Local Governance Without Local Leadership?: Emerging Lessons From an Ongoing Study

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Korea provides an excellent model for the investigation of local governmental leadership in Asia, as a number of stages in the evolution (and reverse) of local autonomy have been present in the course of a single lifetime. Prior to the localization reforms of the early 1990s, there had not been an opportunity for local leaders to exhibit much of the "leadership behavior" typically cited in western scholarship. Furthermore, a Confucian and Buddhist cultural heritage deeply affects the behavior expected of leaders in any type of organization, governments included. There is little question that governance, as opposed to structured government, requires leadership. Devolution of government and decentralization must therefore be distinguished from local autonomy and local governance. "Snapshots" of perspectives on leadership by the citizenry and local public servants captured as part of a long-term study on local governmental leadership in Asia raise the question of whether Korean local governance can be realized in the short-term future when there is a perceived absence of leadership by elected and professional governmental elites.

Foundational Matters

One will perceive that the title of this study requires four definitions (at least), which might be posed as problem statements:

(1)   What is governance?
(2)   What is local governance?
(3)   What is leadership?
(4)   What is local leadership?

As the first two are subjects still in deep debate, and such discussions are beyond the aims of this study, we will make do with a mere quick survey on the topic. It is presumed that most readers of this study already have formed

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some level of understanding on those issues, and in fact, are supporters of the notion that "local governance is good." The third will be touched upon through the literature, but it is the fourth, the definition of "local leadership," that comprises the focus of this study. The definition goes far beyond what might be offered in a dictionary or described by a group of scholars, it is a living thing, based on those who are affected by it.

In a fully-functioning democracy, leaders are elected by the electorate. However, there is a contrasting definition of leadership that is closely tied with ·the concept of followership. As reflected in a succinct metaphor, "you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink." The second leadership construct, pertaining to followers, would argue that a leader can entice this horse to drink. Both of these definitions, however, must be distinguished from mere popularity.

This study is based on a survey, which is itself based on a similar study-design conducted in Canada.[1] This study-design utilizes metaphors to gather information without the taint of perceived "right" answers based on the current prevailing business literature. The topic area of the study is less obvious from the title, but the main focus of this ongoing study, is how leadership in Asia differs from that in the so-called "western civilizations."

Governance and Local Governance

It is generally accepted that the term "governance" incorporates civic activity beyond the scope of the traditionally defined government. For this study, the following definition, as it emerged from a series of email discussions and workshops related to a study group based in Europe, will suffice.

> (T)he set of formal and informal rules, structures and processes by which local stakeholders collectively solve their problems and meet societal needs. This process is inclusive because each local stakeholder brings important qualities, abilities and resources. In this process, it is critical to build and maintain trust, commitment and a system of bargaining.

Within this study, local governance is defined by incorporating the concept of "local" within the above definition. Unfortunately, the definition of local is quite vague. In traditionally centralized political domains such as Korea, "local" is often used to refer to anything not "central," thus provincial and "Metropolitan City" (cities independent of provincial government authority) governments are included, whereas in other lands these would be viewed as "regional" or "intermediate" forms of government. In Korea and elsewhere (arguably also the United Kingdom), decentralization and localization are treated

as functional equivalents. This issue is left unresolved within this study, as it is blurred as well in the minds and discussions of the populace.

Leadership

It would seem impossible to develop leaders in any sector without an aim, a definition of leadership. The literature is filled with definitions, the number of papers, books, and presentations on leadership is simply staggering. Van Wart (forthcoming) provides an excellent overview on leadership studies in general, and offers insights on where leadership studies in the public sector have taken us over the past few decades. He refers to Bass (1990: xv), where over 7,500 empirical and quasi-empirical references were cited, as well as comments by Ralph Stogdill, James McGregor Burns, and Warren Bennis concerning our lack of knowledge about leadership despite years of study. The cyclical nature of interest in leadership has been noted by many, including Van Wart (forthcoming), who found that, over the life of *Public Administration Review*, there were only 25 articles with an explicit focus on leadership, about four per decade, on average. It would seem the leadership issue is far more popular in the business sector than in public management. Van Wart also notes that there are numerous training programs for leaders at all levels of government, which becomes important in discussion of what is known about leadership, and what can be learned.

The leadership literature is filled with references to the question of whether leaders are "born" or can be "made." Opinions range from those that claim it is impossible to train leaders (see Pitcher 1997, for a representative view) to the opposite extreme, "that each person has leadership potential, and that the capabilities of leadership can be and are learned" (Korac-Kakabadse and Korac-Kakabadse 1997: 436, citing Bennis and Nanus 1985; and Kakabadse 1991). Others state: "There are no known ways to 'train' great leaders" (Zaleznik 1990: 65), or claim that leaders must be developed over a longer term of work-related opportunities (see Bolt 1996; Weber 1996 and Kotter 1996), or go still further, arguing that it is not just training and the traditionally defined leadership opportunity that is needed for future leadership, but opportunities for experimentation in leadership (Saner 2001: 660). Cacioppe (1997: 343) suggests that "the development of leadership may be in a different direction than we had considered...may involve learning how to shed mental habits, to drop egotistic concerns and worries, and to reflect on one's actions, intentions, and goals." Such a reflective experiential basis does not appear to tie closely to a classroom model of leadership development. We may also consider whether the question of "making" leaders is consonant with current themes on government (and leader) "capacities" (as opposed to competencies, which arguably can be learned).

There are several definitions we may look to for a quick summation. Kotter (1990: 5) offers a helpful and not-too-restrictive framework: Establishing Direction; Aligning People; and Motivating and Inspiring. Covey (1990: 152) offers the similar Pathfinding; Aligning; and Empowering. In a discussion of civic leadership we might consider something along the following: "Leaders have followers, and leadership is not popularity, but responsibility and results" (derived from Drucker 1996: xii).

One issue in defining leadership is whether or not "the led" concurs in the definition of leadership. Hubbard (2001: 229) notes:

> Good societal leadership—leadership devoted to the public good —
> is hard to define. It depends on a society's history, culture, and
> traditions, and systems of governance. . .[it] changes through time
> and varies with the particular mix of personalities.

This concept of "the led" is important, because in any given society not all choose to be "followers," yet the elected leadership is presumed to have some influence on the lives of all.

In addition to the question of whether or not leadership exists in a particular context is the scientific study of "types" of leadership, and how these types may impact impressions of leadership behavior. Again, there are countless studies, ranging from near "pop psycho-babble" paperback book constructs to scholarly tomes. A recent wide-ranging compendium on the topic may be found in the *Journal of Managerial Psychology,* volume 12, number 7 (1997), with 19 articles emerging from the Australian public service context.

Narrower definitions become highly controversial, and perhaps are less generalizable in the various environments where leadership may be encountered. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Public Management Committee observes: "Although importance of good leadership is widely recognized, it should be noted that leadership is difficult to define and means different things in different countries" (OECD 2000: 2). Cultural issues, the current state of governance within the nation, and perception of "crisis" all affect a local society's working definition of leadership. Others, including Saner (2001, who quotes Hofstede 1980 with approval), observe that leadership outside of the United States (US) adds additional factors typically overlooked in mainstream leadership discussions. Carl and Javidan (2001: B1) observe that the vast literature on the relationship between culture and leadership styles "points to a major divergence in views regarding the universality or culture-specificity of leadership effectiveness." Factors at the local government level muddy things even further. It is clear that Parry is right, there is a need to "generate a more generalizable formal theory of leadership in local government" (1999: 153).

Looking at leadership in an Asian cultural context, Wildavsky's (1989) "cultural theory of leadership" assumes that different types of leadership are found in different cultures. His nine ideal types lead to general propensities of leadership for four different culture types. This infers that expectations and definitions of leaders in different cultures would likely be different.

Local Leadership

The role of local leadership opportunity may be inferred from studies that discuss the perceived authority of local leaders. Linder and Heierli (1999) point out that leaders' sense of responsibility versus power and authority varies widely between countries. Ahn and Back (1999: 111) show that the majority of local leaders in Korea feel that the national government should take responsibility for a number of issues that would be perceived as "local issues" in a number of other countries, including the US. Meinardus (2001: 220-21) points out that city councils are the weak link in Korean local autonomy, not only vis-a-vis the mayor (a "strong mayor" form of relationship), but more importantly in relationship with the professional managers. Meinardus (2001: 223) further observes that the appointed deputy mayors from Seoul (national government) wield considerable authority, and there is currently a proposal to extend the authority of these un-elected and locally unaccountable managers. When asked how he could lead his professional staff of city employees, when he had little real power, the mayor of Miryang (a largely rural small city/ county of 50,000 in the southeast corner of the Korean peninsula) stated: "By speaking in high language, or maybe order" (personal interview). High language, in the Korean language, would appeal to workers' highest values because they are spoken to in a language form reserved for high executives, nobility, or teacher/scholars, and is neither common nor expected of one perceived as higher rank. Other studies suggest "authenticity" (as a human) (Duignan and Bhindi 1997), legitimacy (within the context of local norms) (Czamiawska 2002), or even "moral manipulation" (see Frey 1994 discussing Casson 1991).

Previous and ongoing studies by this author of perceptions of "what is leadership?" for Korea (Dickey 2001) have indicated that the Korean model differs from that of North America as well as from the scholarly and popular literature. To help account for cultural differences and enable a wider population to participate equally in the investigations, technical language has been avoided through the use of metaphor. One example of previous use of metaphor in this context comes from Bridges (1997: 12), as he notes: "There was a time when leadership metaphors favored the physiological, with the leader as the head and the organization as the body." He further suggests that contemporary wisdom rejects such pattern, that "all the cells repel the invader," "all the geese in the V take turns at the point."

Use of Metaphor

The use of metaphor has a long history in scholarship, most particularly in the fields of psychology and sociology. Wood (2001: 11) notes that not only has use of metaphor risen in ordinary speech, but that organizations are utilizing them intentionally, and metaphor is used in organizational analysis.

Rather than presenting suggestive terms, metaphor stems are used to uncover decontextualized notions of leadership. Eight of the nine metaphor stems from the original study were utilized, translated into Korean. Each item asked the subject to consider an organization (i.e., society) through the proposed metaphor, such as an automobile, and to select one of five parts of the metaphor (e.g., steering wheel or headlights) as most representative of a leader. The underlying entailments of each selection, taken as a collective whole, may offer insights into the respondent's perception of the role of a leader in an organization. As an example, the steering wheel of an automobile is a "director," one that tells the organization which way to behave or go in the immediate situation, whereas the headlights serve to provide the "vision" for the organization and the engine is the "motivator," supplying energy. Additional questions sought the respondents' identification of great leaders in Korea.

Local Government in Korea

Local leadership is a new concept for Korea in many respects, as mayors were appointed by the central government until 1995. More important, perhaps, is that appointees were often seen as temporary in nature, particularly in the smaller cities and provinces. As one example, in the city of Miryang, mayors' terms of office prior to 1995 were one month, three months, or six months, in short cases; one year or one and a half years at most, in long cases (Lee 2002). It may be concluded that citizens and bureaucrats, too, are learning about leadership.

Local government in the United States has typically been described under three models: Mayor-Council (also termed "strong mayor"), Manager-Council (also known as "weak mayor"), and Commission (no elected chief, individual Commissioners may be in charge of specific governmental departments). Added to this list can be several other types, including the English Councils and Asia's bureaucrat-dominant design (particularly where senior-most professional managers are appointed and heavily influenced by central government). Korea has adopted a "strong mayor" form of local government. One mayor has observed that, at least in terms of personnel matters, the Korean mayor is much stronger than his counterparts in most other countries (Lee 2002). The English Council system, with as many as 40 councilors in a city, most working through

committees overseeing various departments, seems to offer little opportunity for individual councilors to impact city processes; yet Martin (1997: 540) reports that these councilors nevertheless see city government under the rubric "[council] member led and [professional] officer driven." Clearly there is a belief that elected officials should lead government regardless of its form.

The opportunity for leadership at the local government level, however, is also greatly affected by the level of local autonomy. Jung (2002) and Moon (1999) note that in Korea and Japan roughly 50 percent or even 65 percent of local government activities are delegated tasks from the central (national) government where little local decisionmaking opportunity is available. Furthermore, professional staff in Korea, as in many other countries, have a great deal of influence in the policy outcomes of local governments where it impacts budgeting or technical sophistication.

One conclusion from Korea's state of affairs is that the deputy mayors, still appointed by the central government, have an inordinate amount of authority, particularly considering the need for strong relations with central government to obtain additional funds and to execute "delegated functions." Less than half of local governments' income is generated from local tax and "business" revenues, and a great part of the work of local authorities is delegated from the central government (but little discretionary authority is granted for the implementation of these tasks).

In the political arena, ultimately, it is the electorate who determines the "successful leaders." Leach and Wilson (2000: 9) emphasize the ties between political culture and leadership. Recent local offices election outcomes in Korea seem based more on "national politics" than local leadership. Where leadership is not equated with electoral activism: how is leadership defined and practiced by elected local officials? How is it defined by professional government employees, and the citizenry-at-large? These are the questions this study seeks to answer.

Preliminary Outcomes and Findings

In an initial (pilot) study, taxi drivers, though not representative of the demographics of Korean society in general, were chosen as respondents. Popular perception is that they are well in touch with the sentiments of the average Korean citizen. In fact, taxi drivers are often referenced by politicians, newspaper columnists, and members of society-at-large as a source for "the pulse of the nation." In a more complete study (in progress), municipal employees and elected officials are surveyed. Detailed comparative analysis of these and future surveys will reveal how the perceptions of leadership of the

elected, the workers, and the citizenry, correspond. Complementing this study are interviews with elected chief executives at various levels of local government. Not unsurprisingly, the leadership perspectives of various leaders differ yet there are certain similarities within Korea as well.

The "Mayor" of Muju County, a quiet mountainous area with no nearby cities, pointed to Stephen Covey's principles in leadership[2] as one of his guiding frameworks in local government leadership. However, Mayor Kim observes that love of the people and the region one represents is the most important, and if the people are unhappy, he has failed as a leader. (Muju was virtually ignored in Korea's drive for modernization/industrialization, perhaps a cause for Mayor Kim's focus related to ski-tourism, eco-tourism, and natural preservation rather than economic development.)

In partial contrast, the "Mayor" of Dongdaemun Borough ("Gu") in Seoul indicated that his leadership style was based on encouraging public servants to serve the citizenry well through incentives.[3] Mayor Yoo and the Borough have received a number of awards and recognition from a variety of sources for citizen services (see Chosun Ilbo 2000, and Chung-Ang Ilbo 2001 for two newspaper accounts). A Borough, County, and "regular city" all qualify as the third (local) level of government in Korea, the Province or Metropolitan City (in essence, population over one million) comprise the second or "intermediate" level of government, below the central/national government. Mayor Yoo is highly regarded by many, and considered an "up and comer" for higher political offices. This too may affect his leadership style, and how he is perceived by others. (See Ammons [1991] on the productivity and innovation of "reputational leaders.")

In contrast to some of the current concepts of "leadership across the organization" (see Parry 1999; Pitcher 1997; Ulrich 1996), both Mayor Yoo of Dongdaemun and Mayor Lee of Miryang reported that leadership did not go below the subdepartment head level (third or fourth tier below the mayor: e.g., Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Division or Department, [small] Department, Subdepartment), which would be two or three levels of supervision/responsibility above most "frontline workers." Mayor Kim of Muju did not respond to this question, but his other responses appear to indicate that his sense of leadership (doing what is right based on love of people and the region) would extend down to lower levels of supervision, if not to the line workers themselves. However, the concept of leadership as a means of reducing subordinate dependency and encourage self-leadership (Parry 1999: 149) appears incompatible with the traditional Confucian reliance on hierarchical structure.

Public servants' ideas on leadership do not appear to match up well with those of the taxi drivers or the elected officials. To some extent it might be

expected that the perceptions of executives and staff would not match, and that politicians and the electorate would not match. It is important to continue the study in other political environs, to determine to what extent or degree mismatch is normal. Do "well-governed" lands have the same mismatch? Are "popular" or "reputational" leaders more aligned with electorate expectations? Do "effective" local administrations have a higher matching between staff and executives?

The preliminary study and current data from followup studies appear to substantiate that the concerns stated by Andrews and Field (1998: 134) for Canada are valid for investigations of leadership in Asia as well, "it appears that lay concepts of leadership do not closely resemble taxonomies found in the leadership literature." Furthermore, it appears that the concepts of leaders do not closely match that of the public servants they lead; though the politician's ideals may not be so different from those of the citizenry, whether they are put into practice is a separate matter.

There is a high level of agreement in a lack of leaders identified in these studies. Taxi drivers, elected executives, and bureaucrats alike had difficulty identifying even one current leader. The response for local leaders was even lower. (The former mayor of Seoul, Cho Soon, appears to have received the highest number of votes.) This higher level of expectation may have been spurred, in part, by the metaphors they had read only moments before, but it was unexpected. As the response to the question of "Has Korea ever had a great leader, if so who" was also low. There may be other issues as well, particularly considering the folkloric legends of warrior- or scholar-leaders of ancient Korea. The most frequently cited leader (crossing the bounds of both "ever" and "contemporary") was Park Chung Hee, despite his reputation as an iron-fisted and autocratic master. Or perhaps because of it?

There is an extremely high selection of metaphors supporting "leader as Director" and "leader as Motivator." (See Appendix 1 for the metaphor questions.) While the results from Canada also show a preference for such leadership orientations, the Korean responses appear to be far more substantial. This is not altogether unexpected, as it supports the initial hypothesis that Asians have more differing expectations of leadership than the west, and it indicates that those promoting "Asian values" in politics may understand their electorate better than critical western media.

Further investigations are warranted for perceptions of leadership in a variety of communities across the globe in pursuit of that "more generalizable formal theory of leadership in local government" (Parry 1999: 153).

Endnotes

[1]Andrews and Field, 1998. Many thanks to Richard Field for his support in providing the survey instrument and interpretations from that study, essential to the establishment of the present study course, "local leadership."

[2]Covey and others regularly visit Korea for management training programs to present on management and leadership. Many recent leadership and management books have been translated into Korean. Mayor Kim did not refer to specific principles or a particular publication during the interview.

[3]Mayor Yoo stated that prizes, pay increases, and various perquisites were the best way to lead staff towards customer satisfaction as expressed in regular "customer service" surveys.

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Appendix 1

Metaphor Stems (Survey Questions)*

1. Think of the organization as if it were an ocean liner. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) captain   (b) navigator   (c) chief engineer
    (d) naval architect   (e) chief purser

2. Think of the organization as if it were a car. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) engine   (b) steering wheel   (c) wheels
    (d) headlights   (e) front bumper

3. Think of the organization as if it were a computer. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) video screen   (b) central processing unit
    (c) keyboard/mouse   (d) electricity   (e) software

4. Think of the organization as if it were an airplane. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) fuselage   (b) rudder   (c) compass
    (d) engine   (e) black box recorder

5. Think of the organization as if it were a human body. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) heart   (b) DNA   (c) brain
    (d) blood   (e) eyes

6. Think of the organization as if it were a restaurant. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) maitre d'   (b) chef   (c) waiter
    (d) diners   (e) health inspector

7. Think of the organization as if it were a legal system. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) judge   (b) lawyer   (c) police
    (d) parliament   (e) prison system

8. Think of the organization as if it were a movie. With this metaphor in mind its leader is the:
    (a) audience   (b) director   (c) actor
    (d) writer   (e) distributor

*(R. Field, personal communication, August 2001a)