

Thai Generation Z: The Evolving Paradigm of Leadership in the Kingdom of Thailand

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Abstract

Leadership knowledge, styles and applications continue to evolve through generational perspectives at both a personal and societal level. In Thailand, the traditional hierarchical and paternalistic leadership structure is being challenged by a generation that is strongly influenced by western culture and global events. In a divergent leadership mindset to that of their parents, Thai generation Z prefer a shared leadership style that is based on integrity, vision and inclusiveness and identifies the emergence of female leadership into what was once a male dominated domain. This generational desired mindset, however, is in its infancy as self-leadership and leadership development remains an elusive concept for those outside of the Thai elite. Generation Z is entering the workforce in Thailand and the development of leadership for this global generation of Thais is of significant importance in dealing with a rapidly ageing population, instability of its political system and a slow process of technological development to meet the requirements of Industry 4.0 and digitalisation. Thai Generation Z will be the generation that Thailand calls on to maintain its economic status in Asia and to ensure the continued future development of its society and institutions. As this study finds the paradigm of leadership in Thailand is in the process of evolution due to generational change.

Key Words: Leadership, Self-Leadership, Generation Z, Collectivism, Individualistic, Digitalisation, Industry 4.0, Thailand

1. Introduction

From generation to generation, leadership has been an integral part of human development in both a personal and a broader societal application. In an individual perspective it is manifested in self leadership and in a societal application as organisational and community development that ultimately contributes to the economic growth and stability of a country (Northouse 2007). Leadership may be defined as the process of influence between a leader and followers to attain group, organisational or societal goals (Hollander 1985). A plethora of academic research has noted that leadership evolves with generational perspective and cultural application (Broadbridge and Hearn 2008). Lammers and Hickson (1979) suggest that Latin style leadership is manifested as a classic bureaucratic hierarchy, whereas in an Anglo-Saxon application it is less centralised with more freedom of power and decision making.

Leadership in Asia and the developing world is historically shaped by greater centralisation of decision making, less formalised rules and the traditional paternalistic or family orientation (Joiner et al. 2009). Leadership has been explained against a range of titles that include authoritarian, paternalistic, benevolent, and now in a modern application that includes moral, transactional, transformational, situational, entrepreneurial, authentic, and shared leadership (Rowley and Ulrich 2012). Despite the numerous modern leadership titles, regionalism and cultural attributes continue to influence and shape leadership characteristics styles and traits (Rhein 2013).

In Western society, leadership literature consistently identifies three variables; vision, motivation and influence as the skeleton that supports the various leadership concepts (Farling et. al 1999; Naidoo et. al. 2019). The Western application (*individualistic society*) of Leadership, as noted by Iles and Preece (2006) focuses on individual leader development and the enhancement of human capital. In an Asian application (*collectivist society*) leadership development consists of the collective ability of people to undertake leadership roles to build social networks and relationships and may include formal authority. For example, Thai cultural values influence Thai leadership and management style and are more focused on collectivism, harmony, and consideration for others (Zhu et al. 2007). The building of harmonious relationships is an important aspect of Thai Leadership as Farh, and Cheng (1999) explain along with respect for authority and the maintenance of hierarchical order in society. The base line of hierarchical order in Thai society is usually demonstrated by the head of the family (*father*) (Tjosvold et. al 2004).

To understand the importance of relationships in a leader-follower context, Gergen (1994) suggests that relational theory explains how people make sense of themselves in the world and is generated and sustained in the context of

ongoing and harmonious relationships. Drath (2001) suggests that relational leadership is a communal achievement whereas Uhl-Bien (2006) outlines relational leadership as a process through which social order and change are constructed and produced through new values, attitudes approaches, behaviours, and ideologies. The contextual application of leadership in a cultural sense identifies both internal and external influences that may influence leadership style and application (Taromina and Selvarajah 2005).

Internal or organisational demands are the manner in which a manager would respond to goals, objectives, structures, and issues (*knowledge, experience, relationships, organisational values, and decision making*) within an organisation and contribute to organisational effectiveness. Environmental influences (*culture, authority and hierarchical community harmony and non-confrontational interactions*) are external and may affect the success of the entire organisation (Selvarajah et. al 2013). This high-power distance instills leaders with more control yet less expectations (Farh, Earley and Lin 1997; Liden 2012). Additionally, Confucian values are still embedded in Asian culture, emphasising collectivism with leadership styles expected to be humble and self-depreciating (Fu et. al 2010). In Thailand, leadership has become a topical issue in society. The current system of Government, societal structure and cultural values are under scrutiny with widespread changes being sought to Thailand's education system, strict gender conformity, constitution, and monarchy (Kuo 2020). In a cultural context there is a clash of old and new values that focus directly on the leadership of Thai society.

Thai Generation Z are challenging the hierarchical system that has little tolerance for those who express different opinions or who raise questions about traditional Thai institutions (Chaitrong 2020). In essence, Thai Generation Z are challenging the traditional concepts of Thai Leadership; authority, hierarchical order, and harmonious relationships (Farh and Cheng 1999; Sprietzer et. al 2005). The significance of leadership development in an Asian and more specifically a Thai context is paramount for a country that is one of the biggest economies in Asia. Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 528 billion USD in 2020 is expected to grow to around 546 billion USD in 2021 and 549 billion USD in 2022 (World Bank 2020). As of June 2021, Worldmeter (2021) sets the Thai population at 69,945,494 with an average age of 40.1 years and is considered to be an ageing population. A study by Baxter (2017) highlighting the challenges of Thailand in meeting the demands of Industry 4.0, noted that by 2040 one in four Thai people will be a senior citizen.

Industry 4.0 was introduced at the Hanover Fair in 2011 by the German Government as an initiative to stimulate their economy. It consists of cyber physical systems within industrial production systems that has produced rapid advancements in technology mainly in production and manufacturing industries (Ghobakloo 2018). A recent study of Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2020) identified Industry 4.0 as a major challenge for Thailand in ensuring economic and social development. To meet these challenges, the Thailand Government implemented the 'Thailand 4.0' policy as a tool for managing the technological developments in innovation, knowledge, and creativity. The success of this policy will be an important test for Thai leadership practice as the Monarchy and Government are the litmus test for Thai leadership development. More importantly, the study noted that the current generation of Thai youth – Generation Z's skill, knowledge, and leadership development readiness to deal with the demands of the 21st Century are questionable.

Further noting the importance of leadership development in Thailand, Fernando (2016) describes the twenty first century as the 'Asian Century' with market development and expansion by western companies into Asia and Asian companies into Western market. As Jones and Pimdee (2017) explain, for the Thai economy to reap the benefits of the Asian Century they must overcome the projected shortfall in skilled workers across all industries and rapidly adapt to the technological advances made possible by Industry 4.0 (Bahrin et al 2016; Berawi 2018). To meet the challenges of an ageing Thai population there will be significant responsibilities placed on Thai Generation Z in meeting the leadership requirements of government, industry, and the overall economic future of Thailand. The influx of Generation Z into the Thai workforce and the generational change that is impacting on the authority, hierarchical order and relational interaction between society, government and industry illustrates the importance of this research. A study by Development Dimensions International (DDI) (2021) focusing on the Global Leadership Forecast which covered 50 countries and 24 major industry sectors indicated that developing the next generation of leaders ranked in the top three industry challenges globally and even more importantly that global companies must develop young people to take on the highest levels of leadership. That said, one style of leadership bridges both the internal and external cultural context of Leadership.

Self-Leadership is a predominant, self-influenced perspective that focuses on the achievement and motivation of intrinsically desired tasks or jobs that normally would be out of the ability of the individual (Manz 1986). To meet the challenges of global leadership development, global companies must continually adopt new models of leadership where '*everyone is a leader*' that focuses on motivation or the self-leadership variable of leadership (Abid et al 2012). Over the millennia, new models of leadership have emerged from different mindsets and cultural influences that have occurred due to generational change. Twenge et. al (2010) describes the term *Generations* as an approach to grouping age cohorts, identified as groups of people born at a similar time, as well as to evaluate individuals on a number of issues, behaviors, and characteristics. People belonging to the same generation share

and experience similar historical, social, and cultural events that affect the development of their attitudes and values. Furthermore, Schullery (2013) stressed that there are different beliefs and characteristics of each generational community that have a direct effect on attitudes and behaviours.

Generation Z or *digital natives* are persons born after 1995 and 2015 and are beginning to enter the global workforce (Gentina 2020). Farrell and Phungsoonthorn (2020) describe Thai Generation Z as people who place great value on development, good relationships, professional development, and financial stability (Adecco 2015). Thai Generation Z tends to be both collectivist with high uncertainty avoidance and power distance. The espoused national cultures of Thai Generation X and Y as highlighted by (Hofstede 1980; House et. al. 2004; Schwartz 1992; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2012) remain the same for Thai Generation Z (Farrell and Phungsoonthorn (2020). Generational values are a combination of values learnt at home, school, life changing events and political ideology that are prevalent during individual development. The majority of these learnt values perpetuate the espoused national culture that can be shaped by religion, national and community values and parental teachings (Farrell and Phungsoonthorn 2020). Gentina (2020) explains that Generation Z are the first to be described as the *global generation*. This generation are considered to be *digital natives* and like no other generation before them have experienced a *global youth culture*. This has resulted in very different mindsets to that of older generations and caused friction against many long held cultural practices which will eventually transfer to management and business practices.

In a global business context, as Rowley and Ulrich (2012) explain, leadership is an important concept in Asia, contributing to human capital development and is seen as a significant differentiator for the individual Asian economies looking to the future. There is a paucity of literature that focuses specifically on Thai Generation Z leadership. This paper seeks to address this gap in knowledge by identifying this generations cultural understanding and application of leadership and the existence of or emerging convergent (common) or divergent (different) leadership practices in Thailand.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Foundations of Thai Leadership:

The foundations of Thai leadership are historically attributed to the Chakri Monarchs that commenced with King Rama the 1st in 1782 up until the present Monarch, King Rama the 10th. Early recorded examples of Thai leadership were displayed by King Naresuan (1590 to 1605) who helped restore honour and credibility to the then Siam following many conflicts with the then Burma (Myanmar). However, the early foundations of Thai leadership are contributed to King Mongkut (1851 to 1868) and King Chulalongkorn (1868 to 1910) who are considered to be the fathers of Thai leadership (Winichakul 2011). King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn both had a liking for western knowledge and lifestyle and adapted many western ideologies into Thai society. More so, it was King Chulalongkorn who made many trips to Europe in an effort to understand western society. He used the diplomacy and social skill he learnt from those European trips to prevent Thailand from being formally colonized by either the British or French (Wyatt 1984, Terwiel 2011 and Peleggi 2002. Both of these Thai Monarchs used western leadership styles and traits and cross pollenated them into Thai society setting the baseline for the development of Thai leadership traits and style (Winichakul 2011). Over time, the style of Thai leadership has varied, and has been shaped by personality and contingent circumstances. Mulder (1992) suggests that there are two traditional styles of Thai leadership. A leader whose legitimacy is based on morality (*khunna*) is more well-mannered and orientated towards the people, whereas a leader who bases their legitimacy on power (*decha*) are a (*nakleng*) tough, charismatic, and loyal to close associates. The unstable nature of Thai politics has given birth to the *administrator* style of Thai leadership. This hierarchical business style leader facilitates the running of a country while catering to the requirements of a coup and is closely linked to the *nakleng* type of leader (Laothamatas 1988). To further understand Thai leadership, followers are bound by a culture that demands blind loyalty and respect for authority that maintains hierarchical order in society. In essence, they are servants to the hierarchical order of Thai leadership. As Greenleaf (1977) explains, natural servants are persons who understand they are servants first prior to any display of leadership.

Maisrikrod (1993) describes Thai society as one that is 'polarised' between conservatives-v-reformists, pro-military-v-pro-democracy, and traditional military/bureaucratic power holders-v-the new business power-based seekers and that Thai political culture shapes the nature of leaders. However, Santasombat (1990) identifies the importance of personal ties and suggests that Thai leadership is based on 'uncertain' patron-client ties. Noting, the hierarchical nature of the Thai social system in a work environment, Komin (1991) identifies the tendency of Thai employees refer work related issues to those higher in the hierarchy to establish legitimacy (Noypayak and Speece 1998). Further illustrating the high-power distance of Thai society, Fieg (1989) identifies Thai organisations as a vertical structure system where the ultimate superior uses their power and authority to make decisions with the subordinate implementing these decisions without question as would be consistent with an autocratic leadership

style (Bakalis and Joiner 2003; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin 1999).

2.2 Culture and Thai Leadership:

Smuckarn (1979) suggests Thai culture consists of three dominant themes: *personalism* outlines the importance of people to maintain good relationships with others who can benefit them. This results in Thais being more relationship-orientated than task-orientated.

The *fun-loving* theme focuses on present-time consumption, a dislike for hard work and a liking for broad-mindedness. The *merit accumulation* theme emphasises virtuous conduct, tolerance, and individual initiative. These cultural themes illustrate the collectiveness of Thai society, with Buddhism being the dominant factor that shapes Thai values. Thai values can be described as either *terminal* or *instrumental*. Terminal values represent the individual's goals in life with Instrumental values being the required behaviours needed to obtain those goals (Koman and Smuckarn 1979) In a western context terminal and instrumental values have similarities to the leadership variable of *motivation* of which also manifests itself in self-leadership.

The principles of Buddhism as described by Nakata (1986) illustrate that leadership behaviour that is inclusive of integrity, politeness, decisiveness, knowledge, justice, and empathy are desired traits that should be part of Thai leadership. They are similar to the western leadership traits associated with Ethical leadership. Although these principles represent the religious beliefs of Buddhism and collectivist values of Asian society, Runglertkengkrai and Engkaninan (1987) suggest that Thai leadership concepts continue to be largely or directly adopted or adapted from western leadership practices. However, the western leadership styles of transformational and transactional leadership are difficult for Thai's to understand. Bennui (2008) noted that Thai language does not contain either past or future *tense*. The vision element of a transformational leader represents *future tense*, and this presents confusion in a Thai cultural application. Thai leadership is more orientated towards the *here and now tense* and is representative of a transactional type of leader – manager. In Thai culture, past tense as explained by Prapobaranakul and Pongpairoj (2016) is not expressed through verbs but rather through context and contributes to the lack of speculation and future-orientated conclusions. This may be caused by the absence of counterfactual statements in Thai writing and literature (Grabe and Kaplan 1996).

Although Buddhism is seen as a major factor shaping Thai culture, Confucianism also contributes to the Thai cultural mindset. Confucianism as described by Adair (2013) explains that man exists to serve another, and that virtuous behaviour is an underpinning factor. In Confucian ideology, benevolence is also a key factor in that leaders, display kindness and strive to meet the priorities and needs of their followers first. As Block (1993) and Greenleaf (1997) explain putting the needs of and self-interests of others first illustrates concern and helps to elicit trust. The building of trust in *leader – follower* relationships establish a sense of community well-being and stability (Cook and Wall 1980). In a collectivist society, the leader is first the follower, and may be a mother or father, or any person who wields influence, however leadership begins with a choice in that one wants first to serve (Greenleaf 1997).

Greenleaf (1997) suggests that *leaders* and *followers* are interchangeable entities with the latter prompting the conscience of conformity with normative expectations (*collectivist*) whereas Burns (1978) described the transformational *leader* and *follower* acting as a system to improve all facets of each other's lives. In this manner each other's action is each other's gain. Similar to the behavioural leadership traits of Buddhism as described by Nakata (1986), Greenleaf (1997) suggests that the variables of vision, influence, credibility, trust, and service are desired leadership traits of a servant leadership style. The common thread that underpins both Buddhism and a servant leadership style is forming of relationships based on trust and integrity. Servant leaders seek to cultivate positive relationships with subordinates and create an environment of growth and success that is underpinned by ethical behaviour (Van Dierendonck 2011). The traditional style of Thai leadership where followers - servants were expected to fit within the hierarchical, paternalistic leadership framework for many years appears to be divergent in that it is moving more towards a shared – authentic style of leadership. This appears to be caused by the generational change of people who no longer show blind loyalty and conformity to the traditions of Thai society. Instead, this generation is seeking transparency and inclusiveness in Thai leadership.

Luthans and Avolio (2003) note that authentic leadership is a core factor in the development of transformational leadership and describe authentic leaders as hopeful, optimistic, ethical, and possess the ability to develop future leaders. The authentic style of leadership is distinctly different to the traditional styles and traits of Thai leaders and may indicate why there is a disconnect in the leadership development of the current generations of Thais. The younger generations of Thais and in particular generation Z are displaying more self-awareness of societal problems facing their country. This heighten awareness is due to the generational challenge of leadership in neighboring Asian countries (*the milk tea alliance*), and a tendency to adopt a more western lifestyle than that of their parents. Thai generation Z, see themselves as possessing the required ethical priorities to fill future leadership positions in Thai society. However, this generation has not developed their own preferred leadership style and have minimal knowledge on how leadership is applied in an individual or societal application. This identifies a gap in knowledge and as such, this research provides an important contribution to Thai leadership development.

2.3 Thai Contextual and Relational Influences:

To understand leadership across generations, contextualization provides a platform to understand the culturally embedded constructs (Rousseau and Fried 2001; Tsui 2006, 2007 and 2012). Rowley and Ulrich (2012) highlight that Thai leadership is shaped by the (*emic-country specific characteristics*) context of its own institutions and culture, namely the Thai Monarchy, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Confucianism has been cultural base for traditional Asian societies and remains engrained in modern Thai society. Ho (1995) notes that through relationalism, a person is intensely aware of the social presence of other human beings and how their acts influence other people. In Confucian ideology, relationalism or *ren* is the virtue that demonstrates a person's adaptability to others requests and fulfill the leader-follower harmonious relationships (Hwang 2000).

The four Confucian virtues of class system (*social order and obedience*) doctrine of the mean (*avoiding extremes and maintaining harmony*) *renqing* (*benevolence*) along with power distance and collectivism are the primary contexts that define and differentiate leadership (Fu and Tsui 2003). Sirussadaporn-Charoenngam and Jablin (1999) and Joiner et. al (2009) identify that Thai people place great value on deference to rank and respect for authority with superiors in Thai society able to express disagreement with followers. However, as Sriussadaporn (2006) points out, the leader may lose face (*sien*), but this is not negatively received. Deephuengton (1992) outlines that Thai's believe non-confrontation as the most important part of their thoughts and behaviour and will use silence as a way to withdraw and avoid further dispute, repressing tension, and any further loss of face. Pimpa (2012) explains that from birth Thais are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups that provide them with lifetime protection in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede 2001). In contrast to that belief, Thai generation Z are displaying divergent behaviours (*nok luw nok thang*) in that they are openly questioning and challenging the leadership of superiors in Thai society. This is also causing friction in family relations as the older generation of Thais still openly support traditional leadership models.

Mulder (1994) proposes that Thai relationships and personal motivations are built on benevolence (*jai dee*) and goodness, usefulness, and obligation (*boon koon*), the stronger the motivations will determine the predictability of the relationship. Crevani and Endrissat (2016) suggest that leadership is emergent and contextual and is located in the relational processes that facilitate the collectivist processes of organizing, cooperating, and adapting. In a relational perspective collectivist leadership is focused on teams, workgroups, networks, and organisations with positive outcomes achieved through coordinated work and mutual responsibility. For example, in a Thai relational context, Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff (2007) highlight the divergent leadership traits and behaviours of individuals where social order is negotiated, as being more beneficial to social development. Thai generation Z appear to be moving towards a disruptive constructionist perspective of relational leadership where leadership is based on the individual leader's skills and abilities and not that of a *khunna* or *nakleng* style of leader.

2.4. Thai Generation Z:

Thai Generation Z have grown up in a country that's political system experiences instability due to the prevalence of military coups (Hewison 2010). Bangkok continues to be the power base of Thailand and supports a culture where the Bangkok elite consider rural people as uneducated, uninformed and require guidance (Phatharathananunth 2016). The national culture shaping the early development of Thai generation Z was drawn from home, school, and the media. Although there is notable generational change in Thailand, the overall culture is still reflective of a society that is collectivist with high uncertainty avoidance (Farrell and Phungsoonthorn 2020). One of the more notable generational changes is the rise in generation Z seeking tertiary education. The acquisition of a higher level of knowledge appears to be contributing to the noncompliance of strict obedience required by the current class system. Instead, there is a divergent trend towards independence, and the overt expression of imagination and perspective on Thai society (Rigg et al 2014).

Thai generation Z are now entering the workforce on mass and leadership development will be crucial in ensuring the future economic development of Thailand. Hampton and Keys (2017) suggest that this generation will have a strong work ethic, similar to the Baby Boomer Generation, display responsibility and resilience to that of their Generation X parents and be more tech savvy than Generation Y. Adding to these noted generational work differences will be the addition of an evolving leadership style and its application. This can be directly attributed to the manner in which generation Z will interact with other staff due to technology and a workplace structure that is continually influenced by a remote and globally mobile workforce. Farrell and Phungsoonthorn (2020) describe Generation Z or *digital natives* as the first of the global generations that have continuous and unlimited access to technology and interactive communications. Tinmaz and Lee (2019) suggest that a large proportion of Thai population including generation Z have no knowledge of Industry 4.0 and its impact on their life. Hariharasudan and Kot (2018) note the low level of English proficiency amongst Thai generation Z in a world where the language of the digital world is English.

To maintain the economy of Thailand and to advance Thailand through the technological development of Industry 4.0, the requirement to develop individual, community and national leadership skills for Thai generation Z are crucial to the future of Thailand (Puriwat and Tripopsakul 2020).

A study by Baxter (2017) that focused on *Thailand 4.0 and the Future of Work in the Kingdom* noted that the Thai economy was at a critical point in maintaining its economic status against neighboring countries such as Singapore and South Korea, identified that effective leadership was required to reform its educational, social, and business sectors as a key process in maintaining and growing its economic stand point.

Moreover, Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2020) identified that reform of these sectors required urgent reform and that leadership development of Thai generation Z was crucial in ensuring the future development and prosperity of Thailand. To develop these various leadership skill sets, this research seeks to identify the gaps in knowledge between the traditional hierarchical and paternalistic leadership styles and traits and how the Thai leadership paradigm may be evolving due to generational change and its cultural application.

3. Methodology

The research methodology for this qualitative study involved the interviewing and data collection from 100 randomly selected male and 100 randomly selected female Thai generation Z persons from Bangkok, and both a southern and northern province in Thailand. The data collection was conducted in two parts. The first part of data collection involved the interviewing of respondents using a questionnaire consisting of ten questions requiring short answers. The short answer questions were designed to establish a base line understanding of current Thai leadership styles, traits and cultural behaviours, and any identifiable nuances between Thai and Western leadership applications. More specifically, the short answer questions sought to understand the emergence of any new Thai leadership practices or perspectives that could be attributed to generational change. The second part of data collection utilised nine questions to identify both the relational and contextual application of current Thai leadership. The responses sought to identify *how important* leadership is for Thai Generation Z and if leadership is *practical and necessary*.

The participant responses for both the relational and contextual leadership questions were recorded using a Likert Scale. For the *how important* is leadership the Likert Scale recorded (1 very unimportant; 2 unimportant; 3 neutral; 4 important; 5 very important). For the *is leadership practical and necessary* the Likert Scale recorded (1 not at all; 2 some progress, 3 half way, 4 mostly, 5 being neutral and 5 completely). The levels of response for the Likert Scale were chosen to minimise English language difficulties and the cultural understanding of leadership concepts.

This allowed for research participants to provide responses that directly related to their own life experiences, cultural knowledge, and their generational knowledge of how leadership is viewed in both a personal and a broader social application. The ten short answer questionnaire and the relational and contextual Likert responses address both the emic and etic viewpoints of Thai leadership. Kottak (2006) explains, that while the emic approach investigates how people think, it is also referred to as an insider, inductive or bottom up and is the starting point for the perspectives and words of the research participants. It allows for the research of human beings; from within a social group (participant perspective) and from outside (observer perspective), to convey their knowledge and for patterns and themes to emerge. Etic viewpoints use constructs as accounts, descriptions and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community or scientific observers. Nicholson (2018) explains constructivism theory as a way of how people construct their own understanding of phenomena through experience and reflection, while social constructivism (*often combined with interpretivism*) extends constructivism by including social actors and even cultural and generational development.

Creswell (2014) notes constructivism is a perspective that is widely seen in qualitative research while Crotty (1998) outlines that the goal of a constructivist approach relies as much as possible on the participant's view of the situation being studied. Emic and etic viewpoints can also apply specifically to codes used in Thematic Analysis (Lett 1990). To identify convergent or divergent leadership themes, practices or patterns the collected data from the short answer questions, relational and contextual Likert scales were uploaded into NVivo 10 for coding and categorisation. The coding in qualitative research involves the segmenting of data into units and rearranging them into categories to facilitate insight, comparison, and the development of theory. Codes serve as a retrieval and organising device that allows for the rapid retrieval and clustering of all the segments related to a particular question, concept, or theme (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research data, Lincoln, and Guba (1985) suggest that the collected data contains credibility (*confidence in the 'truth' of the findings*), transferability (*showing the findings have applicability in other contexts*), dependability (*showing the findings are consistent and could be repeated*) and confirmability (*a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest*).

Bringer et al (2004) and Silverman (2010) suggest that NVivo can enhance the rigour of research by providing a comprehensive trail of decisions made during data collection and analysis. The truth of findings is enabled in the use of NVivo, by providing an audit trail that links with data uploaded into NVivo 10. 3.3.8 Research Validity, Reliability and Evidence -v- proof (QSR International 2014).

Results:

Thai Generation Z: Male

The short answer questionnaire identified that Thai Generation Z males considered the term leadership as having the ability to be assertive, control people and make decisions. Their understanding of leadership comes from the hierarchical power base of Thai society and the strict cultural requirement to conform with the paternalistic respect for older generations. Their knowledge of leadership skills and behaviours were minimal as there is no specific development of self-leadership or broad societal leadership abilities taught from generation to generation. However, the male respondents stated that Thais who held societal positions of power, were wealthy, had high education and experience or were open-minded displayed the personality and behavioural characteristics of leaders in Thai society. The majority of respondents were unable to identify a person who was Thai or foreign who they considered to be a leader. Overwhelmingly, they could not nominate a person of Thai Generation Z who they thought was a leader and considered the current form of Thai leadership as being based on a lack of knowledge and honesty. In comparison, they viewed the western style of leadership as one that was open-minded, based on vision and independent thinking. The second part of the data collection instrument recorded responses to specific leadership questions in both a relational and contextual application. Figure 1 below illustrates the relational responses to questions that Thai Generation males considered to be important.

Relational Responses - Male:

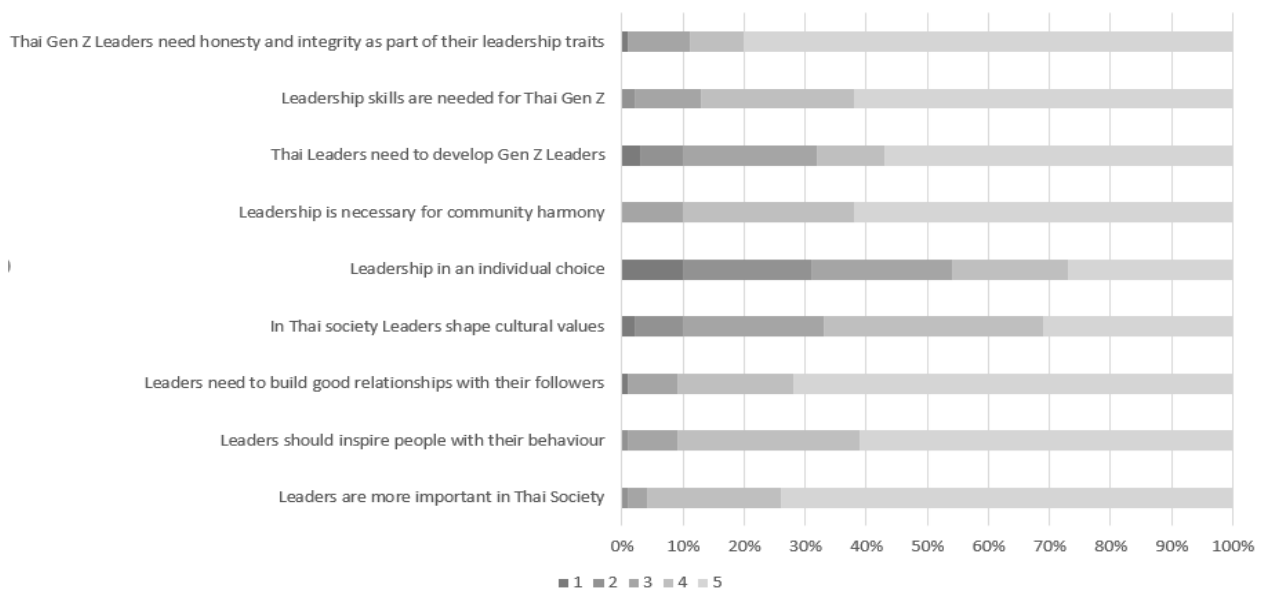


Figure 1: Thai Generation Z Male Relational Responses – Important

Figure 2 below illustrates the responses as to whether leadership is practical and necessary in modern Thai society.

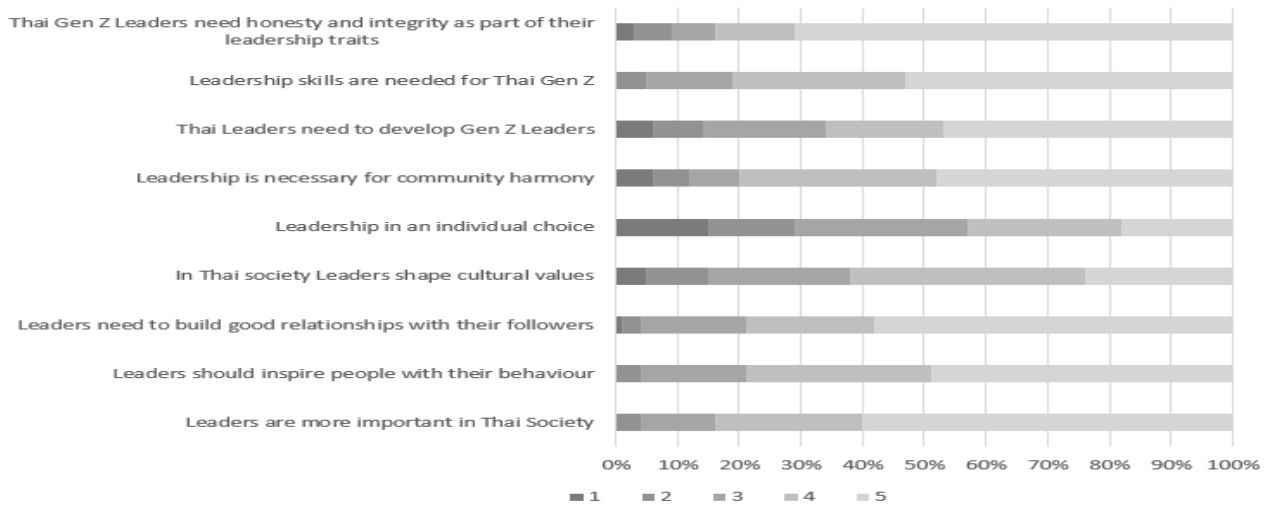


Figure 2: Thai Generation Z Male Relational Responses – Practical and Necessary

The relational leadership responses of Thai generation Z males identified that leadership is an individual choice and that is practical and necessary in Thai culture. They believe that leadership in Thailand is shaped by cultural values and that leaders should inspire their followers. The most interesting response was generation Z males viewed leadership as a personal choice. This response identified a convergent mindset with that of previous generations of Thais who believe that if blind loyalty is shown to the higher echelons of Thai leadership, everything in life will be provided. This is convergent with the relational mindset of Thai leadership where followers never question authority and illustrates that Thai leadership is still shaped by cultural values.

However, in what was divergent to the traditional Thai mindset of leadership was that this generation of Thai males believe leaders should inspire followers with their behaviour. Undoubtedly, this response is highlighting generational change in Thai leadership as this is the first generation to openly challenge the leadership styles, behaviours, and values of the Thai leader-follower relationship.

Contextual Responses - Male:

Figure 3 below illustrates the contextual responses to questions that Thai Generation males considered to be important.

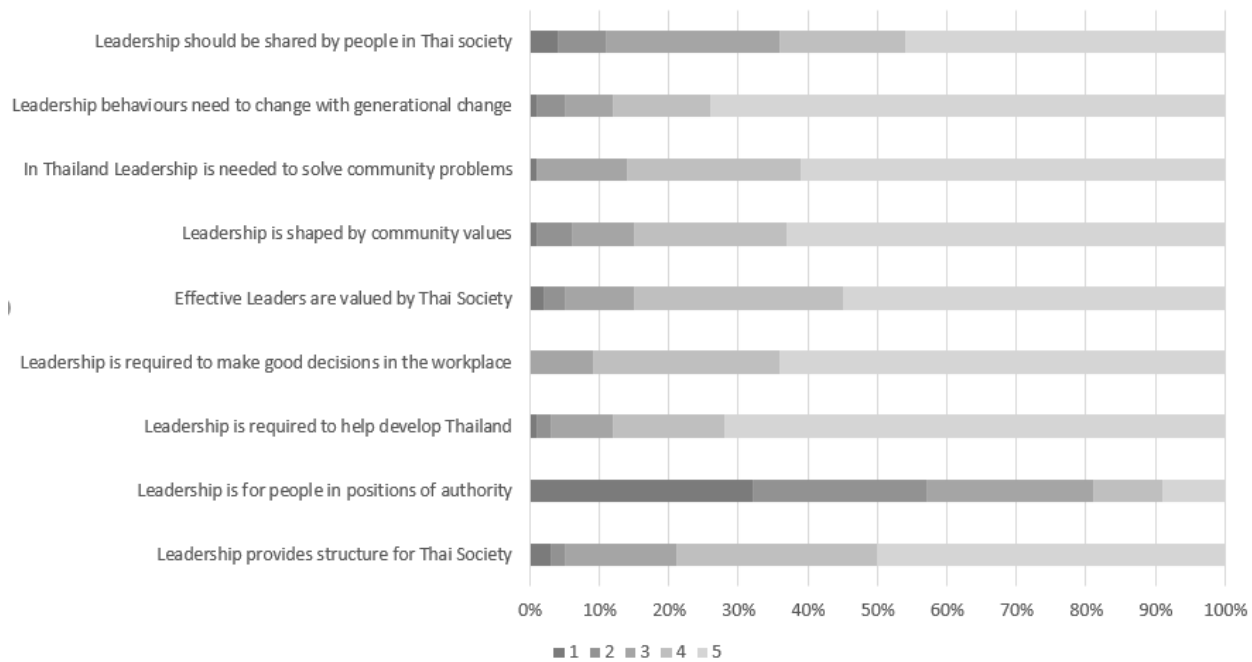


Figure 3: Thai Generation Z Male Contextual Responses– Important

Figure 4 below illustrates the contextual responses as to whether Leadership is practical and necessary in modern Thai society.

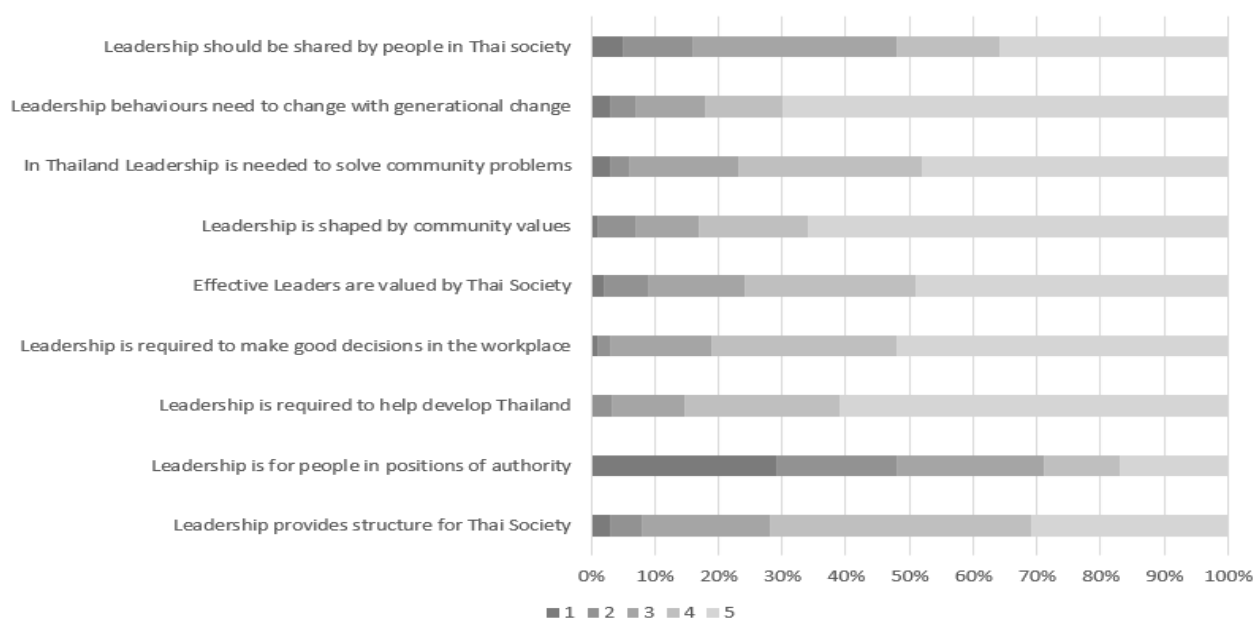


Figure 4: Thai Generation Z Male Contextual Responses – Practical and Necessary

In a contextual application of Thai leadership, generation Z males believe that leadership primarily remains the domain of people who are in a position of authority. This response is convergent with the relational views of a traditional male dominated leader-follower construct in Thai society. A notable divergent response was that this generation of Thai males believe leadership should be shared with effective leadership being valued in Thai society. This may indicate that generational change is also of the view that Thai leadership is no longer the responsibility of a few people in the Thai elite but requires the leadership application of many to address the challenges facing Thailand.

Thai Generation Z: Female

The short answer questionnaire identified that Thai generation Z females consider the term leadership as possessing the ability to be assertive, make decisions and hold a high level of responsibility. In Thai culture there is a high male -v- female context where males are more prominent in shaping societal structure and decision making. Therefore, the development of Thai female leadership styles and knowledge by the older generation is minimal. A high percentage of female respondents could not identify a person of Thai or foreign origin who they considered to be a leader but believed people who possess high experience and help others to be leaders. This perspective could be due to the more maternalistic style of female leadership where the consequence of decision making is considered. The female respondents considered that Thai people who were trustworthy, fair to everyone and open-minded displayed the required personality and behavioural characteristics of Leaders.

Similar to Thai generation Z males, Thai generation Z females could not identify a Thai person from their generation who they considered to be a leader. The female respondents described the current form of Thai leadership as being based on a lack of honesty and management skill. In comparison, they considered western leadership as being based on a strong relationships between leader and followers and open-mindedness in decision making. The second part of the data collection instrument recorded responses to specific leadership questions in both a relational and contextual application. *Figure 5* below illustrates the relational responses to questions that Thai generation females.

Relational Responses - Female:

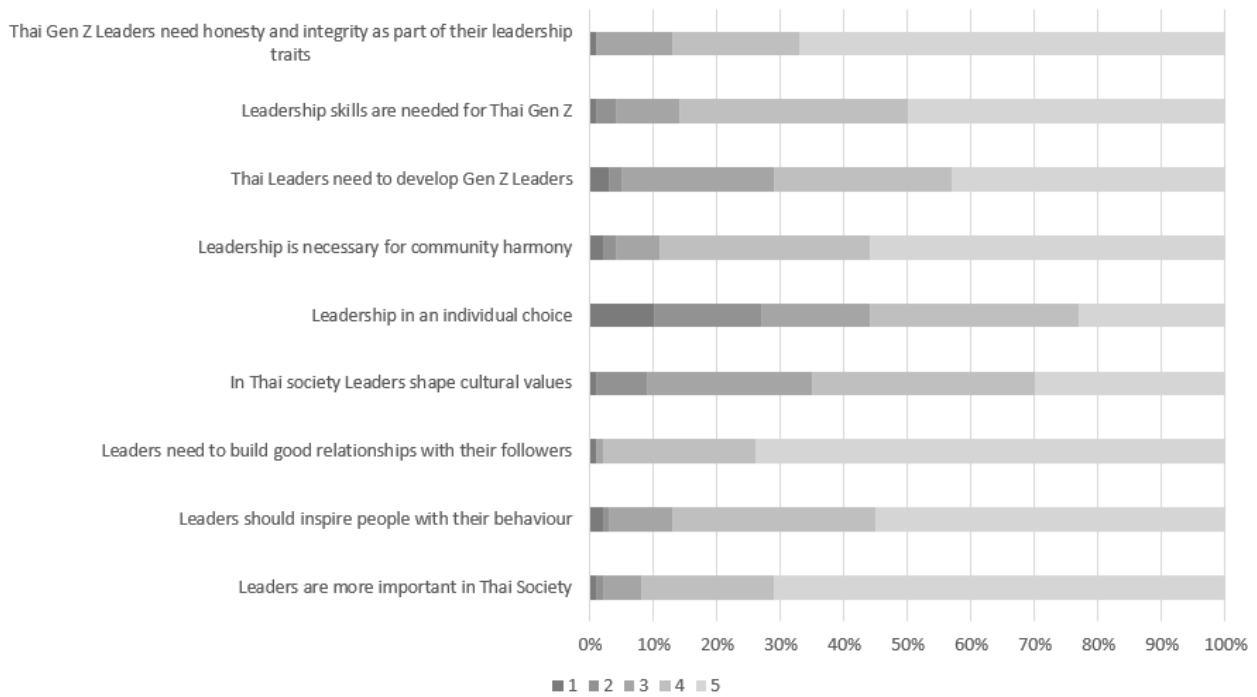


Figure 5: Thai Generation Z Female Relational Responses – Important

Figure 6 below illustrates the responses as to whether leadership is *practical and necessary* in modern Thai society.

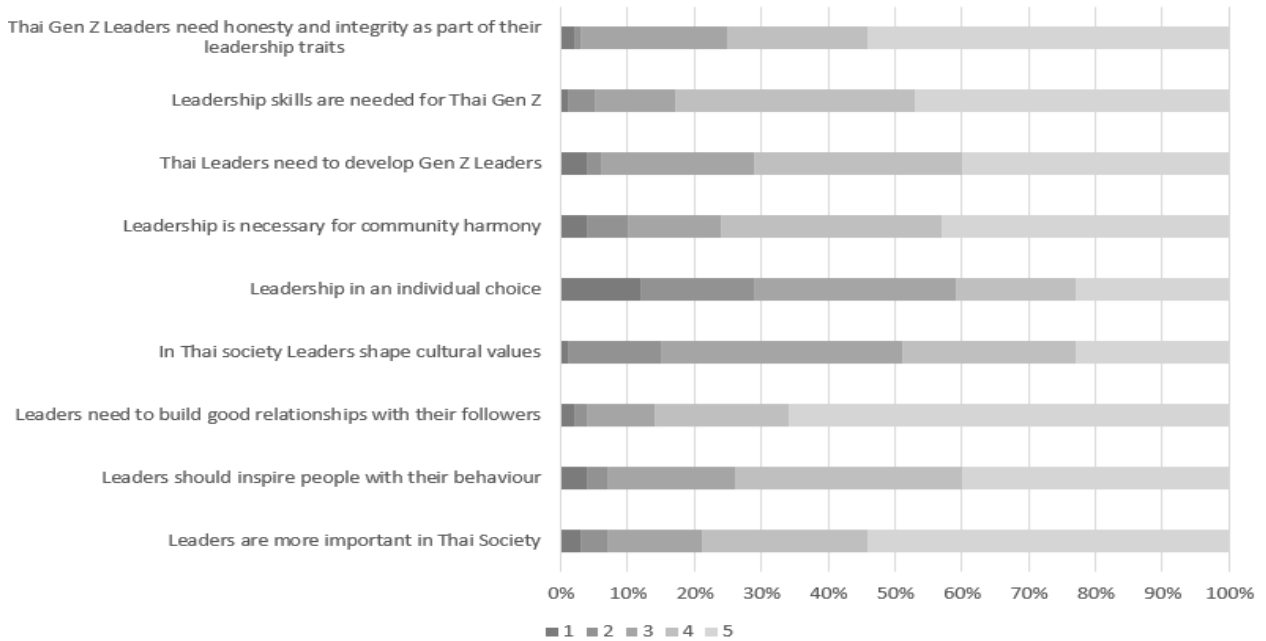


Figure 6: Thai Generation Z Female Relational Responses – Practical and Necessary

The relational leadership responses of Thai generation Z females were similar to the convergent male responses in noting that leadership in Thai society is a personal choice and is shaped by cultural values. The female respondents also illustrated a divergent mindset in believing that followers should be inspired by the behaviour of leaders. This highlights the emerging prominence of females in Thai society by overtly commenting on the individual and societal application of leadership. Further noting the emergence of Thai female leadership characteristics, the belief that leadership is an important and necessary factor in maintaining community harmony. The baseline for community harmony in Thailand is the immediate and then extended family unit. This may further indicate that generational change is altering the balance of gender equality in Thai culture.

Contextual Responses – Female

Figure 7 below illustrates the contextual responses to questions that Thai Generation Females considered to be *important*.

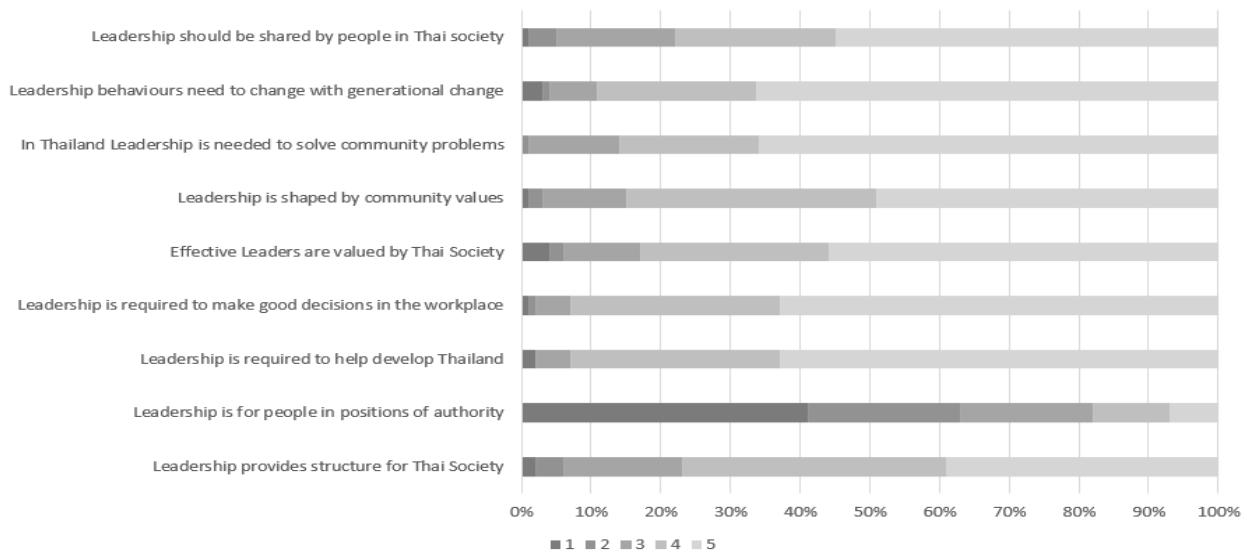


Figure 7: Thai Generation Z Female Contextual Responses – Important

Figure 8 below illustrates the contextual responses as to whether Leadership is *practical and necessary* in modern Thai society.

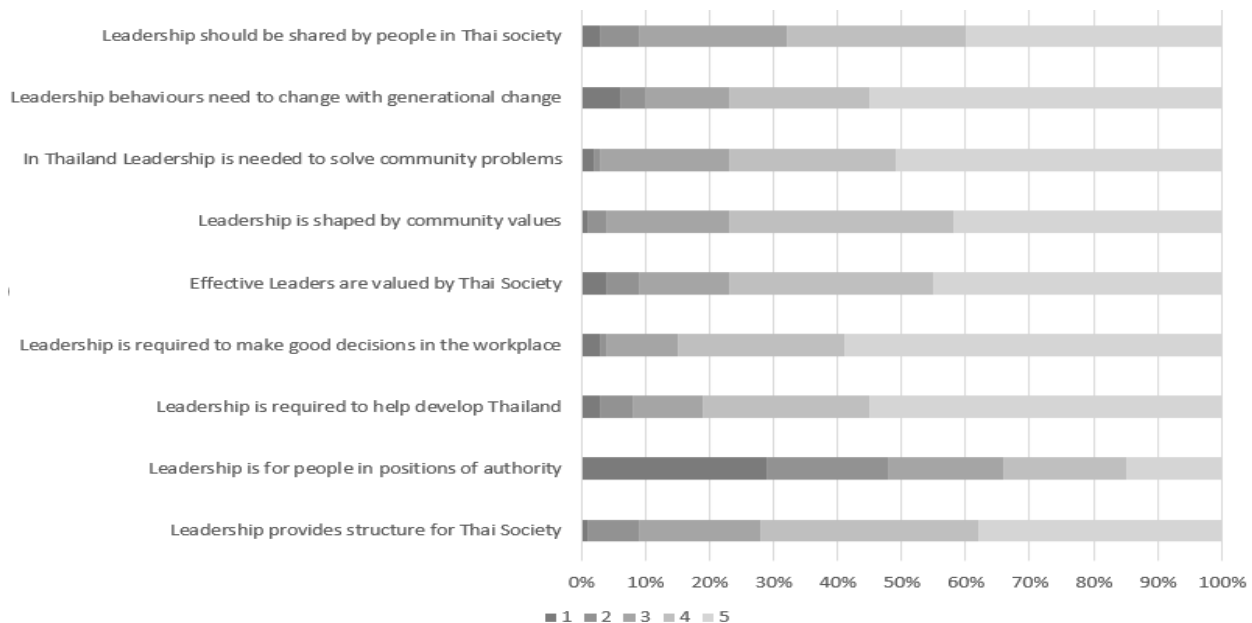


Figure 8: Thai Generation Z Female Contextual Responses – Practical and Necessary

Thai generation Z females illustrated a convergent mindset in believing the contextual application of leadership in Thailand is currently only for people who hold positions of authority, to provide structure in society.

However, divergent female responses noted that leadership should be shared by Thai people and is an important factor in problem solving and decision making. Further highlighting the emerging female leadership voice in Thailand, the respondents noted that leadership behaviours and their application need to evolve with generational change.

Discussion:

From an early age Thais are taught to love and respect the monarchy and to never question the authority of elders. The monarchy sits at the head of Thai society while elders provide paternalistic leadership and guidance to ordinary citizens. They accept that these ‘leaders’ will provide guidance for the majority of Thai people, and they conform without question. In essence the majority of Thais are servants to the leadership of the Thai monarchy. The older generations are motivated to remain loyal in the belief that better times are ahead. This illustrates the upper tier of Thai leadership. The lower tier of Thai leadership is the domain of quasi politicians, who for many years have been military coup leaders. Their style of leadership has been a mix of hard military man (*nakleng*) come business manager (*administrator*).

The *nakleng* and the *administrator* style of older generations of Thai leaders continue to shape the structure and application of leadership in Thailand. Although the older generation of Thais do not teach younger generations self-leadership or its societal application, the current style of leadership in Thailand is a prominent topic of concern. The younger generations of Thais and in particular Generation Z are challenging long held cultural values that threaten to change the fabric of Thai society. This study identified that a change in Thai leadership style is desired by a generation that is more open minded, does not want to be bound by strict cultural structures and is more influenced by global behaviours and decision making.

That said, Thai generation Z do not clearly understand the concept of self-leadership or how Thai leadership needs to evolve. They desire a society that is more inclusive of decision making, gender equality and where the country's leaders have vision for the development of prosperity of Thailand. The lack of leadership development for the younger generation of Thai males, has resulted in the belief that leadership is the domain of powerful people who possess high education, sit in a position of authority, or have the ability to control people by being assertive. This was convergent with current Thai leadership mindsets. It illustrates that the *nakleng* perception of Thai leadership where males must be tough, manly and have charisma to be a leader remains the status quo and highlighted no divergence in leadership style or trait. This cultural mindset reflects the *leaders are born not made* theory, which has long been disproven. Further illustrating the leadership vacuum in Thai society, the male respondents were unable to identify any current Thai or Foreign people who they considered to be a Leader. More noticeable was that they could not identify a person from their own generation who they believe displayed any noticeable leadership traits or styles.

In an indication that the Thai leadership paradigm is changing, generation Z, noted that future Thai leaders must exhibit personality and behavioural characteristics that include the ability to be open-minded, have a vision for the future and to be transparent and honest. This new generational mindset was divergent from the traditional conformance with Thai cultural expectations. It tends to align with the *khunna* style of Thai leader who is more orientated towards the people. Although the *khunna* type leader in Thailand is culturally desired, open-mindedness, vision for the future and transparency, identify change in the leadership by a generation that is strongly influenced by western culture.

In a societal application, generation Z view the transformational type of leader as the most desired style of leadership to transform Thai culture and society. In comparison it is similar to the leadership style of revered Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn who implemented western knowledge into Thai society to prevent formal colonization. This time however, effective leadership is not required to deal with external contingencies but internally to evolve the current hierarchical and paternalistic process of Thai leadership and effectively lead the next generation of Thais. Achieving this may prove to be very difficult as Thailand has a rapidly ageing population and the gap between older and younger Thais has deepened the void of misunderstanding and maintenance of values. The generational change in values and behavioural practices of generation Z have identified that the current style of Thai leadership is no longer acceptable as it does not provide a future for national prosperity. In the public sector, male seniority is still more prominent in government, military, and community hierarchies, which still remains the litmus test for leadership and decision making in Thai society.

Compounding the leadership challenges facing Thailand are the demands of technological development to maintain its GDP which relies heavily on the income produced by tourism and exports generated from the agriculture sector. The success or failure of Thailand's future economic and cultural development will rely heavily on the leadership development of its younger generations and more specifically on Thai generation Z males as the male gender still holds prominence in Thai society. In past generations, Thai females maintained a low physical presence in Thai society and were less vocal on social issues than males. However, in modern Thai society females are now more prominent in positions of power and leadership in large corporate organisations and private companies. This has exposed Thai females to the interpersonal behaviours and organisational development skills required of corporate leaders.

The high percentage of female responses identifying vision, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and decision-making ability supports the rise in female corporate ability. This identified a divergent mindset from traditional Thai culture where females now seek to gain a broader knowledge of leadership abilities that are underpinned by trust, where integrity, openness, and competence allows them to continue their prominence in the corporate world. This is opening the door for them to become more vocal on social issues concerning the development of Thai society. This divergent change illustrated that Thai generation Z females exhibit a more developed understanding of leadership styles and traits than their male counterparts. It highlights a generational change in Thai leadership from its current exclusive male dominated hierarchical, command and control style to include a noticeable female orientated leadership style that reflects inclusiveness and transparency of actions. The acquisition of leadership knowledge has resulted in mothers teaching daughters self-leadership skills to ensure that they become successful in their chosen careers and to enjoy a social status that they were not able to attain. It is another noticeable generational change in Thai leadership from a one-sided leadership domain to more gender balanced equation.

The study identified that emic country specific characteristics and local cultural contexts continue to influence leadership styles and beliefs (Zhang et al 2012; Chai et al 2016) and the humanistic perspective of inspiring and engaging others is based on cultural and local moral values (Pirson 2017). For Thai Generation Z, the knowledge and understanding of leadership is still very much a work in progress. The current societal structure requires no development of individual leadership abilities as this is provided by the upper tier of Thai leaders. Any drift outside of this mindset results in the term, *a nail that sticks out must be hammered down*. This has resulted in leadership development being confined to those who serve in the Thai military or privileged elite and has stifled the leadership development of younger generations. This may identify why generation Z has limited understanding of leadership knowledge and the inability to identify current notable leaders or people they consider to be leaders of their generation.

To bridge the current gap in leadership knowledge and application in Thai society the older generation must become self-aware of the strengths and weaknesses of its current leadership model and how it develops the younger generations to meet the future challenges facing the country and its citizens. This appears to be the stumbling block of current political/ society issues. Generation Z must understand how important leadership is to not only their personal future hopes and aspirations but how the development of self-leadership will contribute to the overall prosperity the country. It is upon the shoulders of Thai generation Z to deal with the many challenges of an ageing population, the possibility of a diminishing GDP due to falling technological development of its industries and commercial markets that these responsibilities rest.

Limitations of Research:

This research was conducted in the northern provinces of Thailand with some data collection occurring in Bangkok. Respondents were randomly chosen that represented a generic sample of Thai Generation Z society. This provided a limitation in that it did not provide a representative sample from the southern provinces of Thailand or from Generation Z males and females who were serving in the Thai military and may have been able to provide a more in-depth illustration of Leadership. This limitation was due to the restrictions of the current pandemic and current leadership issues that are currently in dispute in Thai society. Future research into this field may seek to look at leadership knowledge and styles of Thai generation Z male and female's whose leadership attributes are formally developed. A comparison could then be made to those male and female respondents whose leadership attributes are less developed in a local or community environment with an aim of developing a specific Thai Leadership Model.

Conclusion:

Human history is littered with examples of younger generations challenging the authority of the older generations. This has ranged from fashion to pop music and behaviours that test the limits of cultural acceptance. Across Asia and in particular Thailand, generation Z is challenging the mainstay of Thai society, the constitutional monarchy, and the current military lead coup government. If you look closely at the base of this generational Asian *spring* the common denominator is a lack of or poor leadership. Thai generation Z have adopted a mindset of their own that no longer includes the servant type leadership of their parents and grandparents. Like the Thai Monarchs of old, this generation of Thais are seeking a more open-minded, visionary, and inclusive style of leadership that is based on western ideologies but retains a Thai cultural application. Further sending tremors through the backbone of Thai society like never before is that both generation Z males and females are openly seeking this new divergent style of leadership that was once only considered the exclusive domain of the Thai elite. However, achieving this may be easier said than done as Thai society is complex with many layers of competing interests.

The rise in social prominence of Thai females is an exciting factor that will provide an alternative style of leadership and societal application that is far different from centuries of male dominance. The future of Thailand depends greatly on the leadership development of both genders and this needs to begin with a heightened knowledge of self-leadership. This can only be attained by the older generations of Thais realising that leadership structures and practices of the past are no longer suitable for a generation that is greatly different from their own.

These generational differences have occurred through the blending of cultures and nationalities, the equalisation of gender differences, higher levels of education and the ongoing developments in technology. Current Thai leaders must acknowledge that generational change is not only occurring in Thailand but all over the world. Globally, generation Z are coming into the workforce and their leadership development in business, society, technical qualifications, and essential services will be paramount. This will be essential in order to maintain economies and to guide society through the many natural and man-made challenges the world will face in the coming years. The study of leadership has been ongoing since the times of Aristotle and Sun Tzu and has identified many generational changes in leadership knowledge, styles, traits, and cultural applications. It is an important part of human development and evolution and thus will continue to be a source of research and reclassification for generations to come.

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Acknowledgments:

I would like to sincerely thank Dr Rodney Turner, Victoria University Melbourne Australia, and Thanaporn Boonwuitiwat Naresuan University for their assistance throughout this research.