

## Exploring Relevant Dimensions to Leadership Excellence In Thailand

P.J. Anurit

School of Management, Shinawatra University, Pathumthani, Bangkok, Thailand

C. Selvarajah

Faculty of Business & Enterprise, Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria, Australia

D. Meyer

Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria, Australia

**DOI Link:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v1-i1/100>

**Published Date:** 06 October 2011

### Abstract

This paper explores the dimensions that contribute to leadership excellence in Thailand and empirically tests the Selvarajah, Duignan, Nuttman, Lane and Suppiah (1995) model. Summated scales for the importance of Excellent Leadership, Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviours (MB), Organisational Demands, and Environmental Influences were developed. A structural model was constructed to explain the relationship in excellence in leadership. 403 managers participated in this research. The findings suggest that there are strong cultural factors such as non-confrontation and respect moderating the perceptions of Thai managers with regard to an Excellent Leader. Thailand attracts international investor interest and the relevance of behavioural values for business is of great importance to human resources management. There is limited literature on Thai management and leadership styles and the available literature has not linked cultural values and norms to leadership constructs in Thailand. The findings in this paper are important for managers on foreign assignment in Thailand and for others who engage with Thailand.

**Keywords:** leadership, excellence, Thai, Chinese, Bangkok, face, non-confrontation, respect, personal qualities, managerial behaviours, environment influences, and organisational demand

### Introduction

Leadership is one of the most researched areas in organisational 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. Research addressing cultural

elements of the leadership phenomenon, such as the GLOBE project is an advance on previous studies which have been limited mainly to interpretation of quantitative data without addressing the underpinning cultural factors. Broad categorisation of cultural dimensions have been provided by researchers such as Hofstede (1984), Hofstede and Bond (1988) and Trompenaars (1993). In recent years, the GLOBE project initiated by Robert House (see House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta 2004; Chhokar, Brodbeck and House 2007) has provided insights into the influence of culture on organisational leadership across 62 nations. However, weaknesses still persist when interpretations of the leadership phenomenon are not strictly within 'boundaries' where cultural similarities can be emphasised. The GLOBE project (see Gupta, Hanges and Dorfman, 2002) has classified 10 cluster groupings; five are identified within European settings making up 13 percent of the world population. This clearly suggests that there is more work to be done to establish acceptable and meaningful cultural boundaries in the rest of the world. More focused and targeted research may suggest that nations such as India and countries in Asia may have cluster groups not observed in the GLOBE project. For example, Gupta, Surie, Javidan and Chhokar (2002) have justified the cluster formation of Southern Asia; comprising Iran, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines even though there are diverse and varied cultural influences in these societies. Similarly, overstating the predominance of a sub-culture contribution, without proper identification of subcultures to national studies can be equally misleading. Kennedy (2002), reporting on the GLOBE study in Malaysia titled 'Leadership in Malaysia: Traditional values international outlook', interpreted the values of Malaysian Malays as surrogate measure for values of Malaysian managers, thus ignoring the role and contributions of the Malaysian Chinese and the Malaysian Indians to leadership in the country. The same error can be attributed to Hofstede's (1984) study which included profiling the cultural values in Malaysia. In Hofstede's Malaysian sample, the IBM employees in Malaysia between 1967 and 1973, would have predominantly been Malaysian Chinese; therefore making Malaysia a Confucian nation.

Therefore what are the precise measures of cultural provenance and how much latitude should be observed before reaching the boundaries of meaningful cognition?

Equally, there are still many unanswered questions about the dimensions of excellence and its relationship to leadership. Early literature on leadership focused on factors such as effectiveness, productivity and efficiency (see for example, March and Simon, 1958; Katz and Kahn 1966; Mott, 1972; Campbell, Bowna, Peterson, and Dunnette, 1974; Steers, 1977). Though this view has not changed drastically, the emphasis in the 1980s shifted when authors such as Kantor (1985), Kotter (1985) and Peters and Waterman (1983), popularised excellence in organisation as opposed to the study of effectiveness. The notion of excellence is loosely defined and therefore is a general theme that avoids quantification of precise measures and allows researchers room to explore the dynamics and relativities that contribute to the elusive meaning of excellence. Leadership excellence, therefore, is a phenomenon and every new research provides a new perspective in the understanding of what constitutes leadership in a given situation or place.

Most studies have dealt mainly with national emphasis and have not seriously looked at sub-populations of the country as contributors to managerial values. In this paper, we are interested in the relationship between managerial values and how they contribute to

leadership excellence and how these differ within Thailand between different demographic groups; such as age, gender and ethnicity. Culture in its manifestation changes over time and studies (see Ralston, Gustafson, Terpstra, and Holt, 1995; Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008c) have shown that generational differences affect value perceptions. Similarly, gender perceptions have been studied to determine women's managerial behaviours (for example, Yukongdi and Benson, 2005). Increasingly, women managers are participating in larger numbers in Thailand than in many European countries. A UN survey of women in management and administrative positions worldwide placed Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines ahead of Netherlands, France and Germany (cited in van der Boon, 2003). In many countries of Southeast Asia, there are sizeable ethnic groups and this could affect leadership value perceptions (see Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a).

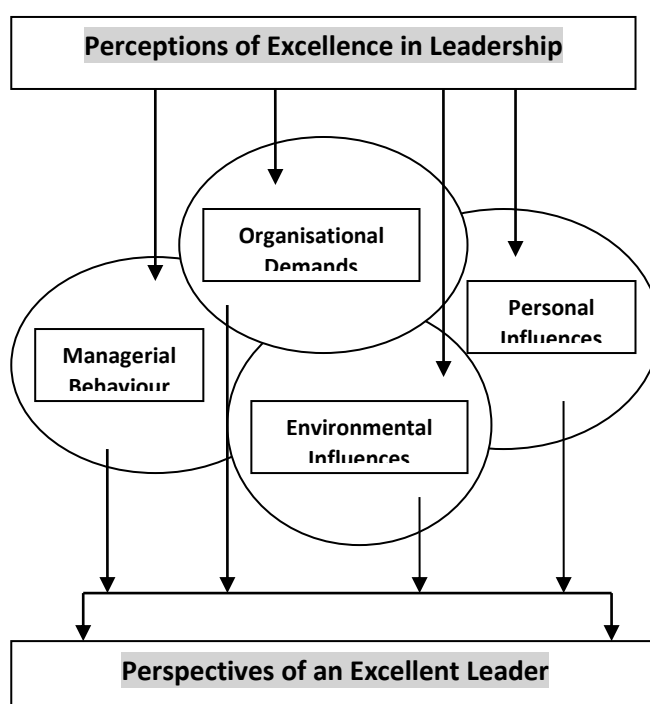


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study of excellence in leadership

Source: Adapted from Selvarajah et al, 1995.

The four broad categories for the study of excellent leaders:

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

Managerial Behaviour (MB) - person's nature, values, attitudes, actions and styles when performing the managerial duties. It emphasises persuasive powers.

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

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

**Culture**

Tung (2004) explains that the single most distinguishing feature between North American and East Asian management is that, management practices are seen as a science in the former whilst Asia sees it as an art. Tung (2006) further stresses that in East Asian societies, experience expressed as an art is highly valued even though the younger generation is equipped with management education. Given this understanding, in seeking managerial value dimensions contributing to excellence in leadership in Thailand, we turn to culture as the contextual basis for this study.

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 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, the UK and the USA with multicultural societies have an advantage over countries with a single dominant culture such as China and Japan when accessing international markets.

In this study, Hofstede's definition of culture "The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another" is used as it stresses that culture is collective; not an individual attribute and that it is not directly visible but manifested in behaviours (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004, p.58).

The term "excellence" is used here in its standard definition of surpassing others in accomplishment or achievement (Taromina and Selvarajah, 2005). In this paper, excellence in leadership is perceived in terms of the behaviours 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 behaviours that allow a leader to achieve excellent performance (without excluding the possibility that one might possess an excellent character).

**Contextualising Thai culture**

The new Bangkok airport, named *Suvarnabumi*, or 'the Golden Earth' is an ancient Sanskrit name for the Indianised parts of Southeast Asia, and in this context Thailand is often referred to as the "Golden Peninsula" (Keyes, 1995). Modern day Thailand is a nation of paradoxes where there are tensions and conflicts between culture, life and governance on the one hand and human nature and the practical necessities and experiences of life on the other. Though military coups are common, the nation maintains a reverence, often bordering on fanaticism for the monarchy and the liberal or middle-path interpretation of the Buddhist tenets. It is, however, a nation in harmony; with itself and with the world though one would not think this given the many military coups experienced in the country. However, this is in itself a contradiction. While on the one hand democratic values are exercised, on the other, the political change agent is often the militia. The general public engages in this democratic process and supports change as long as the monarch and the religion are held above politics. Thailand attracts people of all generations and provides insightful experiences within boundaries of individual moral and ethical value standards. The boundaries of tolerance, however, stop with criminal offences where harsh penalties are imposed for offences such as the possession of illicit drugs and disrespect to the monarch and the Buddhist religion. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), the highly respected monarch of Thailand, has stressed that arrogance and lack of tolerance for differences of opinion should be avoided as they

represented serious barriers to national progress.<sup>1</sup> It is within these broad guidelines that Thailand has developed.

In an earlier publication, Swierczek (1991) provided an explanation for three streams of leadership styles in Asia distinguished on broad cultural backgrounds; the East Asian, the South Asian and the Southeast Asian. Based on this categorisation, Selvarajah and Meyer (2008a) explained cultural influences on the leadership styles in Malaysia, a nation highly influenced by East and South Asia. Malaysia, a neighbour to Thailand, retains a political, economic and social system that has yet to integrate the three main races (Chinese, Indians and Malays). This suggests that unlike Thailand a national culture is far from reality. Selvarajah and Meyer (2008a) in their findings suggest that all three aspects of Swierczek's (1991) categorisation are not only evident but visible in Malaysia. Thailand, on the other hand has, through its political and social policies, integrated settlers to the main-stream Thai culture, suggesting that ethnic differences will be less pronounced.

In a 2006 article, Niffenegger, Kulviwat and Engchanil, argued that despite possessing unique characteristics, Thailand resembles most Asian countries, for example in such measures as Hofstede's (1980) collectivism and power distance which differentiates Thailand with western cultures. In another recent publication, Swierczek and Onishi (2003) considered the applicability of Japanese management in the Thai environment. In their view, though the cultural affinity of Thailand is closer to Japanese values than those of the West, the Thai national culture has aspects that are unique, which becomes a source of conflict and impacts on the leadership style required of Japanese managers in the Thai environment. Niffenegger, Kulviwat, and Engchanil (2006) are of the view that the uniqueness of the Thai culture rests on the essence of the Thai Theravada Buddhism as expressed in the 'Four Noble Truth'. Rowley and Warner (2006, p.394) has expressed concern with Hofstede's (1980) narrow view of expressing culture which ignores the "tradition of spiritualism," and building business relationships involving tradition, networking and time. Rowley and Warner further express the need for new specific measures to confirm these ideas. The essence of this uniqueness and its effect on leadership will be discussed in this paper.

### **Background**

Thailand is a nation of 66.5 million people and is the fourth largest country in ASEAN in terms of population after Indonesia 228.5 million, Philippines 90.5 million and Vietnam 86.2 million (ASEANstats, 2008). It shares its border in the south with Malaysia, in the west with Myanmar (Burma), to the northeast with Laos and to the east and southeast with Cambodia. The country is therefore at the heart of the Greater Mekong Subregion of Southeast Asia. The Greater Mekong Subregion is comprised of Thailand and its immediate neighbours, except for Malaysia. Theravada Buddhism is the common religion in these nations.

Prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Hinduism was the religion of this region and even to this day, aspects of Hinduism, such as the *Mahabharata* (Indian Vedic war epic based on Krishna, an incarnation of the god Vishnu) and *Ramayana* (Indian Vedic love epic based on Rama another incarnation of the god Vishnu) are popular among the Thais. With the advent of Theravada Buddhism in the 13<sup>th</sup> century which came from India via Sri Lanka, the country embraced Buddhism. Though Buddhism's root religion is Hinduism, the Thais found the non-existence of an eternal blissful self (soul) or *Atman* in Buddhism appealing as it provides a simple

---

<sup>1</sup> "King calls for end to intolerance". Bangkok Post, December 5, 2001.

explanation for reincarnation based on the concept of *Karma* and *Dharma*. *Karma* is the cumulative effect of an individual's actions in both their present and past lives and *Dharma*<sup>2</sup>, is one's righteous duties. To the Buddhist, the concept of God or soul defeats the purpose of self improvement as 'divine' intervention removes personal concentration on the self. Buddhism, therefore, generally emphasises coexistence, tolerance and individual initiative (Wongtada, Leelakulthanit and Singhapakdi, 1998).

Historically, unlike its neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, Thailand has never been colonized. Thailand was a 'buffer' nation when the French ruled Cambodia and Laos in the east and the British ruled Malaysia in the south and Burma in the west. Thailand like its neighbours has over the centuries been influenced by India to a large extent and also by China. Many of its cultural and religious traditions have their origin in Sanskrit and Pali literature whose origins are Indian. It is not uncommon to see Theravada Buddhists paying homage to the Hindu Trinity; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The King of Thailand is venerated as a descendent of the warrior god Rama (an incarnation of Vishnu). This, Indianisation of the Thai belief system and its influence on management behaviour will be discussed later.

Adding to this rich cultural tapestry is the addition of Confucianism, brought by the Chinese who came to Thailand as merchants and settled mainly in cities such as Bangkok. The Chinese comprise only three percent of the Thai population but control 60 percent of commerce in Thailand (Chen, 2004, p.8). As a racial group they are often indistinguishable from the local Thais as they, like all Thai nationals, have names which are of Sanskrit origin. The Chinese in Thailand are therefore highly integrated into the Thai cultural environment. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is forwarded for testing.

*Hypothesis 1:* The relative importance of the constructs underlying leadership excellence will not differ between the Thai and the Thai Chinese due to a convergence tendency of the Thai national culture.

In the second hypothesis for this study we proposed that younger managers will have a different view of leadership excellence than older managers. Particularly it is expected that managers under 35 years of age will exhibit greater work focus and more interest in environmental development than older managers. Ralston et al. (1995) completed an exploratory study of generational shifts in work values in China. The study looked at the values of the new generation of managers compared to the older managers who had their formative years in the communist era. The findings profiled the emergent new generation of Chinese managers as being more individualistic, less collectivist and less committed to Confucian philosophy than their earlier counterparts. The study highlights a tendency towards individualism similar to western managers. Similarly, Selvarajah and Meyer (2008c) reported that social objectives influence leadership behaviour in China in that older managers who have lived most of their lives under communism attach more importance to authoritarian managerial culture than younger managers, while in Cambodia, older managers were found to exhibit less work focus and less interest in environmental tracking than younger managers (Selvarajah, Meyer, 2008b). It is expected then that older managers will exhibit more nurturing orientation and will support

---

<sup>2</sup> Dharma is the central concept that explains the 'ultimate truth' or reality of the universe. The symbol of Dharma is the wheel – is the central motif of the Indian flag and appears in Hindu and Buddhist literature.

organisational prosperity compared to younger managers. Assuming similar age effects in Thailand it is proposed that:-

*Hypothesis 2:* There will be generational differences in the perceptions of the importance of leadership excellence in Thailand

The third hypothesis suggests differences between the perceptions of males and females in the study of the dimensions that influence leadership excellence. In particular it is expected that Thai females will be more conservative and exhibit a nurturing orientation than Thai males, exhibiting similar preferences to the responses of older workers.

In a research conducted on women managers in Thailand, the study (van der Boon, 2003) showed that, in general, patience, sincerity, honesty, consensus, persistence and a willingness to learn were mentioned as important managerial attributes and it was also expected of women managers to be humble, respectful, attentive, understanding and discreet. The study also indicated that a 'motherly approach' to subordinates provided further support for women managers. This is similar to older male managers providing mentor support to younger employees. The women managers also saw a non-confrontational approach supported harmony in the organisation, even if they publicly agreed but privately disagreed with their male colleagues.

*Hypothesis 3:* There will be gender difference in the perceptions of the importance of leadership excellence in Thailand

There is a dire need for cultural contextualisation with regard to leadership behaviour and excellence in Asian countries. Thailand, in this regard is not a highly researched country but contributors such as Hanks (1962), Hofstede (1984), Brown and Levinsons (1987), Khanittanan (1988), Fieg and Mortlock (1989), Deephuengton (1992), Trees and Manusov (1998), Sirussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999), Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiket, and Smith (2002), Swierczek and Onishi (2003), Niffenegger et al., (2006) and Yukongdi (2010) provide some insight into the Thai value system with regard to management behaviour. The following seven hypotheses propose seven constructs for the cultural contextualisation of leadership excellence in Thailand.

### ***Decision making***

Research in Leadership and decision making was popularised by Vroom and Yetton in 1973 with the publication of their book *Leadership and Decision Making*. Vroom (2000: 83) argues that "theories of decision making intersect with theories of leadership" and he quotes the work of Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) which defines styles of leadership as being influenced by "area of freedom afforded subordinates" (cited in Vroom, 2000: 83). He refers to organisational cultural boundaries within which leadership decision making operates. Dickson, Den Hartog and Mitchelson (2003) provide insights to 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 process of Korea and Japan, both Confucian nations, are different. In studying the decision making process and implementation of rules between the Thais and the Japanese, Swierczek and Onishi (2003) also see large differences in these two societies. While the Thais prefer decisions made for them by their leaders, decisions are

meant to be flexible. The Japanese decision making process is lengthy and involves the participation of employees and decisions, once made, are rigid. Thus decision making is a much more crucial skill for Japanese leaders where decisions are hierarchical and enduring. Therefore decision making, an important aspect of managerial behaviour is investigated with regard to its influence on leadership excellence in Thailand. In this study the following hypothesis is tested using a scale which measures the importance of quick and independent decision-making in excellent leaders.

*Hypothesis 4:* In Thailand perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to decision making.

### **Work focus**

Theravada Buddhism promotes the “teaching of analysis” which uses critical methods of investigation rather than blind faith. This school teaches the aspirant to achieve 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 (Lamberton, 2005). Individuals are 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 (Marlatt, 2002). The Noble Eightfold Path in essence directs individuals to seek the:

Right wisdom *paññā*<sup>3</sup> through proper view and intention;

Right ethical conduct *sīla*<sup>4</sup> through speech, action and livelihood;

Right mental discipline *samādhi*<sup>5</sup> through effort, mindfulness and concentration.

This religion clearly supports and respects individuals who seek the right path; have clear perspectives and intentions in the work performed, communicate these intentions clearly and act them out, and remain focused on the job. This suggests work focus will be an important aspect of managerial behaviour in Thailand. In this study work focus will be measured with a scale that rates leaders more highly if, they are logical in problem solving, prepared to listen in order to understand problems and to use persuasion, while realistically assigning work loads. This scale allows the testing of the following hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 5:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to work focus. In particular, This are expected to be logical and rational in their approach to problem solving and setting of work tasks.

### **Managerial style**

---

<sup>3</sup> Prajñā in Sanskrit and *paññā* in Pali. Pali is a derivative of Sanskrit and is the Buddhist script used in Thailand and was brought to Thailand from Sri Lanka in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>4</sup> *sīla* in both Sanskrit and in Pali.

<sup>5</sup> *samādhi* in Sanskrit and in Pali

The Thais are generally supportive of differences of opinion and thinking which again is based on the Buddhist philosophy of seeking self improvement. This is unlike the Confucian traditions where there is greater emphasis on conformity. Long-term orientation is closely associated with Confucian values and is based on a future time horizon which includes planning, thrift and perseverance (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). The work style of the Thais is more of the “here and now” compared to the Confucianist who plan for the future. For example, unlike the Japanese (explained in Swierczek and Onishi, 2003), the Thais do not understand why losses may have to be incurred in the short-term to ensure long-term prosperity. Equally, commitment to a company and promotion are different between the two societies. Life time employment and slow promotions are features of the Japanese system while permanency or work tenure is not fully supported in the Thai culture. The Thais also look for promotions within a much shorter time frame in a career suggesting that organisational propriety is not as important for Thai leaders as certain aspects of managerial behaviour such as individual initiative, tolerance, respect and conflict avoidance as defined by the Managerial Style scale used in this study, allowing the following hypothesis to be tested.

*Hypothesis 6:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to Managerial Style

### ***Harmony***

Managing under conditions of uncertainty is a popular topic in management studies and important to leadership (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta, 2004; Niffenegger et al., 2006; Hofstede, 2007). The Thais tend to avoid uncertainty or the unknown which may lead them to awkward situations when initially interacting with others<sup>6</sup>. Embarrassment due to uncertainty may prevent the Thais from communicating freely. Thus, they are more likely to find out what they should do or should not do so that they can adapt and communicate appropriately. According to Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999), for example, the Thais 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 when they meet. Khanittanan (1988) argues that the 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 on the attention paid to harmony (Niffenegger et al., 2006). Given this dislike for uncertainty, the Thai manager would monitor social trends, political changes, and international issues while abiding by the laws governing business operations. For this reason it is expected that a Thai leader who is socially and environmentally responsible and one who monitors environmental issues closely will be regarded more favourably.

*Hypothesis 7:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors supporting environmental harmony.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hofstede's (1984) uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) shows the Thai being highly ranked on this index (UAI at 64 which is higher than the Asian average of 58).

**Respect (Face)**

Leadership studies have highlighted the importance of social order (Schein, 2004) and as Rieff (1983, p. ix) states “mirroring in each man the social order in which men act out their lives.” In exploring Hofstede’s (1984) concept of individualism, Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) argue that Thai culture emphasises social harmony, respect and conflict avoidance. The Thai system is based on social hierarchy that respects authority while maintaining individuality. Hank’s (1962) analysis of merit and power in the Thai social order suggests that the Thai hierarchy depends on merit (*boon*) or virtue (*khwaamdii*). Hanks also explains that managers who are generous, caring and have good managerial skills are respected regardless of their origins. He also states that generally, Thais prefer to be associated with respected individuals. Therefore, having harmonious relationships with others is an important trait to Thais and it is expected that this trait will influence leadership.

In her study of Thai politeness, Phawadee Deephuengton (1992) argues that notions of face are significant for the discussion of politeness in the Thai culture. There are various expressions about face in the Thai language such as (see Deephuengton, 1992: 50):

- sia naa* (loss of face - being disappointed)
- raksaa naa* (to save face)
- naa baan* (having thin face - being considerate)
- naa naa* (having thick face - being inconsiderate or shameless)
- naa pen* (having a charming face - being delightful)
- khaaj naa* (selling face - shamelessness)
- naa yai* (having a large face - being generous)

Deephuengton (1992) argues that saving face is not only an individual act but also a mutual act. Thais are aware of saving their own and the face of others in embarrassing situations, such as in the act of refusing, requesting and disagreeing. To the Thais, the self-esteem of themselves and that of others are important in relationships and these behavioural norms extends to the work environment.

*Hypothesis 8:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to respect (face).

**Deference to authority**

Organisational demand was defined previously as the way in which a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation. This can be interpreted as the way in which a manager responds to organisational propriety and authority. In leadership studies, the issue of authority relationships has been central (Casimir and Li, 2005; Graen, 2006; Lin, 2008). Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) point out that Thai people place high value on deference to rank and respect for authority. It is acceptable for superiors in the Thai society to be bold when expressing disagreement with their subordinates. Although being forthright may involve loss of face, the superior is not negatively perceived as superiors are ones who protect and assist their employees at work and in their personal lives. However, the Thais see work as a means rather than an end. Life outside of work is equally

important emphasising enjoyment and leisure which include the family. In comparison, the Japanese are workaholics who voluntarily work even on weekends and sacrifice time with their family (Swierczek and Onishi, 2003). The Thai concept of work life, therefore, differs widely from that of the Japanese<sup>7</sup>. This suggests that though the Thais value deference to rank (that is in support of organisational propriety), they also believe that the employee as an individual and the respect for self are important.

In the organisational context, the deference for authority is similar to Sinha's (1980) Nurturant Task Leadership Style (NTL) which is characteristic of the Indian leader (Selvarajah, 2008a) where the style is characterised by leader's concern for task and nurturing orientation. These characteristics suggest that the Organisational Demand dimension, with its emphasis on maximising productivity, supporting the corporate image, teamwork, support for others and long-term goals, will be important in shaping perceptions of leadership excellence in the Thai context.

*Hypothesis 9:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to deference to authority.

### ***Non-confrontational style***

Conflict management is an important leadership function (Tse, Francis, and Walls, 1994; Amason, 1996; Chen, Liu and Tjosvold, 2005). Researchers such as Lovelace et al (2001) and De Dreu and Van de Vliert (1997) have found that it is not how conflict is perceived that is important but how constructive or destructive conflicts are managed. However, in many societies, especially collectivist countries in Asia, conflict is avoided (Chen, 2004; Graham, Kim, Lin, Robinson 1988; Hofstede, 1993; Tse et al., 1994). Fieg and Mortlock (1989), Deephuengton (1992) and Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) argue that the Thais perceive non-confrontation as the most important part of their thought and behaviour. This is to maintain harmony and as explained earlier, maintaining harmonious relationships is a pervasive value in the Thai society. To avoid personal friction and to maintain good relationship, the Thais seek neutrality by identifying with in-group membership, such as using honorific address with group members or in-group language/dialect when confronting an outsider (Deephuengton, 1992). As such, the Thais are able to express disagreement while maintaining smooth relationships. This again emphasised the need for a non-confrontational style in Thai leaders. The Thais have a tendency to avoid unnecessary conflict in their contacts with others and face-to-face conflicts are rare among the Thais.

Deephuengton (1992) in his study revealed that the Thais use silence as a way to withdraw from confrontation. Being silent allows a person to withdraw from the interaction and avoid further dispute. Deephuengton points out that silence is positively perceived and is a way in which the Thais repress tension and avoid further face loss. Similarly, Knutson, et al., (2002) found that the Thais have low willingness to communicate when they sense a dispute is about to occur. Hence, it can be implied that they use silence as a communicating tool to withdraw from disagreements and to prevent further confrontation. Trees and

---

<sup>7</sup> This is also supported by Hofstede (1984) where the masculinity index (MAS) for the Japanese was very high (95) compared to the Thais (34).

Manusov (1998) note that nonverbal behaviours, such as facial expressions, hand gestures and other meaningful body movements used to express views can be either positive or negative. For example, eye rolling, unpleasant facial expression and a loud voice communicate negative feelings. With respect to nonverbal expression, the Thais have been taught to neutralize their emotional expression whether they are sad, happy or upset. Predictably, they view unpleasant facial expression (e.g., eye rolling) and impolite behaviours (e.g., not paying respect to superiors or elderly people) offensive and unacceptable. The Thais will perceive silence as a sign of respect unless it accompanies impolite nonverbal behaviour.

Reconciliation is difficult between disputing parties (Fieg, 1989); this characteristic therefore places value on individual space within relationships and this is also applicable in the workplace. Moreover, Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) note that expressions of anger are more likely to cause disharmony, and is a sign of ignorance, offensiveness and immaturity. Deephuengton (1992, p. 95) found that to mitigate disagreement, the Thais use indirect speech to convey disagreement, such as "It is not that matter at all" (*maj chai jaan nan leej*). The listener uses the expressions as a means to mitigate opposing expression and to prevent further face loss for both speaker and listener.

*Hypothesis 10:* In Thailand, perceptions of what makes an Excellent Leader can be understood in terms of factors relating to a non-confrontational style.

The final hypothesis concerns the way in which these constructs interact. In particular the consequences of a confrontational approach will be examined. As indicated by the final hypothesis it is expected that the perceptions of leadership excellence for managers who excel in other areas will be diminished if they have a confrontational as opposed to a non-confrontational style

*Hypothesis 11:* A non-confrontational personal style mediates the importance of other leadership characteristics. This means that leaders who do well in terms of work focus, respect, organisational demand and environmental influence will excel only if their personal style is not confrontational.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data collection was carried out using the questionnaire developed by Selvarajah et al. (1995) at three universities located in Bangkok, North Thailand and East Thailand<sup>8</sup>. The respondents are practising managers in the Master of Business Administration and other business masters programmes at these universities. Questionnaires were distributed and collected centrally using collection boxes. The Likert-type questionnaire had ninety-four items with one indicating no importance and five indicating very important. Neither the respondents nor their organisations were required to be identified. A total of 800 (200 each in the North and East Thailand and 400 in Bangkok) 'Excellence in Leadership' questionnaires were distributed and 412 were returned. Of the 412 returned, 401 were useable, giving a 50.1 percent effective return rate. Responses were sought on a one to

---

<sup>8</sup> Far Eastern University in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen University in Eastern Thailand and Shinawatra University in Bangkok.

five importance scale for each of the ninety-four 'excellence in leadership' value statements.

In this paper we develop scales for the importance of an Excellent Leader, Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviour, Organisational Demands and Environmental Influences (provided in the Appendix). 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 and exploratory factor analysis is used to split the Managerial Behaviour and Personal Qualities constructs into scales that relate to the above hypotheses. It was found that Managerial Behaviour was composed of three of the dimensions discussed above, namely Work Focus, Decision Making Style and Managerial Style while Personal Qualities was composed of two of the dimensions discussed above, namely Non-Confrontational Style and Respect. The reliability of the scales was measured by Cronbach's alpha and the internal validity of the scales was assured using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. A scale with a Cronbach's alpha of above 0.70 is 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). The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses shown in the Appendix produced a root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of less than 0.08, a goodness of fit statistic (GFI) of above 0.90 and a normed chi-squared statistic (CMIN/DF) of less than three, suggesting adequate internal validity (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999).

Non-response bias was assessed by assuming that later respondents are more closely related to non-respondents than early respondents (Armstrong and Overton 1977). This was done by comparing earlier respondents to later respondents. A MANOVA test indicated no significant difference between the early and late responses for the above eight scales ( $F(8,394) = 1.242, p = .273$ ). In view of this result it can be assumed that non-response bias is unlikely to have had an adverse effect on this study, but this conclusion will be explored further using the Heckman (1979) method. In this approach nominal logistic regression is used to predict whether each respondent is likely to be an earlier or late respondents on the basis of the scales described above. A Mills Ratio is then produced using the ratio of the normal probability and cumulative distribution functions for each residual. If the inclusion of this Mills Ratio in regression analyses has a major impact, it means that non-response bias cannot be ignored. This approach will be further discussed in the results section.

An initial correlation analysis is used to test whether the hypothesised dimensions are associated with perceptions of leadership and structural equation modelling is then used to test the last eight hypotheses, effectively validating the conceptual model proposed in Figure 1. Finally tests of invariance are performed in order to determine whether there are age and gender differences with regard to what characteristics are perceived as being more important in a Thai leader (H2 and H3) and whether there are significant differences between Thai and Thai Chinese managers (H1) in this regard. In APEL studies, a concerted effort is made to study subpopulation effects within nations and regions (for example, see Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Selvarajah, 2008). The same is done in this study. SPSS v16 and AMOS v16 are the software packages used for the above analyses.

## Results

In the sample of 403 managers, 72 per cent of the respondents were local Thais and 28 per cent were Thais of Chinese ethnicity. The majority (95 per cent) gave Buddhism as their religion. Of the total sample, 49 per cent were men and 51 per cent were women. The higher participation levels of women to men reflect Launglaor, Sharma, and Thasnapark (2006) research where they found an increasing number of women in MBA programs in Thai universities, especially in Bangkok. In their research, Launglaor et al (2006, p. 40) had 55 per cent women MBAs responding and he found that they see the MBA qualification as “bestowing leadership and other organizational skills without any gender discrimination” in the Thai society, where in general men tend to dominate in terms of the cultural positioning of the genders. It was a relatively young sample with 56 per cent of the respondents under the age of 35 and 77 per cent at most 40 years old. However, the female employees tended to be younger than the male employees with 51 percent of males less than 35 years old and 61 percent of females less than 35 years old (Chi-Square = 4.543, df = 1, p = .033). The majority of respondents (68%) worked for private organisations with 16 per cent having senior management positions, 37 per cent middle manager positions and 39 per cent line manager positions. Organisation size varied significantly with 31 per cent of respondents working in organisations with at most 50 employees and 20 per cent of respondents working for organisations with more than 1000 employees. Most people (77 per cent) worked in departments employing at most 25 people.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for scales. (\*\* p<.001)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Mean	4.34	4.03	3.90	3.90	4.36	4.11	4.23	4.13
Std Deviation	.55	.57	.60	.70	.54	.50	.54	.58
Cronbach's Alpha	.82	.82	.76	.78	.76	.78	.85	.77
Excellent Leader (1)	1	.73**	.57**	.43**	.77**	.75**	.74**	.61**
Environmental Influence (2)	.73**	1	.72**	.54**	.72**	.81**	.75**	.72**
Managerial style (3)	.58**	.72**	1	.54**	.57**	.72**	.65**	.71**
Decision Making (4)	.43**	.54**	.54**	1	.49**	.55**	.50**	.47**
Work focus (5)	.77**	.71**	.57**	.49**	1	.76**	.79**	.71**
Organisational Demand (6)	.75**	.81**	.72**	.55**	.76**	1	.77**	.76**
Non-confrontational Style (7)	.74**	.75**	.65**	.50**	.79**	.77**	1	.68**
Respect (8)	.61**	.72**	.71**	.47**	.71**	.76**	.68**	1

In order to apply the Heckman check for non-response bias, nominal logistic regression was used to predict the timing category for questionnaire responses with the above scales used

as the independent variables. It was found that none of these scales had a significant relationship with the timing category (early/late) for the questionnaire responses. The residuals from this regression were used to create the Mills Ratio referred to below. A hierarchical regression analysis for leadership excellence showed that when the above Mills Ratio was added to a model containing the other scales there was no significant increase in R-Square. This last result, together with the very minor change in the coefficients between stages 1 and 2 of the regression, confirms that non-response bias is unlikely to be significant in this study.

Hypotheses 4 to 10 were initially examined by considering the correlations between the scales constructed using the tables shown in the appendix. Table 1 shows significant correlations between Excellent Leader and all the other scales providing some support for all these hypotheses. Further support for these hypotheses was found in Figure 2. However, only Environmental Influence, a Non-Confrontational Style, Work Focus and Organisational Demand have direct impact on perceptions of an Excellent Leader. As suggested by the last hypothesis Non-Confrontational Style plays a key role, mediating the effect of all the other scales on perceptions of Leadership Excellence at least partially.

**Figure 2. Structural model for leadership excellence with  $\beta$  coefficients showing the strength of all significant relationships. (RMSEA = .066, GFI = .988, CMIN/DF = 2.80)**

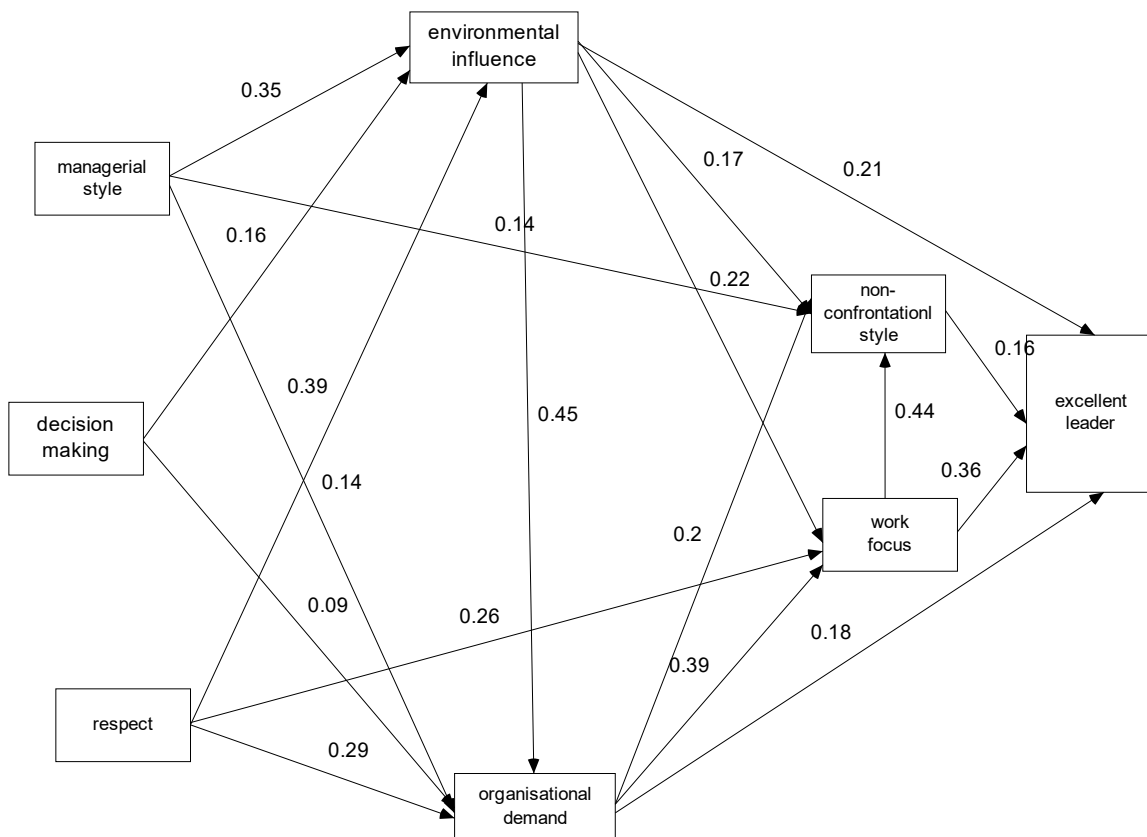


Table 2 shows the effect sizes obtained when the model shown in Figure 2 is fitted to the overall data set and the data for each region. These total effect sizes incorporate both direct and indirect effects. It is clear from the overall effect sizes that Environmental Influence has the greatest impact on Excellent Leader followed by Work Focus and Respect. Organisational Demand and Decision-Making are less important. Contrary to expectation a Non-Confrontational Style is not particularly important in its own right, but, as indicated in Figure 2, a Non-Confrontational Style does partially mediate the relationships between other more important scales and Excellent Leader, providing support for the last hypothesis. Although Work Focus, Environmental Influence and Organisational Demand have an indirect impact on Excellent Leader via the Non-Confrontational scale, they also have a direct relationship with Excellent Leader.

Table 2. Standardised excellent leader effect sizes

	Overall	Bangkok	Eastern Thailand	Northern Thailand
Respect (Face)	.415	.473	.398	.308
Decision-Making	.116	.119	.119	.094
Managerial Style	.252	.266	.103	.298
Environmental Influence	.501	.522	.418	.430
Organisational Demand	.378	.463	.223	.457
Work Focus	.426	.507	.352	.156
Non-Confrontational Style	.160	.129	.102	.121
R-Square (%)	68	80	46	51

A comparison of males and females using a test of invariance shows significant differences in terms of the weights associated with the above model (Chi-Square = 36.7, df = 18, p = .006). Significant differences are also obtained when people aged under 35 are compared with older people (Chi-Square = 36.7, df = 18, p = .007). The R-Square values in Table 3 suggest that the model better describes the perceptions of leadership excellence for males ( $R^2 = 75\%$ ) than for females ( $R^2 = 62\%$ ) and for people under 35 ( $R^2 = 75\%$ ) than for older people ( $R^2 = 59\%$ ).

Table 3. Standardised excellent leader effect sizes

	Overall	Male	Female	Over 35	Under 35
Respect (Face)	.415	.409	.404	.407	.421
Decision-Making	.116	.124	.103	.076	.140
Managerial Style	.252	.291	.216	.233	.270
Environmental Influence	.501	<b>.602</b>	<b>.414</b>	<b>.397</b>	<b>.577</b>
Organisational Demand	.378	<b>.231</b>	<b>.533</b>	<b>.518</b>	<b>.301</b>
Work Focus	.426	<b>.490</b>	<b>.358</b>	<b>.332</b>	<b>.463</b>
Non-confrontational Style	.160	.193	.143	.087	.210
R-Square (%)	68	75	62	59	75

Little difference over gender and age group are seen in regard to the importance of Respect, Decision-Making, Managerial Style and Non-confrontational Style. However, there are important differences for the other variables. In particular, Environmental Influence and Work Focus are considered more important by younger managers and by males while

Organisational Demand is seen as more important by older managers and by female managers. It appears that female managers hold similar views to the older managers despite the fact that the percentage of managers under 35 is higher for females (61%) than for males (51%). These results support the second and third hypotheses.

Another invariance test shows that the Excellence in Leadership model for Thailand weights do not differ significantly for Thai and Thai Chinese (Chi-Square = 27.754, df = 18, p = .066), providing support for the first hypothesis.

## **DISCUSSION**

In pursuing the objectives of the APEL study (see Selvarajah et al., 1995), we have looked at Thailand as a national identity and also from subpopulation perspectives. Thailand is an interesting country; as researchers we are marvelled at both the complexities of the social behaviour and at the same time the simplicity at personal levels. Thais generally are accommodating of diverse human values and this has also been shown in this study where there is great emphasis for tolerance and acceptance of people without being judgemental. This tolerance can be seen in the manner in which the people of Thailand from different ethnic origins have assimilated into a national fabric. This is in contrast to its neighbour, Malaysia, where a national identity is yet to be forged (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a). In this paper, the results clearly show the integration of the Chinese (the single largest minority in Thailand) within the Thai society. But what may not be clear is how much the Thai society may have borrowed from the immigrant Chinese culture. This may also provide explanation as to why the regional response may be different from the response from Bangkok.

However, inter-generational differences have been found as was the case in China (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008c) and Cambodia (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008b). Younger managers perceive Environmental Influence and Work Focus to be more important than do older managers, while older managers regard Organisational Demand to be more important than do younger managers. Also, despite female managers tending to be younger than older managers, their perceptions seem to mirror those of the older managers described above. It is highly likely that the nurturing orientation supports the similarity observed in the women and older managers as when controlled for age, the younger women managers have not responded differently.

In this study, perceptions of what makes an excellent leader in Thailand have been examined in terms of the Personal Qualities, Organisational Demand, Managerial Behaviour and Environmental Influence dimensions suggested by Selvarajah et al., (1995) in their exploratory research of leadership excellence in Asia. Reliable scales have been constructed for these constructs and overall ratings are high for all these constructs, confirming their importance.

The method of analysis was chosen in order to minimise cultural bias. Correlation analysis showed that the four dimensions of Personal Qualities, Managerial Behaviour, Environmental Influence and Organisational Demand are all associated with the Excellent Leader construct while the structural equation model showed that Environmental Influence was the most important dimension in Thailand when both indirect and direct influences were considered. As hypothesised, structural equation modelling showed that a Non-Confrontational Style partially mediates the relationship between Work Focus, Environmental Influence and the Excellent Leader construct. No attempt has been made to justify or interpret the Work Focus mediation effects suggested in Figure 1. This is an

area of much interest in that it may help us to understand managerial behaviour better regarding perceptions of excellence in leadership and will be discussed in future research. We expect to follow up with focus groups and interviews to provide some insights to the phenomena suggested in Figure 2.

This study, however, provides some insights to the cultural underpinnings in the Thai Society that international managers need to understand when dealing with the Thai population. It is indeed interesting that the Thais have identified work orientation (continue to learn how to improve performance, develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry and organise work time effectively), people orientation (have confidence when dealing with work and with people, and give recognition for good work) and honesty, an international construct rated highly by Asian managers (Selvarajah et al., 1995) as valid items in the Excellent Leader construct (see Table 4 in the Appendix). The Thais, unlike the Japanese (Swierczek & Onishi, 2003), differentiate between work and home environments and in this study, respect, as a directly influencing construct, and honesty, enshrined in the Excellent Leader construct, are seen as valued behaviours of managers.

The Environment Influence construct is perceived by the Thai manager as the most important contributing factor to the Excellent Leader. Values that explain the Environment Influence construct are; being socially and environmentally responsible, identifying social trends, being responsive to political trends, fostering international perspectives, having multi-cultural orientation, using economic forecast, understanding laws and regulations, and seeking out problems and opportunities. The findings in this research seem to be in line with Swierczek and Onishi's (2003, p. 198)) findings in that they recognise the Thai's ability to perceive environmental changes as a contributing factor to avoiding uncertainty. This also supports the conformity and orderliness described in Swierczek's (1991) portrayal of the Southeast Asian manager. This finding is again supported in the Malay manager's responses in the Selvarajah and Meyer's (2008a) study of leadership excellence in Malaysia; again confirming that this could be a Southeast Asian value. Scanning of the environment to avoid uncertainty can be viewed as supporting long-term orientation. Yet Swierczek and Onishi (2003: 198), see the Thai as being short-term oriented who 'live for today,' and that the Thai subordinates are "careless in their decision making." It should be noted, however that Swierczek and Onishi (2003) in their study refer to Japanese management and Thai employees and this organisational level difference could skew the findings.

Though long-term orientation, a value in the Organisational Demand construct, is supported by the Thai managers, it is certainly not the strongest of the values identified. As this study does not make comparison with the Japanese value system it is difficult to compare the result of Swierczek and Onishi (2003) study which state that the Thais are less supportive of long-term orientation than the Japanese (a Confucian trait) with this study.

In the measurement of the Excellent Leader in Thailand, illustrated in Figure 2, Environmental Influence and Organisation Demand are seen as constructs supporting the Excellent Leader. However, these constructs are mediated by another construct pertaining to the Thai culture, the non-confrontational style of management. Values linked to 'face' and harmony are strong among the Thais as discussed in the literature. Figure 2 also shows how Work Focus mediates the effect of Environmental Influence and Organisational Demand, on perceptions of Leadership Excellence.

Figure 2 also shows how respect (a valued Thai trait and linked in literature to the non-confrontation approach of the Thai people), decision-making and managerial style support the two important constructs of Environmental Influence and Organisational Demand. What

this then says is that, though we set out to study the effect of the four dimensions (EI, OD, MB & PQ) on excellence in leadership in Thailand, the Thai responses have provided contextualisation to the behaviour of the Thai manager by providing further constructs emphasising values particular to the Thai culture. The non-confrontation style, though not seen as an important construct measuring the Excellent Leader in the Thai context in its own right, is an important mediating construct. Further, respect is not seen as having a direct influence in measuring the Excellent Leader in Thailand. However, respect along with how decisions are made and what managers do, provides definition to the three important constructs of Environmental Influence, Work Focus and Organisational Demand.

Armed with this understanding, what are the implications for foreigners who want to engage with the Thais?

First, they must understand the extent to which deference to authority is envisaged in the Thai nation. For example, the role of the monarch and the spiritual authority of the Buddhist religion have strong influences on the thinking and behaviour of the Thais at the national and personal levels. The Thais show deference to the views of visitors and will accept differences in opinion regarding politics and social leanings, including views on monarchy. However, because of the strong reverence for their monarch, the Thais will not tolerate disrespect to their King. Similarly, the Thais generally are tolerant enough to accept differences of moral values as this is acknowledged within the broader thinking of Theravada Buddhism which emphasises 'the individual journey' and the seeking of one's own Karma and deliverance from reincarnation. As such, a Thai is not judgemental. But again, open disrespect to their religion is not tolerated.

Secondly, harmony and value for 'face' makes a Thai non-confrontational. The Thai will avoid direct confrontation as this can lead to loss of face and poor work relationship. Confrontation is taken personally and a Thai will not differentiate between work and personal conflict. Often walking away and regaining composure is a far more valued behaviour when differences emerge. The Thais are equally concerned with the future as the present but this has to be in a harmonious and progressive manner acceptable to the Thai logic of space and time which exists for the benefit of the individual and society or *sangha*.

Thirdly, the influence of foreign settlers, especially the Thai Chinese who are important in commerce in larger cities such as Bangkok, should be understood. Though the Chinese have assimilated well in the Thai society, they have a strong Confucian and Taoist heritage that they observe. Knowing these cultural influences is important when working with managers of Chinese ancestry (for further reading on these values see Taormina and Selvarajah, 2005; Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a, 2008c).

Finally there are generational and gender differences which need to be recognised and managed. The women managers in Thailand and older managers are more supportive of organisational prosperity compared to males and younger managers who view environmental monitoring and change as being important.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings in this study have implications for theory. In the first instant the study highlights that fine grained analysis and interaction effects of culture is needed to provide an understanding of managerial behaviour. Here we have tried to avoid providing purely a

predictive explanation to cultural behaviour though the models in this research provide these. We have reflected on cultural theory and provided insights to the observed results.

To begin, we provided an explanation of Thailand's proximity to the Indian and Chinese cultures and how they have over the centuries provided strong philosophical and ideological influences on Thai behaviour. Understanding this blend of rich Southeast Asian culture is therefore seen as important for any person engaging with Thailand. The uniqueness of the Thai cultural behaviour is closely associated with the Thai Buddhist philosophies and understanding the concepts of Karma and Dharma and how they are viewed in the context of the individual and collective behaviour in the work environment is important.

This study provides insights to the cultural contextualisation of Thais and their perception of what constitutes excellence in a Thai leader from a behavioural perspective. In a practical sense, an expatriate or a multinational company may face an employment situation where the Thais are reluctant to be up-front with feedback or suggestions. This may be viewed by a foreigner as being non-supportive and disrespectful to management obligations. From a cultural perspective, this is not the intention of the Thais. Therefore, understanding the softer nature of the Thai behaviour and customs has clear implications for feedback processes and disciplinary procedures; for example, ticking off someone in public may not be the most appropriate action.

Thailand, though prone to military coupes, is viewed as an important economy in Southeast Asia and is of great interest to international investors. Tolerance and acceptance of others and their views are an attraction to travellers and people with commercial interest. These are important credentials for attracting investment.

The overall implications are then that the levels of aggregation and the perspectives from which culture can be defined have to be areas of focus for future research in leadership. In this research, gender, geographical location and generational differences are established as factors influencing perceptions of the respondents.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This study is based on ratings of importance for 94 items in terms of leadership excellence. This means that common variance bias may have affected the results. However, as commented by Meade, Watson, and Kroustalis (2007) on the basis of CFA models applied to 24 multitrait-multimethod correlation matrices, while not trivial, common variance bias is often minor in magnitude. Also the work of Siemsen et al (2009) with respect to multivariate linear relationships shows that common method bias generally decreases when additional independent variables suffering from common method variance are included in a regression equation. In this study there are six leadership dimensions that are tested simultaneously, suggesting that common method variance has been addressed to some extent in the analysis itself.

Admittedly a research design which allowed an objective measure of leadership excellence as the dependent variable would have been preferable. However, this is not easily done and even well known studies such as House's GLOBAL study have been unable to achieve this. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) have suggested several research designs which can be used to reduce the effect of common method variance and it is suggested that future research should consider some of these procedural remedies. In addition it is suggested that items allowing the measurement of possible causes of common

method variance, such as social desirability, be included in the questionnaire, allowing the use of statistical remedies for common method variance.

A number of cultural and demographic variables have been identified as influencing leadership excellence in Thailand and these needs to be investigated further. For example, non-confrontation and face, though not unique to Thais alone seem to influence behaviour. What has not been explored is in what way they will affect work behaviour and what are the consequences of ignoring these cultural traits in an organisational setting. There are also strong variability in responses between the gender and this needs further exploration.

## REFERENCE

- Amason, A.C. (1996), "Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict on Strategic Decision Making: Resolving a Paradox for Management Teams,' *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 123-48.
- Arbuckle, J.L., and Wothke, W. (1999), *AMOS 4.0 User's Guide*. Chicago: Small Waters Corporation.
- Armstrong, J.S., and Overton, T. S. (1977), 'Estimating Non-response Bias in Mail Survey, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14, 396-402.
- ASEANstats. (2008), Country statistics profile, The official website of Southeast Asian Nations, <http://www.aseansec.org/22122.htm>. Down loaded 6 May 2010.
- Brodbeck, F.C., Chhokar, J.S., and House, R.J. (2003), 'Culture and Leadership in 25 Societies: Integration, Conclusions, and Future Directions,' in J.S. Chhokar, F.C. Brodbeck and R.J. House (eds) *Culture and Leadership Across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, London, Routledge, pp. 1023-1084.
- Brown, P., and Levinson, S. (1987), *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, J.P., Bowna, D.A., Peterson, N.G. and Dunnette, M.D. (1974), *The Measurement of Organizational Effectiveness: A Review of Relevant Research and Opinion*, San Diego, CA: Navy Personnel Research and Development Centre.
- Casimir, G., and Li, Z. (2005), 'Combinative Aspects of Leadership Style: A Comparison of Australian and Chinese Followers,' *Asian Business and Management*, 4 (3), 271-291.
- Chen, M. (2004), *Asian Management Systems: Chinese, Japanese and Korean Styles of Business*, London: Thompson Learning.
- Chen, G., Liu, C., and Tjosvold, D. (2005), 'Conflict Management for Effective Top Management Teams And Innovation In China,' *Journal of Management Studies*, 42 (1), 276-300.
- Chhokar, J.S., Brodbeck, F.C., and House, R.J. (2007), *Culture and Leadership Across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, (eds), London, Routledge.
- De Dreu, C., and Van de Vliert, E. (1997), *Using Conflict in Organizations*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Deephungton, P. (1992), *Politeness in Thai: Strategies of Refusing and Disagreeing*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Kansas.
- Dickson, M.W., Den Hartog, D.N., and Mitchelson, J.K. (2003), 'Research on Leadership in a Cross-cultural Context: Making Progress, and raising new Questions,' *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 729-768.
- Fieg, J., and Mortlock, E. (1989), *A Common Core: Thais and Americans*, Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Graen, G.B. (2006), 'In the Eye of the Beholder: Cross Cultural Lessons in Leadership from Project Globe,' *The Academy of Management Perspective*, 20 (4), 95-101.

- Graham, J.L., Kim, D.K., Lin, C., and Robinson, M. (1988), 'Buyer-Seller Negotiations Around the Pacific Rim: Differences in Fundamental Exchange Processes,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 48-54.
- Gupta, V., Hanges, P.J., and Dorfman, P. (2002), 'Cultural Clusters: Methodology and Findings,' *Journal of World Business*, 37, 11-15.
- Gupta, V., Surie, G., Javidan, M., and Chhokar, J. (2002), 'Southern Asia Cluster: Where the Old Meets the New,' *Journal of World Business*, 37, 16-27.
- Hair J.F., Anderson R.E., Tatham R.L., and Black W.C. (1998), *Multivariate Data Analysis*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Hanks, L. (1962), 'Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order,' *American Anthropologist*, 64, 1247-1261.
- Heckman, J. (1979), 'Sample Selection Bias as a Specification Error,' *Econometrics*, 47, 153-161.
- Hofstede, G. (1984), *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hofstede, G. (1993), 'Cultural Constraints in Management Theories,' *The Academy of Management Executive*, 7, 81-94.
- Hofstede, G. (2007), 'Asian Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,' *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 24 (4), 411-420.
- Hofstede, G., and McCrae, R.R. (2004), 'Personality and Culture Revisited: Linking Traits and Dimensions of Culture,' *Cross-Cultural Research*, 38 (1), 52-88.
- Hofstede G., and Bond M. (1988), 'The Confucian connection,' *Organizational Dynamics*, 16 (4), 4-21.
- House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P.W., and Gupta, V. (2004), *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The Globe Study of 62 Societies*, London: Sage Publications.
- Kantor, R.M. (1985), *The Change Masters*. London: Unwin.
- Katz, D., and Kahn, R.L. (1966), *The Psychology of Organizations*, New York: HR Folks International.
- Kennedy, J.C. (2002), 'Leadership in Malaysia: Traditional Values, International Outlook,' *Academy of Management Executive*, 16 (3), 15-25.
- Keyes, C.F. (1995), *The Golden Peninsula*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Khanittanan, W. (1988), 'Some Observations on Expressing Politeness in Thai,' *Language Science*, 10 (2), 353-362.
- Knutson, T., Komolsevin, R., Chatiket, P., and Smith, V. (2002), 'A comparison of Thailand and U.S. American Willingness to Communicate,' *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 31, 3-12.
- Kotter, J. (1985), *Power and Influence*, New York: Free Press.
- Lamberton, G. (2005), 'Sustainable Sufficiency – An internal Consistent Version of Sustainability,' *Sustainable Development*, 13, 53-68.
- Launglaor, W., Sharma, R., and Thasnapark, U. (2006), 'Survey of Leadership and Related Skills Development in the Thai MBA Programs,' *Journal of Institutional Research South East Asia*, 4 (1), 25-42.
- Lin, C. (2008), 'Demystifying the Chameleonic Nature of Chinese Leadership,' *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 14 (4), 303-321.

- Lovelace, K., Shapiro, D., and Weingart, L.R. (2001), 'Maximising Cross-Functional New Product Team's Innovativeness and Constraint Adherence: A Conflict Communications Perspective,' *Academy of Management Journal*, 44, 479-93.
- March, J. G., and Simon, H.A. (1958), *Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Marlatt, G.A. (2002), 'Buddhist Philosophy and the Treatment of Addictive Behaviour,' *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 9, 44-50.
- Meade, A. W., Watson, A. M., and Kroustalis, C. M. (2007, April), 'Assessing Common Methods Bias in Organizational Research,' Paper presented at the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New York.
- Mott, P.E. (1972), *The Characteristics of Effective Organizations*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Niffenegger, P., Kulviwat, S., and Engchanil, N. (2006), 'Conflicting Cultural Imperatives in Modern Thailand: Global Perspective,' *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 12 (4), 403-420.
- Peters, T.J., and Waterman, R.H. (1983), *In Search of Excellence: A Lesson for America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J.Y., and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), 'Common Method Biases in Behavioural Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879-903.
- Ralston, D.A., Gustafson, D.J., Terpstra, R.H., and Holt, D.H. (1995), 'Pre-post Tiananmen Square: Changing values of Chinese managers,' *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 12 (1), 1-20
- Rieff, P. (1983), 'Introduction,' in *Human Nature and the Social Order*, eds. C.H Cooley and P. Rieff, New York: Transaction Publishers, pp. ix-xx. 1983.
- Rowley, C., and Warner, M. (2006), 'Business and Management in South East Asia: Studies in Diversity and Dynamism,' *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 12(4), 389-401.
- Schein, E.H. (2004), *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Schneider, S., and Barsoux, J.L. (2003), *Managing Across Cultures*, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Selvarajah, C. (2008). 'Cultural Diversity Management in Malaysia: A study of Indian, Chinese and Malay Business Leadership,' in *India in the Emerging Global Order*, A.K.J.R Nayak and M.G. Jomon, New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, pp. 267-282.
- Selvarajah, C., and Meyer, D. (2008a), 'One Nation, Three Cultures: Exploring Dimensions that Relate to Leadership in Malaysia,' *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, 29 (8), 693-712.
- Selvarajah, C., and Meyer, D. (2008b), 'Dimensions that Relate to Excellence in Leadership in Cambodia: An exploratory Study,' in *British Academy of Management Proceedings*, Harrogate, United Kingdom, 8-11 September.
- Selvarajah, C., and Meyer, D. (2008c), 'Profiling the Chinese Manager: Exploring Dimensions that Relate to Leadership,' *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, 29 (4), 359-375.
- Selvarajah, C., Duignan, P., Lane, T., Nuttman, C., and Suppiah, C. (1995), 'In search of the Asian leader: An Exploratory Study of Dimensions that Relates to Excellence in Leadership,' *Management International Review: Journal of International Business*, 35 (1), 29-34.
- Siemsen, E., Roth, A., and Oliveira, P. (2009), 'Common Method Bias in Regression Models with Linear, Quadratic, and Interaction Effects,' *Organizational Research Methods*, Online First, published on November 30, 2009 as doi:10.1177/1094428109351241.
- Sinha, J.B.P. (1980), *The Nurturant Task Leader: A Model of the Effective Executive*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

- Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam, N., and Jablin, F. (1999), 'An Exploratory Study of Communication Competence in Thai Organizations,' *The Journal of Business Communication*, 36, 382-418.
- Soderberg, A., and Holden, N. (2002). Rethinking Cross Cultural Management in a Globalizing Business World, *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 2 (1), 103-121.
- Steers, R.M. (1977), 'Antecedents and Outcomes of Organizational Commitment,' *Academy of Management Journal*, 21, 305-320.
- Swierczek, F.W. (1991), 'Leadership and culture: comparing Asian manager,' *Leadership and Organisation Development Journal*, 12 (7), 3-10.
- Swierczek, F.W., and Onishi, J. (2003), 'Culture and Conflict: Japanese Managers and Thai Subordinates,' *Personnel Review*, 32 (2), 187-210.
- Taormina, R., and Selvarajah, C. (2005), 'Perceptions of Leadership Excellence in ASEAN Nations,' *Leadership*, 1 (3), 299-322.
- Trees, A., and Manusov, V. (1998), 'Managing Face Concerns in Criticism Integrating Nonverbal Behaviors as a Dimension of Politeness in Female Friendship Dyads,' *Human Communication Research*, 24 (4), 564-583.
- Troompenaars, F. (1993), *Riding the Waves of Culture*, London: Breatley.
- The 2000 Population and Housing Census*, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok.
- Tse, D.K., Francis, J., and Walls, J. (1994), 'Cultural Differences in Conducting Intra- And Inter-Cultural Negotiations: A Sino-Canadian Comparison,' *Journal of International Business Studies*, 24, 537-55.
- Tsui, A.S., Wang, H., Xin, K.R., Zhang, L., and Fu, P.P. (2004), 'Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Variation of Leadership Styles among Chinese CEOs,' *Organizational Dynamics*, 33 (1), 5-20.
- Tung, R.L. (2004), 'Introduction to China's Leading Internet Guru Charles Zhang, Chairman of SOHU.com Inc., on How the Internet has Changed the World's Most Populous Nation,' *Academy of Management Executive*, 18 (4), 143-150.
- Tung, R.L. (2006), 'Of Arts, Leadership, Management Education, and Management Research: A Commentary on Nancy Adler's "The Arts & Leadership: Now That We Can Do Anything, What Will We Do?"' *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5 (4), 505-511.
- van der Boon, M. (2003). 'Women in International Management: An International Perspective on Women's ways of Leadership,' *Women in Management Review*, 18 (3), 132-146.
- Vroom, V.H., and Yetton, P.W. (1973), *Leadership and Decision-Making*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Vroom, V.H. (2000), 'Leadership and the decision-making process,' *Organizational Dynamics*, 28, (4), 82-94.
- Wongtada, N., Leelakulthanit, O., and Singhapakdi, A. (1998), 'Thailand: Consumer behaviour and marketing,' in A. Pecotich and C.J. Shultz II (eds), *Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in East and Southeast Asia*, New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 667-713.
- Yukl, G.A. (2005), *Leadership in Organizations*, New York: Prentice Hall.
- Yukongdi, V., and Benson, J. (2005), 'Women in Asian Management: Cracking the Glass Ceiling,' *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11 (2), 139-148.
- Yukongdi, V. (2010), 'A Study of Thai Employees' Preferred Leadership Style,' *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 16 (1-2), 161-181.

**Appendix**

Table 4. Beta Coefficients for Excellent Leader construct  
(RMSEA = .058, GFI = .983, CMIN/DF = 2.37)

	Estimate
continue to learn how to improve performance	.762
develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry	.662
organise work time effectively	.769
have confidence when dealing with work and with people	.769
give recognition for good work	.473
be honest	.502

Table 5. Beta Coefficients of Environmental harmony  
(RMSEA = .070, GFI = .912, CMIN/DF = 2.99)

	Estimate
be socially and environmentally responsible	.561
identify social trends which may have an impact on work	.677
be responsive to political realities in the environment	.552
foster an international perspective in the Organisation	.594
have a multi-cultural orientation and approach	.632
use economic indicators for planning purposes	.606
study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work	.606
check consistently for problems and opportunities	.636

Table 6. Beta Coefficients for Managerial Behaviour  
(RMSEA = .055, GFI = .95, CMIN/DF = 2.23)

	Managerial Behaviour	(F1)	(F2)	(F3)
Work Focus (F1)	.872			
Decision Making (F2)	.788			
Managerial Style (F3)	.856			
be logical in solving problems			.692	
persuade others to do things			.556	
listen to and understand the problems of others			.698	
focus in the task-in-hand			.712	
select work wisely to avoid overload			.499	
make decisions without depending too much on others				.625
make work decisions quickly				.775
make decisions earlier rather than later				.789

	Managerial Behaviour	(F1)	(F2)	(F3)
try different approaches to management				.654
use initiatives and take risks				.568
trust those to whom work is delegated				.616
think about the specific details of any particular problem				.617
be strict in judging the competence of employees				.653

Table 7. Beta Coefficients for Organisational Demand (RMSEA = .067, GFI = .968, CMIN/DF = 2.81)

	Estimate
focus on maximising productivity	.439
sell the professional or corporate image to the public	.638
support decisions made jointly by others	.644
adapt to changing working conditions	.519
adjust organisational structures and rules to the realities of practice	.532
act as a member of the team	.609
share power	.661
give priority to long-term goals	.429

Table 8. Beta Coefficients for Personal Qualities (RMSEA = .053, GFI = .948, CMIN/DF = 2.11)

	Personal Qualities	Non-Confrontational Style	Respect (Face)
Non-Confrontational Style	.936		
Respect (face)	.894		
be practical		.648	
be an initiator - not a follower		.635	
follow what is morally right: not what is 'right' for self or the Organisation		.538	
accept responsibility for mistakes		.650	
deal calmly with tense situations		.616	
be dependable and trustworthy		.664	
be consistent with dealing with people		.564	
accept that others will make mistakes		.601	
speak clearly and concisely		.664	

	Personal Qualities	Non-Confrontational Style	Respect (Face)
treat most people as if they were trustworthy and honest			.583
have a sense of humour			.499
listen to the advice of others			.735
return favours			.681
respect the self-esteem of others			.737