

YISHUN JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2017

H1 GENERAL PAPER
PAPER 2

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

Joshua Rothman considers the issues surrounding leadership.

- 1 People who fetishise leadership sometimes find themselves longing for crisis. They yearn for emergency, dreaming of a doomsday to be narrowly averted. When Donald Trump's campaign released its first official television advertisement, it featured a procession of alarming images – the San Bernardino shooters, a crowd at passport control, the flag of Syria's Al Nusra Front – designed to communicate the idea of a country under siege. But the advertisement does more than stoke fear; it also excites, because it suggests that we have arrived at a moment welcoming the emergence of a strong and electrifying leader (Trump, a voice-over explains, will 'quickly cut the head off the Daesh¹ – and take their oil'). By making America's moment of crisis seem as big as possible, Trump makes himself seem more consequential too. 5 10
- 2 Our faith in the value of leadership is durable. This faith survives, again and again, our disappointment with actual leaders. Polls suggest that, even though voters who support Trump are frustrated with the people in charge, they are not disillusioned about leadership in general: they are attracted to Trump's 'leadership qualities' and to an authoritarian view of life. In a sense, they are caught in a feedback loop. The glorification of leadership makes existing leaders seem disappointing by comparison, leading to an ever more desperate search for 'real' leaders to replace them. Trump's supporters are not the only ones caught in this loop. Schools that used to talk about 'citizenship' now claim to train 'the leaders of tomorrow'; academics study leadership in think tanks and institutes; leadership experts emote their way through talks about it on YouTube. 15 20
- 3 If you are flexible in how you define 'leadership', you will find that people have been thinking about it for a very long time. Plato, Confucius, and the poet (or poets) who wrote the Bhagavad Gita thought about leadership; so did Machiavelli. Historians have detailed the lives and decisions of individual leaders. Still, case studies and books on leadership advice do not add up to the kind of systematic description you would need in order to say that someone has 'leadership qualities'. The attempt to create that description – to develop, essentially, a science of leadership – began around a century ago, but has met with little success. 25
- 4 For a long time, leadership experts remained nostalgic for old-type leaders. In the nineteenth century, books such as Thomas Carlyle's 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History' attempted to isolate, through historical surveys, the character traits of 'great men'. Well into the twentieth century, many scholars elaborated on a 'trait model' of leadership. They proposed that leaders possessed certain personality traits – courage, decisiveness, intelligence, attractiveness, and so on – that made them intrinsically charismatic, with no respect for bureaucracy. A great deal of time was spent thinking about how leadership qualities might be detected, so that leaders could be identified in advance of their elevation. 30 35
- 5 The trait model is still relevant today. However, by the mid-twentieth century, alternatives to the trait model of leadership have gained traction. Experts have studied leadership psychologically, sociologically, and even 'existentially-experientially'. Many have settled on a 'process-based' approach. They have come to see leadership as something that unfolds in stages. A problem emerges, a leader is selected, a goal is 40

¹ Daesh – an Arabic acronym formed from the initial letters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)'s previous name in Arabic – "al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham"

developed, a team is assembled, the goal is re-evaluated, and it repeats. From this perspective, the working life of an organisation begins to look like an unending sequence of leadership events. A leader's job is to shepherd the team through the leadership process. 45

- 6 Process models favour the bureaucratic over the charismatic, and have a number of advantages over trait models. For one thing, they suggest that leadership is learnable: you just observe the process. For another, they are capable of differentiating between the designated leader, often a broad-shouldered white guy with a power tie and a corner office, and the actual, 'emergent' leaders around whom, at particular moments, events coalesce. Research shows that workplaces often function because of unrecognised emergent leaders, many of them women. Most fundamentally, process models acknowledge that 'being a leader' is not an identity but, rather, a set of actions. It is not someone you are. It is something you do. 50 55
- 7 Leaders, moreover, used to command; now they suggest. Conceptually, at least, leadership and power have been decoupled. In 1927, Personnel Journal cited an expert who defined leadership as 'the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation'. But after the Second World War, the concept of leadership softened. Leaders, it was said, were not dictators or tyrants; instead of ordering us around, they influenced, motivated, and inspired us. A distinction began to emerge between leadership, which was said to be inspirational, and management, which was seen as more punitive. (As the business books have it, 'managers require, leaders inspire'). The distinction persists today. On diagrams of the leadership process, 'punishing disobedient subordinates' rarely appears. 60 65
- 8 Others explore the idea that leadership is a form of captivity, in which one is both separated from others and exposed to their judgment. In his essay 'Shooting an Elephant', George Orwell describes his time as a policeman in colonial Burma. Often, he suggested his decisions were informed by his fear of shame, by the fact that 'my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at'. Sometimes, it is the people supposedly under one's control who really call the shots. 70
- 9 To some extent, leaders are storytellers; really, though, they are characters in stories. They play leading roles, but in dramas they cannot predict and do not always understand. Since the serialised drama of history is bigger than any one character's arc, leaders cannot guarantee our ultimate narrative satisfaction. In addition, events, on the whole, are more protean than people, and leaders grow less satisfying with time as the stories they are ready to tell diverge from the stories we want to hear. Finally, our desire for a coherent vision of the world is bottomless, which parallels our insatiable hunger for leadership. Leaders make the world more sensible, but never sensible enough. 75 80
- 10 Should our leaders keep this in mind? Do we want them to lead with a sense of submerged irony, of wistful self-awareness? When we are swept up in the romance of leadership, we admire leaders who radiate authenticity and authority; we respect and enjoy our 'real' leaders. At other times, though, we want leaders who see themselves objectively, who resist the pull of their own charisma, who doubt the story they have been rewarded for telling. 'If a man who thinks he is a king is mad', Jacques Lacan wrote, 'a king who thinks he is a king is no less so'. A sense of perspective may be among the most critical leadership qualities. For better or worse, however, it is the one we ask our leaders to hide. 85

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