



Understanding the leadership perceptions of staff in China's hotel industry: Integrating the macro- and micro-aspects of leadership contexts

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to understand the leadership perceptions of staff in China's hotel industry. This study integrates the macro- and micro-aspects of leadership contexts by identifying the contextual variables that affect leadership perceptions. In leadership research, industry setting, the hierarchical levels of an organization, and national culture are recognized as the contextual constraints that affect leadership perceptions, and these constraints were used in this empirical study. Four factors emerged from the factor analysis of a survey study: *professionalism*; *integrity*; *masculinity or yang*; and *femininity or yin*. A key finding indicates that both the industry setting and the hierarchical levels of an organization affect professionalism. Implications for the training and development of future international hospitality leaders and local staff are considered.

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1. Introduction

The value of studies of both the China and the hospitality industry contexts has recently been recognized by researchers. Due to the growing importance of China's tourism and hospitality industry, these contexts have become the focus of research activities (Wang, 2008). However, the key issue of leadership requires more attention. Leading and managing staff from different cultural backgrounds is an international imperative (Testa, 2007), but it is also important in the China context. Leadership skills are crucial for the hospitality industry in light of its future competition, dynamic environment, service orientation, and labor-intensive nature (Gillet and Morda, 2003; Pine and Wong, 1998). The globalization and internationalization of the hotel industry that has led to the study of expatriate and local hotel staff represents an important area for research (Go and Pine, 1995; Kaye and Taylor, 1997; Littrell, 2002). China's tourism industry has opened up since 1978, and China will probably become the world's foremost tourist destination by 2014 (World Tourism Organization, 2007), but expatriate hotel managers will still be needed in China for their expertise and abilities in the field of technology transfer. As

most expatriate assignments involve a managerial or leadership role in a host country, "cultural similarities and differences in the area of leadership are of particular concern" (Gerstner and Day, 1994, p. 121). Testa (2007) observed that the "cultural fit" between leaders and subordinates from diverse backgrounds is also important. Recently, Brownell (2008) pointed out that several decades of previous research had not been able to identify a single set of core attributes for leadership that fitted all contexts. She commented: "Clearly, additional studies are needed that synthesize and interpret current research and that continue to assess the impact of context on leadership requirements" (Brownell, 2008, p. 147). The current paper aims to contribute to the debate by providing additional information on this aspect.

1.1. The importance of context

There is a growing interest in research into the impacts of contexts on leadership. Two groups of leadership scholars have shown interest in the study of the relationship between context and leadership; one group uses a qualitative approach (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Bryman, 2004; Bryman et al., 1996), while the other uses a leadership perception approach (Antonakis et al., 2003; Lord et al., 2001). Context can be viewed both from a macro and a micro perspective. From a macro perspective, context is important because it emphasizes an understanding of the whole society and the meaning society has for participants. At this macro level, context can also refer to the

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study of the setting, nature, sphere, or different sectors of an industry, such as construction or hospitality. From a micro perspective, the study of context is the study of the behavior of an organization's members. This approach is concerned with the meaning that people ascribe both to their own behavior and the behavior of others in the context of values, practices, and underlying structures (Bryman, 1988). The unit of analysis can be a school, a hospital, or a hotel. Scholars of the leadership prototype approach have identified a range of contextual factors that may have impacts on leadership perceptions (Lord et al., 2001). Various researchers have explored these factors, which include cultural differences (Brodbeck et al., 2000), the characteristics of leaders, followers, and tasks (Lord et al., 2001), and hierarchical leadership levels (Zaccaro, 2001).

The objective of this study is to integrate the macro- and micro-aspects of leadership by identifying the contextual variables that affect leadership perceptions in both the China and the hotel industry contexts. The following part of the paper will provide a review of the literature on these aspects.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The macro perspective: societal level

2.1.1. The contexts of China and the hotel industry

According to Hollows and Lewis (1995), the China context is different from other business environments for two reasons: the special nature of Chinese culture and the fact that China is in transition from a command to a market economy. One of the key features of the China context that Hollows and Lewis described was its "hierarchical structure," a structure that has characterized Chinese social structure and culture for thousands of years and still has a strong impact on the functioning of organizations. The Confucian ethic of seeing authority as based "more on morality than expertise" probably affects the values of Chinese employees. Another Chinese characteristic is the strength of personal relations or *guanxi* (see Davies, 1995, for a discussion of this Chinese concept). China is also in the process of rapid change from a centralized and distributive command economy to a market economy. This has had a great impact on the role of government in the economy and is clearly of major relevance to state-owned enterprises. New organizational structures, such as joint ventures (usually state and foreign ownership or state ownership with foreign management), have emerged to attract foreign investment and to acquire technical expertise from foreign enterprises. The hotel industry was one of the first industries to begin working within this new structure. Many problems were encountered as a result of this contextual constraint.

Since the hotel industry in China has been opened up to international hotel chains, hotels have had to become more competitive, particularly those hotels in the state-owned and privately owned categories. Hotel ownership in China is very complicated. Prior to 1978, there was no international hotel presence in China. In 1982, the first joint venture hotel was built in Beijing. By 1989, there were seven categories of hotel ownership, as defined by the China National Tourism Administration: state-owned, joint ownership, foreign investment, joint venture, contractual agreement, collectively owned, and privately owned (Yu, 1992). The issue of which form of hotel ownership is the most desirable is still an important issue in China today. Pine (2002, p. 63) commented: "After 20 years of development, China's hotel industry is characterised by a complicated scenario of fierce competition, multiform ownership and management systems, and geographically imbalanced distribution."

2.2. The micro perspective: organizational level

Littrell (2002, p. 26) described the complex work environment of two chain-managed international hotels in a medium-sized city in the interior of mainland China as follows:

In this case, the owners, a provincial government bureau, contracted with an international company to manage the hotels. The chairman of the operation was a PRC-national employee of the owner. The general manager and the financial controller (expatriates) were employees of the chain. In this management contract, the general manager hired the expatriate managers, with final approval by the chairman. The local management team generally hired the local managers, along with the usual CCP and *guanxi* appointments common in China.

In short, the more complex the ownership structure, the more difficult it is for managers (leaders) to exercise their power, authority, and influence over their subordinates (followers) and therefore conflicts arise (Yu and Goh, 1995; Mwaura et al., 1998).

2.2.1. Leadership perception – leadership categorization

Cognitive categorization is defined as "the cognitive process of identifying a particular stimulus as a member of a certain class of stimuli" (Rush and Russell, 1988). Categorization is also considered a process for matching the similarity of a stimulus to a "prototype"; a prototype is a particular type of person schema representing typical traits (Pennington, 2000). Scholars of the categorization-prototype leadership approach have identified a range of contextual factors that may have impacts on leadership perceptions (Lord et al., 2001); examples of these factors include (1) national culture; (2) organizational constraints; (3) leader, follower, and task characteristics; and (4) hierarchical leader levels. How leadership prototypes have evolved in the particular context of the hotel industry in China and the possible impacts that national culture, industry characteristics and culture, and hierarchical levels in an organization have on leadership perceptions are of major interest to this study.

2.2.2. National culture and leadership prototype

Research has indicated that the leadership prototype varies with national cultures in various dimensions and clusters (House et al., 1999). Gerstner and Day (1994) produced one of the earliest and most widely cited studies focusing on cross-cultural comparisons of leadership prototypes. They found significant differences in leadership perceptions, along a set of cultural dimensions initiated by Hofstede (1980), among participants from various countries. In particular, the leadership perceptions had rank order correlations in the *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance*, and *individualism* dimensions.

In the field of the hospitality industry, Testa (2002, 2007) has contributed studies on leadership and cultural congruency in the cruise industry setting. He found that national culture systematically affected how subordinates evaluated and felt about their leaders. He further found that leadership in a multicultural environment was a complex issue and had a significant impact on employees' relationships with their leaders.

2.2.3. Industry settings and characteristics and leadership

Various leadership studies have indicated that context affects leadership in the construction industry, the police, and the educational arena. For example, Bryman et al. (1988) reported that features specific to the particular context of construction projects (such as a project's timeline and the presence of subcontractors) had a profound effect on leadership behavior. They also recognized that a site manager needed to be flexible,

continually adjusting his/her leadership style to suit different people and circumstances.

The hospitality/hotel industry has many unique features. The industry operates in settings where there are frequent interactions between people and it focuses on providing high-quality services to customers. It has its own culture, set of values and practices, and industry characteristics (Guerrier, 1999; Pizam, 1993). These constitute the different contextual and situational variables that may influence perceptions of leadership. Brownell (2008) indicated in a recent review that the leadership skills and attributes needed in service environments are different from those in other types of work environment; for example, effective communication skills and interpersonal competences are especially important in the hospitality environment.

In contrast, the telecommunications industry is capital intensive and more knowledge based. A leader in this industry needs to create an environment that will enhance employee innovation and creativity. Jung et al. (2003) studied 32 Taiwanese companies in the electronics and telecommunications industry, and their findings support a direct and positive link with a style of leadership that relates to “transformation” and organizational innovation. Their results also indicate that “transformational leadership” has a significant and positive relationship with both empowerment and an innovative and supportive organizational climate.

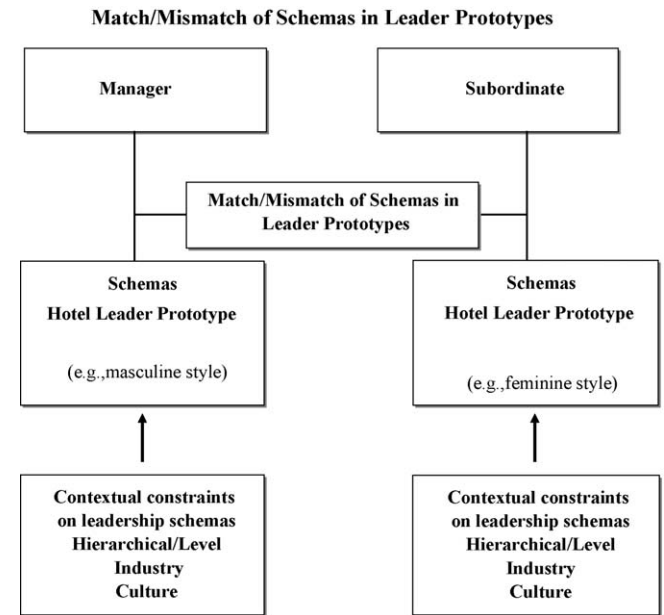
2.2.4. Leadership in different hierarchical levels of an organization

Leadership scholars argue that high- and low-level leaders demonstrate the qualitative aspects of their behavior differently (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Hunt, 1991; Lord et al., 2001). Hunt (1991), for example, suggested that, while higher level leadership focuses on mapping out the strategy or vision for an organization, the lower levels could be characterized as more task or technically focused. Epitropaki and Martin (2004) found that there was a statistically significant difference between managerial-supervisory and non-managerial employees in the dimension of *dynamism*. He added that people already in a managerial role consider traits such as strength, energy, and dynamism to be more important for a business leader than do employees in non-managerial roles.

In addition, scholars and practitioners in the hospitality industry have recognized a particular feature of the traditional hierarchical structure in many hospitality organizations, namely that the distance between expatriate and local employees is great (Sutton, 1996). Also, leadership research typically approaches an organization from the top rather than the bottom (Greger and Peterson, 2000).

2.3. Conceptual model and research questions

Using the above review of the categorization-by-prototype and implicit leadership theories, and the contextual constraints on leadership perceptions, a model is now proposed (Fig. 1). In essence, the model attempts to demonstrate how various contextual factors may have impacts on the leadership schema. The diagram describes possible situations in China’s international hotels. There are expatriates working in these hotels, usually in managerial positions. Consider, for example, an expatriate hotel manager from Germany working with several subordinates in a hotel in China. Due to differences in cultural backgrounds and positions, the *content* of the expatriate manager’s leader prototype (e.g., a masculine type with a decisive image) may be different from his Chinese female subordinate’s ideal-leader prototype (e.g., a feminine type with a sympathetic image). If the German male manager is not aware of these differences and only displays what he perceives as appropriate behavior, the subordinate may not perceive him as a leader, resulting in difficulties for the manager in



Source: modified from Shaw (1990).

Fig. 1. Match/mismatch of schemas in leader prototypes. Modified from Shaw (1990).

terms of acquiring power, receiving respect, and exercising power and influence. Ultimately, this may affect his ability to attain effective management in the hotel.

Different industry characteristics may have different impacts on different prototypes of leadership. While the hotel industry may have some “service-related” leadership attributes, the telecommunication industry may have rather more “transformational-related” leadership attributes, particularly at a higher level. There may be a situation in which the hotel manager and hotel subordinate or the telecommunications manager and the telecommunications subordinate are congruent or incongruent in terms of their perceptions of leadership (i.e., there is a match or mismatch of their leadership prototypes).

Research questions

Based on this literature review and the proposed conceptual model, the aim of this paper is to consider the following research questions:

1. What are the leadership perceptions of staff in the context of the hotel industry in China?
2. What are the leadership perceptions among various staff groups in the hotel industry (managers and subordinates, expatriates and locals) and how do they differ from those in other industries (for comparison, the telecommunications industry)?
3. What are the implications of these perceptions for leadership training and development in the hotel industry?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

An integrative approach of qualitative and quantitative methodologies has been used in the different stages of a project studying the leadership perceptions of staff in the context of the hotel industry in China. According to Bryman (1988), social scientists are likely to exhibit greater confidence in their findings when these are derived from more than one method of investigation. This project used 19 interviews from the early stage

to explore themes relating to the impacts of various contextual elements on perceptions of leadership. Five sub-themes were identified under two major themes: (1) leadership and professionalism in the contexts of the hotel industry and China and (2) leadership and challenges for managers/expatriates in the context of joint venture/international hotels in China. The results were later used for the instrument development of the survey study and the interpretations; for example, three items (“Professional knowledge,” “Strong cultural sensitivity,” and “Knowledge of industry”) were developed in the survey instrument. The major findings of the survey have been reported in a conference paper (Wong and Chan, 2006). This paper will mainly report the details of the quantitative study.

the leadership prototypes of ideal leaders working in the hotel industry. The measure was operationalized with a 25-item scale comprising the following items: decisive, trustworthy, responsible, forceful, fair, determined, aggressive, likeable, kind, generous, sympathetic, wants peace, professional knowledge, customer-oriented, strong cultural sensitivity, knowledge of the industry, honest, humanitarian, strong convictions, disciplined, caring, benevolent, educated, concerned, and goal-oriented. These items were measured on a five-point scale: 1 = does not fit my ideal at all; 2 = does not really fit my ideal; 3 = neutral; 4 = fits my ideal; and 5 = fits my ideal very well. The following sample items are from the questionnaire for local and expatriate hotel managers:

Instructions: As a supervisor/manager in your hotel, what attributes do you think an ideal leader should have?

Please tick boxes with the score (1 to 5) for each of the following attributes to indicate HOW WELL IT FITS your perception of an ideal leader.

16	Kind	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
17	Knows your industry	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
18	Likable	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
19	Professional knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
20	Responsible	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
21	Strong convictions	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
22	Strong cultural sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

3.2. Data collection and instrument development

The main survey instrument was a questionnaire based on the results of both a literature review and the in-depth interviews from the qualitative study (Wong and Chan, 2006). The process and procedures for developing the scales to measure the leadership prototypes were based on the scale development procedures recommended by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis, 1991. These procedures and our actions can be summarized as follows:

- (1) *Specify the domain of the construct:* In this part, all the domains were based on the leadership prototype literature (Gerstner and Day, 1994; Offermann et al., 1994; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; House et al., 1999; Ling et al., 2000) and the main themes that emerged from the qualitative study.
- (2) *Generate and translate the items:* All of the items were generated from a list of 57 items in Gerstner and Day’s (1994) study and the interview studies. As all of items were finalized, they were translated using a process of back translation in order to ensure the accuracy of the meanings in the instrument.
- (3) *Consult experts for opinions on the items:* This was a further step to test the content validity of the construct. Academics with extensive experience were consulted in this process.
- (4) *Conduct a pilot study:* This was the final step; the objectives were to achieve a further refinement of the instrument before it was sent out for the survey and, specifically, to clarify the phraseology and further reduce the number of items. Subsequently, a list of 25 items was selected to represent

3.2.1. Sampling

The target population of this study was hotel staff working in international hotels where the staff consisted of both expatriates and locals. The sample for the survey came from Beijing. Beijing was selected because it is the capital of China and has expatriates working in international hotels. There are 14 five-star hotels and 12 four-star hotels in the city. With the help of the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and the Hotel Association in Beijing, 12 potential hotels with expatriates working as employees were identified. The researcher approached all of these hotels. Ultimately, six hotels agreed to take part in the survey. The 6 hotels (4 five-star and 2 four-star) were managed by different multinational hotel companies or hotel chains from different countries (America, France, Germany, Switzerland, and China).

3.2.2. Data collection from the hotel industry

The topic of the relationship between leadership and cross-cultural issues is a sensitive one, particularly in the Chinese context. The researcher contacted the senior management of each sample hotel and promised to provide a free training seminar to their staff as a means of building rapport, *guanxi*, and trust between the management and other members of staff. We asked the Human Resource Management or Training Department in each hotel to select both front and back of house staff to attend the training seminar, and employees from different departments and levels were asked to attend. Several procedures were adopted to minimize the potential demand effects for participants in answering the questionnaire (Reynolds, 2006). First, before a training seminar began, respondents answered the questionnaire

and then returned it immediately to the researcher. They were also told the survey results were for academic research purposes only and would be kept confidential. The response rates ranged from 85.7% to 100%. We distributed questionnaires to all heads of department and senior management staff through the human resource department (HRD). After answering the questionnaires, respondents returned them to the HRD in a self-sealing envelope provided by the researcher. The envelopes were then collected from the hotel. With this method of collection, the response rate varied from 48% to 70%. The response rate of the expatriates was conspicuously lower.

3.2.3. Data collection from the telecommunications industry

The telecommunications industry was selected as a reference sector due to both the capital-intensive nature of its operations and its knowledge base. It was consequently felt that different leadership styles might be required in this industry. Moreover, given the time and resource limitations of the study, this industry offered the advantage that a sample was available at the same location (Beijing) and at the time as the main hotel industry survey. A “snowball” sample technique was applied (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 105). Fifty students on an MBA course for the telecommunications industry in China were selected. These students were actual telecommunications managers working in the industry. With the consent and help of the course coordinator, the researcher contacted the MBA course official in Beijing, and this official helped to distribute the questionnaires to the participants. Each participant was given five questionnaires, one for himself/herself as a manager and four to take back for his/her subordinates to complete. The questionnaires were then mailed to the researcher. The response rates for managers and subordinates were 74% and 50%, respectively.

3.3. Data analysis

Data collected from the survey were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for analysis. The objectives of the analysis were:

- (1) To find out the extent to which the dimension of *professionalism* was unique in the context of the hotel industry, as compared to other industries.
- (2) To determine whether there were “level differences” in leadership perceptions between subordinates and managers within a larger sample.
- (3) To find out whether there were “cultural differences” in leadership perceptions between local and expatriate employees within groups comprised of locals and other nationalities.

Frequency analysis was performed to provide profiles of the groups. The prototypicality traits of different groups were analyzed using means and standard deviations. Factor analysis was performed in this study to identify the underlying dimensions of the leadership construct. Exploratory factor analysis was applied. Principal component analysis was also used because this method reduced the data to fewer dimensions. Varimax rotation was used in the study to improve the interpretability of the factor structure. Also, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity were carried out to test the minimum standard that should be reached before a factor analysis should be conducted. The factor means of the different underlying dimensions were composed, and then *t*-tests were carried out on those factor means to compare the similarities and differences of different groups along the various dimensions.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic

4.1.1. Brief profiles of hotel staff

Table 1 summarizes the overall profiles of the hotel staff who participated in this study. In this sample, there were only 8.0% more male respondents than female respondents. In terms of age distribution, the majority were within the age ranges of 25–34 and 35–44 years, accounting for 35.6% and 28.9% of the total number of participants, respectively. One respondent was over 65 years old, and the youngest age group (24 years of age or less) accounted for 21.1% of the total. Most of the participants from the hotel industry (60.5%) were married. Approximately two-thirds of the participants had a post-secondary education and almost 6% had a postgraduate education. More than half of the hotel employees in this survey had worked in the industry for less than 4 years. The largest categories in terms of length of work experience were the ranges of 5–9 and 10–14 years (18.6% and 12.7%, respectively). Most of the expatriates were from Asian countries: Asian expatriates accounted for 78.6% of the total, with the largest group coming from Hong Kong (28.6%); the next two largest groups were from Malaysia and Singapore (17.9% and 14.3%, respectively). Western expatriates accounted for only 21.4% of the number in the expatriates group and were mainly from Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

4.1.2. Brief profiles of telecommunications staff

The overall brief profiles of the telecommunications staff are summarized in Table 2. In this group, there were 11.0% more male respondents than female respondents. The majority of the respondents were within the age ranges of 25–34 and 35–44 years (50.7% and 32.6% of the sample, respectively). There was one respondent over 65 years old, and the youngest age group (24 years old or less) accounted for 5.1% of the sample. Most (75.0%) of the telecommunications participants were married. This group of respondents was well educated: 82.0% had a post-secondary education and 17.8% had a postgraduate education. In terms of work experience, 23.7% had less than 4 years work experience; the largest categories in terms of work experience were the ranges of 5–9 and 10–14 years (32.6% and 23.7%, respectively).

4.2. Underlying dimensions of leadership perceptions

It should be noted that, in the original instrument, the measure was operationalized with a 25-item scale. The hotel subordinate sample was explored with factor analysis. Taken collectively, the four factors explained 61.8% of the variance, which is considered acceptable in social sciences research. The reliability test of the measure revealed that the Cronbach’s alpha value was 0.93; this indicated that the 25 items measured the same concept consistently. However, the 25-item factor solution included a number of cross-loaded items, indicating that a particular item could be represented and explained by more than one domain or construct. A trimming process was therefore carried out. Ultimately, 16 items produced four factors that explained 68.3% of the total variance. The factor structure and loadings are illustrated in Table 3.

The factor solution proved to be the same as that from the 25 items. The first factor was *professionalism*, which explained 18.3% of the variance. *Professionalism* represented the following items: professional knowledge, strong cultural sensitivity, customer-oriented, and knowledge of industry. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.86. The second factor, *integrity*, explained 17.5% of the variance and included the items caring, concerned, fair, and trustworthy. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.82. The third factor, *masculinity* or

Table 1
Brief profiles of hotel staff.

	Subordinates		Local managers		Expatriates		All staff	
	N=219	Percent	N=54	Valid percent	N=28	Valid percent	N=301	Valid percent
Gender								
Male	109	49.8	36	66.7	16	57.1	161	53.8
Female	108	49.3	18	33.3	12	42.9	138	46.2
Age								
65 or above	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	1	0.3
55–64	3	1.4	5	9.4	0	0	8	2.7
45–54	13	5.9	13	24.5	8	28.6	34	11.4
35–44	53	24.2	24	45.3	9	32.1	86	28.9
25–34	86	39.3	10	18.9	10	35.7	106	35.6
24 or less	61	27.9	1	1.9	1	3.6	63	21.1
Marital status								
Married	119	54.3	48	94.1	12	42.9	179	60.5
Single	98	45.2	3	5.9	16	57.1	117	39.5
Educational level								
Postgraduate	10	4.6	2	3.8	4	14.3	16	5.7
Tertiary/university	127	58.0	38	71.7	15	53.6	180	63.6
Secondary school	64	29.2	13	24.5	8	28.6	85	30.0
Primary school	1	0.5	0	0	1	3.6	2	0.7
Years of experience in the industry								
30 or above	0	0	1	1.9	2	7.1	3	1.0
25–29	0	0	0	0	2	7.1	2	0.7
20–24	2	0.9	15	27.8	3	10.7	20	6.2
15–19	5	2.3	15	27.8	5	17.9	25	8.7
10–14	24	11.0	9	16.7	4	14.3	37	12.7
5–9	39	17.8	9	16.7	6	21.4	54	18.6
4 or less	142	64.8	2	3.7	6	21.4	150	52.1

yang, explained 16.9% of the variance and represented items such as determined, aggressive, decisive, and forceful. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. The last factor was *femininity or yin*; this explained 15.6% of the variance and included the items benevolent, wants peace, sympathetic, and generous. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.76. The factor scores of the subordinates were computed by adding the

Table 2
Brief profiles of telecoms staff.

	Subordinates		Managers		All staff	
	N=100	Percent	N=37	Percent	N=137	Percent
Gender						
Male	63	62.4	13	35.1	76	55.5
Female	37	36.6	24	64.9	61	44.5
Age						
65 or above	1	1.0	0	0	1	0.7
55–64	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
45–54	3	3.0	12	32.4	15	10.9
35–44	29	28.7	16	43.2	45	32.6
25–34	61	60.4	9	24.3	70	50.7
24 or less	7	6.9	0	0	7	5.1
Marital status						
Married	70	69.3	34	91.9	104	75.9
Single	30	29.7	3	8.1	33	24.1
Educational level						
Postgraduate	17	16.8	7	18.9	24	17.8
Post-secondary	81	80.2	30	81.1	111	82.2
Secondary	0	0	0	0	0	0
Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
Years of experience in the industry						
30 or above	1	1	2	5.6	3	2.2
25–29	1	1	2	5.6	3	2.2
20–24	2	2	7	19.4	9	6.7
15–19	9	9.1	3	8.3	12	8.9
10–14	20	20.2	12	33.3	32	23.7
5–9	36	36.4	8	22.2	44	32.6
4 or less	30	30.3	2	5.6	32	23.7

scores with a salient loading (≥ 0.4) for each factor and dividing this by the number of items in the factor. The same factor structure was used as the basis for computing the scores for other groups.

Table 4 gives the summary of the factor means of the five different sub-groups in this study: hotel subordinates, local hotel managers, expatriate hotel managers, telecommunications subordinates, and local telecommunications managers. While the highest factor mean for all the hotel groups was in the dimension of *professionalism*, all of those in the two telecommunications groups fell within the dimension of *masculinity or yang*. All five groups with the lowest mean scores fell within the same dimension of *femininity or yin*.

4.3. Comparisons of different contextual variables

In total, six *t*-tests were carried out to make comparisons between the factor means of the different groups. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was not employed because of the relatively small sample size. The different *t*-tests were used to find out whether there were level differences, national cultural differences, or industry differences between the different groups from the hotel and telecommunications industries. It must be noted that, in the group comparison, separate factor analyses were not performed for local managers, expatriates, or telecommunications employees due to insufficient sample sizes. Their factor scores were computed based on the factor structure of the hotel subordinates after the Cronbach's alpha coefficients confirmed that their inter-item reliability was acceptable. Six *t*-tests were carried out:

Test 1: Difference between hotel subordinates and hotel managers.

Test 2: Difference between hotel subordinates and hotel expatriate managers.

Test 3: Difference between local managers and expatriate managers in the hotel industry.

Table 3

Summary of factor means of five different sub-groups.

Hotel industry	Mean score				
	Hotel subordinates N = 219	Hotel local managers N = 54	Hotel expatriate managers N = 28	Telecoms subordinates N = 100	Telecoms local managers N = 37
Factor 1: Professionalism	4.34 (1)	4.47 (1)	4.51 (1)	4.11 (3)	4.27 (2)
Professional knowledge Strong cultural sensitivity Customer-oriented Knowledge of industry					
Factor 2: Integrity	4.26 (3)	4.40 (2)	4.32 (2)	4.28 (2)	4.21 (3)
Caring Concerned Fair Trustworthy					
Factor 3: Masculinity or Yang	4.28 (2)	4.38 (3)	4.12 (3)	4.49 (1)	4.59 (1)
Aggressive Decisive Forceful					
Factor 4: Femininity or Yin	3.73 (4)	3.60 (4)	3.62 (4)	3.54 (4)	3.43 (4)
Benevolent Wants peace Sympathetic Generous					

Rankings of factor mean within groups are in parentheses.

Table 4

Factor analysis using Varimax rotation for the sample of hotel subordinates based on 16 variables (N=219).

Hotel industry	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Reliability test	Eigen value	Variance extracted
Factor 1: Professionalism					0.86	2.9	18.3
Professional knowledge	0.82						
Strong cultural sensitivity	0.79						
Customer-oriented	0.77						
Knowledge of industry	0.68						
Factor 2: Integrity					0.82	2.8	17.5
Caring		0.83					
Concerned		0.79					
Fair		0.62					
Trustworthy		0.61					
Factor 3: Masculinity or Yang					0.82	2.7	16.9
Determined			0.84				
Aggressive			0.70				
Decisive			0.67				
Forceful			0.66				
Factor 4: Femininity or Yin					0.76	2.5	15.6
Benevolent				0.77			
Wants peace				0.75			
Sympathetic				0.66			
Generous				0.65			
Total variance extracted	68.3						
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.89						
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity							
Chi-square	1631						
Df	120						
Sig.	0.000						

Test 4: Difference between subordinates and managers in the telecommunications industry.

Test 5: Difference between managers in the hotel industry and managers in the telecommunications industry.

Test 6: Difference between subordinates in the hotel industry and subordinates in the telecommunications industry.

Table 5 shows how these six *t*-tests were used to determine whether there were level differences, national cultural differences,

or industry differences between the different groups from the hotel and telecommunications industries. The overall findings from this survey indicate that all three differences exist. Regarding industry differences, significant differences were found with respect to both hotel managers versus telecommunications managers (Test 5) in the dimensions of *professionalism* and *masculinity or yang* and hotel subordinates versus telecommunications subordinates (Test 6) in the dimensions of *professionalism*, *masculinity or yang*, and *femininity or yin*. With regard to hierarchical or level differences,

Table 5
Summary of *t*-test results and hierarchical, national culture, and industry differences.

	Hotel	Dimension(s) for significant differences	Telecom	Dimension(s) for significant differences
	Hotel		Telecom	
Hierarchical/level differences	Subordinates vs. managers (T1)	Professionalism	Subordinates vs. managers (T4)	None
	Subordinates vs. expatriates (T2)	None		
National culture differences	Subordinates vs. expatriates (T2)	None		
	Local managers vs. expatriates (T3)	Masculinity/Yang		
Industry differences	Hotel managers vs. Telecoms managers (T5)	Professionalism	Hotel Managers vs. Telecoms Managers (T5)	Professionalism
	Hotel subordinates vs. Telecoms subordinates (T6)	Masculinity/Yang	Hotel subordinates vs. Telecoms subordinates (T6)	Masculinity/Yang
		Professionalism		Professionalism
		Femininity/Yin		Femininity/Yin

* T1 = Test 1.

significant differences were found in the subordinates versus managers test (Test 1) in the dimension of *professionalism*. In terms of the dimension of *national cultural differences*, significant differences were found in local managers versus expatriates (Test 3) in the dimension of *masculinity or yang*.

5. Discussion

The discussion of results is sub-divided into two parts. The first part discusses the underlying dimensions of leadership perceptions (*professionalism, integrity, masculinity or yang, and femininity or yin*); the second part focuses on the leadership perceptions among the different groups and discusses results relating to differences in (1) level in an organization, (2) national culture, and (3) industry. However, the two parts are not mutually exclusive. For example, discussing the underlying dimension of *professionalism* involves comparisons between the hotel and the telecommunications industries, and this includes industry differences. Another example is that, when discussing national cultural differences, reference must be made to the underlying dimension of *masculinity or yang* to obtain explanations. Table 5 provides the matrix for these relationships.

5.1. Underlying dimensions of leadership perceptions

5.1.1. Professionalism

As shown in Table 3, Factor 1, *Professionalism*, explained 18.3% of the total variance. This factor consists of four items that capture the essential elements of professionalism within the needs of a service-oriented industry and an international setting: professional knowledge, strong cultural sensitivity, a customer-oriented attitude, and knowledge of the industry. From the results of this study, *professionalism* is clearly a crucial dimension of the leadership perceptions of staff in the context of the hotel industry in China. Of the four factors, this produced the highest factor mean from all the hotel groups (Table 4).

This study also shows that on the issue of the importance of professionalism, expatriate hotel managers did not differ from their subordinates or from local hotel managers (Test 2 and Table 5). Professional skills and a professional image are important for hotel managers, especially expatriates, in establishing their influence on subordinates. This is the case because developing countries need to acquire the technical competencies of the more skillful expatriates in order to help develop their local staff and to run operations (Pine, 2002; Yu and Goh, 1995). Also, hotel expatriates play various roles in training and operations.

In the descriptive analysis, the mean scores for the “strong cultural sensitivity” item (within the *professionalism* dimension)

were 4.16, 4.18, and 4.19, respectively, for hotel subordinates, hotel managers, and hotel expatriate managers. These very high means on a scale of 1–5 indicate that hotel staff perceive strong cultural sensitivity to be a crucial skill, particularly for those employees dealing directly with international customers and with staff from different parts of the world. The literature clearly reveals that different problems are encountered by expatriate hotel managers working with local staff (Chan, 1997; Feng and Pearson, 1999; Kaye and Taylor, 1997; Mwaura et al., 1998; Yu and Goh, 1995). The qualitative interviews from this study also found this to be the case (see Wong and Chan, 2006). The contexts of joint venture or international hotels are especially complicated, with constraints such as Chinese ownership and Western management, cultural differences causing difficulties in communication, cross-cultural understanding, and the conflict of international standards and local practices. Also, Sutton (1996, p. 189) suggested that developing cultural awareness should be a professional obligation for all hotel managers.

One survey project found that the accommodation sector was perceived to be the most professional of all the sectors in the tourism and hospitality industry (Sheldon, 1989). Sheldon's study also identified 12 criteria of professionalism for the sector: (1) long training or education of staff; (2) code of ethics; (3) organizational ability; (4) complex occupation; (5) altruistic service; (6) body of knowledge; (7) people-oriented attitude; (8) license; (9) high prestige; (10) competence test; (11) self-employment of staff; and (12) high income. In the light of the globalization and internationalization of the hotel industry, perhaps certain criteria need to be revised and others added. Obvious examples of the latter are competency in international spoken languages and cultural sensitivity.

Additionally, the majority of both the hotel and the telecommunication samples were aged under 44. There is the possibility that the younger population supports the transformation in China and that professional image (rather than political ideology) has become part of the leadership schema for the younger generation (Roberts, 2005; Zhang et al., 2005).

5.1.2. Integrity, masculinity or yang, and femininity or yin

As shown in Table 3, Factor 2, *integrity*, explained 17.5% of the total variance. It consists of four items which capture the key elements of *integrity*: caring, concerned, fair, and trustworthy. Table 4 further indicates that three out of five groups (hotel local managers, hotel expatriate managers, and telecommunications subordinates) perceived this to be the second most important leadership dimension. Previous research has suggested that integrity is the most important leadership attribute, as ranked by followers (Kouzes and Posner, 1990). It appears to be a

leadership attribute that is widely (perhaps universally) acknowledged in industry, and the hotel industry is no exception. In the current study, out of the top five leadership attributes, trustworthiness was one of two leadership attributes shared by both hotel and telecommunications staff.

Table 3 shows that, while Factor 3 (*masculinity or yang*) explained 16.9% of the total variance, Factor 4 (*femininity or yin*) explained 15.6% of total variance. Factor 3 consists of four items that capture the nature of the masculine or yang leadership style: determined, aggressive, decisive, and forceful. Factor 4 consists of four items that capture the nature of the feminine or yin leadership style: benevolent, wants peace, sympathetic, and generous. It is interesting to note that all groups, regardless of position or industry, prefer the masculine or yang style to the feminine or yin style (the latter was the lowest ranking of the factor means for all groups, see Table 3). However, hotel staff prefer a less masculine or yang style than telecommunications staff (the two telecommunications groups had a much higher factor mean ranking in relation to the feminine/yin than the three hotel groups; see Table 3). Perhaps, the hotel industry requires greater care and customer focus than the telecommunications industry.

5.2. Leadership perceptions among different groups

5.2.1. Differences between the hotel and the telecommunications industry

As indicated in the results (Table 5) and in the previous discussion, staff in the hotel industry perceived the leadership dimensions of *professionalism*, *masculinity or yang*, and *femininity or yin* differently from the telecommunications industry. We will not repeat the same discussion here. However, looking closely at the items within the dimension of *professionalism*, hotel staff ranked the items “customer-oriented” and “professional knowledge” much higher than the staff from the telecommunications industry did: the former group ranked these two items 2nd and 3rd, respectively (4.47 and 4.46 mean scores, respectively), while the latter group ranked them 15th and 14th, respectively (4.11 and 4.11 mean scores, respectively). This major difference may be due to the fact that, in the hotel sample group, hotel frontline staff have more contact/interaction with customers and hotel management places much more emphasis on the service aspect of their work. The telecommunications sample group has fewer frontline staff and their management places more emphasis on technological and knowledge-based skills. Overall, the unique characteristics of the “service” aspects of the hotel industry and the “knowledge-based” aspects of the telecommunications industry at the higher level have an impact on the perception differences between the two groups. More discussion on the differences between the two groups can be found in the next section.

5.2.2. Differences according to the hierarchical level of an individual

There are differences according to an individual's level in an organization. As indicated by the results of this study, there are both similarities and differences in leadership perceptions among hotel staff (Table 5). There was a difference in Test 1 between hotel subordinates and hotel managers in the dimension of *professionalism*. In addition, as interview studies have shown, even though the senior manager or expatriate and the frontline or local staff both perceive professionalism to be important, they each attach different meanings to the word. In short, the junior staff perceived their own professional skills to be more at a technical level, but they expect managers and leaders to have skills more at a conceptual level. Managers and leaders perceived that professional skills relate more to communication and expert knowledge in certain fields, such as sales and marketing (Wong and Chan, 2006). Consistent with the leadership prototype theory, which holds that

an organizational context is a constraint on prototype generation, researchers have also found level differences in leadership perceptions (Hunt, 1991; Zaccaro, 2001).

Several researchers based in the US have identified ethical behavior and strategic-management acumen, rather than hotel industry expertise, as core competencies for future hospitality leaders (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003). However, the results of this study indicate that industry expertise, professional knowledge, and image are important if managers and expatriates hope to establish influence among their subordinates and locals (as in the context of the contemporary Chinese hotel industry). Could the notion that professionalism and strong cultural sensitivity are both imperative skills be a phenomenon that came into being with the globalization of the industry? Or does this idea arise because the sample of hotel staff studied in this project did not come from a corporate level? The concern of Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) was more with strategic decision making than with operational issues. Their samples contained a total of 137 senior-level industry executives in various hotel companies, and the positions of the participants ranged from directors to CEOs of international hotel chains and corporations. In contrast, the sample in this study came from the operational level. There is a need to clarify this issue through further research.

5.2.3. Differences in national culture

Although significant differences in national culture between hotel subordinates and hotel expatriate managers were not found in Test 2, such differences were found between hotel local managers and hotel expatriate managers in the *masculinity or yang* dimension in Test 3 (Table 5).

In his original study of national cultures, Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions according to which national cultures may be differentiated: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism–collectivism, and masculinity–femininity. “Masculine” cultures tend to be societies that place emphasis on materialism, assertiveness, and clear social gender roles. In contrast, “feminine” cultures are societies that place less emphasis on money, but more emphasis on values such as sympathy and overlapping gender roles. While Germany and Japan are “high masculinity societies,” Denmark and Sweden are “low masculinity societies.” Hofstede (1980) classified Hong Kong as “medium masculinity,” but mainland China was not included in his study. Pizam et al. (1997) found that Chinese hotel managers from Hong Kong were less masculine in their style than either Japanese or Korean hotel managers. They also found that “Chinese hotel managers favoured the weaker and less assertive worker” (p. 142).

In the present study, 78.6% of the expatriates were from Asian countries; of these, eight were from Hong Kong (28.6% of the total number of expatriates). Chinese people from Hong Kong may, to some degree, be different from mainland Chinese, especially those who were socialized and acculturated before the 1978 economic reforms. They grew up under very different economic and political systems. Even since 1997, when Hong Kong became part of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), the region has remained within the so-called “one country, two systems” framework. Moreover, compared to the West, Chinese culture is gentler, showing more yin characteristics. Chinese people rely on *guanxi* or relationships. A masculine or yang or task-oriented leader would complement that nature, playing the role of “getting things done.”

These ideas have clear implications for leadership training and development.

6. Implications

Leadership skills are important in the hospitality industry, particularly because of its dynamic and turbulent environment,

labor-intensive nature, and high turnover rate. A major challenge for China is clearly to produce professional hotel managers. Players in the hospitality industry should be made aware that *professionalism* is one of the most important leadership dimensions perceived by different levels and groups of staff. International hotel chains and expatriate managers should maintain their roles of providing technological expertise and leadership skills to local people. They can accomplish this by demonstrating their high standards and their familiarity with the international practices of running hospitality organizations with an effective management and excellent service to customers. In this regard, they should serve as important role models. In addition, they should be made more aware of contextual constraints, such as organizational structure, culture, values, and local practices. In fact, consistent with the findings of the present project, Wang (2006) considered that the Western way of training might not necessarily lead, in the Chinese context, to training effects that are superior to those of the indigenous state-owned hotels. In this study, Wang developed a new model that integrated the Western practice of “hard-systematic supports” with the Chinese practice of “soft-emotional inputs.” To a certain extent, this concept is consistent with both the holistic idea of integrating yin and yang in Chinese philosophy and the China context (Carlopio, 1994; Johnson, 2000).

Local staff (both managers and subordinates) should also develop a greater awareness of international practice and a cultural sensitivity to working in a multicultural context. They should take every opportunity to learn and equip themselves through professional development programs and to create a mindset of lifelong learning. Liu et al. (2006), in their recent study on the training of medium- and high-level managerial professionals in Beijing hotels, concluded that the way to strengthen and improve the professional managerial system in hotels was to train more professional hotel managers. However, they also highlighted a major obstacle to the development of a system of professional hotel management in China, namely “the macro-environment limitation of China, short on performance evaluation and market recognition” (Liu et al., 2006, p. 414). This macro-contextual constraint must be removed through active intervention by government and hotel industry professionals, working together to set the standard and strengthen the system. There are other means by which local staff can enhance their professional image and skills. They can join international professional bodies, such as Hotel and Catering International Management Association (HCIMA) and American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA), to update their knowledge in the field and strengthen their professional status. Government, hospitality trade associations, and professional bodies in China should work together more closely and make alliances with international bodies to create a professional image for hotel staff. These processes are already occurring in China. Hotel managers in state-owned hotels are required to have formal academic qualifications or training related to the hotel industry. Some local hotel managers are becoming qualified as Certified Hospitality Administrators (CHA). In addition, perhaps the core value of professionalism should be nurtured early on in different hospitality educational institutions and also be made part of the formal curriculum (Pizam, 2007).

According to Bryman et al. (1996), leadership trainers need to design more context-specific training programs rather than programs that advocate universal prescriptions. The leadership training and development programs carried out in the context of the hotel industry in China should be more sensitive to contextual differences, as is the case in the US and the construction industry. Even those training programs and methods that have been tested and proved successful in hotels outside China must be adapted to local settings. Hotel chains are using “canned programs” that are too Western in delivery and design. Consequently, they may not be

effective in China (Dewald, 1996, p. 102). In the experience of this researcher, it is more effective in leadership training to localize and to develop greater cultural sensitivity.

7. Limitations and recommendations for further study

This study involved expatriates and local staff in the hotel industry and in a Chinese context. Although the participants were mainly Chinese, there were some respondents of other nationalities. It is impossible to include all of the attributes and prototypes from all countries (see Section 3.2 on Instrument Development). No single prototype would have applied universally, but there may be some universally endorsed attributes as well as culturally specific attributes. One such universally endorsed attribute may be integrity, which was included in the instrument as a result of the rigorous review of the literature.

Although this paper only reports the quantitative results and highlights some of the qualitative results of the whole project (Wong and Chan, 2006), the use of a mixed strategy of qualitative and quantitative approaches is one of the merits of this study. It brings the strengths of both methods to bear on the research problem. However, according to some scholars from both the positivist and the ethnographic traditions, a mixed strategy of this kind lacks rigor. In particular, it makes the research process and the presentation of results to readers more difficult. This paper seeks to present ideas in a systematic and logical manner.

The other limitation is sample size. The sample sizes for local managers, expatriates, and telecommunications employees were relatively small. Consequently, separate factor analyses were not possible. Also, there were few expatriates in the international hotels. In the telecommunications case, a shortage of resources and time prevented the identification of a feasible data collection channel in Beijing. Therefore a convenient sample was adopted for the telecommunications industry.

Despite the limitations of the current study, further research on this topic should be undertaken. A future study could take a larger sample in Beijing and extend the sampling process beyond Beijing to include all of China. As indicated from the interview studies in this project, developing trusting relationships with locals in joint venture and international hotels is always an issue for expatriates. This issue would certainly be worth exploring rigorously, with in-depth interviews about how this obstacle might be overcome.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, the major academic contribution of this study is the application of a conceptual model that integrates the macro and micro perspectives to explore leadership perceptions in the context of the hotel industry in China. Scholars in the field of leadership research are now aware of the importance of such an integration (Gardner and Cogliser, 2006). The present work provides an exploratory study showing how the macro and micro perspectives could be integrated by focusing on the impact of contextual elements on leadership (e.g., level differences, industry differences, and national cultural differences). The overall results indicate that there are indeed differences between industries, levels, and cultures. A major advance in the field of leadership research is the finding on professionalism. The view that professionalism is the most significant characteristic of leadership in the Chinese hotel industry appears to be strongly related to the contexts of hotel industry development and the economic development process currently occurring in China (macro perspective). Previous discussion has shown, in fact, that professionalism had not been identified as an attribute or dimension in the literature on leadership. In addition, through the application of leadership prototypes and implicit leadership theories, this finding

provides a better understanding of the match or mismatch of leadership prototypes between manager and subordinate and expatriate and local. This provides a useful opportunity for managers and subordinates and expatriates and locals to become aware of the different contextual elements that might affect their leadership perceptions (micro perspective). Finally, the practical implications of this study provide contributions for the training and development both of international hospitality leaders and of local staff with an awareness of leadership in different contexts in the globalization of the industry.

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