance with a government mandate (Gilbert et al., 1999; Leonard & Grebler, 2006).

Transformational leaders are inclined to place a strong emphasis on protecting the welfare of individuals in society and ensuring the fair treatment of all people in their actions (Hood, 2003; Tatum et al., 2003). In this regard, transformational leaders may be drawn to managing diversity because it will enhance the well-being of the organisation and its members (Kearney & Gebert, 2009).

Table 2

Summary of Leadership Styles

Style	Description
Authoritarian	Leaders normally keep strict, close control over followers by imposing policies and regulations.
Democratic	Leaders normally share decision-making with their subordinates to promote the interests of the group and social equality.
Laissez-faire	Leaders delegate the tasks to their followers with little or no direction.
Transactional	Leaders use rewards and punishment system to motivate employees.
Paternalistic	Leaders act as a father or mother figure, where they portray complete concern for their followers and workers.
Participative	Leaders invite input from employees on all company decisions.
Transformational	Leaders motivate followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values. They define and articulate a vision for the firm, and inspire followers to carry it out.

3.0 Research Method

As indicated earlier, this is a case study of a prominent women business leader in Malaysia, i.e., Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews at her office in Kuala Lumpur. In order to ensure richer and more accurate data, interviews with her three managerial employees were also conducted. The interview sessions with the participants were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Data gathered from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns within the data. This thematic analysis was performed in six phases following the step-by-step guide by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The phases include data familiarisation, initial code generation, themes search, review of themes, defining the themes, and naming the themes.

4.0 Research Findings

4.1 The Background

Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid is currently the Group Chairman of Securiforce Group. She is popularly known as the Iron Lady of Malaysia for her involvement in a male-dominated industry, i.e., the security business. She started her business in September 1980 after realising a potential opportunity in this field. With a small amount of capital and no permanent staff, she was still very determined to venture into this business. With her hard work and family support, Securiforce now is a leading security company in Malaysia, in an industry that has more than 400 companies. She is now monitoring 65 branches with over 6,000 employees. Her company reputation and operations have spread its wings internationally, to Singapore, Thailand, China, Korea, Turkey, and Germany. Datuk Dr. Maznah has now ventured into property development and logistics businesses as well.

Due to her great interest in human capital, she successfully set up the Maznah Motivational Centre (MMC) which conducts entrepreneurship seminars and human development training series. She coined the, “Zero to Hero” and “Awaken the Spirit of Entrepreneurship/Intrapreneurship” slogans and uses them in seminars to spur and instil the entrepreneurial spirit in every individual.

4.2 Her Early Days

Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid was a village girl who came from Ayer Hitam, Jerlun, Kedah. At the age of five, her parents separated and she had to live with her poor and conservative grandparents. Being the eldest granddaughter of an “Ustaz”, Datuk Dr. Maznah was brought up in a very timid way.

During her school days, her routine was very busy. She came back from primary school at 1 pm and later went to religious school until late afternoon. During her secondary school, she spent most of her after school time meeting her English teacher. The chances to personally meet and chat with her English native speaker teacher has not only improved her English language but also motivated her to spread her wings to overseas. She believed that the inner urge, imagination, and goal setting are of importance in becoming what you want to be. With that determination, she left Jerlun for Kuala Lumpur immediately the day after she finished her Malaysian Certificate of Education.

In order to reinforce her strong will to succeed, she read about the “10 Richest Men in the World” and dreamt to become one. She knew that she wanted it badly enough and

needed to do something about it. Hence, she took Administrative Business executive programme at Stamford College. With Business English, International Marketing, and Mandarin language courses taken, she hoped that she could migrate overseas and achieve her dreams. While pursuing her dreams, she met with her husband and got married.

With her English education background, she took a communication translation course at a Language Centre and joined the Centre as a staff for two years. She did not stay long when she saw an opportunity to serve as a translator at foreign embassies such as the Korean Embassy and the US Embassy. After a while, she again, quit and started her own business in security industry that made her what she is today.

4.3 How the Business Started?

Her decision to engage in the security business started when she served as a private translator at the Embassies and to the expatriate families. During her daily routine of going back and forth to their places, she noticed that these rich people with their big houses need proper security to ensure the safety of their family members. At that time, no such service was offered to private premises. That scenario opened a wide opportunity for business, i.e., security business. With that thought in mind, she boldly started the business in 1970s in Jalan Ipoh with her own fund of RM5,000. At that time, she and her newly married husband hired only five guards who were among her family members from her hometown, Ayer Hitam.

It was a very humble start where there were only five clients. With her guts and courage, she approached Tun Ismail Mohd Ali, who was the Central Bank Governor at that time, to be her client. Sometimes, she and her husband had to get on the ground when there was not enough guard on duty or during festive seasons when they went on leave. The husband would be patrolling the area while she would serve as a guard at the premise.

Having that experience taught her on the practical issues which opened up more potential business opportunities. For instance, when she was on duty at one supermarket in Bukit Bintang, she discovered that there were a lot of potential areas that require security including store room, system, locker, and alarm system, which led her to another business of camera circuit television (CCTV) system. This has led her and the company to develop 20 various systems which made her business a success. At this point, she already came up with a total security solution and sent flyers to homes offering guard service, body guard, jewellery storage, and tele-contact.

4.4 Her Leadership Attributes

4.4.1 Personal Views

The interview with Datuk Dr. Maznah showed that she is a very determined person. This is clearly seen on a number of occasions. For instance, her decision to move to

Kuala Lumpur in order to succeed at a very young age of 17 years. At that time, she did not have her Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) results yet, but her drive to change her life from a village girl to a successful person compelled her to take that leap. She took the Administrative Business Executive course at Stamford College with the intention of migrating. She studied International Marketing, Business English, and Mandarin Language, which she felt would be an advantage when she migrates. Her steely determination once again surfaced when she decided to venture into the security business despite knowing that it is male-dominated industry and a very challenging business. She learned from scratch and even undertook the tasks of a guard when there was a need to replace her staff who took leave.

For Datuk Dr. Maznah, integrity is crucial in her business. When clients entrust her with their property and wealth, it is her responsibility to safeguard them. She felt that integrity is the main reason for the sustainability of her business. She highlighted that, “integrity is my branding. I am dealing with gold bar, money. You need to earn that trust from your client”.

Datuk Dr. Maznah described herself as an easy-going person. For her, being in an industry which is dominated by men, she has to befriend and work well with them. Also, she likes to have intelligent people as her friends in order to learn from them. She has been practising this from a very young age, when she mingled with her English language teachers. Through her easy-going manner and desire to learn and emulate, she is now surrounded by friends from all over the world, who provide her with a potpourri of experiences and knowledge. From the interview, she said, “if you want to be rich, you must be among those rich people, if you want to be intelligent, you must be among those intelligent people. If you want to be pious, mix with the pious people”.

Datuk Dr. Maznah claimed that passion and hard work are important for a business leader. In her case, she is very passionate about her work. That is why she does not mind working late and spending most of her time at office. For her, in business, it is not the regular office hours from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, but one must be willing to work 24 hours a day. Yet, she enjoys every minute of it even though she has to sleep in the office. She reiterated that, “you have to be passionate (about your business) and willing to sacrifice. You need to enjoy the job. Otherwise, do not be involved in business. If you sell clothes or fabric like Jakel, you still need to work till midnight. If you make cookies or open a restaurant like Chef Wan, you have to enjoy cooking. There are people who do business but they do not like it. They are forced to do it. They will not succeed. You have to enjoy doing business”.

For Datuk Dr. Maznah, her eloquence also contributed to her success. She can speak with confidence to convince her clients. When she first started the business, she approached Tun Ismail Mohd Ali, the Governor of Central Bank at that time to be her client even though she had only a few staff members at that time. With her knowledge in international marketing and experience in dealing with people of diverse backgrounds, she is confident that she can sell almost everything; “I’m a great speaker. I can sell anything, at any time, at any cost”.

Datuk Dr. Maznah personally believes in leading by example. As a trainer herself, she wants her employees to be intrapreneurs. She wants them to work hard and uphold integrity in order to succeed. She demonstrated this herself when she comes to the office at night or during the weekend. She believed that when her employees observe her diligence, they will join her. Over time, working hard will become the culture of Securiforce.

4.4.2 Employees' Perspectives

From her employees' perspective, Datuk Dr. Maznah is a person with a vision and specific goals. She makes sure her employees understand the vision and work in congruence toward its achievement. She is aware that the vision of Securiforce cannot be achieved without the help and support of her employees. Hence, teamwork is very much emphasised in the company. In Securiforce, everyone needs to pull his or her own weight and contribute all that it takes to ensure the achievement of the vision and mission.

To her employees, Datuk Dr. Maznah is a hardworking employer and very highly disciplined. She only has two to three hours of sleep a day but always appears fresh in the morning. She expects all her staff to be particular about their appearance too and they have to not only work smart but dress smart because they are the front-line staff who will meet customers and win over their confidence toward the services rendered by the company. Hence, Datuk Dr. Maznah is meticulous about the whole package—smart, confident, and capable staff, who can communicate, negotiate, and make clients feel that they are dealing with a company par-excellence. Should any of her staff members slack in these qualities, she would talk and advise them sincerely. Some of the staff regard Datuk Dr. Maznah as a mind-reader; within a short span of meeting staff, she can sum up their strengths and their weaknesses. In short, Datuk Dr. Maznah has won the admiration of her staff for her capability, spirit, and true grit.

Datuk Dr. Maznah is indeed very ambitious. She believes that success does not belong to one person. All staff must be provided with the right motivation toward self-success and the success of the company as well. As and when the need arises, she sends the staff for further external training, for instance, English classes and marketing courses. For Datuk Dr. Maznah, it is of utmost importance that the staff members are continuously developed. The staff and their family members admire her capability and regard her as an iron lady. They agree that by just observing her unmitigated determination and leadership style, they get motivated.

Though regarded as an iron lady, Datuk Dr. Maznah has a personal touch and is quite friendly with her staff. She treats her employees as family members and makes frequent visits to company branches to meet the staff. Datuk Dr. Maznah is liked by her staff as she would show her appreciation and gratitude by approaching and thanking them in person for their contribution and efforts. She is also regarded as a caring employer when she enquires into the health of her staff and their family members. Staff or family

members who are ill feel touched when Datuk Dr. Maznah takes the time to visit them. To Datuk Dr. Maznah, staff must care for their health; otherwise, it would affect their performance. All managers in Securiforce take after Datuk Dr. Maznah in showing care and concern for the staff's well-being.

4.5 *Her Leadership Style*

Datuk Dr. Maznah exhibits a transformational leadership style. She wholeheartedly trusts her employees. Datuk Dr. Maznah likes to promote from within. One example of this is her Director-cum-CEO, Mr. Jalil. He started as a junior officer at the Cash-in-Transit Department. Datuk Dr. Maznah saw something in him and transferred him from one department to another to enable him to learn about the company as a whole. After a while, he was promoted and is now highly regarded in the Securiforce Group. Another example is Mr. Azdi. He started as an operations manager and now is a regional manager.

With the belief that success cannot be created alone, Datuk Dr. Maznah has groomed her staff to succeed together with her. As a transformational leader, the continuous development of her staff is of utmost importance to her. Her leadership quality is admired by not only her staff and their family members but also the public at large when she makes public appearances. These examples exhibit the transformational leadership style of Datuk Dr. Maznah, including her ability to be visionary and inspiring, as well as recognising her employees' potential.

As a transformational leader, Datuk Dr. Maznah does not struggle for herself only but to transform the community that surrounds her. This is witnessed through the establishment of the Maznah Motivational Centre (MMC) which conducts entrepreneurship seminars and human development training series. With the spirit of "Zero to Hero" she instils the entrepreneurial spirit in every individual. She also wrote several motivational books to share her experience and advice. Among them are "Transformasi Diri: Menuju Kejayaan, Kebahagiaan dan Kekayaan" (Transformation of Self: Toward Success, Happiness, and Wealth) and "Motivasi Memburu Kejayaan" (Motivation for Hunting Success). She wrote these books for no other reason than to inspire the public at large to succeed.

5.0 **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to understand the attributes and leadership style of Datuk Dr. Maznah Hamid who has been in the security business for over 35 years. For that purpose, personal interviews were conducted and thematic analysis was employed. Results revealed that there are a number of attributes of this prominent business leader that are worth sharing. The main attributes which are consistent with the previous literature on top qualities of great leaders, include: (i) being visionary; (ii) being

determined; (iii) having integrity; (iv) being passionate; and (v) being an eloquent speaker. In addition, the findings revealed that Datuk Dr. Maznah is a transformational leader whose approach has been successful in sustaining her business.

It is hoped that the findings would add to the existing literature on leadership attributes and styles of women business leaders, particularly in the ASEAN region. Practically, the findings would be of importance to young entrepreneurs who aspire to be industry leaders. This information can be shared during training or seminars with women entrepreneurs in order to boost their confidence level and commitment to succeed. Similarly, the attributes may be shared among graduates who are interested to venture into business in the future.

This study is not without its limitations. While the findings would provide valuable information, the fact that the researchers only focused on one case study would limit the generalisation of the findings. Notwithstanding this, the information is worth sharing with the public at large.

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