



Flowers in a Greenhouse: profiling excellence in leadership in Singapore

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the changing cultural values that influence the perception of managers to leadership excellence in their organisations in Singapore.

Design/methodology/approach – Summated scales for the importance of excellent leader, personal qualities, managerial behaviours, organisational demands and environmental influences were developed using most of the items categorised by Selvarajah *et al.* (1995) and several other items rated highly in this study. A structural model was constructed to explain the relationship in excellence in leadership.

Findings – In all, 249 managers, from the three main ethnic groups: Chinese, Indians and Malays participated in this research. The findings suggest that ethnic differences are not strong determinants of managerial values in organisations in Singapore. However, gender is seen as a differentiating factor in the behavioural values of Singapore managers.

Research limitations/implications – This study is purely an exploratory study and the size of the sample is not large enough to create purposeful causal relationships. Certainly the effect of ethnicity on the study should be explored further with a larger sample.

Practical implications – Singapore is a highly globalised country that attracts international investments. Statistics in Singapore clearly suggests that there is a sharp increase in women managers in employment. Therefore, understanding the changing behavioural values of managers of both sexes are important for a foreigner engaging with Singapore nationals.

Originality/value – This is the first study that looks at behavioural values of Singapore managers with regard to leadership excellence. The masculinity-femininity dimension is pronounced in the gender split.

Keywords Gender, Confucianism, Ethnicity, Singapore, Culture change, Leadership excellence

Paper type Research paper

In this paper we attempt to extend beyond the bi-polar stereotyping of national cultures often evident in leadership research (see e.g. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2009; House *et al.*, 2004; Hofstede, 1980), and respond to Fang's (2010, p. 159) assertion that "Asian philosophies and changing Asian institutions and cultural



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contexts can serve as an important source of inspiration for cross-cultural theory building". Similar to Fang, we argue that culture is not static or stable as claimed by Hofstede (2007), but rather changes over time highlighting the importance of considering the shifting cultural context when explaining leadership excellence in the region. This study specifically explores the cultural context of Singaporean leadership, a country that has experienced rapid economic and cultural change, evolving from strong value systems with origins in Eastern philosophies.

Singapore's success story resembles that of Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong – all with Confucian traditions. Proponents of the Flying Geese Paradigm have postulated that the less developed nations in the region have aligned successively behind the advanced industrial nations in a wild-geese-flying formation progressing at different stages of economic development (Ozawa, 2005; Kasahara, 2004; Terry, 2002). This paradigm suggests that as growth takes place, the lead nations (such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore) restructure their industrial orientation as labour costs increase and seek comparative advantages by shifting labour intensive production to neighbouring countries, generating flow-on economic growth and development in these countries.

This view explains, at first glance, a seemingly justifiable pattern of industrialisation in East Asia, yet oversimplifies the industrial development of Singapore. Singapore's economic growth is multifaceted, built upon a dynamic and turbulent socio-political backdrop, seeing it shift from a third-world nation to a developed nation within a single generation (OECD, 2010; Yew, 2000). Singapore's accelerated economic growth and development came with the realisation that its independence and required strong political and economic leadership (Chang, 2003). Excluded from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, Singapore has been viewed (Lee, 2000a,b) as a victim of regional ethnic politics and its survival as a nation. With the withdrawal of Britain from Southeast Asia in 1963, its colonies, Singapore and the states of Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore's entry, as a predominantly Chinese population, however, threatened to destabilise the Malay interest in the new Federation and was out in 1965 (Barr, 2000). Singapore's eventual growth as a successful independent nation in Southeast Asia in the last 50 years has required vision, conformity, adaptability, perseverance, emphasis on work ethics and Confucian virtues (Osman-Gani and Tan, 2002; Zhang, 2001).

What has emerged from this process of rapid economic growth and development is an island nation, with a free *entrepot* status, a highly productive labour force and an open and conducive environment for multinational companies (Chang, 2003). This has resulted in significant foreign direct investment from across the globe, and a consistent ranking as one of the most competitive countries in the world (Chang, 2003; Sum *et al.*, 2004; Osman-Gani and Tan, 2002). This rapid development, however, has arguably come at a cost to its rich cultural heritage. The Confucian cultural virtues, which were the bedrock of Singapore's value system, are now facing challenges (*The Economist*, 2011). Filial piety, central to Confucian virtues, seems to be pushed aside by a modernising multicultural and egalitarian society. Singapore's future growth and development seem to be posited on a cultural context balanced between traditional Confucian virtues such as filial piety, and being an egalitarian society.

Singapore's rapid economic development, matched by an evolving socio-cultural and political context, emphasises the importance of understanding leadership practices and conceptions of leadership excellence within a culturally specific model. This is even more justified when considering the rapid transformation evident in Singapore's

labour structure. Even a cursory examination demonstrates an ongoing evolution from a nation dependent on industries, supported by blue-collar workers, to a nation supported by professionals (Singapore Labour Force, 2009). In the decade from 1999 to 2009, there was a pronounced shift to professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMET) from 42 to 52 per cent, while the non-PMET group clerical, sales and service workers, production and transport operators and cleaners and labourers, decreased from 28.7 to 23.9 per cent and 29.3 to 24 per cent, respectively. The shift within the PMET groups was most noticeable in the service sector with an 81 per cent increase followed by construction 19.2 per cent and manufacturing 0.7 per cent.

With the evolution from a production-oriented economic structure, to more complex service-oriented system, Singapore has increasingly required professionals and managers to service this industry. This research is embedded within this context, recognising the rapid economic transformation of the Singaporean system, the shifting socio-cultural context influenced by traditional Confucian values and the ongoing importance of political leadership in directing future growth and development. We examine these changing cultural values and macro-environmental pressures on the perception of what leadership excellence is in Singapore.

From this point, the paper is structured as follows. First, a detailed review is provided of the Singaporean context, highlighting important considerations influencing the development of Singaporean leadership styles. This is then integrated into a theoretical model of leadership excellence, developed from Selvarajah *et al.* (1995), before proceeding to the empirical examination of this on a sample of 249 Singaporean managers. The paper concludes with an analysis of findings and a discussion of the implications of this.

Literature review

As mentioned above, Singapore is predominantly a Confucian nation and researchers (see e.g. Rowley and Warner, 2006; Inglehart and Baker, 2000) have been critical with regard to the approach taken in cross-cultural management research where the “tradition of spiritualism” has been ignored. Rather, it has been emphasised that spiritual and philosophical values have the potential to influence behaviour – and at extension, managerial and leadership behaviours (Rowley and Warner, 2006).

The examination of leadership from a cultural context, considering spiritual and philosophical values, is not a new phenomenon. As early as the fifth and fourth century BC, great masters such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in the West, and Confucius, Mencius and Lao Tze in the East, were exploring relationships between the leaders and their subjects (Taormina and Selvarajah, 2005). The subject of their exploration, in the main, was the complex inter-relationship between the theory of social justice and the position of the virtuous leader. Their inquiry into leadership is as relevant now as it was then.

More recently, Williamson (2008, p. 398) argued that “Leadership refers not just to the exercise of power by individual persons in positions of authority; it also denotes those processes by which a subset of society sets the terms of social life for the community as a whole”. It is evident from such contemporary work that the roots of western and eastern administrative thinking go back to classical thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Mencius and Lao Tze. In revisiting their common philosophical base, Takala (1998) sees leadership research progressing within the framework of: the individual or personal self; the behaviour styles; the contextual nature of leadership; and syncretism – a combination of the above three elements.

In this paper, Takala's suggestion is pursued further by engaging a similar framework developed by Selvarajah *et al.* (1995). In a study that investigated leadership in the five founding ASEAN nations, Selvarajah *et al.* (1995) identified four general categories in which leaders could demonstrate excellence. The four general categories have since been tested in numerous countries, both in the East (see e.g. Selvarajah and Meyer 2008a, b; Selvarajah *et al.*, 2012) and the West (see de Waal *et al.*, 2010, 2012) and they provide leadership patterns for each country by incorporating unique leadership behaviour constructs based on contextual factors. This has resulted in specific cultural model for each country studied.

In developing the theoretical framework for this paper, we likewise explore cultural modelling to provide an explanation of the value perceptions of Singapore managers. Before doing so, we will examine the contextual nature of the Singaporean values base that may have an influence on managerial behaviour and conceptions of leadership excellence in organisations. Specifically, the next sections provide a basis for understanding the socio-cultural context of Singapore, the Confucian philosophy, and migrant values through which we develop a culture specific framework for leadership excellence in Singapore.

The Socio-cultural context of Singapore

Contextual and personal factors can interact to influence culture (Chiaburu and Tekleab, 2005; Lakomski, 2001). Culture responds to stimuli arising from factors such as external influences and education while trying to maintain an internal balance to provide meaning to society (Coopey *et al.*, 2002). The internal balance, often seen as shared values, is subjected to multimodal structures, which may arise from generational differences (see e.g. Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008b) and gender (see e.g. Yukongdi and Benson, 2005). These factors extend beyond a broader system of shared values or, as Hofstede and McCrae (2004, p. 58) explains, "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another".

While Singapore's expulsion from the Federation of Malaysia provides insights to the phenomenon of culture as a collective system seeking to maintain an internal balance of shared values, it does not necessarily capture accurately the dynamic evolution of the Singaporean cultural context – and basis of shared values. Specifically, Singapore's expulsion from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965 was purported to be based in the shared cultural values of the predominantly Chinese population located in Singapore (Lee, 2000a). It was suggested that this population would destabilise the emerging Malay cultural value system in the new Federation. In other words, Singapore's predominant Confucian value system would challenge the Islamic value base of Malaysia. Yet, as will be shown below, the shared values of the Singaporean population have evolved from a long-standing tradition of integrating a diverse migrant population.

Migrant society

Despite these perceptions of being a predominantly Confucian-based population, Singapore is a multicultural and multiracial society, populated by three distinct cultural groups (Statistics Singapore, 2011): Chinese (74 per cent), Malay (13 per cent) and Indian (9.2 per cent). Since its inception in 1819, when Stamford Raffles purchased the Singaporean island for the British East India Company, under a treaty with the Sultanate of Johor, Singapore has flourished as a free port and a safe harbour for international commerce between the East and the West. Immigrant population were brought as indentured labour from China and India to support the growing commercial activities in the state (Sandhu, 2010).

This process of relying on the external sourcing of labour to support economic growth has continued, particularly since the 1960s, with large numbers of migrants and guest workers from neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines adding to Singapore's multicultural racial fabric. Guest workers from these countries alone comprise 20 per cent of the workforce (Luke, 1998). In addition to the Asian workforce, the country also attracts expatriates from the West. This has created a melting pot of cultural influences, building on the key Confucian values from the large population of Singaporean's with Chinese heritage (Chang, 2003), and contributed to the ongoing shifts evident in the socio-cultural context noted above.

Theory development

Building from this socio-cultural and historical perspective, we now turn to examining more specific cultural imperatives within Singapore that influence leadership behaviour, such as Confucian philosophies, human development (especially progress towards gender equality) and modernisation. In doing so, we acknowledge that "culture is [...] a purely mental phenomenon and hence a psychological phenomenon [...] constrained by psychological processes of cognition and learning" (D'Andrade 2001, p. 243). This view of culture is quite different to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2009), Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976), who base their cultural categorisation and measurement on the basis of dominant cultural value orientations. In this study, perceptions are viewed as knowledge mentally organised in the form of schemas or mental structures (Singh, 2002). It is from this developmental viewpoint that we look at Singapore's culture and its influence on leader behaviours. Based on this reasoning, the theory underlying our approach is similar to the cultural modelling presented by Hinton (1998) where unique features or values specific to context of study are addressed (see also Selvarajah *et al.*, 2012).

As noted above, we use the conceptual framework for leadership described in Selvarajah *et al.* (1995). This original model, developed for studying managerial leadership in Asia, was based on both western and eastern literature (see Selvarajah *et al.*, 1995, 2012 for details). From a group of 94 value statements (see Selvarajah *et al.*, 1995; Taormina and Selvarajah, 2005[1]), a group of researchers from six ASEAN countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) created four broad categories for the study of excellent leaders: personal qualities, managerial behaviours, organisational demands and environmental influences. The value statements within the above 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 Organisation (SEAMEO) institute located in Brunei Darussalam. Based on this work, scales for perspectives of an excellent leader (EL) and the four cultural dimensions, organisational demand (OD), personal qualities (PQ), managerial behaviour (MB), and environmental influence (EI) have been constructed using the statements provided in the Appendix.

These four categories are briefly described below (for further information see Selvarajah *et al.*, 1995, 2012):

- (1) Personal qualities – refers to the personal behavioural values and qualities of an individual. It emphasises morality, religion, inter-personal relationships and communication.

- (2) Managerial behaviour – refers to a person's behavioural values when performing managerial duties. It emphasises persuasive powers.
- (3) Organisational demands – relates to the way a manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation. It emphasises the importance of organisational prosperity.
- (4) Environmental Influences – are external factors that influence the success of the entire organisation, such as economics, politics, culture and legal factors. It emphasises the importance of scanning and evaluating the external environment for opportunities.

The four areas are not based on any single theory, but rather are based on ideas from multiple sources, such as literature reviews (e.g. House and Baetz, 1979; Stogdill and Coons, 1957). The premise for this research is therefore based on the understanding that 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 (Fairhurst, 2009; Linden and Antonakis, 2009; Pawar and Eastman, 1997).

Hypothesis development

In developing the hypotheses for this paper, we are conscious of the values that may have contributed to the behaviour of a modern Singapore society as discussed above. These are now expanded below in developing the hypotheses.

The Confucian values in Singapore

To escape poverty and tyranny by the warlords in China, many Chinese, especially from southern China, migrated to countries in Southeast Asia (Chen, 2004). These Overseas Chinese were referred to as “hua chiao”, a term commonly used for Chinese who left China to seek prosperity in foreign lands (Wah, 2001). They were highly motivated to succeed. These migrants brought with them values that can be traced back 2500 years to the sage Confucius (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a). The values are based on a hierarchically ordered society with the family as the basic unit. Selvarajah and Meyer (2008a, b) argue that the nature of a hierarchically ordered society emphasises persuasive power based on codes of behaviour and a strong sense of trust of leaders. This characteristic has been the bedrock of leadership development in Singapore and has contributed to its economic development. As Singapore is predominantly Chinese, the Chinese influence on the leadership styles in the Singapore business sector is very significant. Based on this rationalisation, the following hypothesis is forwarded for testing:

- H1.* For the Singaporean manager managerial behaviour, which emphasises persuasive powers in performing managerial duties, is a significant dimension of what makes an excellent leader.

Value shift

The Singapore Government has arguably used these underlying behavioural values – expressed through the use of persuasive power associated with leadership – as a uniting force to muster support for the country's economic development. During the

early years when the economy was reliant on trading and resource-based economic activities, the collective nature of society based on hierarchical obedience was not challenged (Chang, 2003). However, with globalisation and support for technological advancement, western influences have increasingly been added to the social fabric of the Singaporean society (Lee, 2005). With the push for service industries and the building of Singapore as a centre for global finance, the old ways of doing business based on filial piety are being questioned (Choo, 2005). In this transformation, the perception of what constitutes leadership could be influenced by values supporting change such as individualism, external influences and the importance of organisational growth.

This transformation has been noted in other studies, such as the GLOBE study on Singapore (Li *et al.*, 2008). The study identified that, among the many environmental factors influencing cultural values and leadership in Singapore, two are most important; the presence of foreign firms and the involvement of the government in the country's social life. The presence of the multinational corporations has increased the exposure of western management practices and culture into a fledgling young economy. The Confucian values of a patriarchal society, based on familial hierarchical decision-making system, have been challenged by a progressive and evolutionary egalitarian system underpinned by individualism (Chang, 2003). This culture clash is evident within this evolving modern-day economy. Individualism, emphasising personal values, attitudes and behaviour, would therefore be expected to mediate the relationship between managerial behaviour and the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader. Based on this assumption, it is proposed that:

H2. The personal qualities of the Singaporean manager, which emphasise individual values will be a mediating dimension in what constitutes an excellent leader.

Equally, the overt presence of the government in developing a social infrastructure for a competitive new economy seems to have created a society with an over-reliance on the government (Low, 2006; Choo, 2005; Chang, 2003). The government has acted in a cautionary manner to protect and nurture a healthy and socially sound society based on controversial and highly debated "appropriate" Asian values (Sen, 1997; Emerson, 1995). To achieve this, the government has resorted to change campaigns using advertisements and deterrent laws. Frequent reference is made to Singaporeans as "flowers in a greenhouse" (Lianhe Zaobao, 1997 cited in Li *et al.*, 2002, p. 49). This velvet glove approach to massaging a social system has challenged the competitiveness of the Singaporeans, the survival instinct on which the society was founded. In recent years, concerns have been raised and reservations have been expressed about the future orientation and position of the economy within the Asian and global context (Li *et al.*, 2008; Lee, 1996).

Indeed, recently Li *et al.* (2008) reported that the Singaporeans are losing their entrepreneurial values, despite entrepreneurship being the very foundation upon which the Singapore economy was built. The emphasis on big business and government intervention in the social life of the citizens has created a safety-net syndrome where individual business initiatives are seen as risky and unnecessary. Low (2006) similarly argues that self-dependence, a characteristic of entrepreneurship, is lacking in the new Singapore where the society is becoming over-compliant, too left brained, over-pampered and afraid of failure. This, he argues, stems from "a safe,

orderly and affluent society and the Singapore Government's father-leadership style" (Low, 2006, p. 169). This line of argument suggests that organisational prosperity where the individual is seen as an organisational player is emphasised. Based on this rationalisation the following hypothesis is forwarded for testing:

- H3.* Organisational demand, where the manager responds to the goals, objectives, structures and issues in an organisation will be a mediating dimension in what constitutes an excellent leader.

As an island economy, with no natural resources, Singapore's future is inherently linked with the global economy (Lee, 2000b). Its drawback as a small economy and lacking in natural resources becomes less important for its economic growth as the city-state adopts bold developmental strategies in the areas of human development, information and knowledge. The economy has built a strong managerial cadre that is highly competitive and a vision that is change oriented (Chang, 2003). Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis, emphasising the importance of scanning and evaluating the external environment, is forwarded for testing:

- H4.* Environmental influence mediates the effect of managerial behaviour upon what constitutes excellent leadership.

Women managers and the glass ceiling

Increasingly, the role of women in the Singaporean society is experiencing a shift towards greater equality and participation – away from traditional Confucian ethics. Historically, Chinese communities viewed wealth accumulation as a measure of individual and family glory (Wah, 2001). To achieve this, Chinese are willing to work long hours (Wah, 2001; Sheh, 1995; Thong, 1987). The “good name” of the family is a shared responsibility and working diligently is balanced between the responsibilities held by the women and men in Chinese societies. Though Confucian ethics is virtue-based familism, where the good of the family is pursued by every member of the family, the truth is that, like all societies, the women share a greater responsibility for bringing up children and tending to the home; including the looking after of the aged parents. The society supports filial piety and this responsibility rests mainly with the male members of the society (Fan, 2006), but, as expected of any patriarchal society, this duty of care is usually delegated to the daughter-in-law or daughter.

Though some studies (see e.g. Wah, 2001, p. 81) have observed that the Chinese community in neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia still use Confucian social values, the Singaporeans are gradually replacing these norms with the ability to “serve and deliver”. With modernisation and internationalising of the economy, these traditional values are under threat and are being challenged. Like in many developed societies, women are increasingly participating as equals in the development of their economies. In Singapore with an increasing demand for manpower participation in its economic development, women are seen as important contributors to the small island nations human resources development. The Singaporean women manager is generally a highly educated individual; 27.5 per cent of women had university degrees in 2009 compared to 26.12 per cent for men. The percentage of women managers increased from 6.7 per cent in 1970 to 27 per cent in 1999 and to 35 per cent in 2009 (Singapore Labour Force, 1970, 2009).

Despite the gradual increase in women managers, disparities are still evident in broader measures of wealth and equality such as the salaries paid to women, which are still noticeably lower on average than their male counterparts. In 2009, 24.5 per cent of Singaporeans earning more than S\$3,000 per month were men and only 15.4 per cent were women (Singapore Labour Force, 2009, p. 42). In addition 7.5 per cent of Singaporean's earning over S\$7,000 per month are males compared to only 3.1 per cent for women. Also, the percentage of men earning more than \$3,000 in 2009 was 43 per cent and that of women was 36 per cent. The percentage of men earning more than \$7,000 was 13.2 per cent while that of women was 7.24 per cent. This suggests that though a glass ceiling effect is still recognisable in the Singapore workforce, an increasing participation of women at higher levels of management and even a narrowing of the gap between the gender balance is emerging.

The rapid change to the Singaporean social environment has equally affected changes to the family and work environments of the women. The women manager's ability to serve in the traditional role as family carer is compromised by employment demands. As Wah (2001, p. 81), states "while it is important to change and adopt new management techniques in order to survive or excel, it is important for the Chinese leader to retain at least the shadow of some of the traditional values [...]". This truism has greater meaning for the women managers who are expected to excel in the dual role of carer and provider. Confucianism upholds family determination rather than individual determination and the women managers in modern Singapore have the dilemma of balancing this virtue (Wah, 2001). In support of these arguments, the following hypothesis is suggested for testing:

- H5.* There is a difference in perception as to what constitutes leadership excellence between men and women managers in Singapore.

Research methodology

The data collection was carried out using the 94 leadership excellence statement questionnaire developed by Selvarajah *et al.* (1995). Using a database of Singapore organisations, 600 managers were randomly chosen and individually contacted. When these managers gave their consent to participate in the study, questionnaires were administrated. Responses were obtained from 249 Singaporean managers from a wide range of industries, providing a response rate of 41 per cent. Demographic data were collected, as well as perceptions regarding the importance of the 94 leadership criteria on a 1-5 scale with 1 indicating no importance and 5 indicating great importance.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were performed on the leadership criteria to define the measurement models for excellent leader, personal qualities, managerial behaviour, organisational demand and environmental influence (provided in the Appendix). The exploratory factor analyses suggested one-dimensional constructs in all cases while, as shown in the appendix, the confirmatory factor analysis indicated a good fit for all the measurement models according to criteria defined by Byrne (2001). The weights of these models were compared for males and females and were found to be similar in all cases except in the case of the excellent leader construct. As shown in Table AI in the Appendix it seems that the items "Giving recognition for good work" and "Motivate employees" are more important for men than for women managers.

Scales were developed for the constructs using these measurement models and they were tested for reliability using Cronbach's α . The effects of demographic variables on

these scales were analysed using a general linear model analysis and a regression analysis was used to construct a structural model for leadership excellence. Finally the model weights were compared for male and female managers.

Results

The sample consists of only Singapore citizens with an ethnic breakdown of Chinese 84 per cent, Malay 9 per cent and Indian 6 per cent. This sample distribution closely resembles the population mix in Singapore. The sample is evenly split by gender with most people (84 per cent) employed in the private sector. Only 11 per cent are senior managers, with 33 per cent line managers and the rest middle managers. The majority of respondents (70 per cent) are less than 35 years of age with 91 per cent of the respondents aged 50 years or less. Nearly a third of respondents worked in organisation with at most 50 employees, with 52 per cent employed by organisations with at most 100 employees. But 15 per cent of the respondents are employed by organisations with more than 1,000 employees and 21 per cent with more than 500 employees. Just over half the respondents worked in departments with at most ten employees while 10 per cent worked in departments with over 100 employees. There is an interesting mix of religions with 29 per cent Buddhist, 5 per cent Daoist, 23 per cent Christian, 10 per cent Muslim and 5 per cent Hindu. However, 28 per cent of the respondents said that they had no religious faith.

Associations between the scales

Using the measurement models presented in Table AV, scales were constructed for the five constructs of interest. As shown in Table I all the scales were reliable with Cronbach's α values close to or larger than 0.70 as recommended by Hair *et al.* (1998). The correlations between these scales were all positive and significant. Although the correlations were mostly moderate in size the correlation between excellent leader and managerial behaviour was relatively weak and the correlation between excellent leader and the other scales were relatively strong, especially in the case of personal qualities. This result provided support for the first hypotheses, however it seems that good managerial behaviour is not as important for leadership excellence in Singapore as personal qualities, organisational demand or environmental influence.

	Excellent leader	Personal qualities	Organisational demand	Environmental influence	Managerial behaviour
Mean	4.31	4.09	4.03	3.88	3.89
SD	0.49	0.40	0.47	0.47	0.46
Cronbach's α	0.839	0.747	0.682	0.736	0.808
Excellent leader	1	0.745*	0.594*	0.643*	0.393*
Personal qualities	0.745*	1	0.695*	0.661*	0.566*
Organisational demand	0.594*	0.695*	1	0.617*	0.647*
Environmental influence	0.643*	0.661*	0.617*	1	0.541*
Managerial behaviour	0.393*	0.566*	0.647*	0.541*	1

Note: *Correlations significant at 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table I.
Correlations
between scales

Significant demographic differences for the scales were found only in the case of the managerial behaviour scale. A significant but relatively small religion effect ($F(5, 241) = 2.672, p = 0.023$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.053$) and ethnicity effect ($F(2, 230) = 4.105, p = 0.018$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.034$) were obtained in this case. Student-Newman-Keuls *post hoc* tests showed that managers who are Hindu rated managerial behaviour higher ($n = 12$, $MN = 4.25$, $SD = 0.38$) than managers who are Christian ($n = 56$, $MN = 3.80$, $SD = 0.46$) or have no faith ($n = 69$, $MN = 3.82$, $SD = 0.45$). However, the relatively small sample for Hindu and Indian managers suggests that this result should be regarded with caution. In addition it was found that Indian managers rated managerial behaviour higher ($n = 15$, $MN = 4.20$, $SD = 0.37$) than Chinese managers ($n = 196$, $MN = 3.87$, $SD = 0.47$). There was no significant difference in the mean perceptions of males and females for any of the scales ($F(5, 227) = 0.82, p = 0.539$) and there were no significant age effects ($F(30, 1155) = 0.92, p = 0.587$).

In support of *H2-H4* regression analyses suggested that organisational demand, personal qualities and environmental influence mediate the effect of managerial behaviour on excellent leader. The saturated structural model, shown in Figure 1 was constructed on this basis and was found to describe the data well, with 61 per cent of the variation in the excellent leader perceptions explained. However, further investigation of the mediation effects is required, especially in view of the invariance results reported below.

A test of invariance was conducted in order to determine whether the weights observed in the above model differed significantly for men and women. It was found that this was the case ($\chi^2 = 24.97, df = 10, p = 0.005$), providing support for the fifth hypothesis.

As indicated in Table II there are a few major differences in the standardised β weights for men and women with organisational demand showing significantly higher weights for men than women in the case of personal qualities and excellent leader. However, the R^2 values in Table II suggest that the model shown in Figure 2 describes the leadership perceptions of both men and women well.

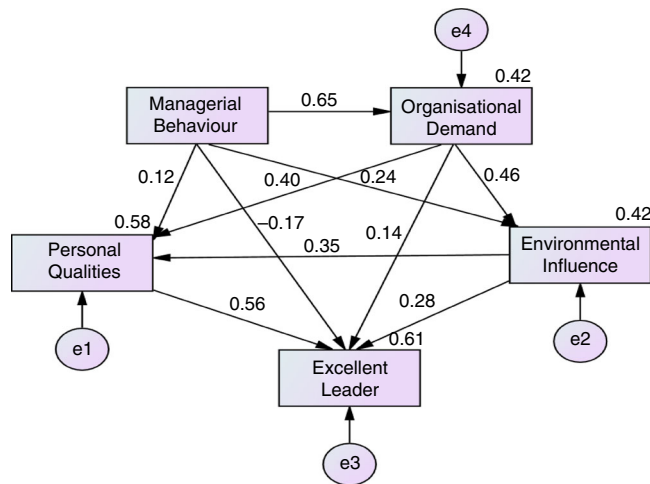


Figure 1.
Structural Model for
excellent leader

Note: β coefficients shown at the centre of each link

Link to	Link from	Females	Males
Organisational demand	Managerial behaviour	0.649**	0.644**
Environmental influence	Organisational demand	0.520***	0.383***
Environmental influence	Managerial behaviour	0.252**	0.260**
Personal qualities	Managerial behaviour	0.218*	0.028
Personal qualities	Organisational demand	0.209	0.549***
Personal qualities	Environmental influence	0.374**	0.358***
Leadership excellence	Environmental influence	0.292***	0.300**
Leadership excellence	Organisational demand	0.034	0.270**
Leadership excellence	Managerial behaviour	-0.088	-0.233**
Leadership excellence	Personal qualities	0.614***	0.443***
R^2		0.597	0.646

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table II.
Standardised β weights
with p -values calculated
from 5,000 bootstrap
samples

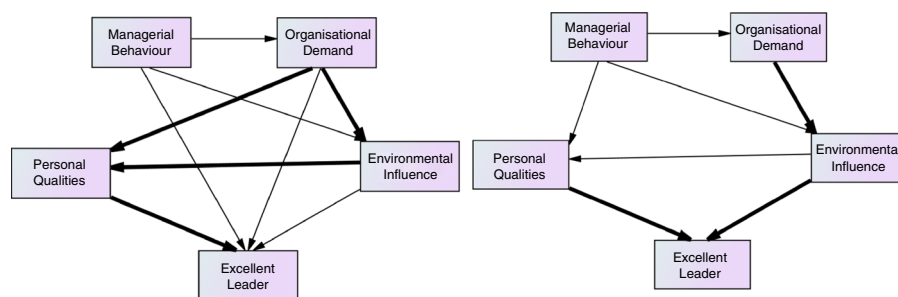


Figure 2.
Excellent leader structural
model for males (left) and
females (right)

Note: Only Significant Links shown with bootstrap p -values < 0.001 for thick lines

As recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004) the significance of all the mediation effects was tested using robust, bias corrected, 95 per cent confidence intervals, obtained using 5,000 bootstrap samples. In support of hypotheses $H1-H4$ the standardised indirect effects in Table III confirm that the effect of managerial behaviour on perceptions of leadership excellence is mediated by organisational demand, environmental influence and personal qualities, for both the male and female samples. Similarly, the effect of organisational demand on leadership excellence is mediated by environmental influence and personal qualities, and the effect of environmental influence on the excellent leader construct is mediated by personal

Link To	Link From	Females	Males
Environmental influence	Managerial behaviour	0.337 (0.248-0.441)	0.246 (0.126-0.393)
Personal qualities	Managerial behaviour	0.356 (0.226-0.512)	0.534 (0.433-0.650)
Leadership excellence	Managerial behaviour	0.547 (0.400-0.691)	0.575 (0.426-0.732)
Personal qualities	Organisational demand	0.194 (0.102-0.311)	0.137 (0.068-0.232)
Leadership excellence	Organisational demand	0.399 (0.258-0.553)	0.419 (0.273-0.593)
Leadership excellence	Environmental influence	0.230 (0.119-0.372)	0.158 (0.083-0.254)

Table III.
Standardised indirect
effect sizes with bias
corrected 95% bootstrap
confidence intervals

qualities. However, as shown in Table III, there are also significant indirect effects in most cases, suggesting only partially mediated relationships.

Of particular interest is the relationship between managerial behaviour and excellent leader and between organisational demand and excellent leader. It appears that in the case of females these relationships are fully mediated by personal qualities and environmental influence. This suggests that, in the case of female managers, persuasive powers (managerial behaviour) and organisational support (organisational demand) are perceived to be important in a leader only if they are associated with good personal qualities and environmental influence.

The relationship between managerial behaviour and excellent leader is even more interesting in the case of men. It seems that men do not expect good managerial behaviour or persuasive powers to necessarily be associated with good personal qualities. In addition there is a significant negative direct relationship between managerial behaviour and excellent leader, suggesting that managerial behaviour on its own may actually detract from leadership excellence. It is only when managerial behaviour is associated with organisation demand and environmental influence that good managerial behaviour will assist a leader.

Discussion

In this study we have concentrated on the Singaporean leadership profile and the subcultures that influence it. We set out to study cultural influences that may influence leadership values, which included religious affiliations, ethnicity, age, gender, seniority and managerial levels. The findings suggest that in Singapore, a multicultural society, the values based on ethnicity and religion have influence on the leadership excellence only in the case of managerial behaviour, which is the least important component of leadership excellence. These findings, with reservation expressed in the limitation section below, suggest that the three main ethnic groups, at least in an organisational context, have converged as a national cultural entity. Modernisation, the multi-ethnic influences of cosmopolitan Singapore and its position within a regional and global economic environment may have all contributed to the development of a national identity.

Although there was no significant difference in the mean perception of the male and female Singaporean managers in the study, a test of invariance suggested that the perceptions of what makes an excellent leader differed between the male and female managers. The female managers seemed to view an excellent leader as one who has good personal qualities and is aware of environmental influences as a requirement to exercising persuasive power and supporting organisational demands. The male managers, on the other hand, attributed the greatest importance to acting as a member of a team and selling the professional or corporate image to the public and adjusting the organisational structures and rules to the realities of practice. Clearly, this suggests a gender difference in the perception of what constitutes an excellent leader in Singapore. It is difficult to conclude if this perception is a recent observation, as similar studies have not been conducted in Singapore in the past. Clearly, women managers, if we are to compare using Hofstede's dimensions are feminine and have less power distance, while male managers are masculine and with greater power distance. It is therefore not surprising that organisational demand, a dimension that supports objectivity is relatively more important for men while personal qualities which supports practicality are more important for women when leadership excellence is judged.

Armed with this understanding, what are the theoretical developmental implications for research and practical implications for foreigners who want to engage with Singaporeans? This paper makes several contributions to the theory and practice of managerial leadership in Singapore. First from a practical sense, this study raises awareness of cultural dimensions and reports on a convergence of cultural values within organisations in Singapore. Therefore, ethnic differences are not strong determinants of managerial values in organisations in Singapore. Religious and ethnic affiliations have a small impact on managerial behaviour, but this is a relatively unimportant component of leadership excellence in Singapore. This is quite different to neighbouring Malaysia where ethnic differences seem to influence managerial behaviour in organisations and managerial behaviour is the most important component of leadership excellence for both Malay and Chinese managers (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a). Both these countries have common heritage but have developed differently – Malaysia emphasising multi-ethnicity while Singapore has developed economic and social policies in pursuit of multiculturalism.

Second, gender seems to be a differentiating factor for perceptions of leadership excellence in Singapore work organisations. Above all else, female managers provide greater support for the importance of dealing calmly in tense situations and being practical. However, respecting the self-esteem of others and treating most people as if they are honest and trustworthy are also important qualities for mediating or moderating the persuasive powers of managers. In fact, women managers in the pursuit of leadership excellence view these virtues as important while exercising managerial powers. Women managers also view environmental influences such as studying laws and regulations, which may have an impact on work, fostering an international perspective, having a multicultural orientation, checking consistently for problems and opportunities, and being responsive to political realities as important measures of leadership excellence. On the other hand, male managers emphasise the importance of organisational demand, in particular adjusting organisational structures and rules to the realities of practice and selling the professional or corporate image to the public. Third, from an investment perspective, the modernisation influences, the work ethics of a dynamic and progressive society is attractive to international investors. Singapore is an international economy and highly reliant on globalisation influences and its ability to adapt, and this has been highlighted throughout this paper.

From a theoretical development point-of-view, the shifting cultural values from a Confucian viewpoint where the role of women in society and modernisation influences are peculiar to Singaporeans and whose experiences are reflected in the five cultural construct model explained in this paper. The definition of leadership excellence in organisations in Singapore therefore needs to be defined within the context of its people. This has clear implications for what Hinton (1998) emphasises as the need for building culturally based theories specific to an environment. The hypotheses in this paper are based on the cultural construct model contributing to excellent leader and are specific to the cultural context of behavioural values in Singaporean organisations. In this sense, the hypotheses supporting the model address the changing values of a society that has developed from a third-world nation to a developed world status in under 50 years. An interesting comparison can be made to neighbouring Malaysia where societal development has had a religious and ethnic emphasis and have impacted on managerial behaviour (Selvarajah and Meyer, 2008a). At separation from Malaysia in 1965 Singapore's economic future was in doubt but with an egalitarian

policy framework, Singapore has attracted larger inflow of foreign capital than its neighbour.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study is based on ratings of importance for 94 items in terms of leadership excellence collected using a single questionnaire. This means that common variance bias may have affected the results. However, as commented by Meade *et al.* (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 five leadership dimensions that are tested simultaneously, suggesting that common method variance has been addressed to some extent in the analysis itself. Podsakoff *et al.* (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.

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 GLOBE study have been unable to achieve this (see Chhokar *et al.*, 2008; House *et al.*, 2004). In particular gender has been identified as influencing perceptions of leadership excellence in Singapore and this needs to be investigated further. However, what has not been explored is the way in which these gender differences will affect work behaviour and the consequences of ignoring these gender differences in an organisational setting.

Note

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

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Further reading

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Appendix. Measurement models

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	All	Male	Female
Have confidence when dealing with work and with people	0.631	0.644	0.640
Create a sense of purpose and enthusiasm in the workplace	0.653	0.654	0.671
Continue to learn how to improve performance	0.663	0.572	0.773
Have a strategic vision for the Organisation	0.594	0.640	0.541
Give recognition for good work	0.543	0.645	0.390
Develop strategies to gain competitive edge in the industry	0.616	0.578	0.671
Organise work time effectively	0.615	0.598	0.622
Motivate employees	0.687	0.808	0.547
Be honest	0.462	0.384	0.558

Table AI. Excellent leader **Notes:** CMIN/df = 2,46, GFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.077. Some indication of gender differences ($\chi^2 = 20.952$, df = 9, $p = 0.013$)

	All	Male	Females
Be practical	0.559	0.561	0.606
Deal calmly with tense situations	0.632	0.559	0.729
Be dependable and trustworthy	0.492	0.532	0.407
Write clearly and concisely	0.372	0.390	0.365
Treat most people if they are trustworthy and honest	0.441	0.392	0.514
Be consistent with dealing with people	0.541	0.584	0.448
Respect the self-esteem of others	0.497	0.454	0.541
Have a sense of humour	0.304	0.385	0.213
Accept responsibility for mistakes	0.428	0.508	0.291
Listen to the advice of others	0.366	0.409	0.378
Follow what is morally right – not what is right for self or organization	0.299	0.246	0.330
Accept that others will make mistakes	0.502	0.510	0.443

Table AII. Personal qualities **Notes:** CMIN/df = 1.495, GFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.045. No significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 13.676$, df = 11, $p = 0.251$)

	All	Males	Females
Focus on maximising productivity	0.414	0.371	0.457
Sell the professional or corporate image to the public	0.549	0.589	0.529
Support decisions made jointly by others	0.473	0.327	0.646
Adapt to changing working conditions	0.325	0.338	0.337
Adjust organisational structures and rules to the realities of practice	0.626	0.620	0.611
Act as a member of a team	0.501	0.553	0.461
Share power	0.501	0.485	0.500

Table AIII. Organisational demand **Notes:** CMIN/df = 2.031, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.064. No significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 7.771$, df = 6, $p = 0.255$)

	All	Male	Female
Be socially and environmentally responsible	0.386	0.387	0.413
Have a multi-cultural orientation and approach	0.614	0.661	0.558
Study laws and regulations which may have an impact on work	0.459	0.306	0.626
Be responsive to political realities in the environment	0.531	0.514	0.561
Check consistently for problems and opportunities	0.572	0.556	0.588
Foster an international perspective in the Organisation	0.533	0.423	0.642
Identify social trends which may have an impact on work	0.490	0.382	0.587
Constantly evaluate emerging technologies	0.530	0.518	0.543

Notes: CMIN/DF = 2.327, GFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.073. No significant difference in gender weights ($\chi^2 = 8.878$, $df = 7$, $p = 0.262$)

Table AIV.
Environmental influence

	All	Males	Females
Allow subordinates authority and autonomy	0.416	0.540	0.230
Be strict in judging the competence of employees	0.553	0.616	0.457
Think about the specific details of any particular problem	0.354	0.254	0.486
Be logical in solving problems	0.517	0.500	0.493
Try different approaches to management	0.569	0.632	0.489
Keep up-to-date on management literature	0.612	0.620	0.582
Be formal when dealing with employees at work	0.451	0.424	0.443
Focus on the task-in-hand	0.519	0.511	0.553
Tell subordinates what to do and how to do it	0.502	0.495	0.528
Be consistent with making decisions	0.441	0.535	0.301
Listen to and understand the problems of others	0.478	0.519	0.408
Make decisions earlier rather than later	0.627	0.627	0.655
Make work decisions quickly	0.430	0.503	0.390

Notes: CMIN/df = 1.806, GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.057. No significant gender differences for the weights ($\chi^2 = 12.949$, $df = 12$, $p = 0.373$)

Table AV.
Managerial behaviour

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