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15 Enacting plurality in designing social innovation

Developing a culturally grounded twenty-first-century leadership programme for a Cambodian context

Joyce Yee, Sovan Srun and Laura Smitheman

Abstract: This chapter charts the development of an online leadership programme for young Cambodian entrepreneurs and managers. Culturally grounded practices are enacted in a context of designing social innovation, here paying particular attention to local practices, cultures and knowledge. The importance of anchoring leadership practices to familiar cultural and spiritual values is highlighted, and resources are created using local role models. The chapter advocates for a plurality of experiences when designing learning programmes to ensure that design's universalist tendencies are not inadvertently recreated; this illustrates pluriversal ways of working that are central to designing culturally specific practices.

Keywords: Culturally grounded designing, design for plurality, online training programme, business leadership concepts, young Cambodia managers, designing social innovation

Introduction

This chapter shares the knowledge gained from the development of the 21st Century Leadership for Young Cambodia Leaders (CLEAR) programme, which is aimed at addressing a lack of culturally relevant leadership resources for local managers. We describe the background, premise and process that went into creating an accessible, self-sustaining, locally rooted and driven, relevant and research-based leadership programme for Cambodian entrepreneurs and business professionals.

What constitutes good business leadership within the changing Cambodian context in the twenty-first century? How do we make it locally relevant, accessible and fit for purpose given the fast-changing needs of ambitious young Cambodians? These were the research questions that drove the development of a new type of leadership programme that sought to address the lack of culturally relevant resources aimed at a Cambodian audience.

At the outset, we were mindful that dominant theories of leadership are often derived from Western contexts and are not universally applicable across cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Javidan & Carl, 2005; Smith & Peterson, 1998). Instead, we consciously sought to identify leadership practices that were Cambodian specific. In doing so, we seek to challenge the idea of 'universalism'—the idea that we all live in a single world (of which the Western world is the ideal) and contribute a practical example of how a modernist concept of leadership has been interpreted within a Cambodian context.

Conscious of design's Eurocentric capitalist origin, we wanted to contribute to the discussions on how design supports different forms of world making (Escobar, 2018; Fry, 2017). By being reflexive of power, gender and social and political dynamics during our research, we believe our insights offer a robust analysis of the data that can reveal insights into the changing understanding of leadership in a Cambodian context. We carefully considered how to work with and through differences, paying heed to cultural plurality (Akama & Yee, 2016) in our approach to the research.

Our aim in this chapter is to use learning from this project to challenge design's tendencies for universalism and generalisable approaches while highlighting the importance of socio-cultural dimensions in the design process. Therefore, it is important that we state our positionality as researchers and designers to help reveal the underlying assumptions and biases. The authoring team consists of the main team involved in researching, analysing and developing content for the programme. The first author is a Malaysian-born UK design academic with expertise in social innovation and impact evaluation. Her role was to lead and advise on the research-related stages. The second author is a Cambodian native with experience in designing online learning platforms. She was the researcher on the project and was responsible for conducting the literature review, interviewing participants and analysing the outcomes. As a young business professional leading a start-up, she brought important field experience and cultural specificity that helped inform and guide the team to follow cultural protocols and decipher cultural nuances. The third author is a UK national who cofounded Impact Hub Phnom Penh (IHPP) after eight years in Cambodia, with three years previous experience supporting capacity-building programmes in India and Burkina Faso. She is the project lead and initiator and has a background in business, social entrepreneurship and innovation.

Leadership in a modern Cambodian context

The initial idea for the CLEAR programme originated from IHPP's observation that there was a lack of accessible leadership resources aimed at a Cambodian audience. They have been working since 2013 from their base in Phnom Penh to support impact-driven entrepreneurs across Cambodia through a series of capacity building programmes, events and mentoring. As part of a global network, they are focused on supporting young entrepreneurs who are looking to deliver social change by working closely with various governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGO) and civil society stakeholders.

Prior to COVID-19, Cambodia's economy maintained an average growth rate of 7.7% between 1998 and 2019, making it one of the fastest-growing economies globally (World Bank, 2019). It has high ambitions, having achieved lower middle-income status in 2015 and aiming to attain upper middle-income status by 2030. With over two-thirds of the population under 30 (United Nations Population Fund Cambodia, 2016), it has a growing tech and social entrepreneurial sector dominated by young people. This generational shift has brought about a change in mindset and approach to the notion of entrepreneurship and what it means to be successful. Many are not driven by purely economic returns, but also focus on delivering social and environmental changes to their communities. This shift, coupled with returning Cambodians with new ideas and different approaches, has created an exciting mix of young talent looking to contribute to society.

Within this exciting and expanding landscape, there is an increasing need for a support network that can help sustainably evolve and nurture these young leaders-to-be. Young people often face societal and cultural barriers when accessing leadership positions, however. A study into the barriers to youth leadership (Transparency International Cambodia, 2020, p. x) found seven major barriers preventing youth from achieving leadership roles. Although the majority of the barriers are culturally specific, that is, age discrimination, nepotism and discouragement by parents, one identifies a lack of soft skills in supporting young people to adapt to different working contexts. It is also interesting to note that many of the barriers faced by youth are connected to the barriers that women face, a key point that echoes what we found in our research for this programme.

Cambodians historically think of leadership in a political context rather than in an organisational or business context. This cultural bias might explain the lack of discussion about what constitutes good leadership because it might be construed by governing authorities as a threat to their positions of authority (Ledgerwood & Vijghen, 2002). This bias also extends to the type of research undertaken to understand Cambodian leadership, which we found to be mainly focused on understanding leadership from a political and civil society point of view (see, e.g., Thon et al., 2009; Pratt & Yongvanit, 2014). This historical focus has meant that most leadership courses available are aimed at community leadership, and they are usually supported by funding from an international NGO or local civil society. At the time of the programme commission in 2018, there were limited training courses aimed at young business professionals and entrepreneurs in Cambodia.

The courses that were available were often costly and concentrated in urban areas. This is especially challenging when many young entrepreneurs struggle to access professional training because they often work outside organisational structures (i.e., when it is their second job). Young managers working in micro-, small- and medium-sized profit and not-for-profit enterprises may not have access to a formal training budget that supports this area of their personal development.

Most importantly, although there are many accessible online leadership development resources that can be accessed, the vast majority are in English and created for a Western market and workforce. Although Cambodians are increasingly learning English as their second language, the country is currently ranked 84 out of 100 countries in the world in English proficiency according to the 2020 EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2020). Language is not the only barrier because there are significant differences in the context in Cambodia, including economic, cultural and social issues, especially in understanding the notion of business leadership.

It was evident from the various historical, political and sociocultural barriers highlighted that there was an opportunity for us to develop a more bespoke, culturally appropriate and contextually relevant leadership training for young business professionals across Cambodia. In the next section, we describe our research, development and content creation for the programme.

Developing the CLEAR programme

Background

An opportunity arose in April 2018 to apply for funding from the British Embassy in Cambodia, here aimed at nurturing Cambodia's future political and business leaders.

We saw this as an opportunity to propose a project focusing on twenty-first-century leadership for young Cambodian professionals, and the aim was to explicitly develop culturally appropriate learning materials and widen access outside of the capital through the use of an online platform. The project was officially commissioned in May and lasted 12 months, with the official launch coming in May 2019.

Concept of leadership

Leadership theories that have been developed in the West fall mainly into four broad categories: trait, behavioural, situational and transformational. Trait theory (Cawthon, 1996) focuses on identifying the traits and characteristics of effective leaders and assumes that leaders are born, not made. Behavioural theory (Johns & Moser, 1989) focuses on the actions and skills of leaders and assumes that these behaviours can be learnt. Situational theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) recognises the importance that context and situation play in determining how a leader behaves. Transformational theory focuses on how a leader encourages, inspires and motivates followers (Bass, 2005). Recently, other types of leadership styles have also emerged that emphasise the development of shared, collective and collaborative leadership practices (Lee-Davies, 2013; Kukenberger & D’Innocenzo, 2020).

A major limitation of dominant leadership theories is that they were developed from a Western cultural perspective. Integral to this understanding are beliefs such as the following: (i) business leadership as a concept is widely discussed, (ii) leadership positions can be occupied by anyone, rather than only by those who currently are in positions of authority, and (iii) leadership is mainly understood from a behavioural standpoint. However, these points of awareness, power and onto-epistemological perspective are often not applicable to other cultural understandings of leadership. Within an Asian context, studies like Alves et al. (2005) and Ling and Fang (2003) have shown the importance of the moral and philosophical aspects to Chinese leadership that is underexplored in Western leadership literature.

Studies have supported our view that leadership theories and practices developed in the West need to consider cultural specificities if we would want to deliver any significant impact (Bird & Osland, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; House et al., 2004). Additionally, we were interested in understanding what context-specific knowledge could contribute to these dominant theories to support more pluriversal thinking.

Initial assumptions

Our market review identified a lack of leadership development opportunities, particularly outside the capital. What was available were often exclusive, uninspiring, lacked interaction and used outdated and theoretical materials that did not easily translate into daily practices. Hence, we set out to build a programme based on the principles of accessibility that would be culturally rooted and self-sustainability.

We felt that delivering rich content through an online platform was the most appropriate approach for addressing the issue of access while also offering flexibility in how and when the participants can undertake the training. However, this was the first time that IHPP delivered training through an online platform, and it was the first time many learners would be learning in this format. For this reason, we built a formal evaluation stage into the work to better understand the benefits and limitations

that this mode offers and to understand how impactful the programme has been for the participants. By choosing to deliver the content online, we were also assuming that connectivity in rural areas would not be a challenge, here considering that the country's internet coverage is close to 76% of the population (DataReportal, 2019).

Another assumption that we made was to focus on creating and delivering high-quality video content that would be interesting enough to ensure learners could access all the content. The aim of the video content was to showcase local business leaders who would be more engaging and relevant to the learners' lived experiences. This would also address the limited examples available from Cambodian leaders presented within a business context.

Because we were trying to cater to both urban and rural business professionals, we assumed that there might be some content and style preferences. We were also mindful of the gender balance by considering that women faced similar barriers to young people in terms of leadership, with the added barrier of family commitments and expectations.

Project and research methodology

The project loosely followed the Double Diamond (Design Council, 2004) design process, with an additional situating stage for the initial project set up and a post-project evaluation stage. Recognising the industrial, Eurocentric origin of the model, which often prioritises generalisability and replicability, we purposefully incorporated key points of reflection in each stage that sought to identify the leadership practices already rooted in local practices, values and history (Akama et al., 2019).

The stages were as follows:

1. **Situating:** Situating and framing the research questions and activities in relation to the local context. For the first author, this was an important step to sensitise and become more attuned to social-cultural particularities.
2. **Discover:** Reviewing literature, recruiting participants and identifying interview questions.
3. **Define:** Conducting interviews with local business leaders, analysing and defining key leadership attributes, values and skill sets, along with a suitable pedagogic framework.
4. **Develop:** Identifying suitable case studies that could be used to illustrate key principles and offer concrete examples of principles in action grounded in a Cambodian context.
5. **Deliver:** Iteratively developing and testing content leading to the production of the videos and supporting materials, such as quizzes and worksheets.
6. **Evaluate:** Evaluating project outcomes, including interviewing participants three to six months after programme completion.

This chapter will specifically focus on the outcomes from the discover and define phases, which were the most research intensive. These two stages took six months and consisted of 22 semistructured interviews with young Cambodian entrepreneurs; this was supported by a literature review on leadership theories. We decided to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews because they enabled us to explore the understandings, experiences and feelings pertaining to leadership more deeply. Our assumption is

that leadership skills can be seen as a continuum, so it is best to understand the individual's leader and leader-to-be's journey. These interviews also allowed us to identify potentially interesting case studies and role models to feature in the video explainers as part of the content.

We identified and contacted 33 Cambodian managers working across the country with varying experiences and working in different types of profit and nonprofit organisations and sectors. The participants were sampled from the IHPP's existing network, as well as through member recommendations. We were particularly keen to have an equal gender balance, as well as having representatives from outside of Phnom Penh. Out of the 22 participants, we interviewed 13 male and 9 female business leaders. Tables 15.1–15.3 illustrate the breakdown in experience, type and sector.

We started our literature review by first identifying Cambodian-specific research on leadership. Unsurprisingly, we did not find many studies directly addressing management leadership in Cambodia, instead having to refer much more broadly to related studies looking at leadership styles in Asia, specifically in China. We were careful not to arrive at a specific definition of leadership because our aim was to understand how this concept was understood by our interview participants. However, acknowledging

Table 15.1 Experience managing.

<i>Leadership level</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>
Early manager and first-time professional	7
Middle manager	4
Senior	7
Founder	4

Table 15.2. Type of organisations.

<i>Type of institutions</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>
Private	12
NGO	9
Government	1

Table 15.3 Sector.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>
Education	6
Food	2
Construction and Property	3
Social	5
Technology	5
Embassy	1

that we did not have specific domain expertise in management leadership, we needed to familiarise ourselves with historical developments in the field through exploring the more widely referenced Western-based leadership theories. Throughout the study, we remained vigilant in how we used existing theories, helping to contextualise our findings where culturally appropriate.

Our review led us to examine three aspects of leadership: (1) leadership theories and styles, (2) associated traits and competencies and (3) assessment tools that could be potentially used to reveal leadership skills and preference. The literature review helped to inform a series of questions we wanted to explore with our participants, mainly grouped into four areas:

1. Definition: Understanding the notion of leadership as a concept and a practical construct.
2. Experiences: Uncovering previous and current experience of business leadership.
3. Challenges: Identifying the challenges linked to being a leader.
4. Advice: Advice or tips for other aspiring leaders.

A mixture of telephone, virtual and face-to-face interviews took place. They were audio recorded, transcribed and translated for further analysis. The conversations were held in the local Khmer language and translated into English by the researcher. An inductive thematic analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2020), where coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data. The researcher collated responses under each question and went through the phases of data familiarisation by listening back and reviewing notes before coding them into initial themes. The project team then reviewed the themes collaboratively against the dataset to ensure that the themes were reflected in the data. This process was followed by the identification of themes against the four areas identified earlier to help us determine what type of content might be suited for the target audience.

We were mindful that the reflexive approach that we adopted (Braun & Clark, 2019) recognises that the data are context bound, positioned and situated. We were using these data to help us understand a very specific topic to inform the development of our programme without aiming to arrive at general theories of leadership. The second author, who is a Cambodian native, conducted all the interviews in Khmer. This helped bridge the potential issues of cultural distance and misinterpretation. As a local entrepreneur with experience leading teams, the second author had perceived local legitimacy that balanced out the potential power inequality when research was conducted by outsiders. The interviews highlighted a number of interesting insights around leadership preferences, styles and purpose. For the purpose of this chapter, we focus on four key themes that surfaced particular sociocultural dimensions of leadership in a Cambodian context.

Insights

Doing the right thing

When we asked the participants what being a leader means, a majority of the responses expressed a desire to be inspirational leaders who can influence others, show care and

be supportive. These concepts express an approach that seems grounded in moral foundations, wanting ‘to do right’ and aiming to create significant change in the life of people and the organisation. This moral imperative echoes studies that have found the importance of moral character in Chinese leaders, pointing towards self-actualisation in the service of society instead of the individual (Lee, 1987). This inspirational style also resonates with a well-known Western-based transformational leadership theory originally introduced by Burns (1978) and later extended by Bass (1985, 1990). Leaders adopting a transformational style often demonstrate specific traits aimed at transforming others—developing and empowering their individual followers to become leaders themselves. When applied to an Asian context, transformational leadership tends to focus on collaboration and collectivism rather than individual accomplishment and power playing. In a study looking at Asian women leaders in hospitality, Maier (2014) identified that the contemporary Asian transformational leader often puts others ahead of self, typically display high levels of charisma and team orientation skills whilst at the same time paying close attention to societal, cultural and organisational norms. In Asia, society expect leaders to demonstrate a strong moral orientation (Hui & Tan, 1999) and display proper conduct in family, kinship and workplace relations (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This cultural preference towards collectivism and moral character is not surprising given the cultural influences on leadership rooted in the dominant practices of Confucianism and Buddhism in East Asia.

Our participants expressed the importance of supporting others in growing and building capacity. However, moving away from a paternalistic, hierarchical and patriarchal Cambodian society (Pen et al., 2017), the interviewees expressed the importance of leaders offering a framework for growth and mutually working together to support the team to realise their potential. This focus on supporting others echoes studies observed in Chinese management, where leadership styles are influenced by collective orientation and social relations (Pun et al., 2000). This approach also aligns well with the idea of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006, Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). A growth mindset is a belief that people, including themselves, can change their talents, abilities and intelligence. The ability to influence and be inspirational is balanced by the pragmatic requirements for a leader to achieve set goals, to be accountable and to be a good communicator.

An interesting finding is the influence of spirituality in leadership approaches, which was expressed by two interviewees who made explicit links to how it has influenced their approach to leadership. One participant identified the four Buddhist virtues: *Metta* (benevolence), *Karuna* (compassion), *Mudita* (empathetic joy) and *Upekkha* (equanimity) as guiding principles when working with others, as well as the use of meditation to understand oneself as a leader. Another participant shared how they practised mindful leadership, focusing on clarity, compassion, appreciation and empathy.

Buddha is the most spiritual philosophy. His leadership is very direct . . . he talked a lot about balance, about moderation (intelligence and emotion). He leads by example, he leads by understanding . . . he says what he means, and he means what he says.

Although we were careful not to assume that all Cambodian leadership approaches have been influenced by Cambodia’s dominant religion, it did suggest a deeper

cultural factor that may have influenced the expressed moral foundation ‘to do right’.

Being flexible and adaptable

We asked the participants to identify their leadership style. Almost half of the interviewees mentioned ‘flexibility’ and ‘adaptability’, both in communication style and task delegation. The respondents did suggest the caveat that these qualities depend on their team member’s level of maturity and personalities. This adaptive approach has been identified in other existing Western-based leadership theories. Using the term ‘situational leadership’, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) describe a situational leader as someone who adapts to the development and maturation of people they lead. Leadership is seen as a ‘continuum’ (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958) or progression of leadership adaptation. Leaders adopt different styles (directing, coaching, supporting and delegating) in response to different levels of capability and experience. This preference for a more adaptive style of leadership indicates a shift from a traditional Cambodian style of leadership that tends to be more hierarchical and directive. This might be reflecting the generational shift in demographics and being exposed to non-Cambodian leaders working in international organisations.

Being open to knowledge sharing

Our interviewees expressed the desire to have a leadership style that is more welcoming and easily relatable to their subordinates. This, they remarked, is also trying to break from the cultural norm where Cambodian leaders can seem aloof and distanced, tending not to offer praise explicitly. There is an inherent tension with traditional Cambodian leadership practice, which tends to be more hierarchical, with many levels of seniority:

I think being open minded is important because you need to succeed with others, with your team members. Good leaders should share experiences, give them an opportunity to do stuff and express their ideas. If you listen to their ideas, you need to hold your judgement. Let them do it first if it is not critical to the company’s success. Even if they do wrong, don’t blame them, give them feedback.

The interviewees suggested that adopting this more open and collaborative approach is considered attractive to younger Cambodians and recognised as a quicker way to achieve collective growth. However, this openness can be a challenge when, culturally and historically, leaders are secretive and protective of the knowledge that their privilege allows them access to. This sentiment was captured by a respondent:

Cambodian leaders hide their characteristics because we have ‘kings’. The kings are usually secretive, so leaders do the same thing. Like the Cambodian saying, if you know 10 things, you only give away nine. . . . The manager doesn’t tell you everything because they are afraid of their job security. The Cambodian culture does not value their sharing among leaders. But in order for our country to grow, you need to think of that.

Being mindful, reflective and self-aware

Many of the interviewees highlighted the importance of adopting a mindful approach that supports constant reflection and heightens self-awareness. One participant specifically mentioned his practice of mindfulness-based leadership:

Mindfulness-based leadership—it teaches everyone what it takes to be a good leader and starts from ourselves, and it requires lots of reflection. As a leader, it embeds focus, clarity, creativity and compassion. . . . Let's start being a leader within ourselves.

Mindfulness is not just focused on enabling the person to become a better leader, but it should also instil a higher level of self-awareness that can help them manage their own emotions, be better communicators and improve the ability to think strategically.

Leadership has to come from inside both for the leaders and the followers. People who want to become leaders need to find someone or some ways to develop themselves through time, not from what others tell them to do. So first they need to want to become a leader, then they would become self-aware, and they start to observe themselves and others how their action influences others. That's how they learn.

Outcomes

Our interviewees overwhelmingly aspire to be transformational leaders. They expressed a moral imperative 'to do right' and support others in their growth. This approach indicates a generational shift in how a leader is perceived and should act. The participants also expressed a preference for a more collaborative and people-focused style of leadership. However, we did recognise a continuing challenge in moving towards this type of leadership. Differing cultural norms, unfamiliarity with this form of leadership and a lack of experience were identified as key challenges.

Analysis of the interviews supported by our initial literature review led to us developing the *CLEAR leadership development pyramid* (see Figure 15.1), which gave us a framework for developing programme resources. It also allowed us to shift the focus from pragmatic skills (such as decision making, time management and communication) to instead reveal the fundamentals of how leaders think, learn and behave. This focus on mindsets reflects new ways of thinking (Kennedy et al., 2013) about leadership as emergent, relational and collective, hence shifting the focus from development of skills to questions of mindset.

The four levels of the pyramid are as follows:

- Mindsets: What mindsets does a leader need to acquire to transform themselves to be the kind of leader they aspire to be?
- Values: Alongside mindsets, what values do such leaders need to have?
- Behaviours and actions: Based on the mindsets and values, what types of behaviours and actions shall the aspiring leaders seek to develop?
- Skills: Finally, to enable certain actions that are desirable in a good leader, what skills do leaders need?

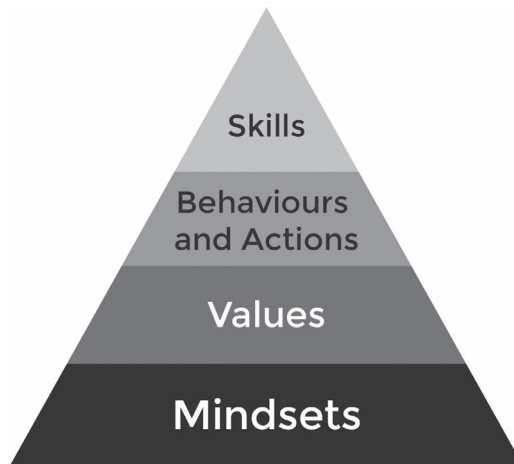


Figure 15.1 CLEAR leadership development pyramid. This Figure is shaped as a pyramid with 4 layers representing the programme framework. At the base level is Mindsets, followed by Values, Behaviours and Skills. The shape of the pyramid (from broad to narrow) is used to convey how each level builds onto each other.

Analysis of the interviews led us to identify six mindsets that support a transformational style of leadership: purposeful, mindfulness, empathy, appreciation, adaptability and nurturing. Each mindset (section) consists of three subsections, starting with a short video introduction by a local leader, followed by a longer video of a selected leader providing an example of the mindset in action. These videos are supported by downloadable resources (such as further readings and worksheets). Each section has a short self-assessment at the end to evaluate learning and serve as a content summary. It is beyond this chapter's scope to go into the details of each mindset. Instead, in the next section, we look specifically at design considerations adopted to create culturally relevant resources.

Discussion

Cultural anchor

One of the ways we were able to help learners relate to the programme material was by offering them what we term 'cultural anchors'. We relied on the local cultural understanding of the researcher and programme manager to bring analytical nuance to the interpretation of the data while also helping us translate key concepts like appreciative inquiry and mindfulness into a Cambodian context. We also recognised the importance of anchoring leadership traits to cultural traits more familiar to Cambodians through the introduction of the four Buddhist virtues of benevolence, compassion, empathetic and equanimity to the programme. Although we could not assume that all learners will relate to this anchor point, it was important to emphasise that a people-focused leadership that centres on empathy and compassion is not an entirely foreign concept and has been predated by a Buddhist theory of leadership

that has existed for over 2,600 years. The focus on mindset also appealed to young Cambodians because it tapped into a philosophical approach to self-development that appealed to Generations Y and Z, localised by the linking with Buddhist philosophy.

Culturally sympathetic role models

Role models are important and recognised as playing a critical role in people's pursuit and attainment of goals (Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011). Two factors that strongly influence role model effectiveness are the extent to which the role model is relevant and identifiable and the extent to which the role model's level of success is perceived as attainable (Collins, 1996, 2000; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). One of the gaps identified in our initial literature research was the lack of Cambodian role models for young business professionals to aspire to. This was confirmed by the interviews, where mainly foreign personalities like Jack Ma, Richard Branson or Barack Obama were mentioned. Recognising this deficit, we focused on filming and showcasing local Cambodian leaders at different stages of their careers. We hope this provides our learners with relevant role models in terms of background, experience and knowledge to support the feeling of attainability. To this end, we were also explicit in ensuring a gender balance in the role models we chose to feature, especially when there were far less recognisable women role models available within the sector. The attention to this point also extended to the launch of the programme in May 2019, where two local female entrepreneurs were invited to share their experiences as leaders.

Plurality of experiences

Mindful of the criticism of design's 'universalism', we not only wanted to account for a plurality of cultural contexts in how we approached this work but also wanted to ensure that our outcome supports a multitude of approaches to leadership. One of the ways in which we did this was to select a range of mindsets that learners could choose to explore individually or as a set of attributes. Although the respondents overwhelmingly favoured a transformational style of leadership, we did not prescribe a fixed route to achieve this. We recognised that learners would need to navigate their own way through each mindset and consider how they might adopt and enact it in their own practice. We started with a video briefly explaining the mindset, followed by an interview with a leader regarding how they apply this approach in their practice. These videos are supported by further paper-based exercises that encourage learners to try it in their practice over a period of time, which is supported by reflective questions and additional resources such as external articles and reading lists.

Conclusion

As of August 2020, over 1,500 participants have registered and completed the programme. Evaluations from the participants have been overwhelmingly positive, with more than 40% of the participants accessing the programme from outside Phnom Penh, which was one of the main aims of the programme. The programme is continually being improved and iterated, mainly focusing on the online delivery platform and content.

We have attempted to use the insights gained from the research and development of the CLEAR programme to demonstrate how to design for plurality. We approached this work without a specific framework or process to follow, instead trusting our ability to attune and pay heed to cultural entanglements (Akama & Yee, 2016) to work with and through differences. Although we recognise the importance of grounding our findings within the context of existing well-established theories of leadership, we want to bring to the surface the social-cultural dimensions of leadership relevant for a Cambodian business context. By focusing on these dimensions, we hope to illustrate the heterogeneity of knowledge and approaches to designing that support a more pluralistic way of designing. We recognise the limitation of this small sample and its focus on a subset of Cambodian business professionals, so we recommend further research to expand and extend our initial findings. We present our insights as a counterpoint to knowledge derived within the Western epistemic canon (Tilley, 2017) and consider this knowledge produced by the Global South as a valid contribution to the future (Kothari et al., 2019).

Our hope is that by focusing on a plurality of understandings in relation to leadership as a concept, we can demonstrate how we might design to account for cultural differences. We offer this as a way to enable further reflection on how we explicitly design for plurality.

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