Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia: An Exploratory Study

Paper ID: BAM-10082

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Summary: This paper explores leader behaviour in a Southeast nation which has a strong Hindu-Buddhist heritage and in recent years’ experienced political turmoil. In particular, it attempts to extend the boundaries of leadership theories by studying cultural imperatives in a nation that has roots in Sanskrit philosophies as opposed to Confucianism found in neighbouring Vietnam, China, Korea and Japan. The research employs structural equation modelling to generate a leadership profile of managers in Cambodia and in so doing identified cultural factors that influence excellence in leadership among Cambodian managers. The findings suggest that Theravada Buddhism and Cambodia’s turbulent recent political history has strong influence on the managerial behaviour of the country’s managers.

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**Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia**

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent years there has been a growing interest in leadership studies across cultures and several books on global leadership have been published (Javidan et al, 2006). Nevertheless, Morrison (2000) is of the view that though there is a growing interest in leadership research, very little has been published on characteristics, antecedents, competencies and developmental strategies. Javidan et al (2006: 68) have acknowledged that “Advice to global managers needs to be specific enough to help them understand how to act in different surroundings.” In this paper we explore the cultural imperatives that influence leadership excellence in Cambodia, a developing country in ASEAN. The purpose of this study is then to explore the cultural context of the country and provide a framework to help foreign executives to better understand the work culture of Cambodians.

Since September 11, 2001, the heightened uncertainty resulting from the horror of terrorist bombing in New York is said to have changed the context within which leaders operate (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, they argue that the content and the context of leadership are different (Kouzes and Posner, 2003: xviii). In other words, with the heightened uncertainty, the context within which leadership operates has changed but the content has not. What is the content? Isn’t content of leadership, behaviour? This then implies that there are underlying leadership behaviour patterns that remain constant, even when there are violent changes in the environment.

The first question to ask is what are the contributing factors that keep content a constant while the context changes. Would not the contextual change influence content over time? Contextual change may even have an immediate effect on behaviour which could either be temporary, where there are out pouring of emotions, or permanent, when the changes are seen as a desirable shift in the values of the society.

This line of inquiry leads to the question “Is the content of leadership universal over all cultures?” If they are universal, then there are underlying common behaviour patterns across all cultures, immaterial of the culture in which leadership is located. If the content of leadership differs between cultures (and subcultures) then we may construe that leadership operates within cultural boundaries and that the behaviour of leaders is influenced by content that is specific to a culture. For example, the compassion and collaborative spirit unleashed by the September 11, 2001 incident influenced all cultures in some form or other. These incidents become a plus or minus in terms of influence to the content of specific cultures.

In this study we investigate the leadership construct in the context of the Kingdom of Cambodia which has experienced a particularly traumatic history in recent times. The early history of this Theravada Buddhist nation is embedded within a wider Hindu civilisation that spread from India eastward to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and the Malay Archipelago. The Indianisation and sanskritisation continued through the centuries with both Hinduism and Buddhism contributing to the rich Khmer culture. The ancient ruins of the Angkor Watt are testimony to this influence. Colonisation by the French in 1883 brought western civilisation to its doorsteps and eventual subjugation of its people and the beginning of a period of bloody wars that brought the US, the Vietnamese and its own home-sprung genocidal, Khmer Rouge, in a power struggle. Between
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

1975 and 1979, one-third of its population lost their lives through starvation, diseases or execution under the Pol Pot’s Communist regime (Pran, 1999: ix).

In this paper we therefore look closely at the cultural make-up of the society in order to understand the leadership profile of Cambodian managers. In addition we present a leadership model to provide a context for this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture

Traditionally culture has been seen as a problem to be overcome in international engagement (Soderberg and Holden, 2002; Hofstede, 2007). Schnieder and Barsoux (2003) however recognise that a properly managed culture can become a competitive advantage. For example, countries such as Singapore and Malaysia have effectively engaged their Indian and Chinese citizens to forge trade relationships with India and China respectively. Similarly countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA with multicultural societies have an advantage over mono cultural countries such as China and Japan when accessing international markets.

Hofstede’s 1980 definition of culture “The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another” is used in this research as it stresses that culture is:

(a) collective, not an individual attribute
(b) not directly visible but manifested in behaviours; and
(c) common to some but not all people
(Hofstede and McCrae, 2004:58).

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) describe the ‘levels’ or layers of culture as leading from the explicit to the implicit. The most explicit layer, which is that most visible, is that of artefacts and products produced by a culture and which can be clearly seen. The next layer is that of norms and values reflecting a deeper more implicit culture. Finally the most implicit layer or core is that of a culture’s assumptions which is the way in which it solves problems and sees the world. Within any one national culture or even organisational culture there may be sub-cultures with potentially many ‘levels’ or subgroups, which will all display the three layers of culture (Lok and Crawford 1999). Religious subgroups may exist as may subgroups of classes and races providing more ‘levels’. The highest level of culture is the national culture of a region.

In the GLOBE research Project, conceived by Robert J. House in 1991, the focus is on relationships between societal culture, organisational culture, and organisational leadership in countries across the world. The study covers 61 countries with data collected from over 9,000 managers in 500 different organisations and engaging over 150 co-investigators (House, Javidan, Hanges, and Dorfman, 2002; Javidan and House, 2001). Cross-cultural trait psychologists argue that traits provide a meaningful basis for understanding and predicting behaviour in all cultures (Church, 2000; McCrae, 2001). However, cultural psychologists such as Markus and Kitayama (1998) and Shweder (1991) have questioned the appropriateness of the trait concept in more
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

collectivistic countries, such as Cambodia where the contextual nature of behaviour is emphasised.

Church et al (2003) theorise that as people in collectivistic cultures are construed as interdependent and connected to in-groups, they have weaker beliefs regarding traitness of behaviour and stronger beliefs regarding the role of contextual factors. The people in collectivistic societies therefore pay:

(a) greater focus to roles and relationships as aspects of self-concept
(b) greater attention to situational information in causal inference about behaviour
(c) less attention to self-enhancement
(Church et al, 2003: 332).

Leadership context
In this study we use the conceptual framework for leadership described in Selvarajah (1995). The model developed for studying excellence in leadership in Asia is based on both western literature (eg., Bennis, 1989; Hunt & Larson, 1979; Peters & Waterman, 1983; Stogdill and Coons, 1957; Takala, 1998; Yukl, 1989) and eastern literature (eg., Ling, 1989; Ling, Fang, Gao, and Khanna (1992); Misumi, 1984; Sinha, 1980; Swierczek, 1991; Xu, Chen, Wang, and Xue, 1985). From a group of ninety-four value statements (see Selvarajah, Duignan, Nuttman and Suppiah, 1995; Taormina and Selvarajah, 2005) a group of researchers from six ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) created four broad categories for the study of excellent leaders: Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviours, Organisational Demands and Environmental Influences as illustrated and summarised in Figure 1. Based on this work, scales for Perspectives of an Excellent Leader, Organisational Demand, Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviour, and Environmental Influence have been constructed for each of these constructs using the statements provided in the Appendix.

Figure 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

![Diagram of Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership]

Source: Adapted from Selvarajah et al, 1995.

**Personal Qualities** - personal values, skills, attitudes, behaviour and qualities of an individual. It emphasises morality, religion, inter-personal relationships and communication.

**Managerial Behaviour** - person’s nature, values, attitudes, actions and styles when performing the managerial duties. It emphasises persuasive powers.

**Organizational Demand** - the way a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation. It emphasises the importance of organisational prosperity.

**Environmental Influence** - external factors that influence the success of the entire organisation. It emphasises the importance of scanning and evaluating the external environment for opportunities.

**Contextualising Cambodian Culture**

Ninety five percent of the Cambodian population of nearly 14 million people (EIC, 2006) are Khmer and the balance made up of Vietnamese, Chinese and Malay Muslims.

The social fabric of the Cambodians is intertwined in the religious practices derived from Hinduism for the first twelve centuries of this millennium, and Buddhism from then on. Though Buddhism’s root religion is Hinduism, the Khmers found the non-existence of an eternal blissful self (soul) or *Atman* in Buddhism appealing as it provides a simple explanation for reincarnation based on the concept of *Karma* which is the effects of individual taught and deed and *Dharma*, which is the individual’s actions of both their present and past lives. Unlike China, Japan and Vietnam, Cambodia’s eastern neighbours where Mahayana Buddhism is practised, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar adopted Theravada Buddhism which was imported from Sri Lanka.

Inglehart and Baker (2000) used religion as an explanatory factor for culture. In this paper, to provide an explanation to the Khmer culture, we turn to Theravada Buddhism, the underlying religious and philosophical base for ninety five percent of the Cambodian people.

**Theravada Buddhism**

Theravada Buddhism promotes “teaching of analysis” which uses critical methods of investigation rather than blind faith (Men, 2006: 51). This school teaches the aspirant to achieve
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

the goal of a “worthy one” by seeking answers through engaging in valid thought and experience. Understanding this principle is important when seeking reason for the tolerant social behaviour within these societies. Buddha’s teaching is in essence about overcoming *dukkha* or suffering. Each individual is expected to have their own life’s experiences, guided by their *karma* or actions, and ultimately the individual has to seek cessation from suffering by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path in essence directs individuals to seek the right wisdom *paññā* in regard to view and intention; the right ethical conduct *sīla* in regard to speech, action and livelihood; and right mental discipline *samādhi* in regard to effort, mindfulness and concentration. This religion strongly supports and respects individuals who are seeking the right path through having clear perspectives and intentions in the work performed; communicating these clearly and acting these out properly; and being focused on the job.

It is again this philosophy that has given scope to patronage and hierarchical observance of social relations and status (Chandler, 1996: 2; Men, 2006:52). In other words each person has a station in life and one has to accept this and respect those higher up in the social hierarchy as they are seen to have earned their status meritoriously. Chandler (1996: 2) is critical of the value attached to subordination to status as it entrenches the feudalistic behaviour in people giving status to elite groups and subservience to them. This acceptance of one’s station in life behaviour by Cambodians suited the French administrators who referred to them as docile (Pran, 1999). Within this hierarchical system which respects authority, the religion strongly supports making right decisions for the individual and the organisation where trust, competence and consistency would be important measures of managerial behaviour.

Chandler however believes that the notion of changelessness is a myth as Cambodian history highlights major transformation. This suggests that culturally Cambodians are pragmatic and accept changes. Again, these new influences may have been awakened by Cambodia’s traumatic history.

**Historical Influences**

French presence in Cambodia came as an invited protective measure against Vietnam. Initially, a treaty in 1863 allowed French entry for trade. With a weak monarchy and the French intolerance to Cambodia’s close ties with Thailand, the country was annexed by the French in 1886. French rule continued until Cambodia proclaimed a unilateral declaration of independence in 1953 which was ratified by the United nations in 1954 (Men, 2006: 76). Independence was short-lived as Cambodia was dragged into the Vietnam War in the 1960s (Pran, 1999). The North Vietnamese army trained and equipped Cambodian Communist guerrilla youth called Khmer Rouge to combat the American propped Lon Nol government. Civil war persisted for five years, culminating in the over-throw of the government on April 17, 1975 (Pran, 1999: x).

The Pol Pot rule banned art, religion and western influence and reverted back to an agrarian society where hard labour and working for the glory of the revolution were seen worthy of an individual. The *Angka*, the Khmer Rouge’s ruling organisation replaced the family where young

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1 *Prajñā* in Sanskrit and *paññā* in Pali. Pali is a derivative of Sanscrit and is the Buddhist script used in Cambodia and was brought to Cambodia from Sri Lanka in the 13th Century
2 *sīla* in both Sanskrit and in Pali.
3 *samādhi* in sanskrit and in Pali
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

Cambodians and children were forcefully removed to work in labour camps under the patronage of the Angka. Within weeks the Khmer Rouge swept into Phnom Penh and Sophiline Cheam Shapiro (1999:1) narrates her experience “they dispersed the city’s population into agricultural collectives and declared history dead’. Sophiline Shapiro goes on to say that the “constant change in ideology has left me, and I think my whole generation, confused”. It is said that 1.7 million Cambodians died during the four-year Pol Pot rule and six million survivors saw their families’ decimated (Kiernan, 1999: xvi).

The Pol Pot led Communist rule was defeated by Heng Samrin with support from the Vietnamese army in 1979. The country was placed under UN trade sanction and, with in-fighting among parties; the country sought the help of the international community. The country was temporarily entrusted to the UN which organised elections in 1993. The turbulent history culminating in civil and genocidal war has left Cambodia a poor and deprived nation that is now seeking development and economic growth. The country achieved a phenomenal growth rate of 10 percent in 2005 compared to its 7.7 percent growth rate in 2004 (EIC, 2006). The turbulent changes in the Cambodian society have strengthened the resolve to excel and to be forward looking suggesting an increase in the importance of characteristics such as the speed of decision-making and initiative. This resolve has also increased the collective behaviour of individuals to make faster organisational decisions within a greater participative environment. Not withstanding the Buddhist cultural influence, it can be said that the older managers, especially the managers who have worked prior to the 1990s and who have been subjected to constant upheavals and changes in social system, would not be in total support of the organisational bureaucracy and of authority.

The society, having been subjected to discrimination by various governing authorities would have greater tolerance for value differences. This understanding suggests that the managers in Cambodia would not discriminate on sex or position in the work environment.

Economically, the country is still very underdeveloped and foreign direct investment is only now starting to trickle in. Most of the industries are not yet sophisticated with lower levels of competition than those seen in the west. The organisations and departments are hence comparatively small.

It is within this turbulent history, its past glory and future aspirations that excellence in leadership in Cambodia is studied. Why are humility, compassion and respect seen as important values whilst revenge, hatred and disrespect are seen as negative values and to be shunned? Understanding the concept of Karma and Dharma within the Cambodian practice of Theravada Buddhism is important in providing answers to the social behaviours embedded in tolerance and forgiveness. Despite the violence of recent years, revenge is seen as a negative force that only breeds hatred and brings bad karma that obstructs enlightenment. Contextualising management practice within this broad Cambodian culture provides the backdrop to understanding leadership excellence in Cambodia.

Based on the above discussions, the following hypotheses are forwarded for testing.

H1: In Cambodia, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be described using the four dimensions of Managerial Behaviour, Environmental Influence, Personal Qualities and Organisational Demand.
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

H2: In Cambodia Managerial Behaviour is the most important dimension for an excellent leader because this construct embodies important aspects of Cambodian philosophy.

H3: In Cambodia, older managers regard managerial behaviour to be less important than younger managers who have not been subjected to continuous historical upheavals.

H4: In Cambodia, perspectives of an excellent leader are not influenced by gender or position.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selvarajah, Duignan, Nuttman and Suppiah (1995) developed ninety-four ‘Excellence in Leadership’ value statements and ranked the 10 most important statements in terms of excellence in leadership. In addition, they ranked the statements in the four categories of: Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviours, Organisational Demands and Environmental Influences using a Q-Sort.

This paper attempts to study the perception of leadership and its variability among Cambodian managers. The research strategy employed a back translated research survey questionnaire in Khmer distributed to managers who were employed in both the private and public sectors. The two research associates identified companies and questionnaires were distributed in the companies and collection boxes were placed for anonymous collection. Neither the respondents nor their organisations were required to be identified. A total of 1000 ‘Excellence in Leadership’ questionnaires were distributed and to date 136 were returned. Of the 136 returned, 127 were useable. Responses were sought on a one to five importance scale for each of the ninety-four ‘excellence in leadership’ value statements.

Triangulation, employing a number of approaches, was used to authenticate the research, especially to provide a cultural explanation for the managerial leadership behaviour in Cambodia. The use of two associate researchers in Cambodia, personal interviews with five managers, document search in libraries and the Royal Cambodian Museum in Phnom Penh, and a workshop at Build Bright University provided the scope for the cultural contextualising of the research.

In this paper we develop scales for the importance of Excellent Leader (EL), Personal Qualities (PQ), Managerial Behaviour (MB), Organisational Demands (OD) and Environmental Influences (EI). The work of Selvarajah et al (1995) provided the basis for these scales but certain improvements are introduced in the current survey. In particular, in order to produce discriminant validity between the scales, the ‘Excellent Leader’ statements are not included in any of the other four scales. In addition, likely high scoring items from the current survey are included and items that reduce the reliability of the scales, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis, are removed. Scales with a Cronbach’s alpha of above 0.70 are regarded as reasonably reliable while scales with a Cronbach’s alpha of above 0.80 are regarded as definitely reliable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998). Confirmatory Factor Analysis is used to check the factor structure of the scales as shown in the Appendix. Models which produce a root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of less than 0.08, a goodness of fit statistic (GFI)
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

of above 0.90 and a chi-squared statistic (CMIN/DF) of less than three may be assumed to possess internal validity (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999).

Regression and structural equation modelling is used to test whether the four hypothesised dimension are associated with perspectives of an excellent leader (H1) and to determine the most important dimension for excellence in a leader (H2). MANOVA analysis is then performed in order to determine whether any of the leadership dimensions are related to the demographic characteristics of the managers, allowing the testing of the last two hypotheses. SPSS v14 and AMOS v6 are the software packages used for the above analyses.

RESULTS

In the sample of 127 managers, 84 per cent of the respondents were men and 16 percent were women. It was a relatively young sample in that 55 percent of the respondents were under 35 with 79 percent of respondents aged 40 and below. Only 6 percent of the sample was aged over 50. The majority of the respondents (49 percent) were employed in the private sector with 27 percent employed in the government sector and 24 percent employed by NGO’s. The majority (51 percent) of the manager classified themselves as ordinary managers with 10 percent saying senior managers and the remaining 30 percent saying line managers. Only 30 percent of the managers were employed by organisations with at most 50 employees, 46 per cent of managers worked in departments with at most 10 employees.

Summated scales were constructed for each of the five constructs, Excellent Leader, Managerial Behaviour, Environmental Influence, Organisational Demand and Personal Qualities described previously. As shown in the appendix, all these scale had reasonable reliability as measured using Cronbach’s alpha and good internal validity as indicated by the confirmatory factor analysis. Modification indices indicated that these scales exhibited reasonable discriminant validity in that each value statement had higher loadings for its specified construct than for any other construct. Scales were constructed for each of these scales.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for each of these scales. All the correlations were significant at the one per cent level and mean values are high for all scales indicating that all dimensions are regarded as important in a leader, providing support for the first hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS FOR SCALES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

| Influence Personal Qualities | .813 | .762 | .851 | .641 | 1 |

Regression model for excellent leader

Table 2 shows the results for a multiple regression model hypothesised to predict what makes an Excellence Leader in Selvarajah et al (1995). This equation explains 79 percent of the variation in the Excellent Leader scale using the Organisational Demand, Environmental Influence, Personal Qualities and Managerial Behaviour scales. The Managerial Behaviour scale is clearly the most important predictor with the highest $\beta$ coefficient. This supports the second hypothesis indicating that in Cambodia the most important quality in an excellent leader is Managerial Behaviour. The initial correlations between the Excellent Leader scale and its predictors shown in Table 1 were all positively significant with p-values of less than 0.001. However, the contributions of Environmental Influence and Personal Qualities are less significant in Table 2 suggesting partial mediation effects. These effects will be investigated in a later paper. The variance inflation factors (VIF) for all the predictor variables are less than ten, confirming the discriminant validity of the predictor scales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: REGRESSION MODEL FOR EXCELLENT LEADER (EL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Qualities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the above regression a structural model for Excellent Leader was developed. This model explains 79 percent of the variation in Excellent Leader scores, providing strong support for H1. However, a larger sample size is required in order to confirm the validity of this model.
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

![Excellence in Leadership model for Cambodia](image)

**Figure 2 Excellence in Leadership model for Cambodia (β coefficients shown)**

**Comparison of Demographic Groups using Scales**

Comparison of demographic groups in terms of scales, using a multivariate ANOVA analysis, shows significant differences only for age ($F(25,432) = 1.81$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .071$), at least in regard to theExcellent Leader scale ($F(5,120) = 2.64$, $p = .027$, $\eta^2 = .099$) and the Managerial Behaviour scale ($F(5,120) = 2.805$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .105$). As shown in Table 3 both these scales declined for older people. In support of the third hypothesis this finding suggests that Managerial Behaviour is perceived to be of less importance by the older generation of Cambodian managers than the younger generation of Cambodian managers. As expected there was no significant gender effect ($F(5,71) = .995$, $p = .427$) and no significant position effect ($F(10,142) = .828$, $p = .603$).

**TABLE 3: AGE DIFFERENCES IN REGARD TO PERCEPTIONS OF AN EXCELLENT LEADER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Excellent Leader</th>
<th>Managerial Behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 35</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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10
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Dev</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

According to Petzall, Selvarajah and Willis (1991, p.143), leadership may be defined as ‘a process of social interaction between the leader and his or her subordinates, in which the leader seeks to influence his or her subordinates to achieve the objectives of the organisation’. In this study ‘excellence in leadership’ is regarded as a combination of factors desirable for good leadership within a cultural framework. As shown in the Appendix 1 “Motivate employees” is the most important predictor for an excellent leader. However, high means for “develop strategies to gain a competitive edge in industry” and “continue to learn how to improve performance” have higher average ratings than this item. The findings highlight the optimistic nature of the Cambodian managers as they see the importance of developing strategies to motivate their people to perform in a growing competitive environment. Given the nation’s bleak history, there is a growing desire to engage productively to improve the individual and collective welfare of its people. This perception that the employees needed motivation and provision of a fair work environment was highlighted in the interviews with managers and the workshop held at Build Bright University.

Environmental Influences are all external factors that influence the success of the entire organisation, in particular economics, politics, cultural and legal factors (Selvarajah et al, 1995). As shown in Appendix 2 the most important item in measuring perceptions of Environmental Influence is “constantly evaluate emerging technologies”. This perception is crucial for a developing economy such as Cambodia where technological advances have been retarded and having very little economic growth. The Cambodian managers are of the view that keeping abreast of technological developments is the most important environmental influence predictor of an excellent leader. However, “study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work” and “check constantly for problems and opportunities” received higher importance ratings than this item. These results indicate that having clear legal rules and understanding them is important to having a transparent work environment. Success for these managers includes developing awareness of problems and opportunities that can enhance the organisation’s performance.

Good communication - verbal and written, is the best item for gauging Personal Influence. But as shown in Appendix 3 several other items are also rated highly, including “Respect the self-esteem of others“, “Treat most people as if they are trustworthy and honest” and “accept responsibility for mistakes”. These values are closely associated with the philosophies of Theravada Buddhism where respect for the individual ‘self’ and forgiveness enforces karmic energy.

Managerial behaviour refers to a person’s nature, values, attitudes, actions and styles when performing managerial duties. The most important Managerial Behaviour items (Appendix 4) were “make decisions earlier rather than later” and “make work decisions quickly”. However, the items “be logical when solving problems” and “focus on the task in hand” were rated most
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

highly. Effective and efficient decisions making, problem solving and dealing with issues are valued managerial behaviour in organisations and the Cambodian managers have supported these equally.

Organisational Demand relates to the way a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation (Selvarajah et al, 1995). The item as shown in Appendix 5, “support decisions made jointly with others” is the best measure for Organisational Demand. The collective decision making is valued over individual decision making; giving support for Hofstede’s (1980) exposition to the collective value-system among Asians. Long-term goal, a strategic orientation, reported in Taormina and Selvarajah, (2005) as an ASEAN leadership value construct is also reported here as an important measure in Organisational Demand.

Seen from a Buddhist perspective, organisations should engage the right perspective, understanding and vision which would benefit the sangha or organisation and should be understood from the Buddhist idea of anicca impermanence or the illusionary relationship of matter to atta self. This view is important in understanding the Cambodian managers acceptance of changes in the environment, while believing in the hierarchial nature of society as a karmic disposition of each individual.

This study has shown that the conceptual framework for the study of excellence in leadership shown in Figure 1 is supported by the Cambodian data. In accordance with the philosophies of the Theravada Buddhist faith, sound (right), clear and speedy decision-making where trust and competence are engaged are acceptable managerial behaviour and this has been identified as the most important characteristic of an excellent leader. Given the turbulent history of Cambodia, there seems to be a greater resolve among the younger managers to excel and to be forward looking.

Age was the only demographic variable that had a significant impact on leadership excellence. In particular it was found that older managers attributed less importance to Managerial Behaviour than younger managers, confirming that the continuous historical upheavals experienced by the older generation of Cambodian managers has had a lasting impact. A similar behaviour was recorded in the Selvarajah and Meyer (2008) study where older Chinese managers who were subjected to the communist regulatory system prior to the 1980s were less supportive of the managerial construct. This suggests that the content of leadership can be influenced by its context and this could have a short or long term effect.

These results suggest that religion and social history have both served to formulate perceptions of what can be expected of leadership in Cambodia. Armed with the understanding of these influences, how should expatriate managers’ best engage with the Cambodian workforce?

First, they must understand the Cambodian workforce. In this research the leadership values of Cambodian managers were discussed in regard to factors that make up Cambodians’ behaviour, their personalities, the demands of the organisation and the environment. These factors are important and should be considered in the context of workplace performance. The Cambodian workforce is from a single ethnic background whose culture, traditions, and the social system are

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4 Atta (in Pali) and ātman (in Sanskrit) refers to ‘self’
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

mainly shaped by the religious inheritance from India and Sri Lanka and the political and economic changes in the country. Understanding Theravada Buddhism, the Indian roots embedded in the Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the colonial influences and the recent political turbulence are important in understanding the cultural make-up of the Cambodian workforce. The Cambodians are easy-going people whose destinies are guided by good karma or actions and they avoid being judgemental of others as this could affect their own destiny. Respecting the self-esteem of others within authority lines is accepted; however this does not prevent the Cambodians from seeking changes as progress of the individual along the karmic path is expected.

It must be noted that historical and social factors contribute to the way management is practiced in Cambodia. For example, Cambodia’s geographical positioning in ASEAN, close to both India and China, is important in understanding the cultural values that impact on the notion of excellence in leadership. It is however, important to know that Cambodia sees itself more as an ‘Indianised’ (in the form of Hindu and Buddhist influences) nation as the Indian cultural values have influenced the economic and social activities for centuries and, for prolonged periods, have influenced the politics of Cambodia. Similarly, colonial influences, such as the social, economic and political structures along with the overlay of religious influences provide the backdrop for understanding the cultural make-up of Cambodia. It is in this context that leadership should be understood in Cambodia. Understanding the various influences provides a cultural contextualisation for understanding leadership in Cambodia.

REFERENCES

EIC (2006). Cambodia Economic Watch, Economic Institute of Cambodia, Phnom Penh
Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia


Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia


### Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

#### Appendix

**Appendix 1: Leadership Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beta Estimate</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.557</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.76</td>
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- **Motivate employees**
- **Have a strategic vision for the organization**
- **Give recognition for good work**
- **Continue to learn how to improve performance**
- **Be honest**
- **Create a sense of purpose and enthusiasm in the workplace**
- **Develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry**
- **Have confidence when dealing with work and with people**

**CMIN/DF = 1.658, GFI = .939, RMSEA = .072, Cronbach alpha = .843**

**Appendix 2: Environmental Influence Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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</table>

- **Constantly evaluate emerging technologies**
- **Check constantly for problems and opportunities**
- **Study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work**
- **Foster an international perspective in the organisation**
- **Use economic indicators for planning purposes**
- **Be responsive to political realities in the environment**

**CMIN/DF = 1.491, GFI = .965, RMSEA = .062, Cronbach alpha = .762**

**Appendix 3: Personal Qualities Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

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<tr>
<td>.350</td>
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<td>.74</td>
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</table>

- **Speak clearly and concisely**
- **Write clearly and concisely**
- **Return favours**
- **Treat most people as if they are trustworthy and honest**
- **Respect the self-esteem of others**
- **Deal calmly in tense situations**
- **Be practical**
- **Follow what is morally right – not what is right for self or organisation**
- **Be dependable and trustworthy**
- **Accept responsibility for mistakes**

**CMIN/DF = 1.576, GFI = .918, RMSEA = .068, Cronbach alpha = .797**

**Appendix 4: Managerial Behaviour Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

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<tr>
<td>.530</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Make decisions earlier rather than later**
- **Make work decisions quickly**
- **Trust those to whom work is delegated**
- **Be strict in judging the competence of others**
- **Be formal when dealing with employees at work**
- **Be consistent in making decisions**
- **Allow subordinates authority and autonomy**
- **Use initiative and take risks**
- **Be objective when dealing with work conflicts**

**CMIN/DF = 1.504, GFI = .86, CGI = .90, RMSEA = .063, Cronbach alpha = .857**
### Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beta Estimate</th>
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<th>Description</th>
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<td>.524</td>
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<td>.87</td>
<td>Try different approaches to management</td>
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<tr>
<td>.523</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>Be logical when solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.523</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>Consider suggestions made by subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.463</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>Focus on the task in hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.451</td>
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<td>.84</td>
<td>Select work wisely to avoid overload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.307</td>
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<td>.96</td>
<td>Keep up to date on management literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>.276</td>
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<td>Tell subordinated what to do and how to do it</td>
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### Appendix 5: Organisational Demand Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CMIN/DF = 0.945, GFI = 0.971, RMSEA = 0.000, Cronbach alpha = 0.765

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Act as a member of the team</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Adjust organisational structures and rules to the realities of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>.507</td>
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<td>.81</td>
<td>Focus on maximising productivity</td>
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