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Leadership Excellence in Organizations in the Mekong Region: A Comparative Study of Thailand, Cambodia, Lao, and Vietnam

Christopher Selvarajah and Denny Meyer

Introduction

This research seeks to develop an understanding of work and leadership values as perceived by local managers. Though the extant literature has charted managerial values of countries such as Thailand (e.g., Selvarajah, Meyer, & Donovan, 2013; Yukongdi, 2010; Cuong & Swierczek, 2008) and Vietnam (e.g., Selvarajah, Meyer, Vinen, & Pham, 2010), a distinct paucity of empirical studies is evident in the other two Mekong countries. Studies such as Selvarajah, Meyer, Davuth, and Donovan (2012) and Chandler (1998) provided an initial explanation for the behavior of Cambodians, based on their adherence to *dharmic*¹ philosophies

¹The Theravada Buddhist philosophies are based on the concept of *dharma*, which emphasizes duties in the pursuit of individual salvation through self-realization. Righteous duties or following a virtuous path removes or lessens the effect of *karma* where actions of past and present lives may

C. Selvarajah (✉) • D. Meyer
Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia
e-mail: cselvarajah@swin.edu.au

and the Theravada Buddhist traditions of authority, individual pursuit of achievement, social interaction, and balance. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, being a land-locked nation and one of the poorest, has been overlooked. In this chapter, we address some of these concerns and look at the Mekong as a region. Of the four Mekong nations, three are Theravada Buddhist, while Vietnam is Confucian. This chapter does not explore the religious influence on managerial behavior (MB), but addresses the contextual nature of MB in the Mekong organizations.

Literature Review

In this chapter, we discuss the contextual nature of leadership and the influence that this has on leadership behaviors in the Mekong nations. In so doing, we discuss leadership studies that have promoted the relationship of context to the phenomenon of leadership behaviors (see e.g., Selvarajah et al., 2012, 2013; Selvarajah, Meyer, & Jeyakumar, 2011; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008a, 2008b). The second part of the chapter addresses the theory development and hypotheses based on the literature.

Review of Leadership Studies

Leadership is one of the most researched areas in organizational studies (Yukl, 2005) and, though great strides have been accomplished in this field, there is still a lack of understanding of the cultural context within which leadership functions. Earlier researchers, such as Hofstede (1984), Hofstede and Bond (1988), provided broad categorizations of cultural dimensions and research, and the GLOBE project has used these frameworks to develop further the concepts of leadership and organizational effectiveness. Initiated by Robert House (see House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007), the GLOBE project has provided insights into the influence of culture on organizational leadership across 62 nations. Criticism has been leveled at these studies, particularly with regard to the measurement tools utilized.

either aid or prevent salvation. Bad *karma* could lead to reincarnation to a lesser being and good karma could lead to breaking the cycle of rebirths or being reborn into a higher order being.

This has led to an intensifying debate around the use of the Hofstede and GLOBE measurement instruments (see, e.g., McSweeney, 2002; McCrae, Terracciano, Realo, & Allik, 2008; Brewer & Venaik, 2010; Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2010; Venaik & Brewer, 2010; Tung & Verbeke, 2010; Shi & Wang, 2011; Minkov & Blagoev, 2012).

Vague interpretations of leadership, particularly within a cultural context, have also received much criticism. The concern arises from how culture is clustered. The GLOBE project (see Gupta, Surie, Javidan, & Chhokar, 2002) derived a ten-cluster cultural grouping. Five cultural clusters are identified within Europe, making up 13 % of the world's population, while the remaining five clusters cover the rest of the world. This disproportionate emphasis of cultural groupings, in terms of the number of countries or the size of populations within the global regions, calls for more detailed examination of the "rest of the world." Furthermore, the fact that the studies are country-based causes further biases. For example, Kennedy (2002), while reporting on the GLOBE study in Malaysia, interpreted the values of a single ethnic group (Malays) as the values for all Malaysian managers, thus ignoring the roles and contributions to leadership of the Malaysian Chinese and the Malaysian Indians in the country.

Therefore, refining the cultural context within which leadership excellence operates, recognizing external influences, and identifying constructs that may influence leadership perceptions within a specific context provide the main thrust of this research. The term "excellence" is used here in its standard definition of surpassing others in accomplishment or achievement (Taormina & Selvarajah, 2005). In this research, excellence in leadership is perceived in terms of the behaviors used by someone in a leadership position, rather than in terms of personal traits or characteristics. This perspective allows both theorists and practitioners to identify behaviors that allow a leader to achieve excellent performance (without excluding the possibility that a leader might possess an excellent character).

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we use the conceptual framework for leadership described in Selvarajah, Duignan, Lane, Nuttman, and Suppiah (1995). This original model was developed for studying managerial leadership in Asia and

was based on both western and eastern literature (see Selvarajah et al., 2012 for details). From a group of 94 value statements (see Selvarajah et al., 1995; Taormina & Selvarajah, 2005²), 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 (PQ), managerial behaviors (MBs), organizational demand (OD), and environmental influences (EIs). The value statements within these categories were then subjected to a Q-sort by Asian managers who were attending executive programs at the Asian Institute of Management in Manila and at the Vocational Technical Institute (VOC-TECH), a Southeast Asian Management Education Organization institute located in Brunei Darussalam. Based on this work, scales for perspectives of an excellent leader (EL) and the four cultural dimensions—OD, PQ, MB, and EI—have been constructed using the statements provided in the Appendix.

“EL” describes the combination of behaviors and attitudes desirable for good leadership within a particular cultural context (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008b). “PQ” are the individual’s values, skills, attitudes, behavior, and qualities; they emphasize morality, religion, interpersonal relationships, and communication. “MBs” cover a person’s nature, values, attitudes, actions, and styles when performing managerial duties, emphasizing persuasive powers. “ODs” are the ways in which a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures, and issues in an organization. They emphasize the importance of organizational prosperity. “EIs” are external factors that affect the success of the entire organization; they emphasize the importance of scanning and evaluating the external environment for opportunities. The four-dimensional framework of Selvarajah et al. (1995) has been applied successfully in numerous studies, in Asia (e.g., Selvarajah et al., 2012, 2013, 2011; Selvarajah, 2008; Taormina & Selvarajah, 2005; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008a, 2008b), Europe (De Waal, Van der Heijden, Selvarajah, & Meyer, 2012), and Africa (Shrivastava, Selvarajah, Meyer, & Dorasamy, 2014). In each of these studies, cultural factors have been found to be related to the four-dimensional framework,

² Both these papers reported on the pilot studies carried out to test the conceptual framework and a pilot sample in five ASEAN countries.

to produce specific cultural context-based models to explain excellence in leadership.

Therefore, the theoretical framing for a study on culture and its influence on leadership requires an understanding of the relationship between the context and the leadership phenomenon being studied (Pawar & Eastman, 1997; Fairhurst, 2009; Linden & Antonakis, 2009). In building the theoretical framework for this study, we have applied the same rationale as Hilton (1998) for building culturally specific models, following Selvarajah et al. (2012), where a nine-factor cultural leadership model was developed and identified as unique to Cambodia and Selvarajah et al. (2013) where an eight-factor cultural leadership model was similarly developed for Thailand. In these studies, the cultural factors were identified through the cultural factor modeling and hypotheses for each of the established constructs.

In this research, based on confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, the four leadership dimensions and the EL construct provide a unique, nine-factor model to explain leadership behaviors in the Mekong nations. Literature-based support for these dimensions is provided with corresponding hypotheses. The seven hypotheses described below support the notion that the MB constructs influence the two excellence in leadership constructs, in organizations in the Mekong region.

Hypotheses

Managerial Behavior: Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment and its influence on organizational performance and effectiveness have been studied extensively (see, e.g., Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Lok & Crawford, 2004; Loke, 2001). Yousef (2000, p. 514) explained that the “one factor which is believed to affect individuals’ attitudes toward change is their commitment to their organizations.” It is, therefore, postulated that organizational commitment mediates organizational performance and also that there are change factors that influence organizational commitment in terms of what constitutes an EL in an organization. This suggests that organizational commitment has a mediating relationship to what constitutes an EL and that personal,

institutional, and environmental change factors will also influence managers who are committed to their organizations and are more likely to support the concept of leadership excellence in their organizations. Avolio et al. (2004) have demonstrated how psychological empowerment mediates the effects of leadership transformation on nurses' organizational commitment in a large public hospital in Singapore. In another Singapore-based study, leadership behaviors are seen to affect job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment (Loke, 2001). The results suggested that, in order of importance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and productivity were influenced by leadership behaviors. What these studies have tried to do is to understand the relationship between leadership behaviors and employee outcomes to "determine if leadership is worth the extra effort" as an organizational commitment that produces performance results (Loke, 2001, p. 191). Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is forwarded for testing.

Hypothesis 1 Commitment to the organization influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations.

Managerial Behavior: Effective Decision-Making

Research in leadership and decision-making was popularized by Vroom and Yetton (1973). Vroom (2000, p. 83) argued that "theories of decision making intersect with theories of leadership" and quoted Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973), who defined styles of leadership as being influenced by "area of freedom afforded subordinates" (cited in Vroom, 2000, p. 83). Vroom referred to organizational cultural boundaries within which leadership decision-making operates. Dickson, den Hartog, and Mitchelson (2003) provide insights into universal values and those that are culture specific—not only when compared between the west and the east, but within a region. For example, the decision-making processes prevalent in Korea and Japan, both Confucian nations, are different.

In studying the decision-making process and implementation of rules between the Thais and Japanese, Swierczek and Onishi (2003) also saw

large differences in these two societies. While Thais prefer decisions to be made for them by leaders, decisions are meant to be flexible. The Japanese decision-making process is lengthy, and involves the participation of employees; decisions, once made, are rigid. Thus, decision-making is a much more crucial skill for Japanese leaders, in an environment where decisions are hierarchical and enduring. For these reasons, decision-making, an important aspect of MB, is investigated with regard to its influence on leadership excellence in the Mekong region. The following hypothesis is forwarded for testing.

Hypothesis 2

Decision-making influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations.

Managerial Behavior: Organizational Climate

Kozlowski and Doherty (1989, p. 546) assert that “climate and leadership are implicitly entwined.” Grojean, Resick, Dickson, and Smith (2004, p. 224), quoting earlier works of Schneider (1975), say organizational climate “refers to perceptions of organizational practices and procedures that are shared among members and which provides an indication of the institutionalized normative systems that guides behavior.” The shared perception and the way work is organized and carried out in an organizational setting then become the norm that guides the behavior of its people. In this regard, we are concerned with how the organization systems impacts behavior.

Organizational climate is therefore seen as the key operational link between the employee and the organizational environment (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). In the early literature (e.g., Sheridan & Vredenburgh, 1978), organizational climate was seen as a factor that constrained leadership behaviors. However, this view has changed, and organizational climate is now viewed as an “implicit aspect of leadership processes” (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989, p. 547). Studying Thai employees’ preferred leadership styles for their managers, Yukongdi (2010) referred to *kreng chai*, or tak-

ing cognizance of other persons' feelings, as an important aspect of the Thai organizational environment. In such an organizational climate, the importance of the individual within the work environment and interpersonal relationships becomes critical. Given this understanding, and based on the arguments above, we can assume that the organizational climate will influence leadership behavior in Mekong organizations, and forward the hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3 Organizational climate influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations.

Managerial Behavior: Taking Initiative

Goerdel (2006, p. 351) postulated “that though network management contributes positively to organizational performance, theoretical work remains to answer how network management induces positive organizational outcomes.” Crant (2000) added that proactive personality and personal initiative support proactive tendencies in organizations, describing four constructs related to proactive behavior: proactive personality, personal initiative, role breadth self-efficacy, and taking charge. It is this premise that this chapter also wishes to address—the concept of proactive management's having an influence on leadership excellence in the Mekong region.

Hypothesis 4 Taking initiatives influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations.

Organizational Demand: Deference for Authority

In leadership studies, the issue of authority relationships has been central (Casimir & Li, 2005; Graen, 2006; Lin, 2008). Presthus (1960, p. 86) defined authority “as the capacity to evoke compliance in others” and added that, in formal organizations, interpersonal relationships are “structured in terms of the prescribed authority of the actors.” Therefore, while organizations are designed to achieve bigger goals, they must

engage “instruments of motivation and direction to overcome the individual goals of their members.”

A number of authors such as Selvarajah et al. (2013), Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999), Joiner, Bakalis, and Rattanapitan (2009) have pointed out that Thai people place a high value on deference to rank and respect for authority. Hofstede (1980) also observed a high power distance categorization for Thailand. The GLOBE study (Gupta, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002) confirmed this observation. The support of deference for authority is not dissimilar to observations in Cambodia (see Selvarajah et al., 2012; Ojendal & Antlov, 1998). Ojendal and Antlov (1998) were of the view that the authority structure within Cambodian culture creates a superior-subordinate relationship in which loyalty and allegiance are based on hierarchy. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 5 Deference for authority influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in the Mekong organizations.

Personal Qualities

The social balance in Asian organizations is also based on respect for each individual's existence (Hilton, 1998). Therefore, balance is sought among authority, individual pursuit of achievement, and social interaction (Benveniste, 2000; Lamberton, 2005). In this context, individualism can be seen as an important personal quality that operates to provide balance, allowing the hierarchical mobility that Hilton (1998) emphasized; see Selvarajah et al. (2012) for evidence of individualism as a moderating variable within Cambodia, a collectivist society. This is also demonstrated for Thailand (Selvarajah et al., 2013). Taylor (1996, p. 19) expressed the view that the doctrine of non-violence embedded in Buddhism “is a call for a respect for the autonomy of each person, demanding a minimal use of coercion in human affairs.”

Leadership studies have highlighted the importance of social order and as Rieff (1983, p. ix) stated “mirroring in each man the social order in which men act out their lives.” For example, the Asian social system is based on social hierarchy that respects authority while maintaining

fair and equal treatment within rank (e.g., Selvarajah et al., 2012, 2013; Sriussadaporn, 2006; Chen, 2004). Hank (1962), for example, analyzed merit and power in the Thai social order and suggested that the Thai hierarchy depends on merit (*boon*) or virtue (*khwaamdii*).

Conflict management is an important leadership function (Chen, Liu, & Tjosvold, 2005; Tse, Francis, & Walls, 1994). Researchers such as De Dreu and Van de Vliert (1997) have found that it is not how conflict is perceived that is important, but rather how constructively or destructively conflicts are managed. However, in many societies, especially collectivist countries in Asia, conflict tends to be avoided (e.g., Chen, 2004; Tse et al., 1994; Graham, Kim, Lin, & Robinson, 1988). Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999), and Deephuengton (1992) argued that Thais perceive non-confrontation as the most important part of their thought and behavior.

Reconciliation is difficult between disputing parties; this characteristic therefore places value on individual space within relationships, and this is also applicable in the workplace. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is forwarded for testing.

Hypothesis 6

Personal qualities reflecting morality, religion, interpersonal relationships and communication are important values in the Mekong culture and will influence managers' perception of what constitutes an excellent leader.

Environmental Influences: Environmental Harmony

Managing under conditions of uncertainty is a popular topic in management studies and important to leadership (e.g., Hofstede, 2007, Niffenegger, Kulviwat, & Engchanil, 2006; House et al., 2004). Thais tend to avoid uncertainty or the unknown, as it may lead them to awkward situations. Embarrassment due to uncertainty may prevent Thais from communicating freely. Thus, to adapt and communicate appropriately, Thais are more likely to find out what they should or should not do prior to engaging. According to Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999), for example, Thais tend to acquire information about the people they will be interacting with before meetings take place. Doing so helps

them to create a pleasant situation and familiarity in the actual meeting. Khanittanan (1988) argued that Thais generally engage in overtly polite speech with strangers or people with whom they are not acquainted or about whose social status they are not certain.

This dislike of uncertainty can be expected to also impact the attention paid to harmony by the manager (Niffenegger et al., 2006). Given the attention for greater harmony, the Thai manager would monitor social trends, political changes, and international issues while abiding by the laws governing business operations. Selvarajah et al. (2012) found that Cambodia offers a work environment that is likely to be attractive to an international workforce. Vietnam is a fast-developing emerging economy, and the *doi moi* process has resulted in substantial achievements in economic growth and employment generation. Selvarajah et al. (2010) found that EIs (change monitoring and orientation) are important dimensions that pertain to excellence in leadership in Vietnam. To shorten the development gap between Vietnam and other countries in the region, the country has placed emphasis on the role of information and communication technology, and a report by Grant Thornton International, based on a survey of 7400 managers in 36 countries, ranked Vietnam first for profit growth in 2010 (Business Week, 2010). For this reason, it is expected that a Mekong leader who is socially and environmentally responsible, and one who monitors environmental issues closely, will be regarded favorably. The following hypothesis is forwarded for testing.

Hypothesis 7 Environmental harmony influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in organizations in the Mekong countries.

Research Methodology

Data collection was carried out using the questionnaire developed by Selvarajah et al. (1995) in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao, and Vietnam. In Thailand, the data collection was in Bangkok, North Thailand, and East Thailand; in Cambodia, data were collected in Phnom Penh and Siem Riep; in Lao, data were collected in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Savannakhet; and, in Vietnam, data were collected in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The respondents were all practicing managers enrolled in MBA

and other business masters programs at universities. Questionnaires were back-translated in all of the languages of the four Mekong countries. The Likert-type questionnaire had 94 items, with one representing “no importance” and five indicating “very important.” Neither the respondents nor their organizations were required to be identified. Useable responses of 401 for Thailand, 217 for Cambodia, 208 for Vietnam provided, respectively, 50.1 %, 22 %, 75 % effective return rates. In Lao, through the Policy and Governance Institute, a snowball technique was applied to managers in the public and private sectors, providing responses from 207 participants.

In this research we developed scales for constructs using the framework for the characteristics of an EL, consisting of PQ, MB, ODs, and EIs (see the Appendix for details). The work of Selvarajah et al. (1995) provided the basis for these scales, but specific improvements were introduced. In particular, in order to produce discriminant validity between the scales, the “EL” statements were not included in any of the other four scales, and exploratory factor analysis was used to split the EL construct and the four Selvarajah et al. (1995) cultural dimensions into scales that reflect the contextual nature of the Mekong region. It was found that MB was composed of four of the constructs discussed above, namely organizational climate, effective decision-making and organizational commitment, and taking initiative, while EL was composed of two of the constructs discussed above, namely strategic leader and organizational leadership. Deference for authority, in this study, is defined as the way in which a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organization (Selvarajah et al., 1995). This can be interpreted as the way in which a manager responds to organizational propriety and authority.

The reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach’s α (see Table 18.3), and the internal validity of the scales assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (see the five tables in the appendix). The root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), a goodness of fit statistic (GFI), and a normed χ^2 statistic (CMIN/DF) suggest adequate internal validity (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) for all of the scales. All of reliability scores exceeded 0.6, and several 0.8, which makes the scales reasonably reliable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

An initial correlation analysis is used to assess whether the hypothesized dimensions are associated with perceptions of leadership, and structural equation modeling is then used to test the seven hypotheses, effectively

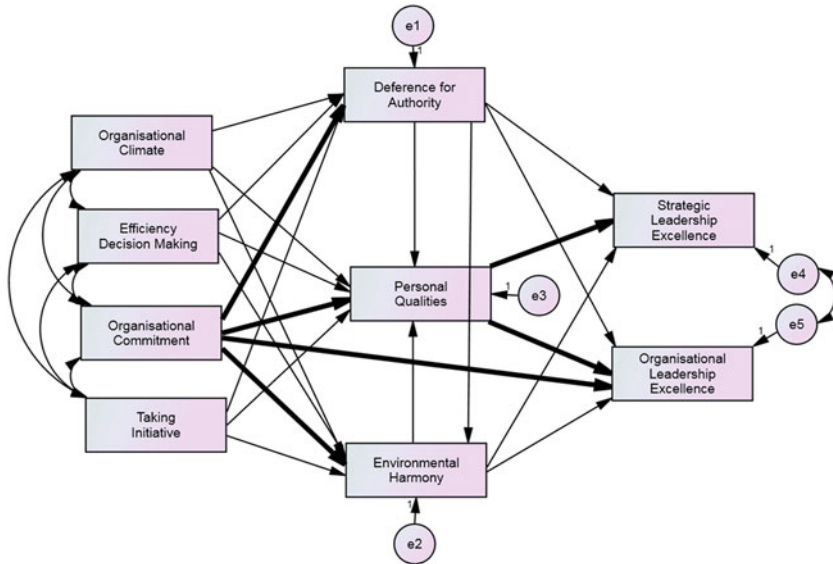


Fig. 18.1 Structural model for excellent leadership

validating the conceptual model proposed in Fig. 18.1. Finally, tests of invariance are performed in order to determine whether there are age and gender differences with regard to which characteristics are perceived as being important. A concerted effort is made to study subpopulation effects within nations and regions (e.g., see Selvarajah, 2008; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008a, 2008b; Selvarajah et al., 2012, 2013).

Results

The results show substantial demographic differences among the four countries, with good gender balance in the case of Thailand and Vietnam but with younger managers for these countries and for Cambodia. The sample from Lao was older, and the majority of these managers were employed in government positions. The percentage of line managers was a little higher for Thailand than for the other countries and the percentage of managers employed in very large organizations (with more than 500 employees) was highest for Thailand. Vietnam had the largest percentage of employees working in small departments, with fewer than 11

employees, while Lao had a relatively low percentage of managers working in departments this small. Finally, Buddhism was by far the most common religion in Cambodia, Lao, and Thailand, but only 43 % of the Vietnamese managers were Buddhist, with most of the remaining Vietnamese managers claiming no religion.

Table 18.1 shows significant differences between the countries in most cases. In particular, organization climate is most important in Cambodia. Organizational commitment, deference for authority, PQ, environmental harmony, strategic leadership, and organizational leadership are particularly important in Lao. Taking initiative is particularly unimportant in Lao, especially compared to Vietnam.

Hypotheses 1–7 were initially examined by considering the correlations between the scales constructed using the tables shown in the appendix. Table 18.2 shows significant correlations between EL (strategic leadership and organizational leadership) and all of the other scales, providing some preliminary support for all of the hypotheses. Further support for the hypotheses was found in Fig. 18.1, a model that describes the relationship among the scales very well. However, organizational commitment is the only MB scale that has a direct impact on excellence in organizational leadership, while none of the MB scales has a direct impact on excellence in strategic leadership. In this research, PQ of the manager plays a key role, either directly or at least partially mediating the effect of all the other scales with regard to perceptions of excellence in strategic leadership and excellence in organizational leadership.

Table 18.1 Country comparison for scale means

	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	F(3,1029)
Organizational climate	4.36	4.13	3.82	3.83	40.51***
Effective decision-making	3.74	3.86	3.90	3.84	2.63*
Organizational commitment	4.12	4.43	4.27	4.08	17.28***
Taking initiative	3.89	3.68	3.88	3.94	6.63***
Deference for authority	3.83	4.13	4.10	4.07	17.64***
Personal qualities	4.19	4.29	4.17	4.06	8.21***
Environmental harmony	3.87	4.15	4.03	3.78	20.24***
Strategic leadership	4.36	4.40	4.29	4.33	1.65
Organizational leadership	4.43	4.56	4.37	4.37	6.66***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 18.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations for scales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Minimum</i>	1.33	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.50	1.36	1.25	1.00	1.00
<i>Maximum</i>	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
<i>Mean</i>	4.00	3.85	4.23	3.85	4.04	4.18	3.97	4.34	4.42
<i>Std deviation</i>	0.68	0.70	0.56	0.66	0.51	0.49	0.56	0.60	0.53
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	0.67	0.69	0.72	0.60	0.72	0.81	0.78	0.78	0.78
<i>Organizational climate (1)</i>	1								
<i>Effective decision-making (2)</i>	0.37**	1							
<i>Organizational commitment (3)</i>	0.45**	0.44**	1						
<i>Taking initiative (4)</i>	0.38**	0.37**	0.47**	1					
<i>Deference for authority (5)</i>	0.44**	0.47**	0.69**	0.55**	1				
<i>Personal qualities (6)</i>	0.58**	0.49**	0.80**	0.54**	0.72**	1			
<i>Environmental harmony (7)</i>	0.48**	0.46**	0.71**	0.51**	0.69**	0.73**	1		
<i>Strategic leadership (8)</i>	0.44**	0.38**	0.61**	0.43**	0.64**	0.66**	0.62**	1	
<i>Organizational leadership (9)</i>	0.45**	0.39**	0.76**	0.47**	0.66**	0.77**	0.65**	0.61**	1

$n = 1033$, ** $p < 0.001$

The structural model in Fig. 18.1 describes the data well ($\chi^2 = 12.03$ with $df = 7$, $p = 0.099$, normed $\chi^2 = 1.719$, GFI = 0.997, AGFI = 0.983, CFI = 0.999, TLI = 0.996). This model explains 66 % of the variation in organizational leadership excellence and 51 % of the variation in strategic leadership excellence. Clearly organizational commitment and PQ are key variables in this model.

MB, described in terms of organizational climate, efficiency of decision-making, organizational commitment and taking initiative, determines the importance attached to deference for authority, PQ, and environmental harmony, which in turn determine the excellence of a leader in both a strategic and in an organizational sense. Interestingly there is no direct relationship between the managerial behavior constructs and the EL constructs, except in one case in which organizational commitment is essential if a manager is to exhibit excellence in organizational leadership. See Tables 18.2 and 18.3 for more detail.

Table 18.3 Total standardized effect sizes

	Organization leadership excellence	Strategic leadership excellence
Organizational climate	0.10	0.13
Efficiency decision-Making	0.06	0.09
Organizational commitment	0.64	0.42
Taking initiative	0.09	0.14
Deference for authority	0.21	0.39
Personal qualities	0.38	0.31
Environmental harmony	0.12	0.26

Discussion

In this study, perceptions of what makes an EL in the Mekong region have been examined through the lenses of the four-dimensional framework suggested by Selvarajah et al. (1995) in their exploratory research of leadership excellence in Asia. The findings suggest that the four dimensions produced seven valid constructs, used to hypothesize the cultural phenomena observed in the Mekong organizations. To explain the EL, reliable scales have been developed for these constructs; overall ratings are high for all of these constructs, confirming their importance. In this Mekong-based study, two meaningful constructs—strategic leader and organizational leader—represent the concept of EL.

Correlation analysis suggested that the four dimensions of PQ, EI (harmony) and OD (deference for authority), and MB with four sub-constructs of organizational commitment, taking initiative, effective decision-making, and organizational climate, are all associated with the two EL constructs (strategic and organizational). The structural equation model showed that organizational commitment had a direct relationship with the organizational leader construct, while the managers' PQ comprised the most important dimension in the Mekong countries, mediating, at least partially, the relationship of the MB constructs with the two EL constructs. As hypothesized, using scales validated with confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling showed that all seven constructs had strong relationships with the two EL constructs. No attempt has been made to justify or interpret the PQ mediation effects suggested in Fig. 18.1. This is an area of much interest, in that it may help us to

understand MB better regarding perceptions of excellence in leadership, and is therefore suggested for future research. What is interesting is that this study supports the relationship established in studies such as Avolio et al. (2004), Lok and Crawford (2004), and Loke (2001), between organizational commitment and organizational performance. Table 18.4 summarizes the support found for the hypotheses.

In this chapter, we have developed a nine-factor cultural model that supports excellence in leadership in the Mekong countries. The model shown in Fig. 18.1 shows that seven constructs—organizational climate, decision-making, organizational commitment, taking initiative, deference for authority, PQ, and environmental harmony—supported the two EL dimensions of strategic leadership and organizational leadership.

Implications for Theory and the Practice of International Business

First, any foreigner wishing to engage with the nationals of the Mekong countries must understand the extent to which MB (organizational climate, effective decision-making, organizational commitment, and taking initiative) are mediated by deference for authority, PQ of the managers, and environmental harmony. For example, the role of the monarch and the spiritual authority of the Buddhist religion have strong influences on the thinking and behavior of Thais at the national and personal levels. Although Thais show deference to the views of visitors, they are not judgmental, and are generally tolerant enough to accept differences in opinions, they will not tolerate disrespect to their King or open disrespect to their religion. Deference for authority is generally a strong value in Asian countries (Selvarajah et al., 2012).

Second, the EL has two faces that are closely related, to provide the measure for excellence in leadership in the Mekong organizations. First, managers are seen as wealth generators for the organization and as such their entrepreneurial nature, as envisaged by Zaccaro and Jimoski (2001), is an important value. The second face of the EL dimension is the strategic leader construct, which engages managers to provide strategic vision and to develop plans that will be sustaining and enduring for the organization's long-term prosperity.

Table 18.4 Support for hypotheses

Hypothesis	Total standardized effect size for leadership excellence		
	Organization	Strategic	Support
Hypothesis 1: <i>Commitment to the organization influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations</i>	0.64	0.42	Strong
Hypothesis 2: <i>Decision-making influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations</i>	0.06	0.09	Weak
Hypothesis 3: <i>Organizational climate influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations</i>	0.10	0.13	Weak
Hypothesis 4: <i>Taking initiatives influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Mekong organizations</i>	0.09	0.14	Weak
Hypothesis 5: <i>Deference for authority influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Thai organizations</i>	0.21	0.39	Weak/medium
Hypothesis 6: <i>Personal qualities reflecting, morality, religion, interpersonal relationships, and communication are important values in the Mekong culture and this will influence managers' perception of what constitutes an excellent leader</i>	0.38	0.31	Medium
Hypothesis 7: <i>Environmental harmony influences the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in organizations in the Mekong countries</i>	0.12	0.26	Weak

Thirdly, the values of an organizational leader are mediated by managers' PQ. From a human resource management point of view, developing the PQ of managers in the Mekong is important for building up organizational capabilities. Understanding the impact that organizational commitment has on these PQ is crucial to understanding excellence in leadership. The managers' commitment to the organization also has a direct relationship with the organizational leader construct. Therefore, understanding and strengthening organizational commitment offer the potential for improving the strategic and organizational leader value outcomes, especially the latter.

Fourthly, MB, except in the case of organizational commitment, is related to EL (strategic and organizational) through the mediating constructs of deference for authority, PQ of managers, and environmental harmony. This has implications for practice as well as theory, as MBs on their own do not relate to leadership excellence. There are factors in the environment, authority structures, and contextual qualities of the manager that mediate the effects of MB with regard to what constitutes an EL.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of contextual factors on leadership behaviors in the Mekong region's organizations. The structural model utilized in this research was sufficiently robust to provide nine distinct cultural constructs that explained relationships between MBs and the conceptions of excellence in leadership in these Southeast Asian organizations. Value interpretations employing contextual and demographic variables were employed to relate these constructs to conceptions of an EL.

Evidence was found in this research to suggest that leadership excellence in Mekong organizations is predicted by the culture-based constructs of organization climate, effective decision-making, organizational commitment, taking initiative, deference for authority, PQ of the managers, and environmental harmony. Of these, organizational commitment and PQ of the manager stand out as being the strongest predictors of leadership excellence.

Appendices

Appendix 18.1 Excellent leader standardized regression weights

		Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Organize work time effectively	F1	0.802	0.790	0.757	0.502	0.735
Continue to learn how to improve performance	F1	0.665	0.779	0.783	0.692	0.724
Develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry	F1	0.690	0.450	0.678	0.577	0.586
Have confidence when dealing with work and with people	F1	0.627	0.746	0.752	0.541	0.701
Motivate employees	F2	0.747	0.714	0.713	0.548	0.698
Give recognition for good work	F2	0.681	0.656	0.576	0.525	0.610
Have a strategic vision for the organization	F2	0.654	0.784	0.701	0.648	0.704
Create a sense of purpose and enthusiasm in the workplace	F2	0.579	0.710	0.721	0.719	0.660
Be honest	F2	0.607	0.669	0.600	0.179	0.528
RMSEA		0.048	0.057	0.050	0.103	0.031

F1 is a measure of strategic leadership, while F2 is a measure of organizational leadership

Test of invariance shows some evidence of a difference in weights for the four countries ($\chi^2 = 37.74$, $df = 21$, $p = 0.01$). This can largely be explained with the low importance of honesty in Vietnam, resulting in a relatively poor fit for Vietnam. However, the overall model for excellent leader describes the Mekong data well (Normed $\chi^2 = 1.99$, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03)

Appendix 18.2 Personal qualities standardized regression weight

	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Speak clearly and concisely	0.762	0.755	0.676	0.600	0.708
Respect the self-esteem of others	0.572	0.632	0.695	0.588	0.619
Write clearly and concisely	0.603	0.646	0.553	0.526	0.587
Accept responsibility for mistakes	0.401	0.557	0.607	0.329	0.492
Follow what is morally right: not what is "right" for self or the organization	0.338	0.375	0.512	0.344	0.429
Listen to the advice of others	0.411	0.470	0.693	0.326	0.495
Be practical	0.506	0.325	0.620	0.394	0.491
Be an initiator—not a follower	0.387	0.529	0.585	0.261	0.486
Treat most people as if they were trustworthy and honest	0.513	0.533	0.564	0.246	0.499
Deal calmly with tense situations	0.428	0.606	0.595	0.413	0.530
Return favors	0.633	0.670	0.637	0.279	0.529
RMSEA	0.066	0.049	0.069	0.109	0.049

Although the model fit is obviously worse for Vietnam, a test of invariance shows no significant difference in the weights used for the four countries ($\chi^2 = 39.06$, df

Appendix 18.3 Deference for authority standardized regression weights

	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Focus on maximizing productivity	0.418	0.455	0.439	0.296	0.408
Sell the professional or corporate image to the public	0.261	0.516	0.638	0.712	0.466
Support decisions made jointly by others	0.554	0.675	0.644	0.346	0.600
Adapt to changing working conditions	0.410	0.430	0.519	0.197	0.420
Adjust organizational structures and rules to the realities of practice	0.493	0.636	0.532	0.467	0.538
Act as a member of the team	0.483	0.493	0.609	0.308	0.549
Share power	0.644	0.551	0.661	0.423	0.560
Give priority to long-term goals	0.543	0.550	0.429	0.424	0.446
RMSEA	0.040	0.089	0.067	0.080	0.050

Although the fit was clearly worse for Laos and Vietnam, an invariance test showed no significant difference among the weights for the four countries ($\chi^2 = 28.977$, df = 21, $p = 0.115$)
= 30, $p = 0.12$)

Appendix 18.4 Environmental harmony standardized regression weights

	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Be socially and environmentally responsible	0.685	0.645	0.561	0.548	0.624
Identify social trends which may have an impact on work	0.564	0.600	0.677	0.399	0.586
Be responsive to political realities in the environment	0.391	0.348	0.552	0.331	0.444
Foster an international perspective in the organization	0.592	0.585	0.594	0.513	0.599
Have a multi-cultural orientation and approach	0.593	0.364	0.632	0.647	0.568
Use economic indicators for planning purposes	0.548	0.466	0.606	0.415	0.537
Study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work	0.546	0.586	0.606	0.416	0.565
Check consistently for problems and opportunities	0.566	0.560	0.636	0.284	0.552
RMSEA	0.074	0.043	0.070	0.073	0.057

No significant difference in the weights required for the four countries ($\chi^2 = 30.570$, $df = 21$, $p = 0.081$)

Appendix 18.5 Managerial behavior standardized regression weights

		Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Think about the specific details of any particular problem	F1	0.752	0.678	0.656	0.863	0.717
Tell subordinates what to do and how to do it	F1	0.682	0.628	0.674	0.790	0.734
Be strict in judging the competence of employees	F1	0.468	0.525	0.535	0.319	0.502
Make decisions without depending too much on others	F2	0.530	0.616	0.635	0.519	0.564
Make work decisions quickly	F2	0.649	0.716	0.765	0.603	0.699
Make decisions earlier rather than later	F2	0.673	0.623	0.792	0.588	0.694
Select work wisely to avoid overload	F4	0.557	0.691	0.627	0.245	0.577
Persuade others to do things	F4	0.402	0.626	0.589	0.411	0.540

		Cambodia	Laos	Thailand	Vietnam	Overall
Listen to and understand the problems of others	F4	0.662	0.670	0.682	0.631	0.660
Be objective when dealing with work conflicts	F4	0.650	0.514	0.623	0.391	0.547
Keep up-to-date on management literature	F4	0.472	0.713	0.672	0.691	0.608
Use initiatives and take risks	F3	0.535	0.702	0.769	0.620	0.684
Try different approaches to management	F3	0.607	0.746	0.729	0.678	0.703
Delegate	F3	0.550	0.376	0.405	0.414	0.424
RMSEA		0.069	0.056	0.057	0.081	0.047

F1 measures "Organization climate." F2 measures "Efficiency of decision-making." F3 measures "Taking initiative." F4 measures "Organizational commitment"

An invariance test showed significant differences among the weights for the four countries ($\chi^2 = 49.477$, $df = 30$, $p = 0.014$). In particular, the loading for "Select work wisely in order to avoid overload" is relatively low for Vietnam

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