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Cultural congruence as reflected in communication leaders' decision-making

A convergent view from London and Singapore

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to motivate by the desire to better understand the interplay between cultural perceptions, both at the national and the organizational levels, and leadership effectiveness in corporate communication practice. In doing so, the research presented in this paper systematically compared views on communication leadership from senior communication executives in two different national cultures: England and Singapore.

Design/methodology/approach – A series of in-depth interviews with the same interview guide were carried out in two leading cities of selected cultures (London and Singapore). A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for this study. Finally, 20 senior communication executives ($n = 11$ in London and $n = 9$ in Singapore) participated in this study. All interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and were recorded and fully transcribed.

Findings – Results suggest that communication executives believe that communication leadership should be treated as a multi-faceted influencing and learning process. Results also reveal that effective leadership qualities go beyond the national cultural boundaries. A more convergent view emerged on communication leadership.

Practical implications – Communication executives should definitely tailor their leadership initiatives to fit the different cultural mechanisms that underlie organizational structures across cultures. Although the author agrees that communication strategies should place a great emphasis on the social dimension of cultural values in a given society, leadership initiatives, and actions should also be carried out to embrace the organizational structure and culture.

Originality/value – The study provides insights into the impact of cultural orientations on the effectiveness of communication leadership. It is important and unique to confirm that organizational culture inserts a more profound influence on the application of leadership skills if compared to the national cultures.

Keywords Corporate communication, Communication leadership, Cultural congruence, Organizational structure and culture

Paper type Research paper

Organizations increasingly need to understand the impact of national culture on organizations' strategic decision-making process and communications. Given that most international public relations and communication efforts involve multiple managerial functions and strategic decision-making capabilities in today's information-intensive climate, cultural similarities, and differences in the settings where leadership practice applies are of particular concern. Literature indicates that existing research on cross-cultural managerial leadership has largely focussed on investigating the impact of cultural (national, regional, and/or ethnic) differences on organizational leaders' behaviors, preferences, and motivations (e.g. Dorfman, 2004; Gerstner and Day, 1994)

with a heavy application of western leadership theories and models to multiple national settings (e.g. Davis and Bryant, 2003; Dorfman, 2004). However, such similar research has not been widely applied to explore the leadership in the area of corporate communication itself.

Recently, a plethora of leadership research in public relations and communication management has used diverse approaches to investigate the meaning of leadership to effective corporate communication practice, with its roots in excellence research in public relations, transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and organizational studies (e.g. Aldoory and Toth, 2004; Berger and Meng, 2010; Jin, 2010; Meng and Berger, 2013; Meng, 2014; Werder and Holtzhausen, 2009; Zerfass and Huck, 2007). Although these studies have investigated critical concepts related to public relations leadership, such as managerial role enactment, gender role, preferred leadership styles in crisis, critical behavioral factors, individual traits, and effective leadership dimensions, few research has investigated effective leadership prototypes in communication practice through a cross-cultural comparison to look at the possible impact of culture could generate on the communication practice itself.

Thus, this research is motivated by the desire to better understand the interplay between cultural perceptions and leadership effectiveness in corporate communication practice. The research presented in this paper systematically compared views on communication leadership from senior communication executives in two national cultures: England and Singapore. Hofstede (2001) characterizes England as a highly individualistic national culture with low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance. In contrast, the national culture in Singapore is characterized as more collectivist, more inter-dependent, and with a high level of power distance and high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). Although there is no doubt that communication practice in the business world in the two cultural societies should share common features, but the means of actualizing such features and moving into actions through effective leadership may vary according to differences in national cultures.

Therefore, to find out the similarities and differences, one leading question is explored in this research: what are the expected attributes and qualities of effective communication leadership in a given cultural context? As such, a series of in-depth interviews were carried out to elicit how senior communication executives in the leading cities (London and Singapore) of two different cultural contexts understand and interpret leadership in communication and how such understanding would be occurring as a result of decision-making and strategic initiatives in their daily practices. The research efforts in this study contribute to the exploration of the functions of leadership in communication practice and provide an opportunity to observe the dynamics between cultural values and leadership in supporting organizations' effectiveness in a given cultural context. Practical and managerial implications are discussed.

Literature review
Cross-cultural research on managerial leadership
A great volume of cross-cultural managerial leadership research has been undertaken during the past two decades as the direct consequences of the rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural climate. Cross-cultural managerial leadership research has largely supported the propositions that cultural differences account for the varieties in the way leaders and leadership approaches are perceived and operationalized in different cultural settings (e.g. Gerstner and Day, 1994; Kirkman et al., 2006;

Scandura and Dorfman, 2004). Cross-cultural leadership research that is based on the behaviors of international organizations (or global firms) specifically suggested that leaders and managers in international organizations should have cultural intelligence and be able to adapt to varying cultural settings (Earley, 2006). Failure to appreciate such differences in culture can lead to undesirable circumstances.

Literature suggests Hofstede's (1991, 2001) work has profoundly influenced the frameworks and development of cross-cultural studies within psychology, organizational behaviors, leadership, and social sciences in general: a considerable amount of cross-cultural management and leadership research has produced convergent results which are largely in line with Hofstede's (1991, 2001) seminal cultural dimensions and models (e.g. Fang, 2003; Javidan et al., 2006; Jung and Avolio, 1999). However, researchers have also criticized the danger that Hofstede's cultural dimensions and related studies may present stereotypical conceptualization of cultures when applying to the comparisons between eastern and western cultures (e.g. attributes of eastern cultures tend to be high in people-orientation, collectivism, and long-term orientation; while western cultures feature task-orientation, individualism, and low power distance) (Chen and Partington, 2004).

There are several subjects within the scope of leadership that have been studied in cross-cultural settings. The subjects range from the origin of leaders (e.g. Kirkman et al., 2006), the relationship between societal modernization and specific leader behavior (e.g. Dickson et al., 2003), unique role demands of leaders according to national or regional political systems (e.g. Earley, 2006; Kirkman and Shapiro, 2001), the variance of leadership prototypes across cultures (e.g. Chen and Partington, 2004; House et al., 2004), followers' preference and acceptance of leadership styles (e.g. Fang, 2003; Scandura and Dorfman, 2004), to leadership behavior patterns across countries (e.g. Ardichvili and Gasparishvili, 2001). These varied perspectives of leadership and organizational practices were compared across cultures: some culture-specific differences were identified (e.g. autonomous, formal, intuitive, and individualistic), while some commonly endorsed leadership attributes were emerged (e.g. positive, trustworthy, intelligent, and decisive) (see Den Hartog et al., 1999).

Thus, Dorfman and House (2004) suggested three competing propositions of cultural influence on leadership effectiveness. The first proposition is about the cultural congruence, which asserts that cultural forces affect the kind of leader behavior that is usually accepted and effective within a society. The cultural difference proposition asserts that the introduction of selected values, techniques, and behavior patterns that are different from the common values in the society will lead to effective task performance. Lastly, there is also the near universality proposition, which asserts that there are some leader behaviors that are universally accepted and effective (Dorfman and House, 2004, pp. 64-66). In short, there has been a significantly increasing consideration of "culture" in leadership research at various levels.

Clearly, leadership exists in all societies and is essential to the functioning of organizations worldwide. However, at the same time, we cannot ignore the possible influences unique cultural forces could generate on many aspects of the leadership phenomena. Some research on managerial leadership in a cross-cultural context suggests that there is a general consensus on the culture-specific nature of leadership practices. For example, Kirkman and Shapiro (2001) confirmed the country-level differences in cultural values when comparing self-managing work teams in Belgium, Finland, the Philippines, and the USA. They found that teams in a higher collectivism culture were more productive, cooperative, and empowered. Previous research has also shown that the determinants of leadership effectiveness considerably differ across cultures

(Dickson *et al.*, 2003). On the other hand, research also confirmed that some leadership attributes and styles can be universal. For example, Ardichvili and Gasparishvili's (2001) study of four post-communist countries (Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and the Kyrgyz Republic) found that the working cultures of the countries differed greatly despite similarities in economic systems and organizational structures. But interestingly, all four countries shared lots of common perceptions in charisma, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Thus, it is necessary for us to recognize the importance of maintaining a balance between universally accepted and culturally specific leader attributes and behaviors when applying diverse leadership functions in public relations practice.

Research on communication leadership
Recently, the topic of public relations leadership has received significant attention from scholars in public relations and communication management: a plethora of research in public relations leadership has focussed on how public relations practitioners could apply different aspects/streams of contemporary leadership skills and behaviors (i.e. strategic decision making, ethical leadership, emotional leadership, and transformational leadership) to improve the effectiveness and organization-wide influence of public relations practice, with its roots in the excellence research in public relations, managerial leadership research, and organizational communication studies (e.g. Aldoory and Toth, 2004; Berger *et al.*, 2007; Meng and Berger, 2013; Meng, 2014; Jin, 2010; Shin *et al.*, 2011; Werder and Holtzhausen, 2009).

However, only a few studies have focussed on cross-cultural comparisons and inter-organizational practice when studying leadership in public relations practice (Benn *et al.*, 2010; Erzikova and Berger, 2011; Shin *et al.*, 2011). For example, Benn *et al.* (2010) researched how Australian-based public relations leaders have used different leadership styles to provide direction and support for various corporate social responsibility initiatives. Erzikova and Berger (2011) used American and Russian student samples to compare the similarities and differences when interpreting leadership in public relations. Shin *et al.* (2011) compared preferred leadership styles in routine and non-routine public relations situations between practitioners in the USA and South Korea. No study to date, however, has explicitly examined communication leaders' leadership styles in communication practice across national cultures. Therefore, on the basis of the considerations outlined above, one leading research question is developed in present study to find out how national culture would affect communication leadership:

RQ1. What are the expected attributes and qualities of effective communication leadership in a given cultural context (e.g. England and Singapore)?

Research method
To obtain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices in public relations within a given cultural context, a qualitative research method, in-depth interview, was used in this study. Although there exists concerns about the polarization between quantitative and qualitative methods in leadership research (Bryman, 2004), the in-depth discussion presented in this study is a crucial contribution and advancement of our limited knowledge and perceptions on leadership effectiveness in corporate communication. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected senior communication executives from various organizations in London and Singapore.

Sample: recruitment criteria and procedure
A purposive sampling strategy was used in this study. The major requirement for the purposive sample is that selected respondents must be communication leaders in their organizations, namely, holding senior communication executive positions in the organization and being involved with more strategy developing and decision making in their daily corporate communication practice. Potential respondents working in corporate communication from two different cultural contexts (London and Singapore) were purposively selected on the basis that they were representatives of the communication profession to some extent in the wider population on the dimensions of profession advancement and social-cultural context in their own country.

Two local organizations helped the researcher recruit respondents for the interviews: first, Heyman Associates Inc. and its partner in London; and second, the Institute of Public Relations in Singapore (IPRS). First, Heyman Associates Inc., a public relations executive search firm in the USA, helped recruit participants through its partner in London. A sample of 50 senior public relations executives with valid and active e-mail addresses and contact information was drawn from its search database to match the criteria of key organizational informants. The researcher fully recognizes that the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the leading professional body for the UK public relations industry with over 9,000 individual members (CIPR, 2012), and their membership database can also offer similar purposive sample selection. However, the researcher used the Heyman database to draw samples for the interviews as Heyman Associates is a major research partner of this research project. In addition, final participants of the study indicated they were members of the CIPR, which further confirmed the reliability of the sampling pool. Second, as the largest professional association for practitioners in Singapore, the IPRS granted the researcher the access to its membership directory, from which the criteria of key organizational informants were applied to select potential interviewees. Thus, the IPRS membership database were used to draw samples for the interviews. Eventually, for each given cultural context (London and Singapore), the researcher selected 50 potential respondents to compose the sampling pools.

An invitation to participate in the study was sent out to the two groups of selected sample on behalf of the researcher, Heyman Associates, and IPRS. For the group based in London, 15 out of 50 indicated their willingness of participation. Eventually, four respondents dropped due to changed schedule. For the group based in Singapore, 11 out of 50 responded and indicated their interest in participating in the study but two dropped. In total, 20 interviews (11 in London and nine in Singapore) were carried out.

The same interview guide was used to conduct the interviews. All interviews were conducted in English as practitioners in both locations are fluent in English, which helped eliminate any translation-related bias. Overall, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded and fully transcribed by a graduate student who had sufficient training in using the method of interview. Qualitative analytical techniques (e.g. template analysis and thematic interpretation) were used to analyze the transcripts (Crabtree and Miller, 1992; King, 1998).

Profile of interviewed communication leaders
As described before, the final sample incorporated 11 communication executives from London and nine from Singapore (coded L and S). In terms of gender distribution, the research sample consisted of seven females (four from London and three from Singapore) and 13 males (seven from London and six from Singapore). Male participants heavily

outnumbered females. Gender category was coded F (female) and M (male). In order to confidentially identify individual participants without any bias, a number notation was allocated to each individual (e.g. no. 1, no. 2, no. 3, etc.) with a combined indication of their gender and geographic location. Therefore, an example of no. 3FL would indicate the third interviewee was a female from London. The researcher fully realized that this was relatively small sample ($n = 11$ for London and $n = 9$ for Singapore) and limited generalizations can be drawn from it.

Results

Overall, two major findings emanated from the interviews, which include: first, there is a true agreement among respondents that it is hard to find a universal definition for communication leadership and the effectiveness of communication leadership in practice should be treated as a multi-faceted influencing process; and second, respondents strongly agreed on several key leadership qualities that are needed and valued in communication practice. More importantly, respondents believed that the effectiveness of communication leadership is heavily influenced by a supportive organizational culture, instead of societal cultures at the national level. The following sections outline the detailed reports of each major finding.

Communication leadership is a multi-faceted process

During the interviews, respondents eluded to a series of concepts and descriptions of effective communication leadership in practice. Such descriptions included thinking and acting strategically, treating leadership as a collective group process, being visionary and forward-looking, mastering fast learning ability, and demonstrating change management capability. The varied descriptions reflected the difficulty of having a universal definition of effective communication leadership, which further manifested the multi-faceted nature of leadership itself.

A leading feature that has been addressed by respondents is effective communication leadership in practice means the communication leader should be able to articulate his/her ideas clearly and is able to set strategic directions for the team and the organization. Even more critically, setting strategic directions is highly relevant to the visionary ability as a leader. Importance was also placed on the ability of leading by example. As put by some respondents:

> What I find to be profoundly gratifying to be a leader is to see the impact you can have on another generation of practitioners by being the example […] (No. 1ML).

> To be a good communication leader, we have to lead by example. As an excellent counselor, you will be expected to giving excellent examples to your colleagues and teams (No. 6MS).

Ethical conduct is another important feature of leadership effectiveness mentioned by most respondents. Respondents agreed that ethical consideration is a central component to effective and sustainable public relations practice. They strongly believed that leaders have the ethical responsibility to influence followers in significant ways. As put by a few respondents:

> There should be a strong ethical dimension within public relations leadership […] You have to be ethically fine-tuned as a leader (No. 1ML).

> The job of PR leadership is to convey the best of our ability and make sure that you ethically help the company to effectively spread that information within visible means (No. 3MS).

Demonstrating a high level of involvement was also indicated by respondents as an identification of effective leadership practice in corporate communication. Both female and male respondents admitted the impracticality of being an effective leader if one is just giving tasks to the team and completely disconnects from the team and/or the business. Fast learning ability was another important leadership attribute mentioned in the discussion, which is relevant to active learning processes where individuals are active role players in the changing environment.

Overall respondents' thoughts and discussion led to the conclusion that the definition of effective leadership practice in corporate communication should depend on the purposes to be served by the public relations functions and by the aspect of the phenomenon of most interest to the respondents. This major finding was in accord with other leadership studies that highlight the difficulty of defining leadership effectiveness in socially deprived settings (e.g. Bryman, 2004). Differences among respondents when conceptualizing leadership led to the selection of various phenomena and events to illustrate and interpret the results. More importantly, respondents have focussed on addressing the importance of understanding effective leadership as a multi-facet influencing and learning process in the discussion.

Essential leadership attributes and qualities in corporate communication

A number of essential leadership attributes and qualities emerged from the transcripts to indicate the expectations of effective communication leaders, which ranged from thinking strategically, treating leadership as group efforts, being visionary, having sufficient knowledge of the organization and the clients, and having a supportive organizational culture. The following sections further explain the above mentioned essential attributes and qualities.

Strategic thinking. Respondents felt that to facilitate effective communication, the role of communication leaders should extend beyond tactical communication tasks and incorporate more strategic concerns. Making good and timely leadership decisions on behalf of the organization or the client has long been recognized by scholars and practitioners as a defining aspect of effective leadership (Useem, 2010). The public relations literature also reflects the fact that top communication managers have a strong strategic focus in their views and actions (e.g. Berger *et al.*, 2007). Discussion revealed in this study addressed similar need for communication leaders to fully embrace the strategic aspects of their role in today's business climate. Respondents agreed that realizing public relations' full potential and value requires the recognition of its acute strategic importance to the organization. As put by one respondent:

> Too often, I get a paper that is very technical. I think it is particularly apparent in people at the medium-level positions where they are trying to cross over from the medium management team to the senior level. However, if people cannot think and act strategically, it will be very hard for them to achieve at next level (No. 3MS).

Leadership as group efforts. Respondents also emphasized the importance of working together to accomplish the collective leadership as a dynamic communication team. The discussion reflects their thoughts on the personal responsibility an effective communication leader has to engaging team members in intellectual stimulation and for carrying out specific roles and actions. This perception of leadership as group efforts and collective achievement further echoed the importance of leading by example as a defining feature of effective communication leadership. Respondents agreed that, effective leaders need to be good internal communicators and be involved in multiple

aspects of group learning processes. An often-repeated description of such attribute is epitomized in respondents' comments:

> A great leader is the one that uses team members' strengths to their advantages and pull them together as a team. All of us have different talents, strengths and weaknesses, and a leader will be able to recognize and pull together those talents to form a strong team that ultimately delivers quality work and make sure the client is satisfied (No. 6MS).

However, the respondents also indicated it is important for leaders to find the balance between getting involved and being disconnected: to give team members sufficient autonomy on job. This expected leadership attribute reflects respondents' interpretation of leader-follower relationship from a transformational leadership perspective. As a more contemporary view of effective leadership, transformational leadership is concerned with developing followers to their fullest potential (Conger, 1998). Effective leaders inspire team members through motivation and encourage them to become committed to eventually enhance the team spirit. Being team focussed also means public relations leaders need to gain respect and trust from the followers by showing them respect and trust as a mirroring process.

Being visionary. Being visionary is another essential leadership quality addressing the importance for communication leader to have a compelling vision of communication for the organization and have the ability to enlist followers to the vision. Based on their own learning processes and experiences, respondents agreed that effective communication leaders should be able to articulate compelling visions which specify organizational values and personal beliefs in making things happen and changing things. Moreover, respondents addressed the importance of articulating the shared vision from the perspective of being forward-looking at a strategic level and enlisting followers into that strategic vision:

> A big part of an excellent leader is enjoying the responsibility of vision, and getting people to believe in that vision. I think when you put yourself in a service mentality, it keeps your feet on the ground (No. 8FL).

> Having a vision in what you want the company to be and how you are going to get there. A shared vision could motivate people, and you will be able to see progress over time (No. 7MS).

Having sufficient knowledge of organization and clients. The conversations also revealed that respondents commonly believed it is quite necessary for communication leaders to go beyond their expertise in communication skills to know more about the organization's business and its environment. Knowing the business helps them be more persuasive in delivering the value of communication efforts to the top management team within the organization. Respondents expected an effective public relations leader demonstrating a responsibility for message construction, for strategically managing and developing communication objectives of the organization, and for integrating the communication team in the learning process, rather than on "merely" executing technical skills in communication and delivering the results. Therefore, respondents see the importance of having sufficient knowledge of the organization's business and environment, as well as the client's business and needs, before communicating the messages onwards to public in general. As several respondents described it:

> A good communication leader has to understand their company business very well and has to decide what is the branding of the company. To be more specific, they need to know what the company stands for and what its values are (No. 2MS).

Knowing your clients and understanding them will help you with your objective and key messages […] A good leader should spend time knowing them, knowing the culture of the company (No. 4FS).

Supportive organizational structure and culture. The support from the organization and its senior leaders in the organization has also been addressed in the conversation. For instance, one respondent commented: "Being an effective communication leader is useless if you had a CEO who is not an effective leader or who does not believe in communication efforts" (No. 11FL). Therefore, gaining support from top management team in the organization, and being allowed to offer insightful advice and make decision indicated a higher level of recognition of communication values in the organization. Respondents in both cultural contexts expressed similar concerns during the interviews:

Depending on the senior management structure of the company, the CEOs, the board of directors, if they appreciate your efforts and see the importance of PR, it is quite a natural thing to have in-house PR staying in the loop for any major announcements and upper-level discussions (No. 3MS).

The communication function needs to have equal weight with other important functions within an organization […] I think it is critical for companies to formalize the leadership function of the communication team within the organization (No. 10FL).

Other frequently mentioned attributes and qualities. Fast learning ability was another important leadership attribute mentioned in the discussion. The general feeling about the learning ability in changing environments was as important as other fundamental communication skills. An example comment about the fast learning ability is:

You need to know what is happening and changing now. As a team leader, one needs abundant experiences to inform team members what can be done and what can't be done. A lot of us get stuck and will say "we've always done it that way," but communication is such a fast-moving space that you do have to keep up with the latest techniques and the latest practices (No. 3ML).

Highly relevant to the fast learning ability, staying on top of new technology was also mentioned by respondents as a fundamental ability in the interviews. For some respondents, mastering new technology is about finding new tools that enable their communication teams to do what they have always been doing but more efficiently and effectively. As put by one of the respondents:

An effective communication leader might be very involved in new technology stuff like blogging and social networks, especially blogging. A lot of business leaders underestimate the power of blogging, especially in the banking industry; you don't find many bankers blogging. Because they are so afraid of blogging, they are afraid that public will criticize them. But I think it can be very effective if it is well used (No. 5FS).

Another respondent lamented the pervasiveness of the media and information in today's business environment, which might yield too much unnecessary work to do in strategic planning. Therefore, respondents suggested it is important for leaders to have the ability to sift through the reams of information available quickly and put out what is really needed and meaningful.

Not surprisingly, when considering some fundamental skills contributing to the effectiveness of communication leadership, respondents agreed that a good leader should exhibit extraordinary oral and written communication skills at the tactical level. In addition, effective listening skill was mentioned as another important skill,

compared to writing proficiency. Respondents also highlighted the good judgment and analytical ability as an add-on feature to effective leadership.

Overall, the analysis of the transcripts highlights that prevailing notions of effective communication leadership are far from uniform and reflects the dynamic and changing pressures operating not only within organizations but also in the communication industry itself. Respondents expressed their holistic views about essential leadership attributes and abilities during the conversation to address the difficulty to get a consensus on the topic across different organizations and individuals. Several insightful comments were noted:

- Respondents acknowledged there is no consistent formula to define communication leadership effectiveness. The majority of them emphasized the importance of being flexible in this rapid changing environment. Being flexible and able to adapt strategies and actions contributes significantly to the effectiveness of leadership learning.

- The majority of respondents commented, as a complex phenomenon, leadership is a constant across different professions. However, in the case of corporate communication, the major characteristic of effective leadership is about constructing and delivering strategic communication on behalf of the organization and/or the client.

- Communication leaders agreed that the adoption of a particular set of leadership practice may not be sufficient to guarantee superior organizational performance; instead, it should be a dynamic learning process for all expected and unexpected changes.

General discussion
This study presents core leadership values and qualities that have been emphasized by senior communication executives in London and Singapore. In accord with the cultural congruence proposition that was proposed by Dorfman and House (2004), results in this study revealed a high level of cultural congruence in perceiving effective leadership practice in communication, especially when referring to essential attributes and qualities an effective communication executive should possess. The results also highlight a prevailing notion that having a supportive organizational culture will play a considerable role in promoting senior organizational leaders' endorsement of communication value.

Even though leadership effectiveness in a given cultural context has been seen as a subjective process reflecting the self with its cultural background, research findings in this paper suggest the possibility of cross-national convergence of management functions, leadership styles, and communication strategies. In addition, the high level of cultural congruence in leadership perceptions reflected in the results would facilitate practitioners' leadership learning process when training opportunities are available.

The findings from the qualitative analysis suggest that the choice of effective leadership attributes and skills in a corporate communication setting is not solely determined by the national cultures in a given society. More often, the choice is largely driven by the consideration of immediate context based on various situations within the organization itself and with the clients. Although traditional managerial leadership has heavily influenced how communication leaders carry out their leadership actions (e.g. being visionary, seeing leadership as group efforts), communication executives also expressed their interpretation on communication leadership as being consistent

with their own professional beliefs (e.g. trustworthy, ethical, and strategic). Such harmonious integration of the managerial leadership approaches and communication values has definitely facilitated the leadership congruence process in both learning and application.

The study also indicates that when cultural environmental factors both at the national and the organizational levels are examined jointly, organizational culture inserts a more profound influence on the applications of leadership skills if compared to the national cultures. We all agree that leaders display personal styles and approaches, but they are also expected to set up choices by institutional opportunities and constraints. The flexibility in organizational culture and the support from the top management team could be key factors in maximizing the full benefits of communication management. While the results of this research cannot address all potential issues and situations that practitioners may face in their request to maximize communication effectiveness organizational wide, it did imply that certain capabilities are "must-have" factors for effective communication leadership.

Assessing the managerial implications, communication executives can definitely tailor their leadership initiatives to fit the different cultural mechanisms that underlie organizational structures across cultures. Although we agree that communication strategies should place a great emphasis on the social dimension of cultural values in a given society, leadership initiatives and actions should also be carried out to embrace the organizational structure and culture.

Limitations and future research

Although the research results can generate managerial implications to corporate communication leaders, the limitations of the research cannot be ignored. First, a limited set of communication leaders are interviewed in this study. The researcher has argued the appropriateness of using qualitative analysis to capture cultural values in interviews. However, the researcher understands that the use of a qualitative analysis technique that relies on subjective interpretation of leadership scenarios could also present some threats in making any generalizations. In addition, the present study uses two major cities (London and Singapore) as a surrogate indicator for national culture. Although the two places often represent the national culture in a large extent, more precise cultural and sub-cultural measures would benefit subsequent research. Future research could extend this research by incorporating more respondents and a mixed method design.

By illustrating these congruent aspects between the two samples in interpreting leadership approaches in communication practice, the researcher hopes to encourage more extensive and rigorous cross-cultural research that aims at identifying the essence of communication leadership, both between and within countries. It is critical to implement a more comprehensive approach to examine the nature of culture and the process of communication leadership, its antecedents and consequences in corporate communication practice.

On the other hand, we have to admit that cultural changes are taking place, specifically, with globalization. The rapid development of communication technology and information exchange and interactions among modern societies accelerate the mutual influence across cultures in a given society. Therefore, it is important for researchers to carefully design any cross-cultural research. Issues such as diversity within societal culture, interaction of national and organizational culture, cultural complexity within organizations, and interaction between the industry culture and

individual behavior should be carefully considered and defined before moving into comparative analysis. In conclusion, the researcher hopes that the present study will encourage researchers to consider leadership and culture as important facets in building research agenda for communication leadership research in general as well as to directly address the issue of cultural contingency in the effectiveness of communication leadership.

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