INSIGHTS INTO HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP: A COMPARISON OF THE UK AND HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

This research explores effective leadership and how it is developed, according to the views of successful hospitality and tourism leaders in the UK and Hong Kong. Understanding what makes a successful and effective leader is vital for the training and developing of future industry leaders. There is a vast body of literature pertaining towards leadership, with much previous research focusing on identifying innate leadership traits or exploring potential outcomes of effective leadership as a means to understand successful leadership. This research explores effective hospitality leadership using empirical qualitative interview data collected from twenty five leaders in the UK hospitality industry and ten leaders in the Hong Kong tourism and hospitality industries. Findings are explored in relation to four areas; where leadership skills were learnt, what makes an effective leader, advice for aspiring leaders and leadership issues specific to the hospitality industry. The findings reveal that the leaders, for the most part, learn their skills from personal experience and from observing others, whilst some also felt that leadership skills are innate. What makes a leader effective is a variety of personal skills, with communication, trust, transparency, integrity and having vision seen as crucial. Advice for aspiring leaders includes being fair and consistent, self -belief, being honest and trustworthy, caring for others, and being enthusiastic and not work shy. Leadership issues specific to the hospitality industry include industry reputation, diverse workforce challenges, and industry volatility. Comparisons between the two countries are made and conclusions are discussed in relation to similarities or differences.

KEYWORDS

Hospitality Leadership, Comparison, UK, Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

The subject of leadership has a long history of research and a well established body of theoretical and practical work (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2009; Lowe & Gardner, 2002). Review papers on the development of leadership studies are a useful way of condensing the many different aspects and approaches, for example work by Mackenzie & Barnes, (2007). Certainly, research in leadership is large in scope and covers a broad range of issues such as leadership challenges (Bennis, 2007), developing leaders (Chiang & Jang, 2008), and cultural orientations (White, 2006). Ladkin and Weber (forthcoming), identify that the earlier studies of leadership focused on the extent to which leadership is different from management and more recently, much of the research has focused on identifying potential benefits of effective leadership for organizations. This may be in the form of departmental or organizational performance (Patiar & Lockman, 2009) or improved employee behaviour (Testa, 2001). Much of the research is dominated by positivist methodologies and findings. It mostly originates from the United States and consequently is largely based in Western settings (Ladkin & Weber, forthcoming). Bryman's (1992) work in

trends in leadership theory and research identify trait approaches, style approaches, contingency approaches and new styles of leadership including transformational and charismatic leadership as a chronological way of understanding trends in leadership theory and research. Northouse (2004) reduces leadership research into common themes and problem areas (leadership as process; leadership involves influence, leadership occurs in a group context and leadership involves goal attainment).

A comprehensive review of the leadership literature from management and organizational fields is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. Four themes in the literature are relevant to this research. The first is leadership training and teaching. Given the importance of leadership, it is no surprise that there is a wealth of research that explores how best to teach leadership (Hegarty, 2005; Law & Glover 2000; Scheule & Sneed, 2001) and leadership training (Saunders, 2004). The common conclusion from these and other studies is that teaching and training leaders is best undertaken both in the classroom and in practical workplace situations. There is also some support that for the idea that being a leader is an innate ability which cannot necessarily be taught (Scheule & Sneed, 2001). Essentially, there are different views and ideas about the best way to train leaders, but it is widely recognised that a combination of theory and practical training is beneficial (Weber & Ladkin, forthcoming).

Second, the characteristics common to and the skills required of leaders has relevance to this research. As identified by Weber & Ladkin (forthcoming), a series of publications from Michigan State University explore various aspects of leadership in clubs in the United States and lodging and commercial foodservice operations in both the United States and Japan (Cichy & Sciarini, 1990; Cichy & Cook, 1991; Cichy, Aoki, Patton & Sciarini, 1992; Cichy, Aoki, Hwang & Patton, 1993; Cichy & Schmidgall, 1996; 1997). Communication, trust, perseverance, and vision are identified as the foundations of leadership, while the 'secrets of leadership' were found to be related to credibility, dependability, accountability, self-confidence, loyalty, and decisiveness. Kriegl (2000) identified the most important skills hospitality managers require in an international work environment, namely cultural sensitivity, interpersonal skills, and managerial flexibility. Their leadership abilities were also perceived as critical, especially an adaptive leadership style that is open to new ideas and overcoming cultural differences.

The third theme of relevance for this research is cultural influences on leadership. Extensive research as been undertaken by Testas (2007; 2009) who investigated the impact of culture on leadership issues in the cruise industry. Specifically the focus was on the effect of cultural congruence between leaders and employees on the perceived leadership style, leader-member exchange and employee citizenship behaviour. Results indicate that cultural similarity between leaders and subordinates lead to higher levels of trust and satisfaction with their leader, compared to situations where the leader and subordinates had a different cultural background. Research by Litrell (2002) explored this in the context of China, surveying expatriate and Chinese managers in two hotels in Inner China. Findings indicated there were no main differences apart from for the variable 'tolerance for freedom,' with Chinese managers being more tolerant of freedom than expatriate managers.

The fourth theme has been recently explored by Wong and Chan (2010) and is the importance of contexts in leadership. They argue that context can be viewed from both a macro level in terms of the understanding of a whole society, and a micro level which is the behaviour of an organizations members (Wong & Chan, 2010:437). Wong and Chan (2010) have identified two main groups of researcher that study the relationship between context and leadership. One group uses a qualitative

approaches (for example Bryman, 2004, Alvesson & Sveningson, 2003) and the other a leadership perception approach (Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Lord, Brown, Harvey & Hall, 2001). Taking a macro perspective, two of the macro contexts identified by Wong and Chan are useful for this research. The first is national culture on leadership, and cites studies by Gerstner and Day (1994) who found significant differences in leadership perceptions of according to cultural dimensions. The work by Testas (2007; 2009) described above is also cited as evidence of the effects of culture on leadership. The second context refers to industry settings and characteristics and leadership. Included in this are the ways in which the industry context affects leadership. The unique features of the hospitality industry are that it operates in settings with frequent personal interactions (Wong & Chan, 2010), and it has it owns set of practices, cultures, and industry characteristics (Guerrier, 2008; Pizam, 1993). As a consequence, hospitality leaders may need a specific set of skills. Browness (2008) argues that effective communication skills and interpersonal competences are crucial in the hospitality environment. Wong and Chan's (2010) study of understanding the leadership perceptions of staff in China's hotel industry through the integration of macro and micro aspects of leadership contexts reveals that industries, levels and cultures do indeed have an impact on leadership perceptions. One interesting and previously unknown finding relates to professionalism. This is seen as the most significant characteristic of leadership in the Chinese hotel industry and it is closely related to the contexts of the hotel industry development and the economic development currently taking place in China.

The research presented in this paper compares two highly developed economies and mature tourist destinations, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. Both are multi-cultural environments, with historical links through Hong Kong's position as a British colony until 1997, when Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China. Both are concerned with maintaining their position as leading destinations for international business and leisure travel, and therefore have a continued demand and need for strong leadership and management of the tourism and hospitality industries. Therefore, the development of leaders, what contributes to their success, advice for leaders and leadership issues that are specific to the tourism and hospitality are all areas of importance for both destinations. Furthermore, a comparison of research findings from the two places allows for an exploration of any contextual or cultural difference or similarities.

THE STUDY

The study enables a comparison between Western and Asian leaders in the tourism and hospitality industries and offers a number of insights into hospitality leadership in these two different contexts.

Methodology

This research was undertaken initially in the UK, followed by a replication of the study in Hong Kong. For both surveys, primary data was collected through the use of in-depth interviews. The merits of using interviews as a method of data collection are many, and include their flexibility, the richness of the data collected, and their lack of constraint on respondent's answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Importantly for this research was the fact that interviews allowed the researcher to return to topics if necessary throughout the interviews, and also to ensure that all issues were explored (Bailey, 1994).

For the UK sample, two different groups of people were identified as potential participants. First, those who the industry itself thought were its most effective leaders; and second, those who had been recognised by their own staff. The first group was identified by inviting Fellows and Members of The Institute of Hospitality to nominate industry leaders who they felt were worthy of recognition. Ten people were identified and interviewed from this group. The second group was identified from two annual surveys; The Sunday Times '100 Best Companies To Work For'; and The Caterer's 'Best Companies to Work For in Hospitality'. From the seventeen hospitality-related companies that were recognised in these two surveys over the past three years, it was decided to approach the leaders of these companies to be interviewed. Fifteen leaders agreed, giving a total sample size of twenty-five. Interviews took place between January and June 2007.

In Hong Kong, a list of potential suitable interviewees was compiled from a variety of published sources and local knowledge of the faculty from one of the authors' academic institution. These potential respondents were from both tourism and hospitality organisations, the final list comprised of twenty-five possible respondents, of which ten leaders agreed to be interviewed. The in-depth interviews took place between December 2007 and February 2008.

For both the UK and Hong Kong samples, each interview took approximately one hour, and was conducted in English. The interviews were recorded and were later transcribed. The analysis was conducted by two people, one acting as the principle data analyst, and the other analysing the transcripts without knowledge of the outcome of the first round of analysis. This is a comparative technique, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In the initial analysis, broad themes and sub-themes were identified. At the time of writing, the UK data had been explored by the principle data analyst only. The Hong Kong data has been previously explored in the context of leadership issues and challenges and developing effective leadership (Ladkin & Weber, forthcoming; Weber & Ladkin, forthcoming).

The profile of the samples is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Sample Profile of Interviewees: UK and HK

UK		Hong Kong	
Respondent Number	Sector	Respondent Number	Sector
1	Contact Catering	1	Travel Services
2	Brewery	2	Conferences & Exhibitions
3	Hotel Chain	3	Hotel Chain
4	Independent Hotel	4	Travel Services
5	Restaurant	5	Cruises
6	Contract Catering	6	Theme Parks & Attractions
7	Inns	7	Conferences & Exhibitions
8	Restaurants	8	Industry Representative
9	Gaming	9	Hotel Association
10	Conferences & Exhibitions	10	Hotel Association & Training
11	Restaurants		
12	Hotel Chain		
13	Hotel Chain		
14	Industry Representative		
15	Hotel Association		
16	Hotel Chain		

17	Catering			
18	Catering			
19	Hotel Chain			
20	Catering			
21	Inns			
22	Independent Hotel			
23	Independent Hotel			
24	Independent Hotel			
25	Restaurant			

Table one shows that the respondents came from a range of industry sectors, representing a broad range of views.

Findings

The findings are presented in relation to four areas; where leadership skills were learnt, what makes an effective leader, advice for aspiring leaders and leadership issues specific to the hospitality industry. Each is considered in turn with themes and sub-themes summarised and quotes used as illustrative examples. The quantitative presentation of the qualitative data is to indicate the frequency of occurrences in this primary analysis stage.

1. Where leadership skills were learnt

The purpose here was to ascertain where the leaders had learned their skills. The results were remarkably similar for both the UK and Hong Kong. For both samples, learning by experience, learning from others and possessing innate leadership traits were identified. The main difference was in the priority of each theme.

Table 2 shows the main themes and sub-themes identified in the data, the number of interviews during which they occurred in both samples, and in brackets, the ranking of each theme.

Table 2. Where Leadership Skills were Learnt

Theme	Frequency & Rank UK	Frequency & Rank HK	Subthemes
Experience	20 (2)	10 (1)	'Real life' learning, no substitute
			Reflecting on experiences
			'Common sense'
			Learning 'on the job'
			Learning from challenging situations
			From reading about theories and inspiration
			Trial and error
From others	24 (1)	10 (2)	Mentors and bosses
			Good and bad people
			Learning from others mistakes
			Watching others
Innate	5 (3)	3 (3)	Innate
			Combination of innate and learned characteristics

A central theme from the respondents was learning from personal experience. This was discussed the most by the Hong Kong sample as all respondents felt it was the most significant way to learn. It was second most discussed for the UK sample. By doing the job, handling different situations and learning from your mistakes are all considered important. Illustrative quotes from the leaders include;

"I think learning from the job is important, when you are learning by actually doing it, it's the best way, so a leader always has to be reflexive and say how come I have done this job right? Or how come I have messed this up, what have I done wrong?" (Respondent 7, HK)

"Experience is very important but learning from experience is more important; very often people don't learn from their experiences!" (Respondent 16, UK)

"You have to learn from experience. From each situation you get a better insight from the issues and get a better insight on how to apply this problem to the other situations. This is a kind of learning process. Very important." (Respondent 10, HK)

I think through a combination of doing the job so, therefore, learning by experience - that sort of action centred approach. (Respondent 17, UK).

"Unfortunately, you have to learn it yourself" (Respondent 9, HK)

"I think, very much trial and error." (Respondent 4, UK).

The second theme, learning from others, was also a widely discussed topic and it dominated the UK discussion. These could be formal mentors and senior colleagues, but also included learning from a range of different people and situations. For example, Respondent 1 (UK) states;

"I don't think there has been one person or one thing that has influenced me. It really is a continual journey and it's an amalgamation of lots and lots of different reading, different learning, different observations that have developed my leadership skills and I'm still developing, you know." (Respondent 1, UK)

"You can pick the good points of individuals and try to merge it with your own way of management, your way of being a leader." Respondent 3 (HK)

"I always try to listen to other people irrespective of whether they are high ranking, even minor business, minor issues, even ordinary people with ordinary parties, whether it is related to the travel trade or hotels, it doesn't matter. (Respondent 1, HK)
"I've learned them just by working with some fabulous people." (Respondent 25, UK)

Learning specifically from mentors is illustrated by comments from Respondent 2 (HK);

"I really learnt from mentors and so from watching people who thought they were leaders but weren't. I learnt from their mistakes".

Others commented that it was possible to learn from both good and bad managers and leaders. Respondent 6 (HK) states;

"Sometimes I think your best teacher is your worst teacher... I mean, sometimes the worst people I work for are the best teachers for me because I knew I wouldn't do it the same way when I got the opportunity to work at that role."

"When you are growing up in a business, you learn from other people, the good and the bad." (Respondent 3, UK)

Comments related specifically to education were also given, for example,

"In the early days, some of my leadership skills, I think, were given to me in a classroom environment." (Respondent 9, UK)

The third theme relates to whether leadership skills can be learned or if they are innate. Some of the respondents felt strongly that leadership could be something that is innate in an individual, and some traits could mean you may be more likely to become a leader. For example, Respondent 4 (HK) noted;

"Of course skills are very important, but they can be learnt with training, you can learn it with education, but some people are born to be leaders".

"Certain important values that leaders need are inherent to a degree. You learn certain leadership skills from others who you have either worked with or admired; and with experience over the years you see the things which work or have inspired you and you in turn try and emulate." (Respondent 19, UK)

The above findings in relation to where leaders learnt their skills confirm the value of experience. Although some of the respondents stressed that an understanding of leadership theory, reading about leadership and classroom education can enhance understanding, ultimately it was different experiences that counted in terms of how they developed leadership skills. It could be argued that certain innate characteristics have a role to play, however, it appears but there is no substitute for experience. The themes were remarkably similar for both the UK and HK samples, with a slightly different emphasis. However, in reality learning by experience and learning from others are intertwined.

2. What makes an effective leader

The leader's views on what makes an effective leader again revealed similar themes between the two samples. However, the relative value of each element was different. Eight themes are identified and are shown in table 3.

Table 3. What Makes An effective Leader?

Theme	Frequency & Rank UK	Frequency & Rank HK	Subthemes
Business Knowledge	3 (8)	10 (1)	Invest in people

Determination	10 (5)	8 (2)	Far sighted Focused Don't quit Positive thinking
Team Support	23 (2)	7 (3)	Give people opportunities Encouragement Motivate Enthusiasm
Open Minded	22 (3)	7 (4)	Discovery Listen Vision Far sighted
Admit failures	10 (5)	5 (5)	Listen to other Take advice
Communication	25 (1)	5 (5)	Keep people informed Interpersonal skills
Respect & Personable	16 (4)	5 (5)	Reflect on experience Gain respect Handling yourself and others
Sense of Humor	10 (5)	3 (8)	Have fun

Many of the respondents gave this question considerable thought, with most giving narratives of situations to illustrate the points they were making. Due to the large number of comments provided by these discussions, only one quote from each sample is selected for illustrative purposes.

For business knowledge; Respondent 3 (HK) notes;

"to be a leader, you have to know all factors of the business because they look upon you as a leader, so they come to you for knowledge etc."

"It really helps if you understand the business inside out." (Respondent 12, UK)

In terms of determination, Respondent 4 (HK) states;

"You have to be very strong and firm also, after you have collected all the views, and then you need to be very strong and firm to speak out what you have chosen."

"It's very important that you know what you want to achieve and you can perceive what your goal is. If you can perceive what your goal is you've then got to be able to persuade other people to help you in doing that." (Respondent 14, UK).

Having the right team is illustrated by Respondent 3 (HK) who states;

"to be a leader, you can't lead by yourself; you have to have the right team, the right department heads to help you. So, you have to have the right caliber of people to help you along, to make sure your strategy works as a team."

"Having a good and happy workforce is vital." (Respondent 4, UK)

Clear communication with all levels of staff is seen to be crucial for effective leadership. This is summarized by Respondent 5 (HK) who says;

"Clear communication is key."

"I think they've got to be a good communicator and I think you've got to devote time. I think that is probably one of the differences. I think you've got to devote a lot more of your time to listening and consulting and communicating with people and supporting people than you probably do with actually doing activities." (Respondent 1, UK)

With regard to admitting to mistakes, Respondent 3 (HK) acknowledges;

"after you make a decision, you have to make sure you carry out the decision rightly or wrongly. Further down the road, you may find it is wrong, and then as a leader, you have to admit that you are wrong, you got to take responsibility, and you got to be accountable as a leader."

"Be human and honest and admit when you are wrong." (Respondent 24, UK)

Being open minded and curious was illustrated by Respondent 4 (HK) who states;

"Actually, leaders need to be open minded because you have to accept all the views, like you have to be open and accept different views from your team, however, you have to be very strong and firm also to have, like after you have collected all the views, and then you need to be very strong and firm to speak out what you have chosen. That's number one."

"Be open minded and prepared to listen." (Respondent 5, UK)

In terms of showing charisma and earning respect, Respondent 2 (HK) states;

"A leader has to be likeable, likeable to the degree that people respect that person and because they are likeable, they would inspire more and get result back more from the inspiration."

"A leader has to be approachable and has to have charisma." (Respondent 8, UK)

The final set of comments related to leaders having a sense of humor. According to Respondent 6 (HK);

"The next thing is the sense of humour which I think you need sense of humour for anything you do, and obviously it is easier for me within the theme park environment because you can have fun doing what we do and have fun anywhere."

"Make work fun. Having s sense of humour really helps" (Respondent 1, UK)

The above findings show there are many traits that combined to make an effective leader. These traits relate to personality characteristics, approaches and motivations, with knowledge of the business being the only exception. Although both samples identified similar themes there is a marked difference in the importance of these themes. For the Hong Kong sample, business knowledge is key, particularly in relation to long term views. For the UK sample, communication is seen as the most important thing, with open-mindedness and fostering team support also strongly advocated.

3. Advice for aspiring leaders.

This question resulted in much comment and reflection from the leaders. The responses are diverse, although broad similarities could be identified. These broad themes are, first, being enthusiastic and passionate about the business as reflected in the following quotes:

"Think carefully about whether you really like this industry. If you are not interested in this industry, the job will be very hard and you won't be very successful. (Respondent 1, HK).

"I think passion is important, the passion to make other people happy, (Respondent 7, HK).

"If you want to be a leader in a particular industry you have to actually passionately enjoy it."
(Respondent 15, UK)

Second, learn all you can about the business, as illustrated by Respondent 2 (HK) who states;

"No matter what industry they entered, my advice is to learn every single thing about the industry that they can possibly learn even they do it on their own. The most effective leader is going to be a leader that truly understands the business they are leading and the people they are leading. So do everything you can to understand the business and anything you can to understand the people, to appreciate the people and to be empathetic."

"Well, I think it would be that they had to know the business. I think that's the most important thing, because if you don't know what you want, and you don't know the business, you're in the hands of other people and you can't be a proper leader." (Respondent 16, UK)

Third, is to be a good person who others will want to follow, as shown by Respondent 5 (HK);

"You have to do the right thing, just because you are the leader, you don't boss people around, you can show your authority and you can also show your compassion, so that you have to be sensitive, dealing with people is a difficult thing."

I think that the caring side of it, making sure you are a leader that people can see and that as a

leader you care about people is important." (Respondent 16, UK)

A leader has to build relationships with his or her staff based on mutual respect and trust. This might be achieved by being value driven, open, trustworthy, honest and approachable." (Respondent 19, UK)

For Hong Kong, a fourth theme was not to be afraid of hard work, and investing time in the industry was also seen as crucial.

"Don't be afraid of hard work. Don't think that it is hard so I don't want to do it. Actually in any business, not only the travel business, for those who are young and just entering the industry, they have to remember that, they have to work very hard, they have to be willing to work hard and fast and up and know more and be open." (Respondent 4, HK)

For the UK, a fourth theme was to be yourself and be honest.

"To listen, just listen to your people and digest and act on that, but definitely to listen and have empathy." (Respondent 25, UK)

Advice for those aspiring to become leaders in the hospitality industry was that you have to be honest about how much you want to be involved in the industry. The view is very much that you cannot be half hearted about the profession as it demands much time and effort. However, those who are passionate about the industry stand a very good chance of success. The interviewees noted the need for a successful leader to have a strong passion for the industry, a desire to interact and enjoyment of dealing with people of different backgrounds.

4. Leadership issues specific to the hospitality industry

This area showed considerable diversity between the two samples. For the UK sample, four specific leadership issues were raised. There was strong consensus on the following factors:

- The industry does not have a good reputation for career development and this can deter people from entering the industry;
- the environment is very competitive, so you have to create a culture for staff that creates loyalty to the brand;
- due to the volatility of the industry, both good and bad times have to be managed, so you need to be an effective leader for both, and
- you have to be able to lead a very diverse workforce, and often one that is geographically spread, with the lowest paid being the company ambassadors due to the nature of service. This takes a particular type of leadership to be able to motivate everyone.

For the Hong Kong sample, the dominant theme to emerge from the interviews was the industry's universal 'people orientation,' of the industry. Therefore, more so than in other industries, leadership skills revolving around interpersonal relations and communication were perceived as

particularly important. Given the importance of the provider-customer interface to customer satisfaction, the need to hire the 'right people' for the job was strongly emphasized. For example, Respondent 3 stressed that

"The single most important aspect of how we deliver good service is hiring the right people"

and Respondent 9 referring to the need for having the right people in a team, stating that

"A hotel is very labour-intensive, so trying to get the team work together is very important, you have to have the right people."

The findings reveal marked differences in terms of specific leadership issues. Common to both is the idea of having to have the right people, both in terms of attracting them to the industry and their subsequent development. It is not surprising that workforce diversity is considered more of an issue in the UK than Hong Kong as many nationalities are employed in hospitality organisations.

CONCLUSION

The research has offered an initial insight into hospitality leadership from both the UK and Hong Kong perspective. Three initial conclusions are drawn.

The first relates to the development of leadership skills. There is no doubt that formal education and training has a role to play in the development of leaders. In agreement with previous research (Hegarty, 2005; Law & Glover 2000; Scheule & Sneed, 2001), the study found that leaders recognised the value of leadership theory and classroom based learning. However, more significant was the role of learning by experience. The present research does not explore whether learning by experience is more important than formal education, or in what form the learning by experience takes. For example, it could be that learning by experience is gained over time on the job or it might be as part of work integrated education. What is clear is that learning by experience has no substitute, therefore in the context of teaching and training it highlights the need for practical work based training and development. Furthermore, it appears there is also no substitute for time spent in junior and senior roles as part of the learning process. The role of mentors was also seen as useful to facilitate learning by experience and again could be applied to both employment after education in the workplace or as part of work based education.

Second, the characteristics of leaders and the skills required for leadership are many, relating largely to personality attributes and skills. Leaders are expected to have vision, good communication skills, loyalty, decisiveness, perseverance and a range of interpersonal and management skills. These have been previously identified in the literature (for example, Kriegl, 2000, Cichy & Schmidgall, 1996; 1997). The present study finds support for these issues. Some cultural distinctions are also evident here. In the Hong Kong context, business skills are valued very highly, whereas in the UK sample, communication was viewed as the most important. The balance between learned skills and personality attributes is often a blurred, but clearly there is a role for both.

Third, the research uncovers some evidence of differences between leadership issues for the hospitality industry in the UK and Hong Kong, reflecting the different situational contexts of the two destinations. This is not surprising given the different labour markets and industry trends that are affecting each place, and it adds value to the notion of the importance of context explored by Wong and Chan (2010). Furthermore, differences are evident in the emphasis given to the leader's perceptions of what makes an effective leader. Previous research (for example, Testas, 2007; 2009) has highlighted the importance of cultural differences. Whilst this research cannot be conclusive in this claim, it can be suggested that cultural differences are evident in terms of the relative importance of the different themes. Although commonalities are found in terms of where skills are learned, characteristics and skills required to be an effective leader and advice for aspiring leaders, the relative importance of these themes varies slightly. Whether these differences are due to situational contexts or cultural distinctions is not known, therefore further research into these contextual and cultural differences would be a way forward for this research and would also assist in widening leadership studies that consider the Asian context.

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