Effective Leadership in Public Organizations: The Impact of Organizational Structure in Asian Countries

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Among public organizations, does variation in organizational structure explain variation in public managers' leadership styles (e.g., transformational and transactional leadership)? The study of leadership in public organizations is increasingly an area of scholarly interest partly sparked by movements to reform public organizations, particularly in the context of emergency management. There is, for example, a need for effective leadership that can help organizations respond to disasters (Kapucu et al. 2010; Van Wart and Kapucu 2011; Stern 2013). There are numerous documented cases where the lack of leadership skills has been linked to major social and economic losses as a result of poor disaster response (e.g., Hurricane Katrina in the U.S.). Yet, leadership is a complex concept and numerous theoretical frameworks have been developed to help explain it (Van Wart 2005). Practically speaking, the existence of different theories of leadership suggests that public managers can decide to exercise various styles of leadership. The style of leadership that a public manager exhibits matters because some styles are perceived to be more effective than others (Trottier et al. 2008). While the effects of leadership have been extensively studied, antecedents or predictors of leadership style have received little scholarly attention (Wright and Pandey 2009; Nielsen and Cleal 2011). The purpose of this research note then is to explore the potential causal relationship between the structure of an organization and the ability of a public manager to exercise transformational leadership in the context of emergency management in two Asian countries: South Korea and Japan.

This research note consists of three main sections. The following section explores the relationship between leadership and organizational structure. The second section examines how certain concepts of leadership and organizational structure were applied in two case studies of disaster response. The final section presents some directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Defined

Van Wart (2005) defines leadership as a complex process by which a knowledgeable, skilled and experienced individual exerts influence on others for the purpose of accomplishing predetermined goals. While he identifies five characteristics that define the essence of leadership, only

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three are reviewed here, as they are of direct relevance to the relationship between effective leadership and organization structure.

The first characteristic is that leaders have a thorough understanding of their environment and are cognizant of their personal strengths and weaknesses in relation to the organizational environment (Van Wart 2005). Leaders are knowledgeable about organizational actors (e.g. internal and external), processes and culture as well as any potential structural barriers to effective leadership.

The second characteristic is that leaders are aware that there are different styles of leadership and that one style may be more suitable to specific circumstances (Van Wart 2005). In other words, leaders understand that depending on the circumstances, one style of leadership may be more effective than others. This is consistent with situational approaches to the study of leadership, where the style of leadership is dependent on the commitment and competence of an individual's followers (Northouse 2013).

The third characteristic is that leaders are goal-oriented and set realistic goals for an organization and its members, and are proactive in accomplishing these goals (Van Wart 2005). Packard (2010), for example, found that among the top factors that employees believe affect organizational performance are clear goals and objectives. This suggests that subordinates may perceive leaders to be more effective when organizational goals are established because goals may provide a sense of direction and value to the work of employees.

Leadership Styles

Research on leadership styles has experienced several paradigm shifts in the search for defining characteristics of effective leadership. The first systematic attempt at studying leadership styles began with the development of the "great man" theory approach (Northouse 2013). This line of research focused on identifying the characteristics or traits of effective social and political leaders and disregarded how organizational structure may or may not foster effective leadership. In this theory, the most commonly cited traits are intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Northouse 2013). This approach was based on the assumption that leaders were born with these characteristics. There was, however, a lack of consensus in the literature on the traits that made a leader effective (Northouse 2013). Research then began to focus on leader-follower interactions and the styles of leading that were more effective in specific contexts (Van Wart 2005).

Recently, greater attention has been paid to the charismatic features of leadership (Trottier et al. 2008; Northouse 2010; Wright and Pandey 2010; Wright et al. 2012). Transformational leadership, for example, is a charismatic style that helps answer the call for change in organizations (e.g., improved effectiveness), the need of organizations to adapt to ever-changing external factors (e.g., funding), and the need to motivate and empower a workforce during times of uncertainty (e.g., economy conditions) (Shafritz et al. 2007; Northouse 2010). This is because transformational leaders are visionary, innovative, inspirational and sensitive to the needs of followers (Trottier et al. 2008; Wright and Pandey 2009; Northouse 2013).

Transformational leadership is a multidimensional phenomenon, which can be observed through four distinct but interrelated lenses: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass and Avolio 1994). Idealized influence is the quality of acting as a strong role model who is well respected and liked by subordinates. Inspirational motivation refers to the ability to inspire subordinates to believe in the mission and

vision of an organization. Individualized consideration refers to taking an interest in the individual needs, interests, and development of others. Lastly, transformational leaders help create opportunities for innovative ideas and solutions to be identified through a process of intellectual stimulation. This intellectual stimulation helps create an environment that allows subordinates to challenge the values and beliefs of leaders, and vice versa.

Trottier et al. (2008) examined the impact and prevalence of different leadership styles in federal government agencies. Specifically, the study sought to determine which style (e.g., transformational vs. transactional leadership) was more prevalent among agency managers and the impact of these styles on perceived leadership effectiveness. The findings suggest that federal agency managers are perceived by employees to exercise transactional leadership more often than transformational leadership (Trottier et al. 2008). On average among federal agency employees, transformational leadership explained 71% of the variation in perceived leadership effectiveness whereas transactional leadership explained 65% of the variance. This finding shows that federal employees perceive that a leader is most effective when they exhibit transformational traits (e.g., understanding, inspirational, visionary, and role model) than when a leader exhibits transactional traits (e.g., exchange of rewards for performance).

These findings have several implications for understanding effective leadership in public organizations. First, the governmental structure (e.g., bureaucracy) may encourage the prevalence of transactional leadership as opposed to transformational leadership. For example, because of established rules, regulations and strong hierarchical lines of authority, a public manager may not have the flexibility to exercise transformational traits. As a result, employees may not find their public manager to be an effective leader. Second, employees are more likely to find a public manager to be an effective leader when the public manager provides them with individualized consideration. This cannot occur in transactional occurrence since there is a greater focus on correcting subordinates' behavior. Third, governments should make greater efforts to develop transformational traits among public managers to improve perceived leadership effectiveness and to consider the degree to which structural arrangements impede effective leadership.

Dimensions of Organization Structure

Like leadership, organization structure is a complex and multidimensional concept (Rainey 2009; Jung and Kim 2013). The study of organization structure is important because it has an impact on the performance of an organization (Brewer and Walker 2009; Wright and Pandey 2010 Jung and Kim 2013). For example, among public managers, an increase in perceived red tape was associated with a decrease in perceived organizational performance (Jung and Kim 2013). This finding suggests that the perceived existence of excessive and burdensome rules and regulations in a public organization will negatively affect the quality of work produced (Jung and Kim 2013). In this paper, the interest is in exploring whether an organization's structure has an impact on the style of leadership that a public manager exhibits, which subsequently has an impact on the performance of an organization. For example, a public manager may not be able to practice transformational traits when his behavior is tightly guided by excessive rules and regulations. Rainey (2009) has identified four dimensions of organizational structure, which are helpful in understanding the nature of organizational structure in public agencies. These dimensions are centralization, formalization, red tape, and complexity (Rainey 2009).

First, the centralization dimension is concerned with whether power and authority are equally dispersed across an organization or whether it concentrates in the hands of a few individuals

(Rainey 2009). Thus, measures of centralization tend to focus on the location of decision-making authority within an organization (Rainey 2009). If public managers have little power and authority, it suggests that they have little discretion and must obtain approval from higher-ranking officials before acting on an idea or decision. If the opposite is true, then dispersed power and authority within an organization enables public managers to exercise discretion with little need to obtain approval from higher levels of the organization. We can expect that variation in degrees of centralization will have an impact on the leadership style that a public manager exhibits. For example, if a public manager has little discretion to exercise power and authority, then subordinates may perceive them to be more transactional than transformational because they are unable to make independent decisions, exercise initiative, or customize decisions to fit the needs of individual employees.

A second dimension of organizational structure is formalization, which refers to the degree to which an organization has written rules and regulations (Bozeman 1993; Rainey 2009). Common measures of formalization include whether employees must follow established rules and/or whether a rule manual, organization chart or other formal instructions exist (Rainey 2009). Formalization is important for public organizations as it helps maintain order and consistency in the performance of employees (Bozeman 1993; Bozeman and Scott 1996). Without written rules and procedures, we can expect greater variation in the performance of individual employees because employee behavior is not guided by established performance standards. For example, without written rules on addressing issues arising from employee performance (e.g., disciplinary action), two public managers may handle an employee performance issue differently (e.g., verbal vs. written reprimand). The degree of formalization in an organization can have an effect on the leadership style that a public manager exhibits. For example, higher degrees of formality may be positively associated with transformational leadership because formalization provides a leader with the tools to clearly communicate the vision of an organization to employees (e.g., written vision statement), establish formal platforms by which employees can be engaged in innovation (e.g., committees; workgroups), and link valuable and individual contributions of employees to an organization's vision (e.g., job descriptions; contracts).

The third dimension of structure is red tape, which is closely related to formalization but a distinct concept nonetheless (Bozeman 1993; Bozeman and Scott 1996; Rainey 2009). Like formalization, red tape refers to written rules and regulations, but these rules are perceived burdensome to an organization and fail to produce the desired result (Bozeman 1993; Bozeman and Scott 1996; Walker and Brewer 2009; DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005; Rainey 2009). DeHart-Davis and Pandey (2005), for example, explored the impact of red tape on managerial alienation such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job involvement. Here, red tape was measured twofold: perceived degree of red tape across an organization (organizational red tape) and perceived ability to promote, reward and/or reprimand public managers (human resource red tape) (DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005). Interestingly, the results suggest that among public managers, organizational red tape has a negative and statistically significant relationship with organizational commitment and job satisfaction but not with job involvement (DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005). Human resource red tape shared a negative and statistically significant relationship with all measures of managerial alienation (DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005). In general, these findings suggest that red tape (e.g., organizational/human resource) has a negative effect on public managers. Because they lack job satisfaction and commitment to an organization, public managers may experience decreased levels of motivation to exhibit transformational traits and even transactional leadership. Instead, public managers may adopt a hands-off approach (laissez-faire) because they lack a connection and commitment to an organization. In order to exhibit transformational traits, a leader must have a connection to the work of an organization to then exert influence, inspiration and motivation onto followers.

The last dimension of organizational structure, complexity, refers to the number of subunits, levels, and specializations within an organization (Rainey 2009; Jung 2012). Thus, the more horizontal differentiation (e.g., specialization) and vertical differentiation (e.g., hierarchy), the more complex an organization's structure (Rainey 2009). Jung (2012) argues that higher levels of organizational complexity negatively affect organizational performance because more complex organizations bear greater expense for coordination and communication among employees. For example, collaboration between two departments that have different specializations may be difficult because they each have different agendas (e.g., vision for the department), needs and challenges. Weak (or a lack of) collaboration between two departments may have an overall negative effect on the performance of an organization because of their inability to jointly produce a necessary benefit to the organization. Interestingly, Jung (2012) found a negative and statistically significant relationship between complexity (measured as number of programs) and organization effectiveness (measured as goal attainment rate). That is, an increase in an organization's complexity was associated with a decrease in an organization's effectiveness. The impact of complexity on leadership may produce mixed results. For example, higher degrees of specialization may encourage transformational leadership among public managers because specialization enables them to develop a niche and engage in change, innovation and motivation within their program or specialty. A strong hierarchy, on the other hand, may pose constraints on a public manager's ability to exercise transformational traits because of strong oversight or accountability systems.

Impact of Structure on Leadership

Wright and Pandey (2010) analyzed the relationship between organizational structure and transformational leadership among public managers of U.S. local governments. They specifically focus on two dimensions of structure: complexity and red tape (Rainey 2009; Wright and Pandey 2010). Complexity, for example, was measured twofold: perceived levels of authority and whether upward/lateral communication was adequate (Wright and Pandey 2010). Red tape was also measured twofold: human resource red tape (e.g., perceived ability to promote, reward and/or reprimand employees) and procurement red tape (e.g., perceived ability of public manager to purchase goods and services) (Wright and Pandey 2010). They hypothesized that a strongly perceived hierarchy, weakly perceived lateral/upward communication, and greater perceptions of human resource and procurement red tape would all decrease the reported practice of transformational leadership among public managers. This is because transformational leadership requires greater levels of flexibility and control in order for both leaders and followers to engage in efforts to instill change (e.g., establishing a vision and engaging in innovation) within an organization. To test their hypotheses, Wright and Pandey (2009) used data from a nationwide survey of senior managers (e.g., general and functional managers) of U.S. local governments with populations over 50,000 residents.

Wright and Pandey (2009) found evidence to suggest that one dimension of structure, complexity, shared a negative and statistically significant relationship with transformational leadership. That is, an increase in perceived levels of authority (hierarchy) and weak communication within an organization were associated with a decrease in use of transformational leadership

among public managers of U.S. local governments. This finding suggests that public managers may not have the flexibility or the support to exhibit transformational traits. For example, weak communications may prevent a leader from obtaining support from other local government stakeholders (e.g., other department heads or elected officials) in order to initiate change. This is because weak communications between two parties also implies a weak relationship (e.g., lack of exchange and support). Higher levels of hierarchy can also pose similar challenges for public managers in exhibiting transformational traits when decision-making rests in the hands of higher-ranking officials (e.g., council or mayor). This infringes on a public manager's ability to exercise discretion in initiating change within an organization, addressing the individual needs of employees, creating a vision that fits the needs of an organization, and seeking external support for initiatives – all characteristics of a transformational leader.

Interestingly, however, Wright and Pandey (2009) found no statistically significant relationship between red tape (e.g., procurement or human resource) and the practice of transformational leadership. This finding is intriguing because the existence of excessive and burdensome rules and regulations was expected to hinder a leader's ability to exhibit transformational traits because red tape has been found to affect a public manager's job commitment and satisfaction (DeHart-Davis and Pandey 2005). Furthermore, this finding suggests that transformational leaders are perhaps able to use excessive and burdensome rules and regulations in innovative ways to accomplish their vision and purpose for an organization. For example, a public manager may transform negative perceptions among employees about excessive and burdensome rules by motivating employees and explaining the value and purpose of rules in accomplishing an organization's mission. A public manager may also initiate efforts and mobilize support from stakeholders (e.g., elected officials) to eliminate and/or change rules that have failed to accomplish their intended effect.

Case Studies

In this research note, two case studies are presented in relation to two of the concepts detailed above: organization structure and transformational leadership. Specifically, the organization structures and leadership styles in South Korea and Japan were examined in the context of their functioning in the face of large-scale natural disasters. This context presents a unique opportunity to study the influence of organization structure on the leadership style of public managers in their work responding to these disasters.

South Korea

In 2012, South Korea experienced the landfall of three successive typhoons: Bolaven, Tembin, and Sanva. The first of these, Bolaven, was a category 4 typhoon, as per the Saffir–Simpson Hurricane Scale (SSHS), and made landfall in South Korea on August 28, 2012. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in South Korea reported that the winds were the fifth strongest caused by a typhoon to hit the country. This resulted in 222 people evacuating their homes, 1.76 million homes left temporarily without electricity, extensive property damage (e.g., \$17.64 million in car damages), and numerous fatalities (Thai News Service 2012). The second typhoon, Tembin, also category 4, made landfall just two days after Bolaven and had similar effects, including a combined sales loss to South Korean airlines in the amount of \$15 million (USD) (Thai News Service 2012). The category 5 typhoon Sanba hit South Korea on September

17, 2012 with maximum sustained winds of 175 mph (Shanghai Daily 2012). This typhoon forced about 1,100 residents to evacuate from vulnerable areas, and President Lee Myung-Bak urged public officials to mobilize resources to reduce the impact of the typhoon on farming communities (Shanghai Daily 2012).

The emergency management system in South has been traditionally operated on a three-tier structure that consists of the national, provincial, and local governments. At the highest tier or level, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Ministry of Safety and Public Administration (MOSPA) are the main authorities responsible for emergency response. In the second tier, metropolitan governments (e.g., Busan and Ulsan) and provincial governments (e.g., South Kyeongsang) play an important role by acting as bridges between the national and local authorities. At the lowest tier, there are 43 local governments that actively coordinate local emergency management. South Korean law allows local governments to enact their own local ordinances regarding emergency management and identifies fire and police stations as local public organizations responsible for disaster response (MOSPA, 2010). The law also encourages the collaboration of these local authorities with other local governments as well as with critical stakeholders such as nonprofit organizations.

The hierarchical structure of emergency management in South Korea seems to suggest that lower level organizations (e.g., local governments) still rely significantly on the direction and support of individuals within public organizations higher in authority (e.g., President and Prime Minister). This suggests a centralized and complex organizational structure, where power and authority is not dispersed across multiple levels of government (Rainey 2009). Over the period when the three typhoons made landfall, multiple news outlets, quoted President Lee Myung-Bak giving instructions to local governments to secure resources, make proper preparations, and to provide reliable information to citizens in efforts to minimize the impact of the typhoons. In another example of hierarchical structure, Prime Minister Kim Hwang-sik identified priorities for recovery efforts (e.g., infrastructure and telecommunications), informed the public of government aid available to help rebuild communities, and instructed officials to establish a government-wide emergency system that would monitor recovery efforts across the country (Thai News Service 2012). These are clear examples of a top-down approach to emergency management in South Korea.

Because local governments in Korea are charged with the responsibility of mobilizing resources and identifying specific plans of action for first responders in their respective communities, there is a need for transformational leaders who possess skills to build coalitions of support and draft plans for managing emergency response. Previous research has found, for instance, that transformational leadership has a positive impact on the resiliency of organizations during a disaster (Valero et al. 2014). Transformational leaders seek to build organizational resiliency through initiating disaster preparedness such as educating the public and by ensuring that organizational members are aware of plans for emergency response. In the case of local government responses in South Korea, however, it appears that public managers did not engage in such preparedness efforts, perhaps due to the structure of their respective organizations, where power and authority is limited and reserved for higher levels of government. The extensive costs related to the 2012 typhoons may, therefore, be linked to the inability of public officials to exercise the type of leadership with the capacity to build resiliency within South Korean organizations.

Japan

On March 11, 2011, Japan was affected by three disasters, two of which were natural disasters: an earthquake and a tsunami (Butt et al. 2014). News outlets reported that then Prime Minister Naoto Kan referred to these disasters as the worst since World War II (Kevin 2011). The natural disasters, collectively known as the Great East Japan Earthquake, was an unprecedented magnitude 9 earthquake with aftershocks of magnitude 6 and 7 as well a tsunami that devastated towns and villages (Butt et al. 2014). The World Bank in collaboration with the Government of Japan produced a report on the damages of the disaster and estimated that approximately 20,000 people died on March 11, 2011—cause deaths was mainly attributed to drowning (Butt et al. 2014, 83). As a direct result of these natural disasters, Japan additionally suffered from a nuclear disaster when reactors of the Daiichi nuclear plants began to melt. This resulted in the release of "an unknown quantity of atomic radiation into the atmosphere, the surrounding soil, rivers, mountains and sea" (Butt et al. 2014, 83).

Unlike South Korea, Japan seemed better prepared when disaster struck because of extensive preparedness in Japan. Specifically, for instance, after the Kobe earthquake of 1993, Japan instituted changes to their building regulations (e.g., buildings, bridges, and roadways), engaged in regular emergency response drills, and ensured that the public was informed about how to be prepared for disasters. These preparedness efforts purportedly helped minimize the impact of a 2011 earthquake, which caused no building collapses in Tokyo (Butt et al. 2014). In addition, Japan recognizes the value of volunteers as a critical resource in emergency management as well as the importance of establishing collaborative networks at the grassroots level. For example, Japan has an established network for disaster assistance, which includes government officials, prefectures (e.g., local governments), and volunteer organizations.

This suggests that after the Kobe earthquake public officials and others in positions of authority exhibited some transformational leadership traits by making efforts to transform or change the way they handled emergency situations. Specifically, it is likely that higher-level officials created opportunities to learn from officials at lower levels as well as others with expertise in order to improve preparedness and leadership in the event of disaster. Thus, the structure of public organizations in Japan may be less complex and centralized than Korean, and public officials may have the flexibility to create change within these organizations. In addition, the collaborative nature of disaster response in Japan also points to the idea that Japan's organizational structures do not necessarily employ a top-down approach, as in the case of Korea. Instead, the use of a less centralized structure seems to be the norm, and multiple stakeholders have roles and responsibilities in emergency response, including nonprofit and volunteer organizations.

CONCLUSION

The case studies presented in this research note highlight the relevance and importance of organizational structure and leadership, particularly within the context of a disaster. When a disaster hits, organizations need to be prepared in order to continue their core functions (Valero et al. 2014). Otherwise, the safety and well-being of a community may be compromised when public organizations are charged with providing essential public services. In the case of South Korea, a hierarchical structure seems to be the norm, where lower level organizations function at the direction of higher levels of government. The degree to which higher levels of centralization matter

in explaining levels of transformational leadership among public managers remains unanswered. The South Korean case, however, suffered major social and economic losses, and one can surmise that perhaps current organizational structures are efficient for the purpose of emergency response. This is different from the Japan case, where extensive preparedness was under way prior to the three disasters and the nature of emergency response is one of collaboration. This can be the sign of existing transformational leaders, who under a different organizational structure, may be more empowered to affect change and transform the resiliency of organizations.

The literature suggests that transformational leadership is indeed perceived to be more effective than transactional leadership (Trottier et al. 2008). One dimension of organizational structure, complexity, has been found to have a negative and statistically significant impact on the transformational leadership among public managers (Wright and Pandey 2009). Another dimension of structure, red tape, was not found to influence whether a public manager exhibits transformational leadership (Wright and Pandey 2009). Two dimensions of organizational structure, centralization and formalization, and their relative impact on leadership style remain unexplored by the literature. In addition, the impact of structure on transactional leadership also remains unexplored as Trottier et al. (2008) only focused on transformational leadership. Thus, future research should analyze the impact of centralization and formalization on whether a public manager exhibits transformational or transactional traits. In addition, because organization structure is a multidimensional concept, a model which includes all four dimensions would paint a better picture about the relative strength and impact of each structural dimension on the leadership style that a public manager exhibits.

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