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THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS AMONG ASIAN WOMEN IN HOSPITALITY

Abstract

As women increasingly occupy key leadership roles in government, industry and society, their styles and approaches towards leading others continues to attract attention in the literature. The focus of this attention is best served in celebrating the transformational nature of women in leadership by illuminating their approach to leadership in a transformational manner. Of particular importance in this regard is the rapid growth and expansion of the Asian hospitality and tourism industry. Increasingly, women will be holding leadership positions of influence, bringing with them a range of leadership styles and approaches worth careful examination in the context of eastern cultural paradigms.

Introduction

The rise of Asian markets and their economic prowess are rapidly changing the global hospitality and tourism industry landscape. The nature of leadership and the role women play in its evolution is taking on greater meaning considering the rapidly changing global-economy. Asian women in leadership roles today are closely aligned with transformational leadership constructs. They recognize the importance of relating to others by building collaborative work cultures that creatively transform relationships and build upon collective action as a means to yielding higher productivity and overall performance. The contemporary transformative leader is best described as a leader that puts others ahead of self. Typically, they possess high levels of charisma and team orientation skills in their approach to leadership while regularly paying homage to societal, cultural and organizational norms. This is of particular importance in Asia given the cultural proclivity towards collectivism.

Transformational leaders who appreciate multiple perspectives bring into conversation, policy and strategy discussions with a more holistic view of the workplace. It is important for leaders within the hospitality industry to carefully examine organizational processes and understand the cultural effects from lifestyle, life values, personality, and perspectives of work that are congruent with the human resources they must work with in the 21st century workforce. The understanding and application of this “fit” has been shown to produce more efficient and effective companies in terms of their visions, missions, goals, and objectives (Gursoy & Swanger, 2007). Since the hospitality industry is growing at exponential rates in Asia, bringing with it workforce challenges that include high turnover, poor retention, staff-shortages and lack of human capital resources. These issues are becoming more complex as workforce composition becomes increasingly multicultural and multinational in nature.

Leadership Theory Continuum

Leadership theories pertaining to style and approach range from traditional scientific management theory based command and control hierarchies to servant lead transformational leadership principles. The command and control bureaucracy or autocratic leadership approach emphasizes strong departmentalization and limited

autonomy at the department level. Consequently, a rigid centralized organizational structure often creates a workplace with many constraints and limited control given to low and mid-level managers. In the hospitality industry in particular, most managers lack full control over their departments and must regularly report to their senior managers. This hierarchical structure often constrains managers' creativity and inhibits their ability to make decisions that maximize their employees' potential to promote high job satisfaction, key factors that influence customer service and guest satisfaction

The organizational bureaucracy found in the hospitality industry has its roots in scientific management theory. Scientific management is the invention of Fredrick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) who believed that "management, not labor, is the cause of and potential solution to problems in industry" (Thompson, 2003). Taylor focused on the division of work and the role of managers to devise and implement the most time efficient and cost effective path to completing a task; the worker was considered a resource to be used for this purpose. Managers leading under the scientific management paradigm have four primary responsibilities: (1) break each element of work down to its constituent parts, (2) select, train, teach, and develop employees, (3) ensure that employees complete their work with a defined standard of consistency and quality, and (4) ensure the proper division of labor. The manager is expected to strive continually to create the most economic and productive division of work by devising a step-by-step procedure for each task (Thompson, 2003). According to Gardner (1990), the large bureaucratic organizational structure perpetuates a sense of depersonalization and dehumanization by its members because it purports the mindset that managers manage and workers work. Recognizing this sense of impersonality leaves many employees feeling anonymous, powerless, and without a sense of their relationship to the whole. In large bureaucratic organizations the struggle for power often leads to infighting and rivalry among employees vying for attention, job security and advancement. The resulting conflict inhibits communication, leads to rigid departmental or sub-system boundaries, cuts off collaboration and stifles adaptability, vitality, creativity, and renewal within the organization (Perrow, 1986).

Conversely, transformational leadership reflects a more contemporary approach to leading others. A leadership style that is primarily based on more collective processes aligned with open-systems thinking and transformative relationships. Today's Asian women in hospitality leadership roles exhibit a wide range of competency in the transformational leadership. According to various researchers, transformational leaders are defined by a set of behaviors that motivate followers to do more than they would be originally expected to do and to subsume their self-interests for the good of the collective benefit (Bass and Avolio, 1995; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Bennis and Thomas (2002) identified four key leadership competencies common among transformational leaders: (a) adaptive capacity, (b) engaging others through shared meaning, (c) calming voice, and (d) purposeful focus on others. Adaptive capacity refers to working well with others across boundaries and the willingness to admit when wrong. A leader who engages others through shared meaning works to find opportunities rather than faults. The transformational leader with a voice has clear values and the ability to discern when it is best to lead or to follow. Finally, the leader who demonstrates purpose has a track record and job history that exhibits a bias toward action and results geared

towards meeting owner expectations. The leadership competencies associated with engaging others in shared meaning and voice align closely with transformational leadership principles. While a blended approach (autocratic-transformational) to leadership is preferable, transformational leaning leadership styles are said to be more contemporary in nature in today's global market place, especially in Asia.

East-West Leadership-Cultural Context

The increased Global travel phenomenon has a no greater impact in the world than Asian countries. These changing international influences have leadership implications pertinent to social, institutional and individual interactions within these host countries. In the east, cultural influences on leadership are rooted in Confucianism. They center on collectivism, virtue, family and egalitarian values related to associations and institutions. In Asia, societal expectations warrant leaders who have a collectivistic orientation and those leaders that are driven by self-interests will not be well respected or accomplished. In Asia, current leadership patterns continue to be influenced by Confucian precepts (Bass, 1985). As such, leaders are expected to set moral examples for their followers and to be more concerned with the collective good than their own (Fu & Tsui, 2003). Leadership research has also found moral character to be an indispensable component of effective leadership in certain Asian cultures (Ling, Chen, & Wang, 1987; Farh & Cheng, 2000).

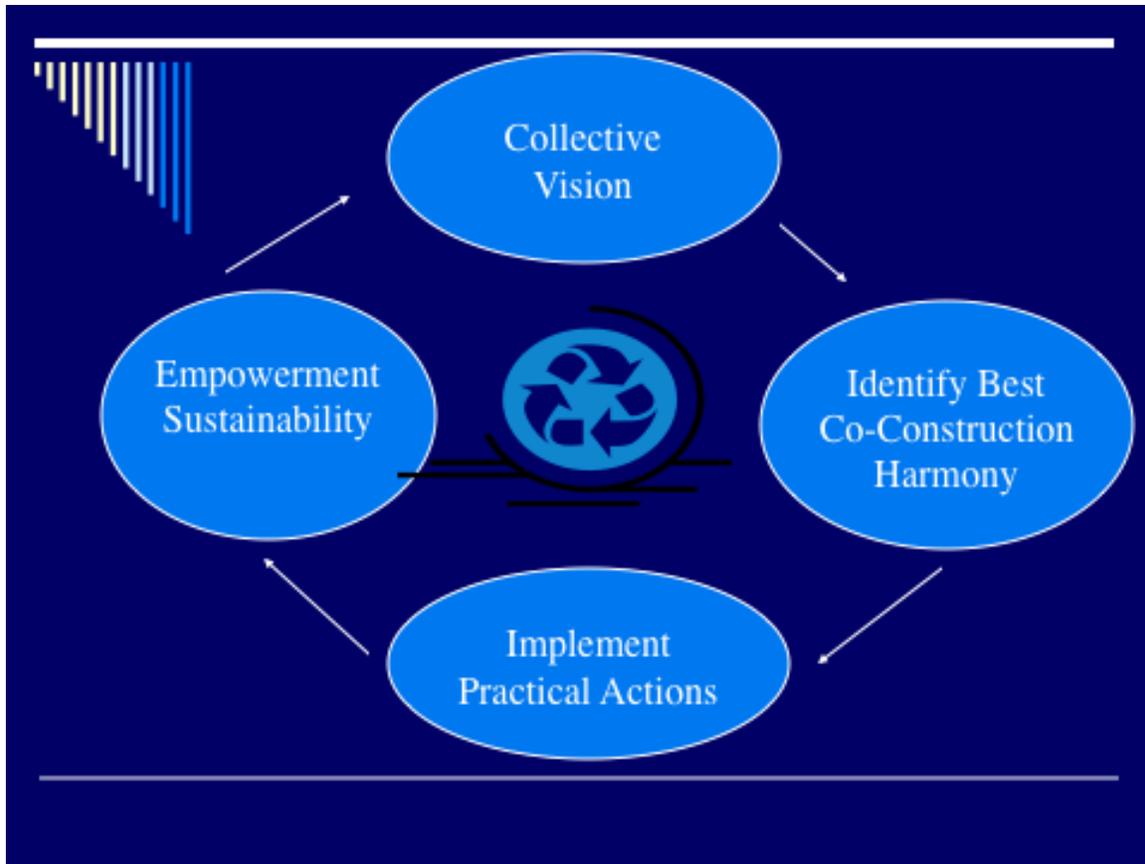
Comparatively, western cultural influences regarding leadership emphasize individualism, self-interest, competition and entrepreneurial spirit above all else. Fu, et. al, (2010), found that unlike the West, where the source of morality is religious beliefs, in Asia, morality resides in social norms and plays the role that religion does in the West (Tom, 1989). Ideologically, "Asian ethics emphasize personal virtue and specifies proper conduct in family, kinship, workplace relations as well as among social equals and between superiors and subordinates in socio-political organizations and institutions" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Good leaders in Asia must have high moral values (Hui & Tan, 1999; Cooke, 2008). Although the Asian market orientation and growth has increased competition and pressure for improved performance; the growth of private business enterprises also makes it possible for individuals to occupy key leadership positions without the required self-transcendent values. Consequently, their follower's expectations place a high emphasis on virtuous and altruistic values in alignment with their own. Those values require leaders to personify prevalent social expectations if they are to leverage the positive effect of their transformational behaviors. The effect will be compromised when followers notice that leaders' behaviors are inconsistent with the values they expect them to hold and they respond negatively with lower commitment and higher intention to leave.

Transformational Leadership Profile

To this end, Asian women in leadership roles today exude hospitality and are passionate about their careers and transformational in nature. They are dynamic in nature, yet visionary and grounded at the same time. Asian women in hospitality leadership roles are change orientated and also capable of handling the financial demands and expectations of complex owner-manager-employee stakeholder groups. Most importantly, they are committed to service excellence and team dynamics centered on collective effort over individual accomplishment. The transformational leader is a leader that challenges team members to raise the bar of performance in order to reach new levels of success. To do so, they emphasize the value of coaching and helping team members to fully understand organizational expectations and what it takes to be successful rather than relying on positional power or autocratic command and control constructs. They value the importance of leading by example and frequently showing fellow team members a willingness to work side by side with them to achieve their goals.

With regard to navigating the daily organizational pressures of maintaining excellence in quality service with rising owner expectations for financial success, transformational leaders spend more time investing in people. They believe, more often than not, financial success is the by-product of quality service in concert with ensuring team members having the right attitude and mindset towards service delivery. In order to do so it requires building bridges between people with different worldviews, sharing perspectives with one another, communicating openly, mutually respecting others.

Exhibit 1. Transformational Leader Context



The Women Leader of the Future

Researchers have debated the notion of gender-based leadership. Typically, they have contended leadership styles of women and men are somewhat different, mainly along the lines of women being less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented towards enhancing others' self-worth (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1995). Other studies have set forth the notion that women's leadership styles are more closely aligned with democratic principles reflecting the challenges that female leaders face in leading others in a traditionally hierarchical organizational setting. Therefore, the possibility exists that female leaders may face resistance if they proceed in the more traditional command-and-control organizational setting with a more interpersonally sensitive but encouraging style of leadership that is reflective of transformational leadership principles. Women's more transformational leadership style and their preponderance to use contingent rewards as well as their diminished use of passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire style can and should enhance organizational effectiveness (Eagly &, Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

In Asia, the transformational leader is a leader that fosters a distinctive operating environment by aligning relational capabilities with expected performance outcomes that are embedded in a rich and meaningful cultural context. That is not to say women or transformational leaders in general are less inclined to exhibit autocratic tendencies.

Rather, they exhibit a more pronounced orientation towards transformation and collectivism than individual accomplishment and power playing. Exhibit 1. illustrates the open–system approach to transformational leadership that is unique to the Asian organizational setting. That is to say, the women leader and their orientation towards collaboration and collectivism may be beneficial in gaining maximum results. This is most evident in a collective vision and action designed to attain quality in product delivery, product positioning and financial performance. In this sense, the transformational leader promotes an entrepreneurial culture built on harmony and co-creation as a fundamental management skill set. They cultivate quality-centric behavior at all times. From the business context, the transformational leader is no push over. They possess the “where with all” to implement action and produce results. Like their autocratic compatriots they are also bottom line driven. The transformational leader elevates conversations amongst organizational stakeholders directly affecting how organizations deal with issues and challenges. Therefore, higher levels of empowerment mean greater business sustainability through listening to and evoking each other’s views.

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