

Public Executive Leadership in East and West: An Examination of HRM Factors in Eight Countries

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Abstract

The Asia-Pacific region is known for examples of public managers taking initiative for addressing large challenges and opportunities, but recent concerns are that public leadership is greatly reduced in the new democratic and media-conscious era. Comparative data from South Korea, Mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the United States, India, Brazil, and Chile show that perceptions of strong public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific are similar to those in the United States (respectively 40% and 35%). Perceived leadership is greater in stable, one-party regimes (Malaysia, Mainland China), than in those that have party turnover (Taiwan, South Korea). This article also argues that HRM factors affect the calculus of leaders' initiative-taking, and finds that in both the East and West public executive leadership is associated with HR factors affecting recruitment, selection, compensation, appraisal, rewards,

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and satisfaction with civil service systems. This article calls for further research and strategic HRM actions that strengthen public executive leadership in democracies.

Keywords

leadership, public governance, HRM, Asia-Pacific, senior managers

The Asia-Pacific region has many examples of public managers and agencies taking leadership to promote economic development and social progress (Berman & Kim, 2010; Friedman, 2008; Lu & Hsiao 2003; Wad, 2009). Public managers are seen taking initiative, building consensus, innovating new strategies and implementing policies and programs in collaboration with, or under the direction of, political officials. However, a concern is that many of these practices came to the fore under current or past 'soft' authoritarian regimes, and that current democratization, liberalization and media coverage are now restricting or even curtailing public managers' leadership. While practices of managerial leadership in economic, social and other areas of development are readily found in Mainland China and Singapore, they seem fewer and fewer in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Is senior public manager leadership in Asia-Pacific on the wane? Strong nations require a strong public sector, and public managers' leadership is part of that (Rodrik, 2008; Tang, 2004; Vigoda, 2009).

This article addresses two key questions: (1) How much leadership do senior public managers (called "executives") in Asia-Pacific central governments exercise, and how does such leadership compare with that among U.S. public managers? and (2) how do human resource management (HRM) policies and practices affect senior public managers' leadership? The latter is central to this symposium's purpose. Empirical data are based on a multinational survey in South Korea, Taiwan, Mainland China Shanghai, Beijing, Malaysia, India, Florida, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Brazil, and Chile, discussed in the symposium introduction. Study methods and caveats, are discussed further.

In broad context, strong and competent bureaucracies have long been used by growth-oriented coalitions of political and business groups to further their development aims in East and Southeast Asia (Arnold, 1989; Bowornwathana, 2011; Choi, 2010; Wang, 1996). "Soft" authoritarian (one-party) regimes establish deep and manifold ties with bureaucracies to incentivize officials and spur bureaucratic leadership, often with emphases on meritocracy and party loyalty, and quick decision making at the top. Democratization is associated with fewer and more adversarial relations between politicians and bureaucrats, and media exposure causing public officials to shy away from leadership (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981; Svava, 2001). While there are many good reasons to favor democracy (e.g., freedom, accountability, and long-term stability), the successes of nearby authoritative¹ regimes in Mainland China and Singapore unequivocally highlight executive leadership deficits in democracies (Berman, Chen, Jan, & Huang, 2013; Neo & Chen, 2007; Quah,

2010). The need for increased bureaucratic leadership in the United States is also raised by Meier and O'Toole's (2006) "more bureaucracy, less democracy" thesis, which argues that leadership by agency officials is more effective than that of elected officials in ensuring effective program outcomes. Questions about the sufficiency of public manager leadership exist in many countries (e.g., Page & Wright, 2007; Raffel, Leisink, & Middlebrooks, 2009).

This article contributes to understanding the extent of bureaucratic leadership and HRM factors that further it. First, it provides a systematic, baseline comparison of senior public manager leadership-taking in the East and West. To date, comparative studies of public management leadership are sparse, in part because access to such officials is very difficult. Second, as a study grounded in HRM, we examine HRM factors affecting perceived senior public manager leadership-taking (rather than, say, factors inspired by democratic or political theory). We discuss the broad context of HRM, rather than any specific strategy (e.g., executive training). This article focuses narrowly on perceived senior manager leadership and does not address broader matters such as the role of government policy in national progress.

Framework

Theories and definitions of leadership in public agencies abound. While there is surely no one way to define and analyze public leadership, this study defines public executive leadership as (a) having or embracing a strategic vision and taking initiative for ensuring relevant programs and policies; (b) building support for agency activities among political officials, societal groups and agency staff; and (c) overseeing, implementing and producing results with public value, integrity, and purpose. This definition is consistent with others that typically include elements of setting goals, aligning the organization with exigencies and opportunities in its environment, acquiring resources, motivating subordinates, and ensuring public value, integrity, and purpose (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Moore, 1995; Van Wart, 2011). It is also consistent with contemporary HRM practices, for example, underlying notions of "core competencies" for public executives that are the basis for developing selection, training and evaluation criteria in the United States, South Korea, Australia, and Singapore (APSC, 2008; Bowman, West, & Beck, 2010; Neo & Chen, 2007; Robertson & Choi, 2010; Steen & Van der Meer, 2007).

From a national systems perspective, it matters that public executives not only have these leadership skills but also that executive leadership occurs in abundance in many settings. An exceptional instance of public manager leadership stands as an example for others, but it takes hundreds of, even thousands of, instances of executive leadership for such efforts to move a country forward in strong and synergistic ways, as public manager leadership typically occurs in discrete, narrow, and varied areas. One manager leads in attracting private investment into science parks, while others make discrete contributions to kindergartens, fisheries, agriculture, or criminal justice, etc (Taiwan Ministry of Civil Service, 2010). One commonality among these discrete efforts is that they typically involve the above three elements of leadership (Borins,

2008; Chen, Huang, & Hsiao, 2006; Neo & Chen, 2007; Talbot, 2010). Thus both quality and quantity of public executive leadership matter, and an abundance of both are needed.²

Empirical and theoretical reasons exist for hypothesizing differences in perceived public executive leadership among countries, notably between Mainland China and the United States. Empirically, it is readily observed and widely reported that Mainland China has made great progress in its public infrastructure and economic development, and increasingly in social, health, and educational areas, too (Biden, 2011; Welch, 2012). One may suspect that in a communist country, senior public officials have a strong hand in making such decisions and in giving shape to them. By contrast, the United States is widely reported to be falling behind in its public infrastructure and development of major new social, health, education, and economic initiatives, all of which may suggest that senior public managers are not doing much by way of leadership.³

Theoretical reasons also exist to suspect greater leadership in authoritative countries such as Mainland China, as the legitimacy of “soft” authoritative regimes increasingly rests on performance (rather than control or strong fear); the multitude of ties and controls by political leaders over the bureaucracy allows for ensuring manifold initiatives. Such regimes also include nominally democratic countries with “authoritative” leadership such as Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia. By contrast, strongly democratic countries such as the United States must balance performance with other values such as transparency and responsiveness, and also contend with leadership uncertainties and discontinuities, resulting from frequent party turnover, which further reduces emphases on performance. Indeed, the democratization of Taiwan and South Korea is anecdotally accompanied by reduced state developmentalism and bureaucratic initiative-taking (Berman et al., 2013).⁴ Hence,

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Senior public managers in Mainland China undertake more leadership than those in the United States and other countries in this study.

The second study question concerns HRM factors that may affect perceived public executive leadership in different countries. Senior public managers have much discretion in deciding how much leadership they and their subordinates undertake; there are typically few rules and only vaguely defined evaluation processes regarding the extent to which they have strategic vision, take initiative for ensuring relevant programs and policies, build support for agency activities, and oversee implementation with public value and integrity (Olshfski & Cunningham, 2008; Svara, 2010). As managers experientially know, unmotivated and poor quality staff are a significant barrier to even thinking about taking initiative; studies, often in business, show top management initiatives faltering for lack of subordinate motivation and skills (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1994; Ogbanna & Harris, 2002). Light (2008, p. 124) in a study of federal managers finds that midlevel and lower level employee competence is a predictor of perceived performance (along with the work environment [being open to new ideas], resources, and an effective disciplinary process). By contrast, studies of “high performance”

organizations and transformational activity typically occur in the presence of executive leadership, performance-oriented management, and a significant number of well-qualified, well-motivated, and high performing staff.

Whereas we assume that public executive leadership is affected by executives' own sense of purpose and ambition, as well as expectations or demands from their political superiors, we think that the workforce quality, motivation, and performance culture also affect decisions about public executive leadership-taking.⁵ Regarding Asia-Pacific context, rigorous and highly competitive entry exams in East Asia and India, and selective recruitment in Singapore, are thought to produce a highly qualified talent pool; in some countries, selection and exam pass rates are less than 5%. Additionally, the work ethic of East Asia is famously high, though decidedly mixed and often more relaxed in Southeast Asia (e.g., Kim, 2010). However, less is known about the "quality" of HRM policies in Asia-Pacific, that is, the extent to which this qualified pool is in fact utilized in productive ways and, in fact, even represents talent that is well suited for the jobs on hand. We also know little about the impact of specific, Asia-Pacific cultures.

Specifically, we hypothesize that hiring well-qualified employees increases competent staff for carrying out new initiatives and thus enables or induces more public executive leadership. Linking performance to rewards, and using performance appraisal to hold people accountable, are oft-discussed themes in the literature, and are hypothesized to increase workforce motivation and alignment with leaders' objectives and, hence, increase public executive leadership (Liu & Dong, 2012; Oh & Lewis, 2009). Providing competitive salaries increases workforce retention of well-qualified employees, as does satisfaction with one's civil service system, both increasing public executive leadership (Taylor, 2010). It is obvious that these factors occurring in tandem may have a large effect on public executive leadership, and stating these in generic ways allows for comparison across countries. Hence,

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): Being able to hire well-qualified candidates increases perceived public executive leadership.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Linking rewards to performance increases perceived public executive leadership

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): Appraisal that holds people accountable for their performance increases perceived public executive leadership.

Hypothesis 2d (H2d): Providing competitive salaries increases perceived public executive leadership.

Hypothesis 2e (H2e): Positive perceptions of one's civil service system increases perceived public executive leadership.

The survey also examines workplace culture, some of which may be shaped by societal differences.⁶ Anecdotally, cultures of followership are widespread in East Asia (called "obedience"), and are associated with a lack of initiative, judgment, and creativity which, in some ways, limit workforce effectiveness (Berman, Moon, & Choi, 2010; Leung, Koch, & Lu, 2002; Li & Cropanzano, 2009). Followership pushes

even minor decisions upward, causes a need for micro-management by senior managers, breeds attitudes that view initiative as “trouble making” and rewards workers for following superior’s orders even when they know of better ways. Anecdotally, one surely comes across many instances in Asia-Pacific where senior managers do work that in Western bureaucracies is done at much lower levels. Yet, while deficient in some ways, the culture of followership is well-suited for implementing top-level decisions, and an important countervailing hypothesis about public agency leadership is that it is contingent on political leadership that directs the bureaucracy;⁷ the implication (or, suggestion) is that public managers in Asia-Pacific might not ever have been very leading, or only at the highest rungs, or perhaps concentrated in a few agencies of exceptional ability.⁸ Such a possibility has not been hitherto much stated about this region. Hence,

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Cultures of followership (a) decrease perceived public executive leadership and (b) are more prevalent in East Asia.

Finally, performance practices are hypothesized to further public executive leadership-taking, as senior manager leaders may themselves be expected to initiate or improve new programs, have cultures in which new initiatives are more readily implemented, do not additionally need to work against unproductive attitudes, and subordinates in such workplace cultures may bring forth improvements, too.⁹ Performance practices include openness, managers setting high expectations, group support, workforce motivation, and increasing ethics awareness (Berman, 2006; Walker, Boyne, & Brewer, 2010). Anecdotally, East Asian workplace cultures typically have many of these characteristics, though openness is sometimes lacking, as leaders are expected to make decisions, but workers are not necessarily expected to give input to them. Leaders are unlikely to be challenged even by other leaders who may wish to preserve harmony. Some East Asian workplaces seem to be more about “working hard” than about performance (outcomes) per se. With some important exceptions,¹⁰ Southeast Asia workplaces are generally not known for their performance culture; for example, many lack investments in performance-oriented infrastructure, training, recruitment, and rewards (Berman, 2011). Hence,

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Workplace cultures of performance (a) increase perceived public executive leadership and (b) are weaker in Asia-Pacific.

Method

Between March 2011 and December 2011, an extensive, international survey “Current Trends and Emerging Issues in Asia-Pacific HRM,” was implemented and responses from senior employees, supervisors and lower managers in central or state governments in South Korea, Mainland China (Beijing and Shanghai), Taiwan, Malaysia, India, South America (Brazil and Chile), Florida, Utah, Oregon, and Washington are analyzed here. The entire data set of the above countries/states consists of 3,702

completed surveys. The survey has 115 questions (with some local efforts including additional items), and survey response rates vary 32% to 80% among countries. Data were unavailable from other countries. On average, respondents have worked about 16.1 years in government and 11.0 years in the organization that they are reporting about. Respondents' average age is 43 years, about half (49.9%) have a graduate degree, 42.0% are female, and 71% are a supervisor or manager. Sample comparability rests on similar level central or state (nonlocal government) respondents providing nondefense services and on using valid sampling and data collection procedures as described in the Symposium introduction.¹¹ The survey instrument includes six items pertaining to senior managers that were developed with the above conceptualization in mind.¹²

Measurement

All survey items use a 7-point Likert-type scale, strongly agree to strongly disagree, unless otherwise stated. The measure of perceived public executive leadership is an index measure based on the following six survey items: Senior managers often take initiative for developing new programs and policies, Senior managers ensure that the agency responds well to new problems and changes in society, Senior managers have a clear strategic vision for our agency, Senior managers generate support from citizens and elected officials for our agency's mission or programs, Senior managers often promote more effective ways of working, and Senior managers display exemplary leadership. These items encompass the before-mentioned three aspects of such leadership mentioned in the definition; the first three items encompass strategic vision and taking initiative, the fourth concerns building support, and the last two involve producing results with purpose and integrity. The alpha coefficient of these six items is .92.

The measure of "followership" is based on four measures: It is important to not challenge group consensus around here. People should follow the suggestions of their superiors, even when they know of better ways. In my department, it is more important to be liked by one's superior than to perform well, and being innovative and excellent is dangerous to one's career here. These items give expression to this concept, notably in East Asia, and respondents in other countries likely also recognize these items (Guo, 2011; Hofstede, 2001; Lee & Moon, 2010). The alpha coefficient of these four items is .73.

The measure of performance culture is composed of the following six items: Managers set high performance expectations for employees; Our department encourages open and constructive dialogue; People are guided by a sense of right and wrong; I am willing to start work early or stay late to finish a job; We empower employees to make important decisions; and Our workgroup is like a family that takes care of most members. These items are collectively consistent with widely understood notions of modern performance (Berman, 2006; Walker et al., 2010). The alpha coefficient of these six items is .75. (While many HRM factors are associated with performance culture, these items exclude HRM factors and thus allow for a stringent testing of

HRM factors when controlled for these items. Note also that HRM factors can be present in the absence of performance cultures.)

All other items are measured as single survey items, such as We are able to hire candidates who are well-qualified for the job, We can quickly hire candidates, My department upholds merit principles in hiring, My salary is competitive, and Achieving good results will get me promoted here (taken as a measure of linking rewards to performance). These items exactly or closely reflect the stated hypotheses. The items, shown in the Tables below, all reflect the actual survey wording. While the above index measures are appropriate for the data as a whole, clearly there are some countries for which they do not always scale well. Some country specific models necessarily use single survey items as indicator variables.

Finally, the nature of perceptual data raises an important rival hypothesis, that having favorable HRM conditions may cause positive work experiences or produce an “esprit de corps” within the workforce, such that survey respondents may think more highly of the leadership of senior-level managers because that leadership is exercised in a high-quality organizational setting. Our data allow for considerable testing of this rival hypothesis, as it assesses workplace satisfaction through such items as “I enjoy working with others in the department,” “My supervisor is helpful,” and “Generally speaking, I am satisfied with my job,” which can be taken to reflect a positive workplace condition. The alpha coefficient of these three items is .74.

Results

Public Executive Leadership

Table 1 shows items of perceived public executive leadership in South Korea, Taiwan, Mainland China and Malaysia. The items encompass the above mentioned aspects of having vision and taking initiative, building support, and overseeing implementation. About half of the respondents (48.0%) agree or strongly agree that senior managers display exemplary leadership and about the same (47.0%) agree or strongly agree that senior managers ensure that their agency responds well to new problems and challenges in society. However, considerable respondent variation exists within each item, and on average, respondents in these Asia-Pacific settings only *somewhat agree* that senior managers undertake these activities (mean = 5.08, with 7 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*). Among respondents, 39.3% agree or strongly agree with at least half of the items in Table 1, while 22.8% disagree to varying degrees with at least one of the items. Thus the following statements are both true: (a) on average, perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific study settings is modest, and (b) about 40% of Asia-Pacific respondents perceive high levels of senior public executive leadership, hence making it a rather common occurrence.

These above statements are based on substantive grounds and not on any arithmetic frequency of the response distribution. Table 2 shows senior public executive leadership is highest in Malaysia and lowest in South Korea (mean = 5.38 vs. 4.79, $p < .01$). Further analysis of the data show these differences are quite significant; for example,

Table 1. Public Executive Leadership in Asia-Pacific.^a

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree ^b	Don't know
Senior managers display exemplary leadership	9.4	38.6	27.6	11.1	13.3%
Senior managers often take initiative for developing new programs and policies	9.1	37.1	26.7	11.6	15.5
Senior managers ensure that the agency responds well to new problems and changes in society	8.9	38.1	28.6	10.4	13.9
Senior managers have a clear strategic vision for our agency	8.8	34.2	28.2	10.9	17.8
Senior managers often promote more effective ways of working	7.4	34.8	28.9	12.4	16.5
Senior managers generate support from citizens and elected officials for our agency's mission or programs	7.3	33.1	25.9	7.4	26.3
All =	8.5	36.0	27.7	10.6	17.2

^aIncludes Mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia ($n = 1,600$). Cronbach $\alpha = .924$.

^bCombines the categories *somewhat disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree* for purpose of space.

whereas 56.8% of Malaysian respondents agree or strongly agree that their agency responds well to new problems and challenges in society, only 30.5% of South Korean respondents agree or strongly agree.¹³ Among Malaysian, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean respondents, respectively, 48.0%, 41.3%, 39.9%, and 25.2% agree or strongly agree with at least half of the items in Table 1. The high rating of Malaysia is consistent with public management reforms that have been assertively pursued in a centralized and coordinated manner since the 1980s by its prime minister's office. Reforms follow those elsewhere with, for example, foci on e-government and improved service delivery, but having advanced targets and accountability as Malaysia has set challenging goals for 2020 (Yeoh, 2011).

The index measure of perceived public executive leadership is statistically significantly different between Mainland China and the United States ($t = 3.03, p < .01$), as well as between all Asia-Pacific study settings and the United States ($t = 4.27, p < .01$). The differences are modest; 35.2% of U.S. respondents agree or strongly agree with at least half of the items in Table 2, compared with 41.3% in Mainland China (and 39.8% among all Asia-Pacific respondents). The largest differences between Mainland China and U.S. respondents are about displaying exemplary leadership (respectively, 54.8%

Table 2. Public Executive Leadership (By Country).

	N	Mean ^a	SD
Asia-Pacific			
Malaysia	281	5.38	0.94
Mainland China	499	5.08	1.05
Taiwan	531	5.05	1.16
South Korea	236	4.79	1.07
All =	1,547	5.09	1.09
Comparison groups ^b			
United States (Florida, Utah, Washington, Oregon)	1,516	4.91**	1.26
South America (Brazil, Chile)	197	3.51**	1.41
India	145	5.06	1.31

^a7 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree.

^bBased on *t* tests, compared Asia-Pacific (all).

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

vs. 37.7%, agree or strongly agree) and finding more effective ways of working (respectively, 50.9% vs. 30.5%). Respective results among all Asia-Pacific respondents are similar, 50.6% and 48.3%. Other differences, such as often taking initiative to develop new programs or policies are very close, within 2% to 5%, and in some instances not significant; for example, the difference between Mainland China and the United States on taking initiative to develop new programs or policies is modest, 47.5% versus 45.0% (*p* < .05). Based on these results, we conclude that there is *modest statistical support for Hypothesis 1* that respondents perceive greater public executive leadership in Mainland China than in the United States. We further discuss and interpret these results in context in the conclusion.

Analysis supports the validity of these results. As might be expected, lower managers in the sample have a more favorable assessment of perceived senior manager leadership than employees, but the difference is slight (mean 5.12 vs. 4.96, *p* < .05).¹⁴ On average, about 1-in-6 (18%) respondents state “don’t know” about any item in Table 2,¹⁵ but removing these responses from analysis does not substantively affect the study finding of only “somewhat agreeing” with these items (mean = 5.49). Middle managers (defined as Grade 11) in the Taiwan supplemental survey also have a higher assessment (5.49, *SD* = 1.10), likely reflecting their deeper familiarity with senior manager activity. One minor difference is that fewer U.S. respondents state “don’t know” with regard to these items (about 6% to 9%); eliminating these from analysis widens the gap between Asia-Pacific and U.S. respondents (5.49 vs. 5.11, *p* < .01), but this still does not substantively change study conclusions.

Finally, Table 2 also reports perceived public executive leadership in India and South America, too, for purposes of further comparison. Though based on small samples, the results for India are very similar as those for Asia-Pacific study settings (5.06 vs. 5.09, *ns*), but perceived public executive leadership is very much lower in South America (3.51, *p* < .01), and further analysis corroborates that this is for both Chile and Brazil (resp. 3.51 and 3.48, *ns*). By comparison, in these countries only

Table 3. HR and Other Factors.

	Asia-Pacific ^a	USA	India	South America ^b
Hiring well-qualified applicants (H2a)	4.95	4.93	4.33**	3.60**
Linking rewards to performance (H2b)	4.18	3.62**	3.73*	2.75**
Appraisal that holds people accountable (H2c)	4.74	4.54**	5.11**	3.22**
My salary is competitive (H2d)	4.07	3.96	4.69**	3.56**
“We have an excellent civil service system” (H2e)	5.02	4.28**	5.16	3.13**
Follower-ship (H3)	4.45	3.13**	4.03**	4.07**
Performance culture (H4)	5.12	5.34**	5.20	3.55**
Work satisfaction	5.37	5.77**	5.77**	4.56**

^a1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

^bStatistical tests based on Games-Howell statistics.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

21.0% of respondents perceive that senior managers often take initiative to develop new programs or policies, and only 13.5% agree or strongly agree that senior managers display exemplary leadership. Interestingly, growth in these countries often is attributed to resolute and visionary political leadership and a vibrant private sector; in our survey, civil servants themselves corroborate the lack of public manager leadership.

HRM and Other Correlates

Table 3 shows the prevalence of a range of HR and other conditions relevant to the above hypotheses in comparative context. Among our Asia-Pacific respondents, 41.3% agree or strongly agree that they have an excellent civil service system (mean = 5.02), 40.2% agree or strongly agree that they are able to hire well-qualified applicants (mean = 4.95), 37.5% agree or strongly agree that appraisal hold people accountable (mean = 4.74), 23.3% agree or strongly agree that their salary is competitive (mean = 4.07), and 20.3% agree or strongly agree that they link performance to rewards (mean = 4.18).

While these are surely not high incidence rates, perceptions in the United States and South America are *not higher* and often even lower. Comparably, only 22.0% of U.S. respondents, and 17.0% of South American respondents are satisfied with their civil service system (both $p < .01$), and only 15.9% and 14.6%, respectively, agree or strongly agree that they link rewards to performance. In other areas, the U.S. respondents have about equal satisfaction, such as being able to hire well-qualified applicants (42.8%), well above South America (17.7%). Only India scores higher, such as perceptions of having a competitive salary (44.4%), satisfaction with the civil service system (51.1%), and using appraisal to hold people accountable (46.2%). That U.S. respondents do not score higher is somewhat remarkable given the emphasis of these topics in the United States; the U.S. does not show greater perceived HR leadership and achievement, according to managers and employees.¹⁶

Table 3 also shows that Asia-Pacific study settings have higher perceptions of followership than other regions (mean = 4.45, vs. 3.13 for United States). Further analysis shows, that Mainland China reports statistically greater levels of followership (4.79) than other Asia-Pacific study settings: Taiwan (4.31), South Korea (4.38), and Malaysia (4.18, all $p < .01$). Among the survey items, Asia-Pacific respondents score higher on all index items, with the exception that South Americans agree or strongly agree even more than Asia-Pacific respondents that “being innovative and excellent is dangerous for one’s career:” 30.2% vs. 12.5%.¹⁷ While it might be argued that these scores are low, about half (53.3%) of all Asia Pacific respondents strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree that followership is present, as compared to only 1-in-7 (13.0%) of U.S. respondents.¹⁸ Table 3 also suggests that the United States is bit of an outlier in this sample as having exceptionally low levels of followership.

Table 3 shows performance culture is present in these Asia-Pacific settings, though it is stronger in the United States; on average, respectively, 38.1% and 55.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree with these index items ($p < .01$).¹⁹ Followership does not necessarily imply low performance culture, but rather performance with a different emphasis. Among Asia-Pacific respondents, *more* agree or strongly agree that managers set high performance expectations for employees than U.S. respondents (63.6% vs. 44.4%). However, among U.S. respondents, more agree or strongly agree that employees are empowered to make important decisions than Asia-Pacific respondents (41.1% vs. 25.4%).²⁰ Among Asia-Pacific respondents, Mainland China and Malaysia more often strongly agree or agree that employees are empowered to make important decisions (respectively, 31.0% and 33.6%), than those in South Korea and Taiwan (19.8% and 18.5%), and the difference between Malaysia and U.S. responses is *not* statistically significant.

Table 4 shows regression results pertinent for testing the framework hypotheses among Asia-Pacific study settings. For comparative purposes, Table 4 results are also shown for the United States, India, and South America. Study conclusions are shown in Table 5. As regards Asia-Pacific settings, all hypotheses are accepted, with exception of H2c (“appraisal holds people accountable”). Though multivariate support is lacking for this hypothesis, it is bivariately strongly associated with perceived public executive leadership ($r = .47$), comparable to other HRM factors whose bivariate associations with the dependent variable range from .31 to .53. This factor is significant in the models for the United States and South America. The model is a very stringent test of the impact of HRM, as it excludes indirect effects of HRM on the dependent variable through other model variables that are also affected by HRM, such as performance culture and work satisfaction. The latter also controls for the rival hypothesis of perceptions affecting study measures, as discussed earlier. Removing these two latter variables only modestly reduces model fit (from .50 to .41), and shows all hypotheses accepted (all $p < .01$). The reported models are examined for integrity, including multicollinearity (all VIF < 2.5), but no evidence of model violation is found.

Finally, what difference does perceived public executive leadership make in Asia-Pacific study settings? The multicountry survey includes additional items of perceived innovation and performance. The index measure of perceived public

Table 4. Perceived Public Executive Leadership (Regression Models).

Dependent variable: Perceived public executive leadership				
	Asia-Pacific ^a (t-statistic)	USA (t-statistic)	India (t-statistic)	South America (t-statistic)
Constant	.284* (1.86)	.896** (3.96)	-.382 (-0.54)	.496 (0.76)
Hiring well-qualified applicants (H2a)	.055** (2.86)	.071** (3.96)	.019 (0.38)	.016 (0.35)
Linking rewards to performance (H2b)	.070** (4.21)	.117** (7.35)	.080 (1.81)	.126** (2.76)
Appraisal that holds people accountable (H2c)	.019 (1.08)	.073** (4.25)	-.025 (-0.34)	.108* (2.15)
My salary is competitive (H2d)	.042** (3.19)	.016 (1.11)	.059 (1.09)	-.046 (-1.25)
"We have an excellent civil service system" (H2e)	.132** (6.48)	.052* (3.00)	.027 (0.40)	.196** (3.76)
Followership (H3)	-.051* (-2.51)	-.108** (-4.23)	-.194* (-2.26)	-.035 (-0.52)
Performance culture (H4)	.385** (9.76)	.468** (11.11)	.774** (6.10)	.213** (3.87)
Workplace satisfaction	.256** (8.67)	.197** (6.29)	.031 (0.26)	.381** (3.44)
Manager ^b	.024 (0.51)	.014 (0.25)	.197 (1.08)	.074 (0.43)
Gender ^b	.076 (1.86)	.129** (2.71)	.429 (1.76)	.174 (1.15)
Age	.041 (1.61)	.026 (1.03)	-.139 (1.20)	.098 (1.21)
N =	1,451	1,478	118	188
Adjusted R-squared	.503	.516	.543	.524

^aIncludes South Korea, Taiwan, Mainland China (Beijing, Shanghai), and Malaysia.

^bGender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Manager: 1 = manager/supervisor; 2 = employee.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

executive leadership is strongly associated with the survey item "we frequently develop innovative programs" ($r = .52$), "workplace productivity is high" ($r = .53$), "we compare our performance against similar departments" ($r = .37$) and "we used advanced IT applications" ($r = .40$). While objective data are preferred, these associations do point to the relevance and effectiveness of perceived public executive leadership.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines perceptions of public executive leadership in South Korea, Mainland China, Taiwan, and Malaysia. First, it finds that about 40% of respondents perceive high levels of senior public manager leadership, hence making it a rather common occurrence, and only slightly higher than in the United States (35%). Second, this study finds that public executive leadership is associated with HRM factors such as being able to hire well-qualified candidates, using appraisal to hold people accountable, providing competitive salaries and linking rewards to performance. Comparatively, 41% of Asia-Pacific respondents are satisfied with their civil service system, compared to only 22% of U.S. respondents, and HRM is relevant to public executive leadership in both settings.

Whereas many contemporary studies often make narrow contributions to theory, comparative studies often identify areas in need of further emphasis in existing

Table 5. Summary of Study Findings.

Hypotheses	Result
H1: Perceived public executive leadership is greater in Mainland China than the United States	Mixed
H2a: Being able to hire well-qualified candidates increases perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	Yes
H2b: Linking rewards to performance increases perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	Yes
H2c: Appraisal that holds people accountable for their performance increases perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	No
H2d: Providing competitive salaries increases perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	Yes
H2e: Positive perceptions of one’s civil service system increases perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	Yes
H3a: Cultures of followership decrease perceived public executive leadership in East Asia	Yes
H3b: Cultures of followership are more prevalent in East Asia	Yes
H4a: Workplace cultures of performance increase perceived public executive leadership in Asia-Pacific	Yes
H4b: Workplace cultures of performance are weaker in Asia-Pacific	Yes
Other key study findings	
Perceived public executive leadership is highest in Malaysia and very low in South America	
About 40% of respondents in Asia-Pacific and the United States report strong perceived public executive leadership	
Asia-Pacific respondents are more satisfied with their civil service system than those in the United States	
Perceived HRM factors are no less prevalent in the Asia-Pacific than in the United States	
Performance culture has different emphases in Asia-Pacific than the United States	
HRM factors are relevant to Asia-Pacific and U.S. perceived public executive leadership	

Note. All study conclusions limited to study sample.

studies. First, the literature commonly shows senior managers affecting HRM and the organizational climate, reflecting a typical focus from business studies that regard HRM as an implementation tool for leaders’ strategic efforts. However, this study shows that HRM and workforce conditions also affect senior managers’ actions, affecting their calculus of the scope of change. This seems appropriate in the public sector where HRM policies are not readily changed and in which leaders come up through the ranks of agencies (hence, being often accepting of these policies). Regarding HRM as an “independent variable” affecting leaders’ initiative-taking is surely underemphasized in much of the current literature, and a study contribution.

Second, while our study does not include political factors, our findings include substantial circumstantial and indirect evidence that “regime” factors likely affect public executive leadership which, in turn, has HRM implications. Concisely, our

“regime” argument is that stable, one-party systems of government, whether de jure (Mainland China) or de facto (Malaysia, Singapore), typically establish manifold, deep, and systematic relations with agencies and provide for stable party leadership of agencies and strong bureaucratic performance that is sought in Asia-Pacific. By contrast, party turnover disrupts leadership relations with agencies, and political deadlock further robs agencies of political leadership at the top, hence reducing executive leadership. Having manifold political appointees, such as in the U.S. federal government, sometimes does little to address the problem of weak and “thin” political leadership (Berman et al., 2013; Lewis 2008).²¹

Consistent with this, we find, first, that public executive leadership is higher in the de jure or de facto one party systems of Mainland China and Malaysia (combined, 45%), than in the United States (35%), as well as Taiwan and South Korea, all of which are strongly democratic (combined, 33%). Public executive leadership is higher in China than the United States with regard to providing exemplary leadership and finding more effective ways of working, which is consistent with implementing many programs and policies; however, public executive leadership is not higher with regard to taking initiative for developing new programs or policies, which is a key province of political officials.

Followership is also found to be higher in Asia-Pacific study settings, and highest in Mainland China. Followership is consistent with the bureaucracy being willing to implement new initiatives from the top; this involves considerable managerial leadership in overcoming obstacles that is consistent with this study’s finding of senior managers showing exemplary leadership and finding more effective ways of working. The lack of sustained and “deep” political leadership in the United States also suggests a need for greater emphasis on empowering managers and employees to make more decisions. Consistent with this, this study also finds that perceptions of managers frequently developing innovative programs are higher in the United States than among Asia-Pacific respondents (44% agree or strongly agree, vs. 33%).

Finding that executive leadership is modest at best, and even lower in democracies, should surely spur efforts to increase it in the latter. HRM has a role to play in this, promoting policies and programs that better unleash creative energies of public executives. Executive training is relevant for capacity building, but insufficient in light of limited political leadership. Some transforming possibilities include using independent or civil service commissions to push for greater initiative-taking by requiring executives and political appointees to meet and agree on mutual leadership objectives (in a word, ensuring leadership by senior public managers), increasing the weight of demonstrated leadership and innovation in promotion criteria at lower ranks, and providing public reporting and accountability on agency-led initiatives. In this regard, a recent New Zealand (2011, p. 52) report states that “Better state services will require more effective leadership, with leaders driving improvement by taking on roles across the system as well as within their individual agencies.” That is a lot more power that traditionally has only been at the very top of agencies, and all of the above measures have HRM implications for public managers.

The point of exploratory and comparative studies is to open new lines of investigation. We had no way of knowing in advance that the measure of perceived executive

leadership would be in aggregate so similar between the Asia-Pacific and United States and have significant variation within Asia-Pacific along the lines of stable, one-party systems versus systems with party turnover. This study leaves much work to be done. Some readers may skeptically ask for more evidence about the impact of HRM on public executive leadership, and such studies should surely be undertaken. Studies may also wish to consider other differences between East and West than studied here. We should also hear assessments from public executives and political appointees themselves. From political scientists who study politics–bureaucracy relations, we need to know more of what increases agency performance. Specifically, more study is needed on the impact of political turnover and gridlock on bureaucratic leadership; democracy comes at a price, and democratic societies do well to find ways to improve and fine-tune its performance. What is the impact of party-turnover on agency performance and the role of public executives? How can performance systems be more resilient to democratic politics, while still ensuring adequate responsiveness and accountability by executives? While we do not know whether innovations that strengthen public executive leadership will come from Asia-Pacific, this is surely a place where public executive leadership is as strong and dynamic as any other place.

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Notes

1. We use the word “authoritative” rather than “authoritarian” to comply with such use in the People's Republic of China (PRC).
2. As an example of encouraging innovation throughout every part of the organization, the City of Seoul expects all of its managers and employees to submit ideas of improvement, on which they are evaluated. Over 5 years, 230,000 ideas were solicited, of which about 8,000 were adopted. Performance appraisal has been retooled to give weight to creativity and improvement (Berman & Kim, 2010).
3. This is surely not to lay blame on civil servants. The woes of political deadlock in Washington are well-known, as are fiscal constraints that hold many States back. But for whatever reason, leadership is not occurring.
4. We compare China and other countries on the basis of regime type. The survey does not include additional measures of “authoritativeness,” which we recommend for future studies. However, one does need such measures to state that China is a nondemocratic regime with an authoritative government, of course.

5. Whereas the literature commonly shows senior managers affecting the organizational climate (a typical focus in business studies), we examine how senior managers' leadership is affected by HRM practices and organizational culture (e.g., Dension, 2000; Lindorff, 2009; Shivers-Blackwell, 2006).
6. Culture is defined as "distinctive patterns of thinking" (Hofstede, 2001), often associated with specific behaviors, judgments, and artefacts.
7. This is a different point than political control over the bureaucracy though the two are related. See Park and Joo (2010), who describe how NPM was used by political appointees in South Korea to gain control over bureaucracies.
8. A recent book makes much the same point, McGregor (2010).
9. An additional argument for considering organizational factors in the public sector affecting senior manager leadership is that many public executives come up through their agencies and may be unfamiliar with other approaches in business and even in other agencies; HRM that alters orientations can be hypothesized to have a significant impact on senior manager leadership.
10. Well-known exceptions include Singapore and New Zealand and, to lesser extent, Australia and Malaysia in recent years.
11. Some country surveys included additional items, reflecting local interests. In Taiwan, local interest was to replicate the survey among middle managers (Taiwan Grades 11 and 12) with an additional 26 items which allow for additional triangulation.
12. All data have imperfections. Survey data are respondents' perceptions of events and circumstances, as comparable and objective data are absent on these matters. To minimize bias, we worded questions in an objective and factual manner, and we asked respondents about their own perceptions rather than that of others. Respondents are well-informed informants, often with direct experience and knowledge of senior manager actions. This approach avoids problems of self-reporting bias by senior managers themselves. Of course, other stakeholders may have other views.
13. The respective percentages for Mainland China and Taiwan are 51.1% and 46.0%.
14. $t = -2.43, p = .15$
15. Across all items, 40.1% of respondents state DK/DS on at least one item, though only 10.2% of respondents state DK/CS on three or more items.
16. In fact, Mainland Chinese and U.S. respondents score about equal, with exception of providing competitive salaries, with which U.S. respondents are more satisfied.
17. Only 6.6% of U.S. respondents agree or strongly agree with this item, and 14.0% of Indian agree or strongly agree.
18. Following Berman and West (2003), we classify these as mean scores of 4.5 or higher.
19. Based on analysis that uses 5.50 as cutoff mark. Also, 40.2% of Indian and only 3.4% of South American respondents agree or strongly agree
20. These differences are also reflected in perceptions of openness and constructive dialogue: 61.6% (United States) and 48.2% (Asia-Pacific), and people being guided by a sense of right and wrong: 85.7% and 67.8%. Other index items show little difference.
21. Stated differently, party turnover, often taken as a test of democracy, reduces bureaucratic leadership. Indeed, management theory 101 suggests as much; top management turnover and paralysis, however defined, will decrease performance.

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