

Book Review

Culture and Gender in Leadership: Perspective from the Middle East and Asia

James Rajasekar & Loo-See Beh (Eds). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 317 pages

Mohamad Fazli Sabri
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

This book contributes much to the studies on culture and gender, particularly in the context of their influence on leadership. Analyses of these subjects by leading and emerging academics are focussed on selected countries in the Middle East and Asia, areas where cultures and practices differ greatly. The authors of the various chapters provide a good understanding and distinctive viewpoints of the cultural relativism and gender in leadership in the selected countries through detailed descriptions and case studies. While contributing to the amount of knowledge and practice in the stated areas, the research presented further adds to the development of theory and experiential research in the stated fields.

The book is divided into three different sections. Section one focuses on leadership while section two focuses on culture and section three on gender and leadership. The authors explain the differences in leadership behaviour as affected by culture and gender. The significance of the collective study done in the Middle East and Asia lies in that it affords a deeper understanding of the current phenomena and fills the gap in research done on leadership, factors and situation and also leadership styles and behaviors. The joint efforts of James Rajasekar and Loo-See Beh to make available this comprehensive study collection contributes to the enormous differences in the theory and practice of leadership, culture and gender in different regions.

The authors of Chapter 1 in Section I, Loo-See Beh and William R. Kennan, discuss an alternative viewpoint to the traditional situational leadership theory, one that offers flexibility to the approaches to situational leadership in East and Southeast Asia. It moves towards the im-

portance of the properties of social human capital combined with network connections to bring about the desired results to organizations and countries. The Western perspective of leadership theory is the key issue since the question arises whether it is applicable in the context of leadership in Asia. Beh and Kennan focus on the differences in leadership in East and Southeast Asia. As countries like China, the Republic of Korea and Japan are identified as being traditional societies, their leadership style differs from the Western style. In addition, Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand have different political and authoritarian landscapes. Accordingly, the authors argue that the leaders from the East, especially in the political context, play major roles in shaping the institutional activities and connection between citizens. Moreover, communication between leaders and organizational members also play significant roles in shaping the success of institutional goals.

The study done by James Rajasekar, Salem Al Abri and Yasser S. Tabouk in Chapter 2 discusses “Visionary Leadership in the Arab World: Its Nature and Outcomes in the Omani Workplace.” The academicians deliberate on leadership in a different context, i.e. with a focus on leadership practice in the Middle East, a region undergoing transformation. The crucial elements of visionary leadership on employees’ level of motivation and commitment in Oman are discussed. The study looks at the following three inter-connected facets of leadership in organizations in Oman: providing vision, communicating effectively and responding to chaos and how they interact with and impact employee motivation and commitment. The study reveals that the attitude of visionary leadership towards chaos is positive, and that the existence of vision and effective communication has a positive impact on employee motivation and commitment.

Interestingly, the study presented by Francis Thaise A. Cimene and Alan N. Aladano in Chapter 3, “Leadership Perspective from the Philippines: Its Implications for Theory, Research and Practice”, reveals that leaders in the Philippines consider leadership an art, ability and an ongoing process. A leader is seen as continuing to grow in tandem with the continual growth of people and society.

Chapter 4 by Xiao Ran Song and David Beckett, “Conceptualizing Leadership for a Globalizing China”, focuses on the social and political

changes brought about through globalization that have had the greatest impact on the economic and political landscapes. The philosophy influences on the definitions of “leader” and “leadership” is discussed in detail. Their interviews with Chinese and Westerners working in China show the complexity of and the potential for the development of leadership in China. The study also distinguishes between the main Western ideas on leadership and traditional and current studies on leadership in China.

In Chapter 5, Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh writes on “Evolving Agencies amid Rapid Social Change: Political Leadership and State-Civil Society Relations in China.” The study examines the character and development of political leadership in China during crucial periods. It also examines periods when there was enforced stability, often illustrated by the types of societal expression and the resultant state reactions. The study also examines the important question of who finally benefits and at whose disadvantage in this situation and what effects this has had on the shifting nature of post-1989 political leadership, at a time of increasing conflicts within the Chinese social environment and the consequent more complex agent-institution interaction. The study offers the reader insight into and an understanding of contemporary leadership in China.

The theme of Section II is culture. Many of the chapters in this section are written from the management viewpoint and within the scope of culture and the establishment of leadership in specific social areas. Section II begins with Chapter 6, Alexandre A. Bachkirov’s study on “Organizational Leadership Decision Making in Asia: The Chinese Ways”. This chapter integrates existing academic work on how decision making is affected by Chinese national culture. The chapter puts forward that the main activity of a leader’s role is decision making. “Decision making constitutes the essence of leadership.” It stresses the significance of realizing that national cultures influence decision making. The chapter also examines the paternalistic leadership style, in addition to other fundamental features of present-day Chinese societies. It further examines how the Chinese cognitive process of thinking and decision making is influenced by the national culture, with emphasis on particular kinds of leadership decisions such as risky choice, stock market buying/selling, ethical decision making and reward allocation. However, the writer states that this chapter merely presents a sketch and makes a sug-

gestion for more research into this area.

Anna M. Danielewicz-Betz's study in Chapter 7 discusses "Glocalization of Leadership and Cultural Implications for Higher Education: A German-Saudi Case." The subject of the study is glocalization in the Arab region in the context of the degree of Westernisation in higher education. The study examines Saudi Arabian and German higher education and compares Islamic and Arab leadership style with the German. The major finding is that the Arab style of leadership does not meet employers' expectations of future leaders due to the lack of leadership skills and appropriate preparation for the challenges of the global executive's world. As such, the study proposes that hand-on skills be merged into the educational system for graduates to achieve global success.

The qualitative study in Chapter 8, Brian T. O'Donoghue's "Face's Consequences: The Impact of "Face" on Leadership, Management and Follower Behaviour in Malaysia" is the first study in this field in Malaysia. The study discusses how "face" affects leadership, management and the behaviour of "followers." "Face" refers to maintaining a person's dignity by showing respect, pride and dignity to that individual. The writer recommends the adaption of Western management approaches to overcome misunderstanding in the context of "face" and offers practical guidelines for this.

In Chapter 9, "Indian Leadership: Concept and Context", a study by Rajesh Kumar and Madhavi Harshadrai Mehta, seeks to understand the Indian concept of leadership, which has evolved from the country's culture, tradition and philosophy. It is said, "The circumstances of men determine their philosophy but, conversely, their philosophies too determine their circumstances." This chapter basically provides the reader with an evaluation of the formation and understanding of the Indian concept of leadership.

Chapter 10 comprises a study by Sami A. Khan and Deepanjana Varshney, "Transformational Leadership in the Saudi Arabian Cultural Context: Prospects and Challenges. The major concern of the study is the connection between the dynamics of transformational leadership, and culture and values in which leadership qualities are embedded. The study also focuses on the cultural values, organizational culture and the effect of Islam on leadership in the country. The crucial elements are honesty and integrity of the transformational leadership with the loyalty

of followers, a higher degree of acceptance of leaders and their vision. This chapter provides an understanding of leadership in the cultural context, and the developing paradigms and leadership challenges in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 11 offers an elaboration of Arab culture. “Expatriate and Omani Workplace Relationships and Individual Performance” by Stuart M. Schmidt, Unnikammu Moideenkutty and Adil Al-Busaidi explores the relationships between expatriate and Omani workplace supervisor-subordinate relationships and subsequent individual performance. The main concerns are trust, affective relationships, leader-member exchanges, supportive downward influence, supervisor effectiveness, organizational citizenship behaviour and individual performance. Although they expected to find subordinates to be liked more by supervisors of the same nationality and for supervisors to be liked more by subordinates of the same nationality, the findings proved otherwise. They found subordinates to be liked more by supervisors of a different nationality. The findings were similar for the supervisor-subordinate relationship. The study concludes that in workplace relationships (trust, liking, and quality exchanges) between members of organizations can develop notwithstanding their nationality.

The focus of Section III is on Gender and Leadership. “Glass Fence Thicker than Glass Ceiling: The Puzzling Gaps of Women’s Leadership in Korea by Hunmin Kim in Chapter 12 analyses women’s leadership in Korea, with an emphasis on four perplexing gaps. These are women’s leadership with economic growth; women’s leadership with human development; the leadership gap between government and business sectors; and the gap between social and household leaderships. The gaps are due to the clear-cut division of gender roles that lead to complete separation of the household from society. As such, a glass fence exists, resolutely keeping Korean women away from achieving heights in their careers and in positions of leadership. Although the glass fence still exists for the majority of Korean women in a largely male-dominated country, a great achievement was undoubtedly the election of the first female president in 2012.

In Chapter 13, “Why Women are Missing: Women Leadership in Afghanistan’s Education Policy and Practice”, a study by Susan Wardak and Edna Mitchell discusses why there is an absence of roles for

Afghan women, particularly in the area of education. This although the goal is “to eliminate discrimination against women”. The obstacles to this are lack of education and constraints created by cultural traditions, even with a history of women leaders. The study concludes with suggestions for the future.

The final chapter, Chapter 14 offers a discussion on “The Development of Arab Women Leaders: An Emirati Perspective.” Sara Alhaj and Constance Van Horne examine how the roles played by lived experience develops female Emirati leaders as against formal interventions. The study also examines the underlying factors enabling women to learn how to lead. This chapter contributes to the under-theorized area of leader development and the development of women leaders in the Emirati context. The data was collected by the authors by in-depth, semi structured interviews analysed using the grounded-theory methodology. A leader-apprentice structure is used to describe the findings. This comprises experiencing influential encounters, handling and learning from challenging situations, and changing through a formal training programme, underscoring the importance of processual and interpersonal daily interactions for learning the practice of leadership. The study suggests that leadership learning be thought of as an apprenticeship with learning being rooted in the culture. The study also suggests further research on women’s leadership, an area worthy of exploration.

Overall, this book provides us a greater and clearer understanding of the influence of culture and gender on leadership from the perspectives of two different regions, the Middle East and Asia. The book is thus essential reading for scholars, policymakers, undergraduates, graduate students, and leaders.

Biographical Note: **Mohamad Fazli Sabri**, Senior Lecturer, Universiti Putra Malaysia. E-mail: fazli@upm.edu.my