# The case for responsible leadership

The perspective of the United Nations

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*Wednesday, 4 March 2020*

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# Defining responsible leadership

# What is leadership?

"[There are] almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept." Stogdill (1974, p.259)

Leadership, although it can be confined within various terms, in reality is an **individual concept** whereby each person must **identify the needs of their environment** and build up relational **skills and personal traits** that allow them to **create influence and trust** within their subordinates **with vision and direction**.

# What is responsible leadership?

"The art of motivating, communicating, empowering and convincing people to engage in a **new vision of sustainable development and the necessary change.**"

"Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. **But if you must be without one, be without strategy.**"

*General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the coalition forces in the Gulf War of 1991.*

# What is **irresponsible** leadership?

"Behaviours conducted and decisions made by organizational leaders that are illegal and/or violate moral standards, and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers."

*(Brown and Mitchell, 2010)*

# Why do we need responsible leaders?



- Leaders have both power and potential for contributing to the betterment of the world
- Multitude of stakeholder claims: necessitate mutually beneficial relationships
- New demands on leaders: Complexity of interconnected and intercultural environment, diversity of interests and needs of multiple stakeholders
- Responsible leaders constantly work to build the capacities of their organization to learn, to change culture, and to adapt to trends.

# Why do we need responsible leaders?



**21st century challenges require responsible leadership**

**THEREFORE, responsible leadership is an URGENT imperative, NOT a luxury or even an option**

# The public sector's perspective

# Public vs. private sector leadership

Private sector
| profits and shareholder value |

Public sector
| legislation and public services |



- Similarities exist between the public and private sectors.
  - Both sectors are populated with organizations of diverse sizes, budgets, and missions.
  - Both sectors are customer service oriented - the public organization's customer being the citizens.
- Nonetheless, major differences are clear:
  - **Private sector organizations** usually focus on profits and shareholder value, while operating within a business or entrepreneurial framework.
  - **Public sector organizations** typically focus on regulatory implementation of legislation and service delivery to citizens, while operating within a unique constitutional framework founded upon the separation of powers in the branches of government.

# The Competing Values and Challenges of Leadership Roles

- Today's public-sector leaders are being asked to function with fewer resources while continually finding new ways to tackle challenges.

- Leadership in the public sector is especially important; it not only influences the job performance and satisfaction of employees but also how government and public agencies perform.

- Leadership is critical to effective public governance, including progressive planning, efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

- Public sector leaders also face different challenges than in the private sector, and perhaps call on different competencies.

# Procedures, processes, and rules

- Traditional organizational culture is markedly different between public and private sector entities.
- In a recent study in the Netherlands, entitled *Decoding the DNA of Public and Private Sector Leaders*, a research organization found that public sector leaders are confronted with the challenge of delivering public services efficiently, but always within the framework of authorized procedures, processes, and rules.
- Consequently, public sector senior leaders are typically prone to follow and monitor rules and procedures, constrained to giving restrictive directions about the way things need to be done.

# What is allowed? What is forbidden?

„In the **PUBLIC SECTOR** you can do only what is required by law, legislation, or policy.“

„In the **PRIVATE SECTOR** you can do anything that is not prohibited by law, legislation, or policy.“

# Trust, a commodity?



- Trust, and the quality of that trust, is fundamental to ensuring that public and private sector can work together
- Often, there is mistrust between both sectors
- Public sector tends to think that private sector wants to buy trust (views trust as a commodity), and carries an agenda of financial interest, without caring about society
- Private sector views public sector as inefficient, bureaucratic, and sometimes corrupt.

# The leadership for the UN agenda

# The 2030 Agenda



17 universal goals

169 targets

# The 2030 Agenda

- We, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, [...] have decided today on new global Sustainable Development Goals.

- "On behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision [...]"

- "[The Agenda] is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.

- [It is] the result of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world."

- „All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan."

- "The high-level political forum will have a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes at the global level."

# The 2030 Agenda
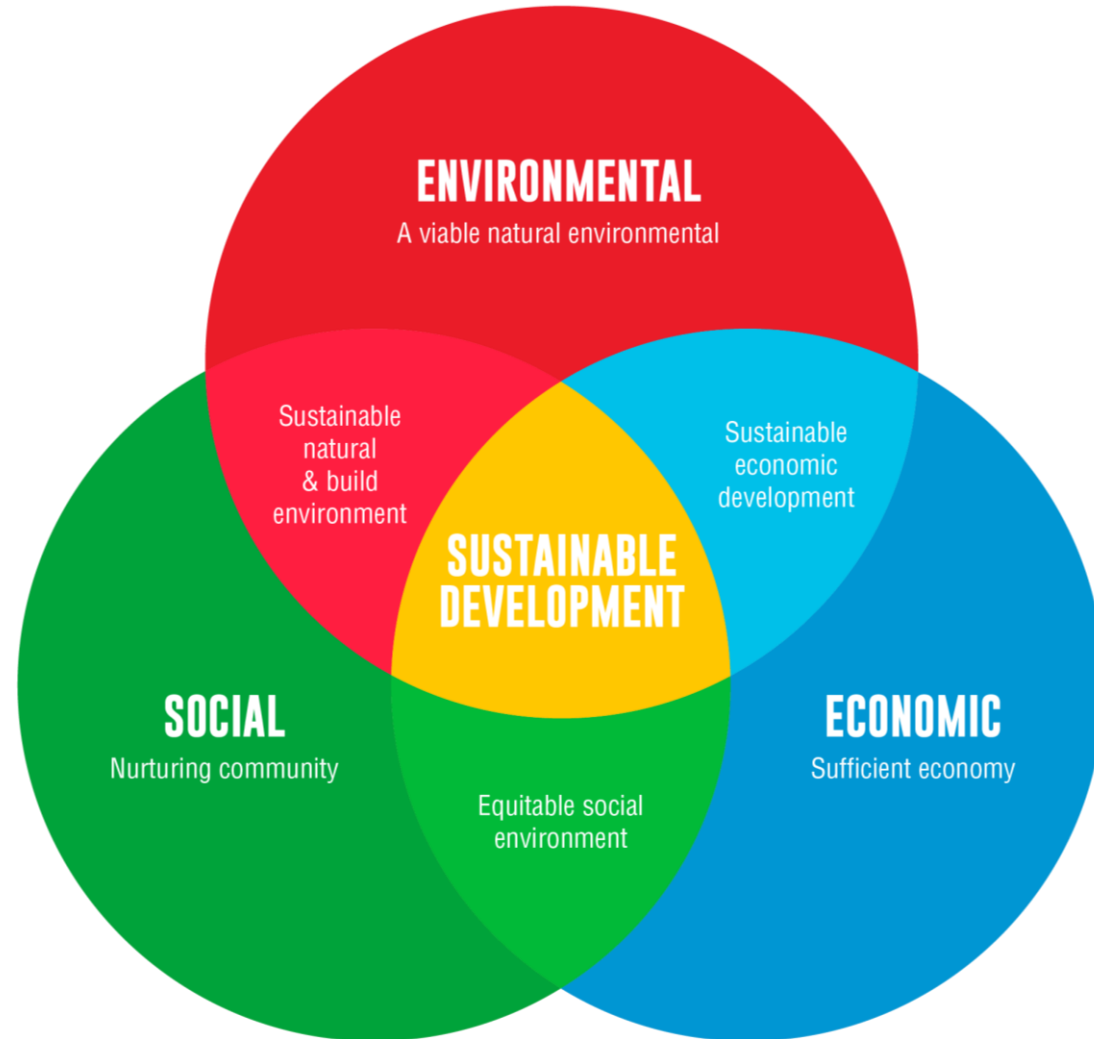
# Interconnectedness of the 2030 Agenda
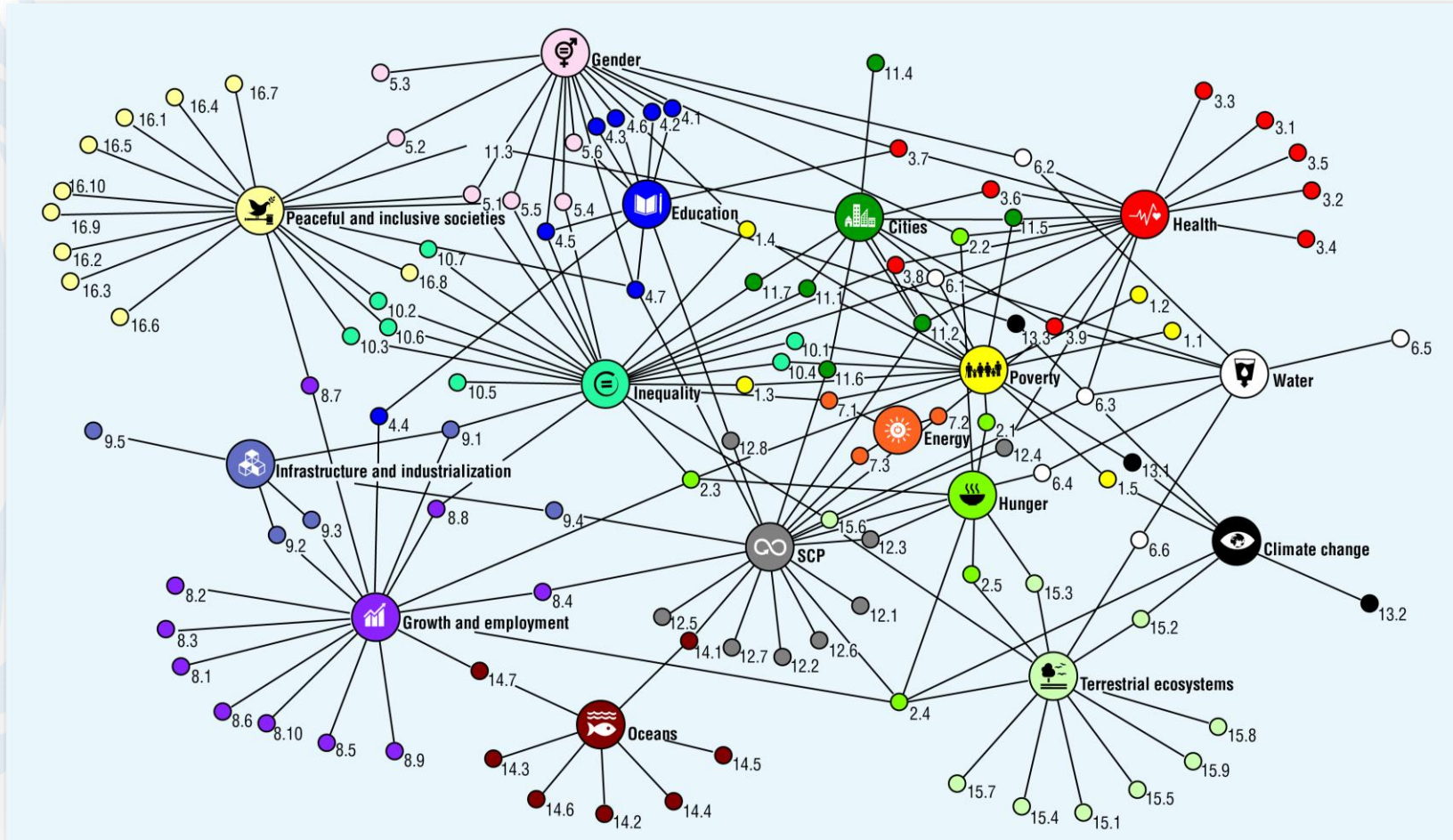
# Transformational leadership

- The 2030 Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions

- Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda specifically calls for effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

- Implementing SDG 16 must be approached from the side of "transforming" rather than just "developing" institutions.

- Responsible leadership is a fundamental part of this process.

# The concept of international service and integrity

**Dag Hammarskjold (UN Secretary General 1953-1961)**

- Before his time, service was thought of only in terms of your community and national interest.
- With the increasing amount of cross-border issues, international service became an obligatory part of every citizen's duty.
- International service has 4 core values
  - **Loyalty** to the principles of the UN charter
  - **Independence** from national or regional view
  - One's position in leadership is reliant on their sense of **integrity**. It is important to be committed to the ideals of the UN even when it is treacherous for them.
  - **Courage -** To ourselves, to be true to one's own morality. The courage to admit mistakes with humility. Lastly, the courage to defend your convictions even in the face of dangerous enemies.
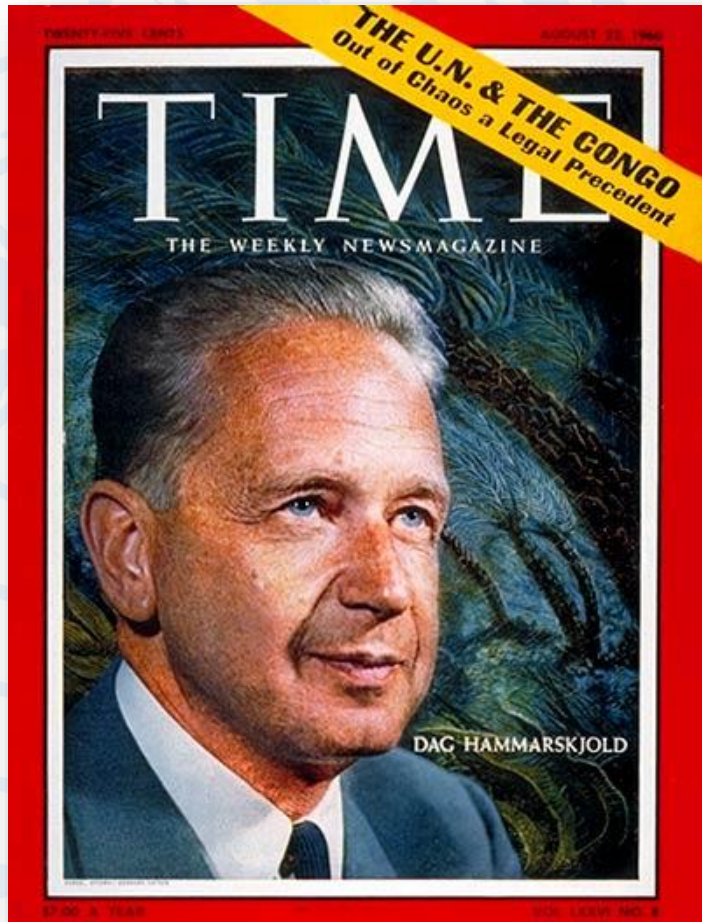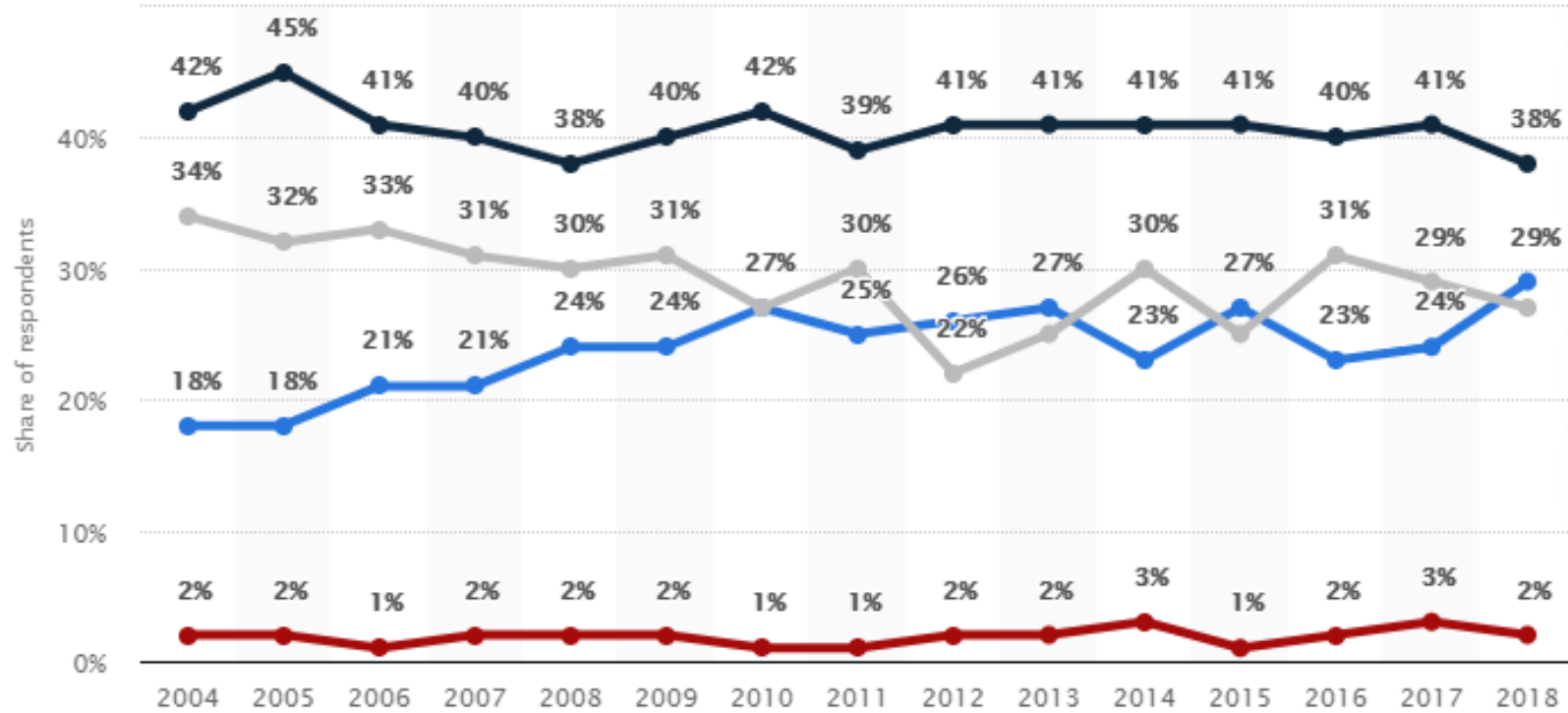
# What does it mean in practice?

# Public perception of leadership

**Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?**



Legend:
- Needs a great deal of improvement
- Could be improved quite a lot
- Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well
- Works extremely well and could not be improved

# Transformational leadership



Involves the day to day functioning of government. Not concerned with change just removing outward problems

Transactional

Transformational

Solves the root of the problem. Where real change starts.

- A transformational leader is one who aims to affect societal and institutional change.

- These leaders identify a system-wide problem then visualize a solution to it.

- A leader who uses transformational leadership is focused mainly on system-wide changes, which are much more complex than the regular maintenance that a government requires.

- Transformational leadership requires a leader with strong interpersonal skills such as charisma, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, vision, and collaboration.
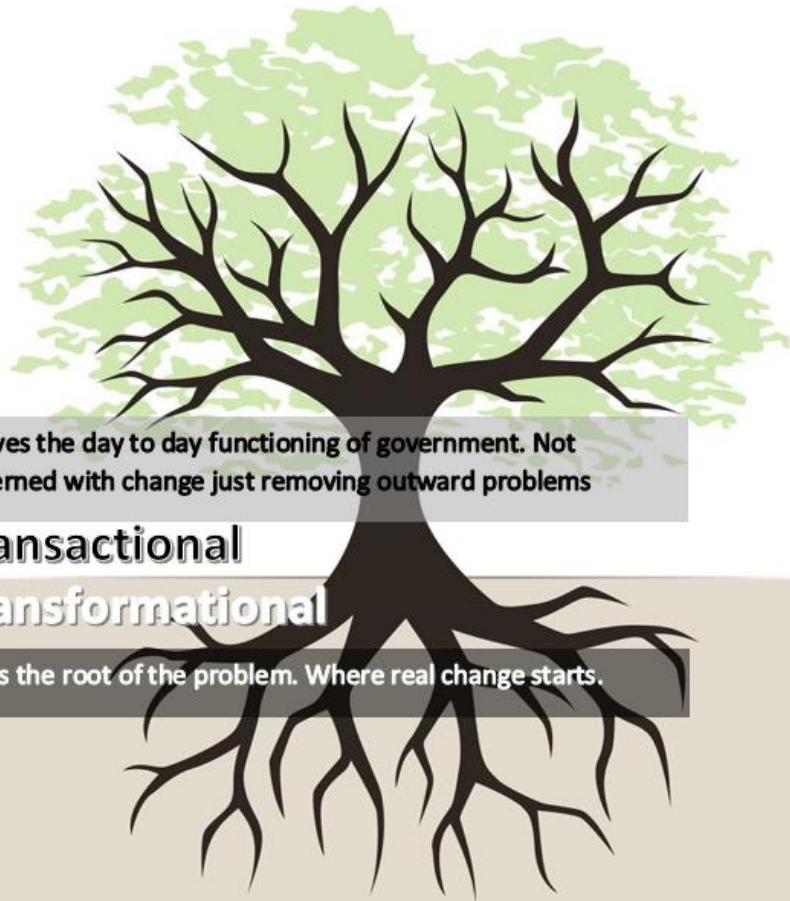
# Realpolitik and leadership

- The word realpolitik literally means "practical politics."
- It emphasises practical realities over ideological concepts.
- It focuses on considerations of power without regard to ideals, friendships, or altruism.
- It tends to function with a non-fixed set of rules and a focus on short-term accomplishments.
- Realpolitik can be seen from two sides:
  - One view is Faustian - that realpolitik is a soul-sacrificing maneuver in order to keep power.
  - Another view is that unlike naive, unflinchingly principled policies, realpolitik ensures success and progress in a society.

# Realpolitik and leadership

- The most famous German advocate of Realpolitik was **Otto von Bismarck**, the First Chancellor (1862–1890) to Wilhelm I of the Kingdom of Prussia. Bismarck used Realpolitik in his quest to achieve Prussian dominance in Germany.
- He manipulated political issues such as the Schleswig-Holstein Question and the Hohenzollern candidature to antagonize other countries and cause wars if necessary to attain his goals.

- **Richard Nixon's** diplomacy with China in the 1970's was an example of realpolitik.
- The administration deemed it beneficial for the U.S. to advance relations with China despite strong anti-communist beliefs and an overall strategy of containment.
- On February 21, 1972, President Richard M. Nixon arrived in China for an official trip. He was the first U.S. president to visit the People's Republic of China since it was established in 1949.
- This was an important event because the U.S. was seeking to improve relations with a Communist country during the Cold War.

# Pragmatic transformation?
## Lee Kuan Yew
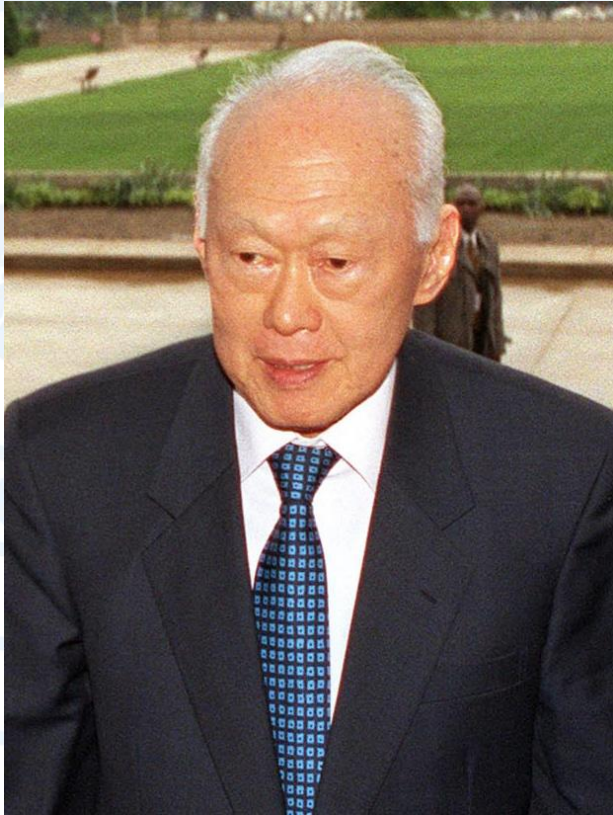
- Lee Kuan Yew was the first and longest serving Prime Minister of Singapore.
- His leadership transformed Singapore from a third world country into a thriving metropolitan city in just three decades.
- Lee eschewed populist policies in favor of pragmatic long-term social and economic measures.
- With meritocracy and multiracialism as governing principles, Lee made English the common language to integrate its immigrant society and to facilitate trade with the West, whilst mandating bilingualism in schools to preserve students' mother tongue and ethnic identity.
- Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher praised "his way of penetrating the fog of propaganda and expressing with unique clarity the issues of our time and the way to tackle them".
- He was criticised for curtailing civil liberties (public protests, media control) and bringing libel suits against political opponents. He argued that such disciplinary measures were necessary for political stability, which together with rule of law, were essential for economic progress.

# Is Realpolitik (ir)responsible?