

Exploring Communication Management and Public Relations in Two Emerging Markets, China and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to address the lack of empirical research in public relations management by investigating the perspectives of professional leaders in public relations in two emerging markets, namely China and Thailand. To gather information, a pragmatic mixed-method approach, which included a survey and interviews, was employed. The data was then processed using SPSS using a sample size of 234. The study developed a framework based on the Meng and Berger Model on PR leaders. It explores how leadership in public relations is shaped by the sociopolitical context of the nation by examining and comparing the cases of China and Thailand. The study draws on the interpretation of professional leadership in public communication by PR leaders. The participants from both countries indicated that there were some similarities and differences between the Chinese and Thai markets concerning public relation leadership. With the most important issue raised in both countries, speed and volume of information appeared to be the most important. In addressing the issues, in-service training to gain new skills and taking advantage of the internet to acquire information appeared as the most important tools. Inspiring and motivating, and ability to manage teams appeared as important leadership abilities considered of value in both countries. The study identified three key dimensions that were present in both countries, namely team collaboration, communication knowledge management, and organizational culture and structure.

Keywords: public relations, leadership, Merg & Berger Model

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1. Introduction

Over the years, the study of public relations management has been tremendous (Tobin, 2017.; Willis, 2019). One key realization in public relations has been the necessity of excellent leadership demonstrated by communication managers (Bardhan & Gower, 2022). This type of recognition is incremental because it raises managerial activity to a higher level by addressing leadership issues, such as envisioning the future and empowering staff to realize their full potential (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Effective public relations does not begin with tactics like writing a press release or a speech; it is a strategic function that begins in the boardroom, where organizational strategies are developed and leadership decisions are made (Berger, 2015; Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017a). Public relation is a strategic function of leadership (Goodwill Industries of Middle TN, 2023). A thorough, research-based understanding of the public and the communication environment in which a company operates will strengthen its ability to build relationships and communicate with the public (Vora & Kishore, 2017). This will increase your capacity to achieve your organizational goals (Bardhan & Gower, 2022).

Nevertheless, it has not been until recently that leadership is more systematically found in public relations research. In particular, this research is conducted about examining ways leadership improves organizational effectiveness and communications. Most work has focused on leadership issues in the United States context, attributing little attention to other contexts currently leading the public relations industry (Chen et al., 2020; Davidson, 2020). This paper seeks to address this gap by providing insights into the leadership status quo in China and Thailand in managing public relations. The two East and Southeast Asian countries are emerging markets that have experienced a significant rise in the field of public relations over the last two decades while also providing non-traditional sociopolitical contexts to examine leadership in public relations.

2. Literature review

There have been systematic attempts to investigate aspects of professional leadership in public relations by researchers. According to Berger (2015), such a discussion is crucial because of the intertwined nature and power within leadership. Martinelli & Erzikova (2017) considers that leadership is the main driver of an organization's communication or decision-making in the public domain. There has been evidence that public relations leaders use more than one leadership style: inclusive and transformational. In contrast, others use transformational and transactional styles to communicate their intentions and offerings to the market. In addition, leadership behaviors are found to be incremental for organizational change (Bardhan & Gower, 2022).

2.1. Public relations in China

It was not until 1993 that the public relations industry arrived in China, according to Li Hong, the local boss of Fleishman-Hillard, the world's second-largest PR agency (Bean & Dodge, 2017). This was not random, as it signified the year of liberalization of commercial advertising in print media. At the same time, the memories of the massacre at Tiananmen Square started to fade, at least for the heads of foreign multinationals in Beijing (Bean & Dodge, 2017). Since then, China has seen unprecedented development, becoming perhaps the fastest-growing PR market in the world and the second-largest in Asia after Japan (Engel, 2012). Every big international agency in Cyprus is investing in accounting for most of the demands for PR services in China, particularly following China's entry into the World Trade Organization (Goodwill Industries of Middle TN, 2023). The intention of using foreign firms' public relations is to familiarize Chinese consumers with their brands. At the same time, it also addresses "deep localization", such as advice on communicating with employees and finding talent. At the same time, the call is for more intense public relations among Chinese companies, with the majority of China's primarily state-owned corporate sector remaining an outlandish concept despite Chinese firms courting foreign capital (Vora & Kishore, 2017).

When considering the issue of leadership in public relations in China, it is important to remember that it has been suggested that Western leadership theories may not be as effective when directly transposed to Chinese people (Davidson, 2020; Men, 2021). "It has been demonstrated in the Chinese cultural context that the Chinese still attach key importance to the moral character of their leaders and their behavior" (Chen et al., 2020). Of the most important concepts to consider for the leadership style in China is *Guangxi*. This concept is embedded in Chinese business decision-making and refers to relationships built on preexisting relationships (Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017b). It is viewed as "one's existence is largely influenced by one's relationships with others, and that one cannot change the environment but must harmonize with it" (Gregory & Willis, 2013). This concept should be considered when discussing leadership

issues in the Chinese business system. In a report released by Development Dimensions International company in China (Bernthal, Bondra & Wang, 2005), three issues emerged of importance: leadership skills, the culture of leadership, and leaders' ability to identify and select talent.

2.2. Public relations in Thailand

Thailand is one of those countries in Southeast Asia which took advantage of its image to attract tourists. Appealing images of exotic beaches and people have given Thailand worldwide recognition, a legacy of which is the "Amazing Thailand" campaign (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Nevertheless, the reality is that public relations in Thailand are not as well developed as they may seem. Communication with the non-Thai public has been difficult because people taking up PR positions lack knowledge of international communications (Puksawadde, 2015). Concurrently, there is a long-lasting belief among Thai people that they are superior to others and thus have little to gain or learn from foreigners (Vora & Kishore, 2017). This is a deeply rooted belief that derives from Thailand's educational system. It is thought that the ASEAN Economic Community, in effect since 2015, has a lot to offer leading public relations firms in Thailand by opening doors to new levels of communication and interaction (Men, 2021).

2.3. Conceptual framework

This study builds on research following the conceptual model of Meng, Berger, Gower, and Heyman (2012). Meng and colleagues at The Plank Center (Meng, 2014; Meng & Berger, 2013, 2019) have been researching leadership and public relations. Their work has provided insights into leadership professionals' values and beliefs which appear to be influenced by work experience and role models deriving from on the job. They acknowledge leadership as a "dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produce ethical and effective communication... [and] fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimize organizations in society" (Meng & Berger, 2022). Meng & Berger (2013) have contributed significantly to the field via a proposed integrated model of excellence in public relations leadership (Figure 2.1). The model incorporates six interrelated leadership dimensions of behavior that influence the value of public relations in an organization: self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability, and communication knowledge and expertise. The model includes consideration of the institutional environment through acknowledging a seventh dimension incorporating an understanding of organizational culture and structure. In its essence, the integrated model suggests that communication leaders could be more effective and excellent when the six personal dimensions are strongly developed and when open communication processes support organizational culture and structures.

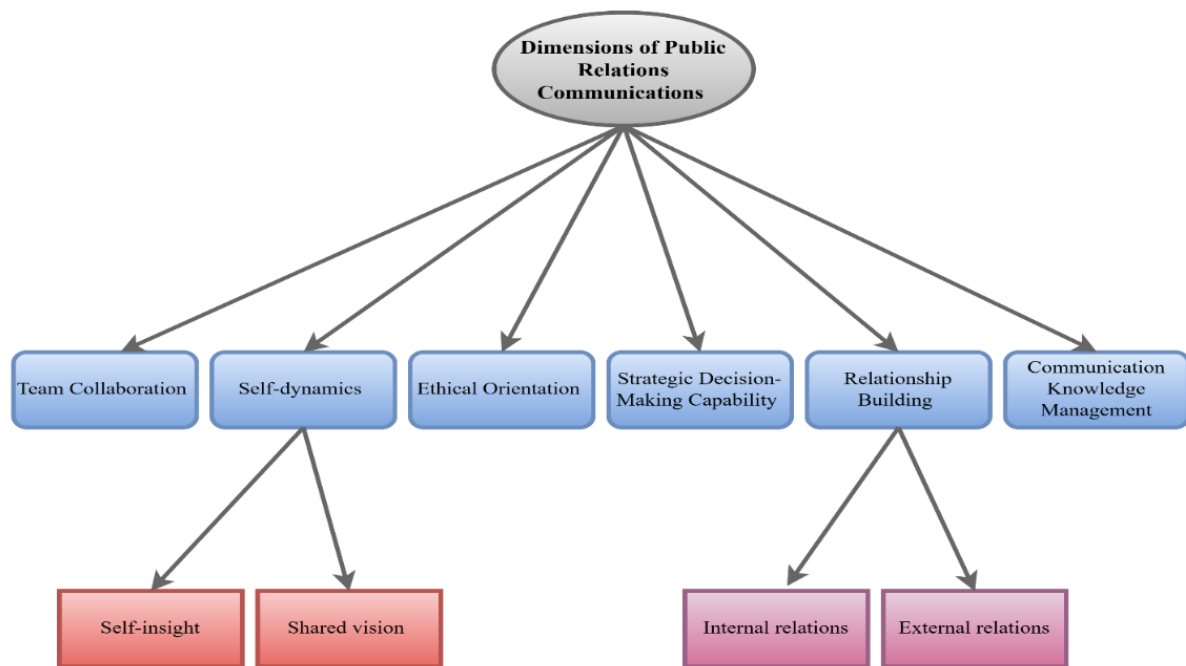


Figure 2.1. The integrated model of PR leadership by Meng and Berger (2013)

The model has informed the largest Cross-Cultural Study of Leadership in Public Relations and Communication Management amongst 4500 communication professionals in 23 countries, the largest study of leadership ever conducted in the profession (Meng & Berger, 2019). Researchers have provided insights on the issue of leadership and societal culture, acknowledging that leadership traits have a universal nature and are culturally specific (Meng & Berger, 2022). This derives from the understanding that although most leadership qualities may not be the result of genetics, effective leadership requires training, and training is culturally based (e.g., Jin et al., 2017; Meng et al., 2012; Meng & Berger, 2018).

This study uses these understandings and knowledge gained from relevant research to explore a twofold cause. First, using Meng & Berger (2013) model of excellent public relations leadership to explore leadership perceptions, and second, seeking to investigate how national sociopolitical contexts shape leadership in public relations by comparing the case of leadership in two emerging Asian markets, China and Thailand.

3. Research aims and questions

The position of the study is to give insights and connect the sociopolitical environments of China and Thailand with leadership in public relations. This type of dimension is achieved by evaluating leadership issues in these two countries by addressing the following questions:

RQ1: What are some relevant issues considered by leaders in PR in China and Thailand?

RQ2: How do PR leaders in China and Thailand resolve these challenges or issues?

RQ3: What are some of the leadership qualities in public relations valued in China and Thailand, respectively?

RQ4: What concrete steps can be taken to advance the training of public relations professionals in Thailand and China?

These questions were further explored following the formulation of three areas of additional focus informed by the integrated model (Figure 3.1). The first area enquired into culture-specific interpretations of critical issues and the influence these have on leadership and

leadership roles, decisions and daily practice. A second layer of interest was in specific ways to utilize organizational culture and structure—the seventh dimension of leadership. Last, the interviews sought answers to the personal dimensions of leadership, such as crucial qualities, capabilities, and values required for next-generation leaders.

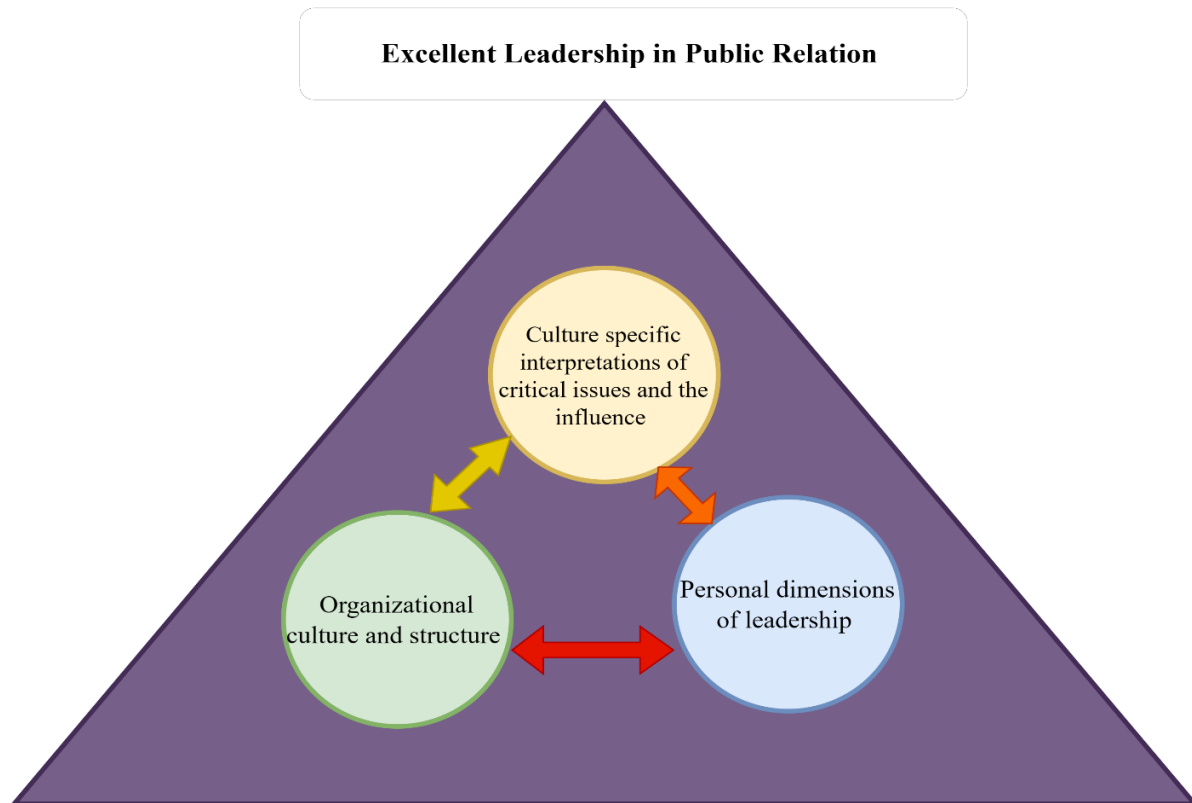


Figure 3.1. Areas of focus for exploring excellent leadership in PR about culture-specific elements

4. Research methodology

4.1. Research design

This research undertakes a pragmatic approach in that it "focuses on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation" (Hair, 2021). In this perspective and to enhance the overall validity of the study findings, quantitative and qualitative analysis methods have been applied as part of the research process (Figure 4.1). The investigation followed the model of excellence in public relations leadership by Meng and Berger (2013) as it was adapted for the aforementioned research in the previous section conducted for a larger project entitled Public relations leaders as sense makers: A global study of leadership in public relations and communication management in 2011-2012.

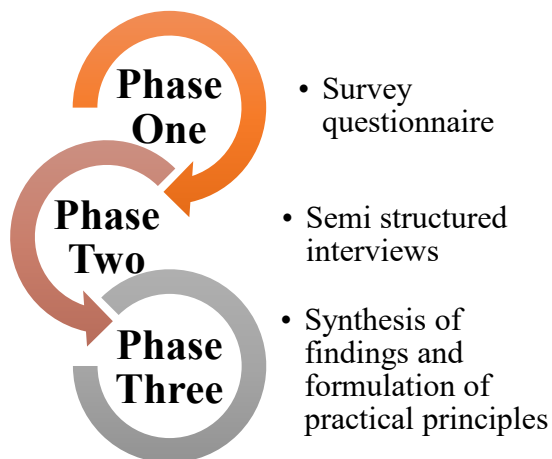


Figure 4.1. The research design process

4.2. Study population

The population for undertaking this study comprised professional leaders in public relations. Due to the scarcity of registered professional databases in China or Thailand, a snowball sampling was employed to reach a diversity of practitioners from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The total sample size is 234 diverse senior professionals and recognized leaders within the PR section participated in the survey and interviews for the research for which 131 emerged from China and 103 from Thailand.

4.3. Descriptive analysis

Figure 4.2 covers the years of experience of PR leaders in China. The majority 63 (48.09%) were in the 11-20 years experience bracket and reasonable number (38, 29.01%) also within the 1-10 years experience bracket. Cognizance to information on Thailand are captured in Figure 4.3, the majority of the participants were within the experience bracket of 11-20 years (59, 57.28%). The outcome from the two countries suggests that majority of PR leaders have relatively enough experience to drive PR activities in achieving the ultimate PR goals.

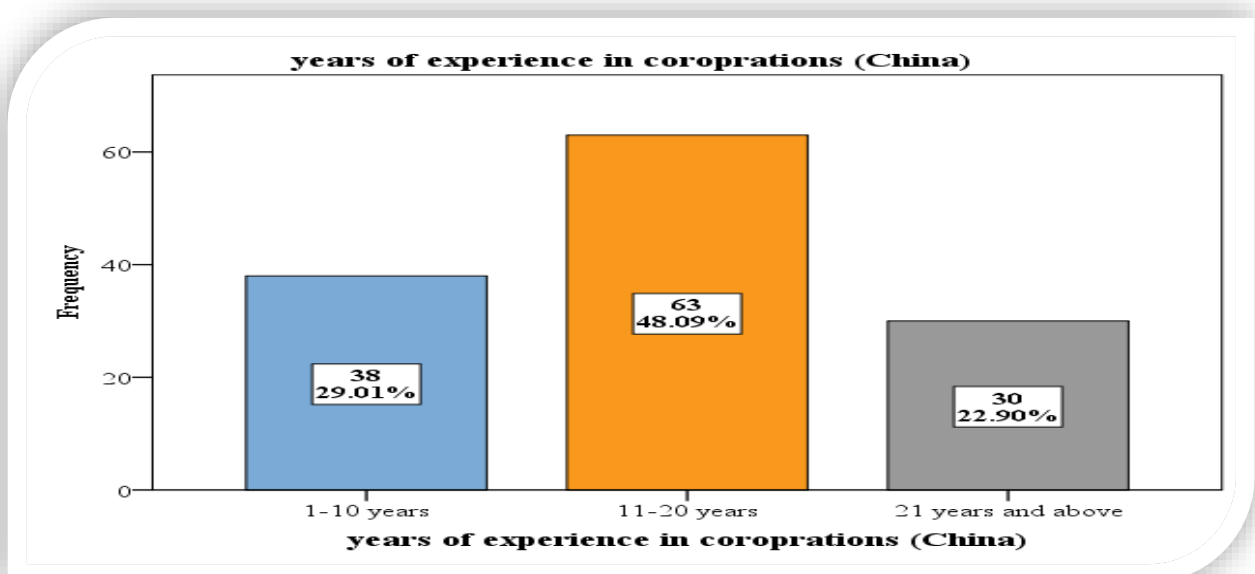


Figure 4.2. Years of experience in corporations (China)

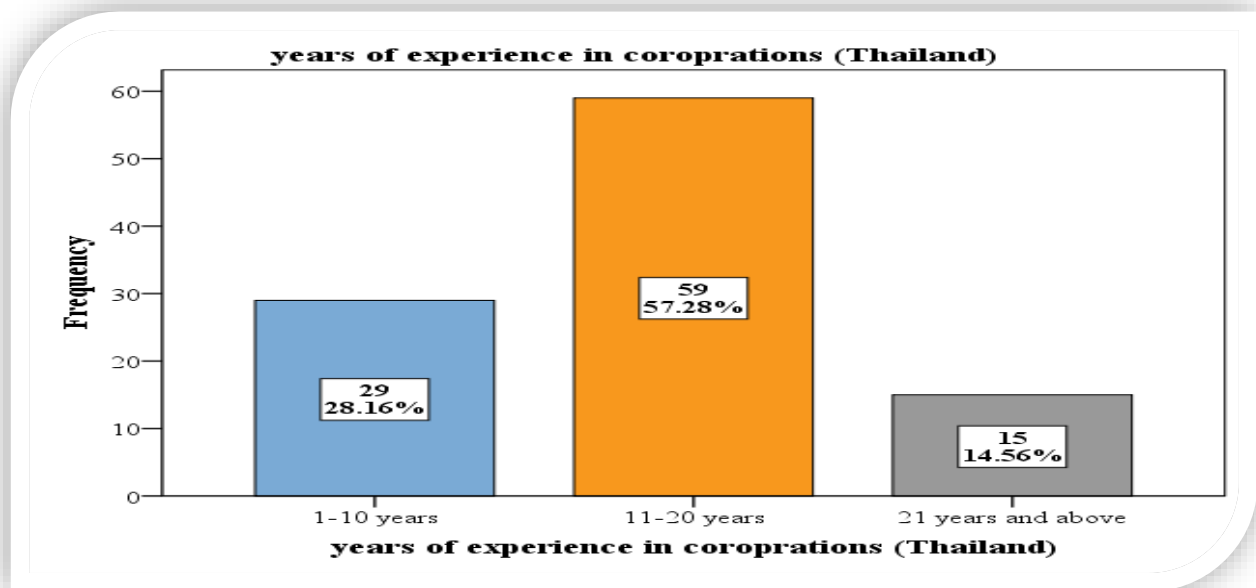


Figure 4.3. Years of experience in corporations (Thailand)

Noticeably, the representative sample revealed that the study's participants in both countries had, in their vast majority, received higher education, most commonly a master's degree. In the case of China, 55% of participants hold a master's degree (Figure 4.4), whilst 47% of participants in Thailand had studied at a master's level (Figure 4.5). The primary educational background for these participants was public relations and management studies, although humanities and financial studies also appeared in their demographics. Whilst an attempt was made to have an equal number of male and female participants in the survey, it appeared that men comprised the majority of public relations leaders in both countries (75%). Nevertheless, the sample used for the semi-structured interviews comprised an almost equal number of men and women (58 men and 57 women) employed in three types of organizations: public or private companies, communication agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

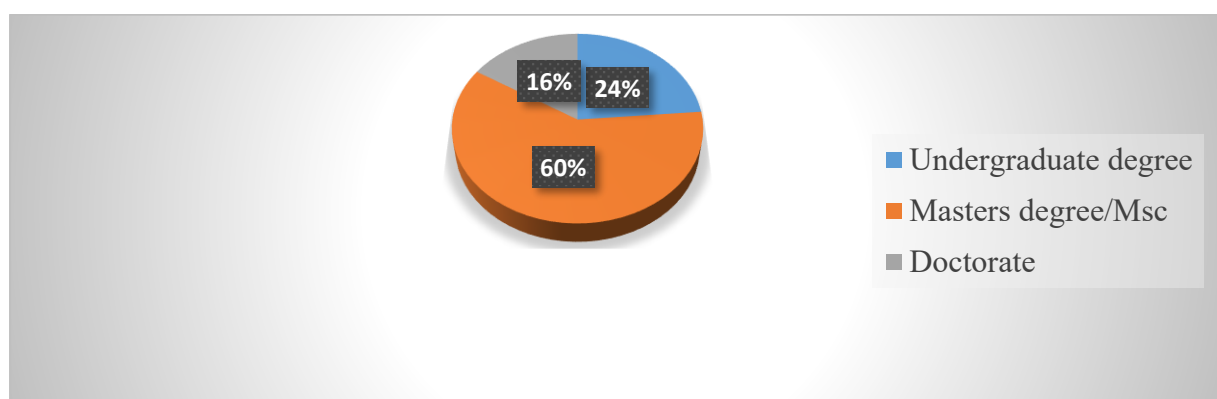


Figure 4.4. Highest qualification sought for all respondents (China)

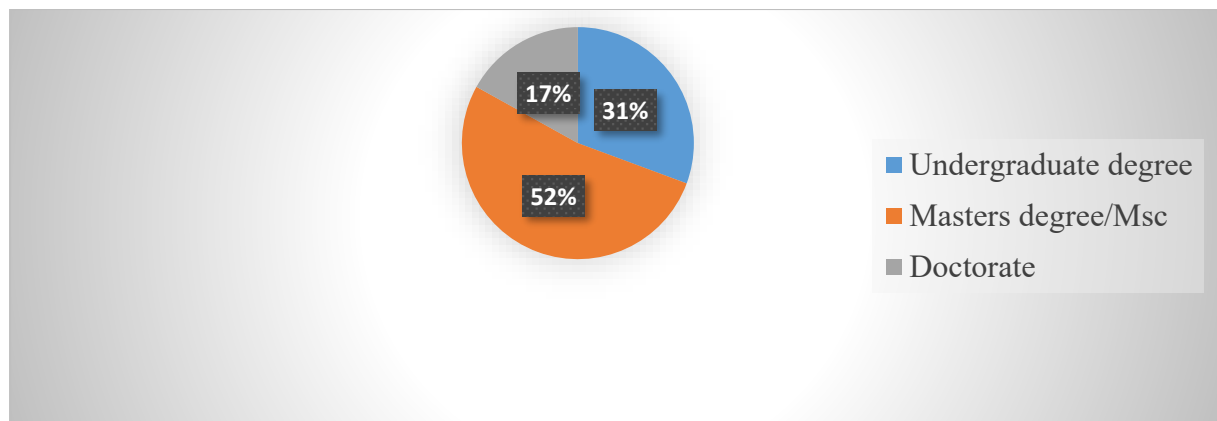


Figure 4.5. Highest qualification sought for all respondents (Thailand)

4.4. Data collection and analysis procedures

This subsection describes the two main sources of gathering data for the research process: a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The intention is to briefly provide the rationale for each method and describe the procedures followed. A questionnaire is a type of research tool used to collect data from respondents by asking them a series of questions and providing them with further suggestions (Phellas et al., 2011). Questionnaires enable the gathering of both subjective and objective data from a wide sample of the study population in order to produce statistically meaningful results, particularly when resources are limited (Kuter & Yilmaz, 2001). It is an effective technique for safeguarding participants' privacy (Phellas et al., 2011). Because questionnaires can measure both qualitative and quantitative data even though its more appropriate for quantitative, the study relied on questionnaires to solicit for information from the PR leaders in both countries to aid researchers in achieving the study's objectives. An online survey questionnaire was prepared and administered with the research population for the study's first phase using a snowballing approach mentioned earlier.

A handful of pre-planned questions are included in semi-structured interviews, but the interviewer has more latitude to change the language and sequencing (Afolayan & Oniyinde, 2019). An in-depth interview is the least planned and formal because the questions and their wording are not predetermined (De Leeuw, 2008). This particular interview style is more suited to gathering complicated data that has a greater percentage of opinion-based data (Horton et al., 2021). A 14 list compiled the interview guide for the second phase of the study, with interviews conducted in their majority via Skype and a few by telephone, with the shortest lasting 35 minutes and the longest an hour and a half. Immediately after each interview, recording, transcribing, and analysis was pursued using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Emerging themes were formed from the responses to the interview questions, and following this process, the third phase of work involved the synthesis of findings from the first two phases. Results were analyzed through means of SPSS software to produce figures for discussions and drawing inferences.

5. Research findings

The following section addresses the findings from the three phases of the study with the most distinct themes and several sub-themes emerging from the analysis and synthesis of the survey replies and conversations with communication leaders.

(1) Findings – What are some important issues for public relations leaders in China and Thailand? (RQ1)

When asked to name and discuss key issues PR leaders in both countries confront in their workplace, 13 issues emerged from the survey in China and 10 in Thailand. With a total of 8 issues in compliance with the answers provided during the interviews in both countries. According to the findings from the survey and survey and semi-structured interviews conducted for this study, the most important issue identified among public relations leaders in China (34.35%) and Thailand (28.16%) -Figures 5.1 and 5.2 respectively- was dealing with the increasing speed and breadth of information flow because of emerging technologies. This same issue arose as crucial in discussions with PR leaders during the interviews: Indicatively, two interviewees stated:

PR leader 2 (China): "...I feel that the biggest concern is addressing the overwhelming flow of information, mostly due to the Internet. There is so much content out there that we must be able to manage daily. It is challenging...."

PR leader 5 (Thailand): "...In my company, we are always interested in keeping updated with the latest trends and new content available to educate ourselves and our employees. It is difficult to manage this enormous amount of information and organize it hierarchically...."

Reportedly, the second most important issue mentioned by PR leaders in China was dealing with any emergency issues arising, rating 25.19%. Handling crises effectively is also perceived as the most important by PR leaders in Thailand, coming third among their reported issues with a percentage of 20.39%. The second highest issue reported in Thailand, with 22.33%, was responding to the digital revolution and the rise of social media. Interestingly, this issue was considered less important for Chinese PR leaders, coming sixth in the list with 14.5%. In China and Thailand, improving employees' engagement and commitment in the workplace was rated third and fifth. 23 respondents (17.56%) acknowledged it, whereas 16 of their Thai counterparts (15.53%) attributed particular importance to this issue. The fourth most important issue in China was concerned with improving the measurement of communication effectiveness, rating at 16.03% among respondents. On the other hand, this issue rated ninth among Thai PR leaders (9.86%), attributing thus less importance to it while meeting communication needs in different cultures were perceived as the fourth most important issue with 17.48%. Finally, discovering, empowering and sustaining top talents was rated seventh in the list for both countries, sharing 10.69% for China and 12.62% for Thailand.

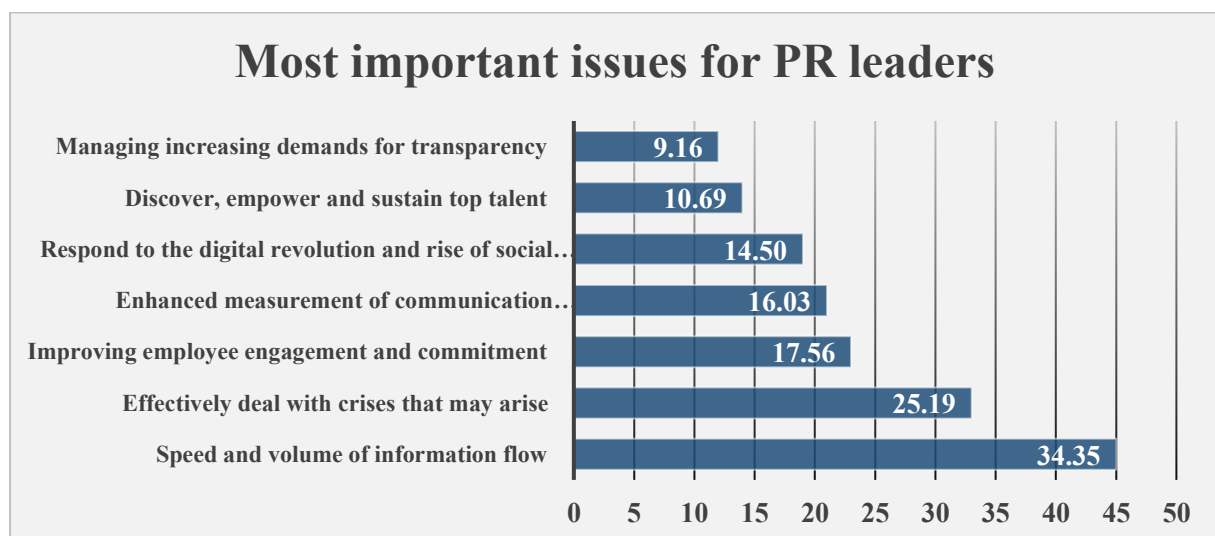


Figure 5.1. Issues important to public relations in China (N=131)

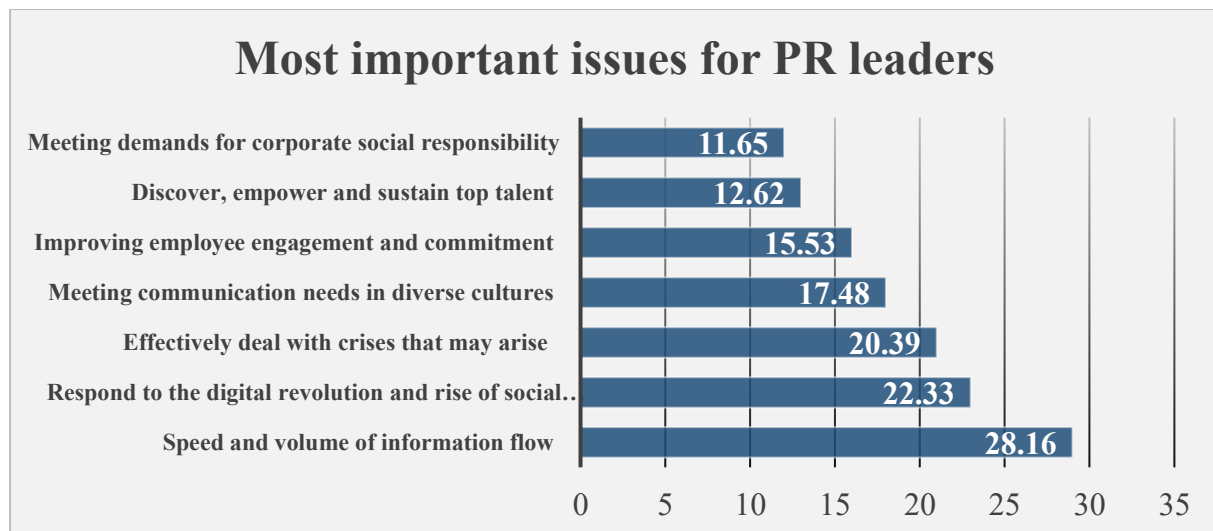


Figure 5.2. Issues important to public relations in Thailand (N=103)

(2) Findings – How do Chinese and Thai public relations leaders address these issues/challenges? (RQ2)

Chinese and Thai PR leaders appeared to cohorts dealing with the speed and volume of information flow as the biggest challenge that needed to be addressed in their field. PR leaders in these two emerging markets employ similar action strategies in discussing appropriate ways to respond to this challenge. Promoting in-service training and own initiatives to gain new skills was considered the most important strategy in China with 40% (Figure 5.3), and the second most important in Thailand with 31% (Figure 5.4). On the other hand, the most important strategy, according to the participants from Thailand, 46% was taking advantage of the Internet to acquire information, analyze and distribute news, which was mentioned as the second strategy among Chinese PR leaders with 33%. The statements from the interviews that follow are characteristic of these views:

PR leader 5 (China): "...I feel like the best way to deal with the constant flow of information is to constantly educate yourself, develop new skills through workshops, seminars and other forms of training...."

PR leader 3 (Thailand): "...My belief is in the power of the Internet as the best way to collect, analyze and share up-to-date information, inform others as well...."

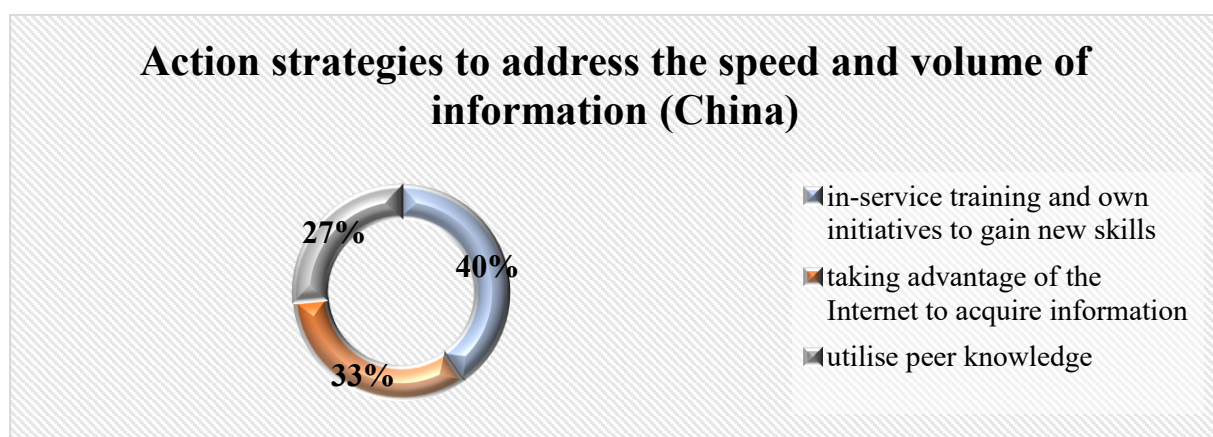


Figure 5.3. Main action strategies to address the speed and volume of information for PR leaders in China (N=131)

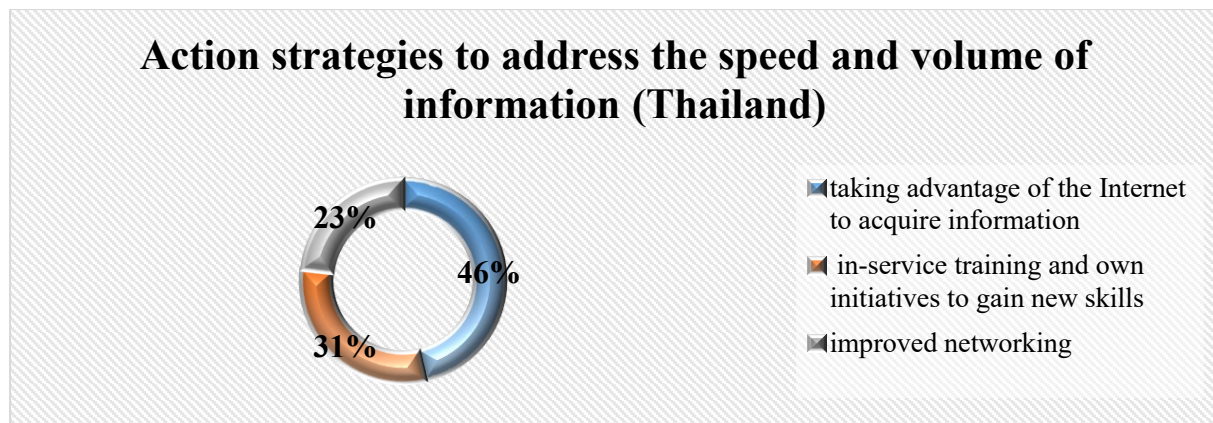


Figure 5.4. Main action strategies to address major challenges for PR leaders in Thailand (N=103)

The second and third most important issues for leaders in public relations in China and Thailand appeared to be dealing effectively with crises. According to the findings from the two data sources, there were similarities in how they coped with these crises. Chinese PR leaders employ management programs to reduce the risk of crises as their top choice, rating it at 45% (Figure 5.5), whereas Thai professionals view this as their third option with 23% (Figure 5.6). On the other hand, Thai professionals attribute greater significance to delivering effective communication plans (41%), whereas this comes second as a strategy amongst their Chinese colleagues (33%). The second most highly mentioned strategy for Thai PR leaders was taking ownership of the solution (36%). The third most highly rated strategy, with 22% among Chinese leaders, was utilizing precaution-monitoring technologies to identify and track potential issues.

The following statements deriving from the interviews are representative of these views:

PR leader 16 (China): "...Creating management programs is the most effective way to minimize the risk of crises. We must be readily available to train and equip our workforce to respond appropriately to any challenge...."

PR leader 34 (Thailand): "...Based on my years of experience, what I prefer to do is use a combination of live data available with my gut. Then I am ready to act, decide, and be responsible for this...."

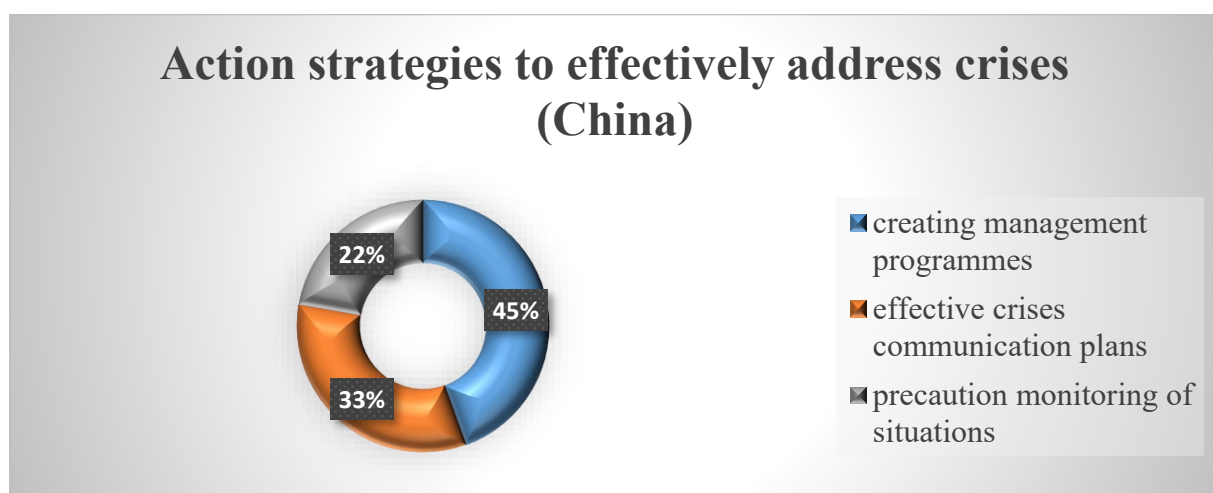


Figure 5.5. Main action strategies to address the speed and volume of information for PR leaders in China (N=131)

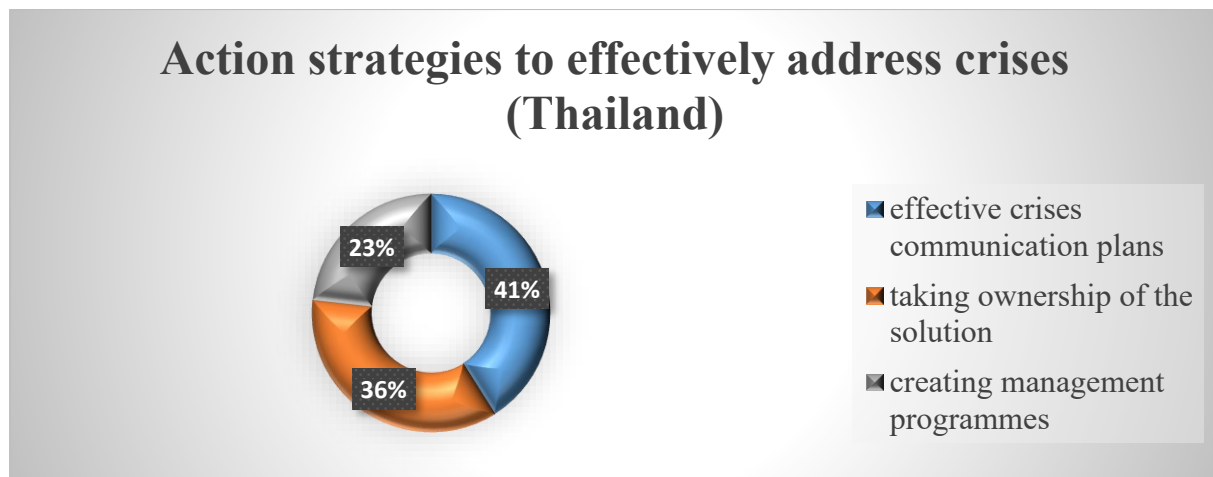


Figure 5.6. Main action strategies to address major challenges for PR leaders in Thailand (N=103)

In Thailand, responding to the digital revolution and social media was rated the second most important issue they must address. One strategy Thai leaders suggested as the most frequently employed to deal with digitization is enhancing interactions among customers, suppliers, stakeholders, and employees (25%). Improving communication and services through better networking is thus important to them.

According to the survey and interview findings, improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace was seen as the third and fifth most common issue PR leaders face in China and Thailand. Chinese respondents refer to listening to the voices of their employees, for example, through appropriate engagement surveys and follow-up on their advice to improve their working environment as their top option (45%) to improve employee engagement and commitment (Figure 5.7). The latter is rated fourth among Thai PR leaders (16%), with more importance given to ensuring that their employees feel empowered to generate ideas and suggest changes that will be applied. In this sense, they will be able to contribute to improved performance, business innovation, and better workplace experiences. This was the first strategy with 46% as far as Thai leaders (Figure 5.8) and second among Chinese professionals with 32%.

Characteristic statements from the interviews that support these views are:

PR leader 22 (China): "... I would say that it is of the most important aspects to let them know their voices are heard, that we acknowledge their suggestions to improve, whether through a survey or informal discussions from which we take action...."

PR leader 31 (Thailand): "... You must make them feel important; each one of them is valuable and has something to offer to contribute to enhanced performance. We value their initiatives and critical thinking...."

Developing reward and recognition programs to celebrate personal wins was the third choice for Chinese leaders (23%) and third among their Thai colleagues (20%), whereas emphasizing work-life balance came second for Thai respondents (34%) and fourth among Chinese (18%).

Action strategies to improve employees' engagement and commitment in the workplace (China)

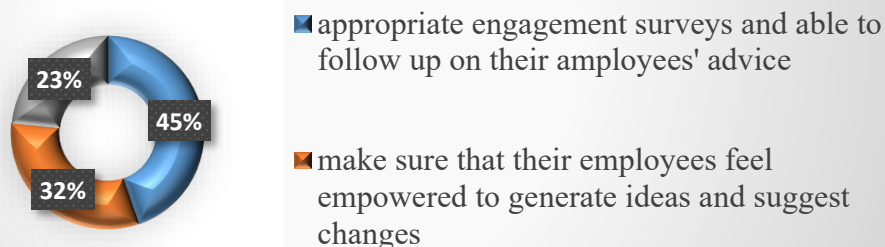


Figure 5.7. Main action strategies to address the speed and volume of information for PR leaders in China (N=131)

Action strategies to improve employees' engagement and commitment in the workplace (Thailand)

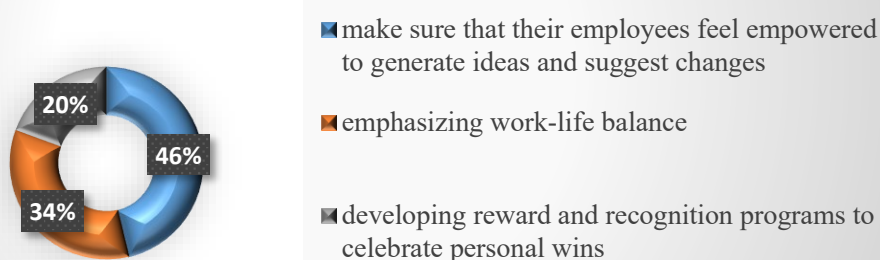


Figure 5.8. Main action strategies to address major challenges for PR leaders in Thailand (N=103)

(3) Findings – What are some of the leadership abilities in public relations in China and Thailand, respectively, that are considered of value? (RQ3)

The three most highly rated leadership abilities or traits reported among Chinese and Thai leaders were similar, although they appeared in a different hierarchy. Chinese PR leaders considered the capability to inspire and motivate others as the top leadership ability scoring 43% (Figure 5.9). On the other hand, their Thai colleagues considered this the third most valuable ability, with 27%. First in their mentioning came the ability to build and manage work groups/teams with 41% (Figure 5.10), rated third among their Chinese colleagues (28%).

A few typical answers during the interviews where PR leaders elaborate on the above are:

PR leader 2 (China): "...My experience tells me that it is imperative to inspire and motivate to be called a true leader. You must set the goals and focus, drive others to strive for success and never give up...."

PR leader 11 (Thailand): "...It is the ability to manage a group of people with different backgrounds, skills, mindsets etc. You must communicate at a high level and share the organizational skills that will unite all for a common cause...."

The second most noted leadership ability in both countries was the capability to participate in strategic decision-making regarding any issues or challenges arising. This ability gathered 33%

of the Chinese PR leaders' responses and 32% of their Thai colleagues. Regarding the fourth option for these PR leaders, the abilities differed in the two countries. Chinese PR leaders consider accountability, taking responsibility for everyone's performance and their own, as critical (22%). Their Thai colleagues think of the capability to solve problems tactfully and analyze issues as the fourth most important leadership trait scoring a percentage of 19%.



Figure 5.9. Leadership abilities considered of value for PR leaders in China (N=131)



Figure 5.10. Leadership abilities considered of value for PR leaders in Thailand (N=103)

(4) Findings – What are some practical ways to improve the development of next-generation leaders in public relations in China and Thailand? (RQ4)

Similar to the perceptions on important leadership abilities in public relations, when asked how it is possible to develop next-generation leaders in China and Thailand, it appeared that there were several commonalities. The top-rated practice for both countries was establishing a leadership development process (how to identify, cultivate and retain leaders). This practical way raised the preference of 45% for Chinese practitioners (Figure 5.11) and their Thai colleagues (Figure 5.12).

The next statements are characteristic of the top choices in each country:

PR leader 18 (China): "...I am inclined to say that the best way to improve the chances of having better future leaders is to focus on highly structured programs for the development of these leaders, to ensure training, mentoring and coaching are targeted and up to dated...."

PR leader 36 (Thailand): "...I think that whether it is formal or informal, the development process such as application and dedicated training, mentoring programs and peer support are crucial...."

The second leadership development strategy was different in each country. It was crucial for Chinese public relations leaders to develop leaders in everyday work (32%) by providing real-time training, coaching, and team training. This action was rated fourth among Thai public relations professionals, with 21%. Thai public relations practitioners, on the other hand, believed that the second most practical way to enhance the development of next-generation leaders was to continuously plan through testing, evaluation, repetition/expansion, formalizing and following a succession plan (33.5%). This was rated fifth among Chinese leaders, with 15.2%.

The third most common action for Thai public relations leaders (23%) and fourth among Chinese leaders (21%) was providing leadership development activities such as training, coaching, mentoring, and feedback. Assessing current leadership skills using validated assessment tools or developed leadership competencies was the third choice among Chinese practitioners, with 26% and fifth among Thai leaders, with 14%.



Figure 5.11. Practical ways to develop next-generation leaders according to PR leaders in China (N=131)



Figure 5.12. Practical ways to develop next-generation leaders according to PR leaders in Thailand (n=103)

6. Discussions

The analysis of the findings reported in the previous section suggested that the Chinese and Thai PR professionals share similar views regarding most of the issues investigated in this study. It was interesting to explore further any cultural factors that could affect these perceptions and overall attitudes. The theoretical framework was brought into the foreground of the discussion at this point of the study to gain more insights into the matter.

When comparing the findings in relation to the integrated leadership model (Meng & Berger, 2013). It is evident that there is compliance between the participants' responses regardless of their country of origin. Therefore, the integrated leadership model can be used on a global scale for developing excellent leadership in public relations. Based on the responses of the 234 respondents to the survey and interviews, the three most notable dimensions present in both China and Thailand were team collaboration, communication knowledge management, and organizational culture and structure (Figure 5.13).



Figure 5.13. Dimensions of the integrated leadership model present in the study

Two of the three highly rated leadership dimensions in this study (communication knowledge management and team collaboration) confirm (Berger & Meng, 2014; Meng, 2014) findings where senior group respondents valued these alongside strategic decision-making, ethical orientation and self-dynamics as the most important leadership dimensions.

Team-oriented work is a form of organizational life that is the most significant and common element in today's businesses (Chen et al., 2020; Davidson, 2020; Gim Hoon, 2012; Puksawadde, 2015). The role of leadership in team settings is gaining increased attention (Falkheimer et al., 2017). A future direction for research in this dimension would include exploring how cultural differences might affect leadership initiatives in a team setting and mediational mechanisms (Bean & Dodge, 2017; Gregory & Willis, 2013) for developing team leadership abilities.

The second dimension of leadership in public relations that was more prominent in this study was communication knowledge management. Fang et al., (2022) suggest that knowledge management is both a goal and a process. As an outcome or goal, it focuses on sharing information for the organization's benefit (Engel, 2012). They argue that "the knowledge management process is not so much about control as it is about sharing, collaboration, and making the best possible use of a strategic resource".

Demoulin & Djelassi (2016) defines it as working at the intersection of technology, organizational structures and cognitive-based strategies. In this conceptualization, technology is the tool, an organizational structure is the context and knowledge is the object, the "stuff" of great advances. If this communication process is well designed, it enables ideas to be shared, and everyone is included in the communication (Fang et al., 2022). This is where the role of an excellent leader come (Meng & Berger, 2019; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018), "to ensure that individual learning becomes organizational learning".

The previous are closely related to organizational culture and structure, which have been viewed as critical to the success of companies (Holzmann, 2020; Meng, 2014). Nevertheless, it is one dimension that does not often occur in real life as company leaders do not appreciate the value of PR to allow leaders in PR to be systematically involved in strategic decision-making groups and processes of organizations (Berger, 2015). Berger & Meng (2014) suggest that organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs or perceptions that employees of an organization share. This can guide the staff on what to do and what not to do, such as practices, values and assumptions (Jin et al., 2017). These values are better communicated and envisioned through leadership in an organization (Andersson, 2020; Meng et al., 2012; Simonsson & Heide, 2021). Therefore, leaders such as the ones in this study appreciate their role in maintaining an organization's culture to ensure consistent behavior within the workplace and a healthy atmosphere overall for employees (Bean & Dodge, 2017; Fang et al., 2022; VOLPONE et al., 2012).

7. Conclusion

For a while now, the field of public relations attributes more significance to leadership as a means to ensure organizational effectiveness and corporate success. This study's findings shed light on an increasing interest in leadership as one key element to ensure communication management and organizational effectiveness in public relations practice and scholarship. The importance of the comparative study pursued and reported in this paper among emerging markets, China and Thailand, lies in the fact that it contributes to a deeper understanding of current conceptualizations and practice of public relations leadership in an Asian context, which has not been substantially addressed in the literature. The next step of the research in

this area would be to compare these two emerging markets with more established economies such as the US and Europe.

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