



An Examination of Power Distance

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Introduction

Power distance is something that anyone in the workforce will experience no matter the type of job or position they hold within an organization. Power distance is the unequal distribution of power between parties and the level of acceptance of that inequality. In this case, power distance will be examined in a business or organizational setting. Power distance can create obstacles within an organization, its operations, and its employees. These obstacles can affect numerous aspects of a job such as work relationships, decision making abilities, and job performance. Power distance can affect everyone within an organization differently, but how it affects a person relies on their personal power distance orientation. However, some employees may be more accepting of the power distance an organization has than others. Different factors within an organization can contribute to the power distance it has, such as organizational factors, psychological factors, and the culture of the organization. Throughout this project, the findings should reflect that personal power distance orientation can affect a person and how they work with others around them. The findings should also reflect that the organizational structure and the culture of an organization can contribute to the power distance and the acceptance of it, and what power distance should look like in different industries and organizational structures. It is important to bring light to power distance because it is something that affects everyone in the workforce whether they know it or not. It is not taken into account how it can affect numerous parts of an organization and the environment that is being created for the employees.

Analysis

In any field of work, it is important to have good work relationships with your co-workers and supervisors. Any type of relationship that a person builds has to be built on the foundation of trust, which is one of the most important values that a relationship is built on. If you do not trust a co-worker, supervisor, manager, or anyone that you work with, it would be extremely difficult to work collaboratively. Any type of higher-up in an organization has specific responsibilities that they have to fulfill within their position. Organizations that have a higher Power Distance Orientation, the employees tend to form work relationships based on job title or job function, while in organizations that have a lower Power Distance Orientation, the employees focus on having a more personal relationship with a supervisor and have more involvement in a supervisor's decisions.

A person makes about 35,000 decisions every single day. However, sometimes big decisions have to be made and it could be life changing. Organizations that have a high-power distance orientation expect managers to make decisions on their own, without consulting subordinates for their opinion on the matter. In organizations that have a low-power distance orientation, employees and superiors have a more personal relationship as well as a working relationship, and subordinates are more involved in the decision-making process. Superiors who have a low-power distance orientation tend to be more people-oriented, and subordinates feel more comfortable around them than those with a high-Power distance orientation. Superiors that have a high-power distance orientation are more task-oriented than people-oriented, and they do not focus on having relationships with subordinates. An individual would feel more comfortable coming to a leader with a lower power distance orientation because they are people-oriented and want a personal relationship with the employee. However, they will not go to a leader that has a higher power distance orientation.

There are several psychological factors that can come into play when it comes to power distance orientation. The dimensions that power distance is broken down into are power, conflict with authority, hierarchy, prestige, and social distance. Power is explained as the extent of the acceptance of power in the workplace by an employee and can come from position, expertise, information, charisma, and resources. Managers are considered more reliable by lower-oriented employees because they are seen as powerful. The next dimension is a conflict with authority figures, this dimension examines when and who is appropriate to challenge in the workplace. A supervisor might view the challenge as a personal attack on their knowledge and status within the organization. The next dimension being examined is hierarchy. The hierarchy of a company can attract different people. Employees with a high orientation prefer clear lines of authority. Depending on an individual's hierarchy orientation, they will prefer a different organizational structure. The next dimension is prestige, which is recognized as a need for power. This need for power is reflected in narcissism. Individuals may strive for certain aspects of power to have prestige within an organization, which also can relate to the feeling of having power and control over others. The last dimension that is examined is social distance. Employees who feel superior to others will avoid interacting on a social scale with those they find to be subordinate to them.

Some organizational factors that can contribute to power distance are the structure and standpoints of the organization. The structure of an organization can affect how the employees tolerate the power distance of the organization. In most hierarchical business structures, the relationship between those in power and those not in power comes down to superior and subordinate. Decentralized organizations are more likely to appeal to employees who have low-power distance orientation. Those with high-power distance orientations like having a tall business structure, with many supervisors and higher-ups, are task-oriented and are not very focused on developing personal relationships, they would rather have a working relationship. Power distance can also affect how subordinates view their leaders. . In a study that examines organizational standpoints and leader apology, a leader will most often make an apology that utilizes the standpoints of the organization to form an apology that will influence, appeal to, and appease the employees.

The culture of the employees of an organization needs to be taken into consideration when examining power distance. This form of culture takes the form in an organization as those with lower power distance orientation and higher power distance orientation. This can help discover the demographic of the organization and help determine what type of business will work best for your organization to succeed. The culture of an individual can determine how they interact with people in a business setting. The acceptance of the power distance orientation stems from cultural beliefs and how the culture views status and authority.

When taking all of these different factors listed above into consideration, many things can contribute to and or be affected by power distance. However, all of these factors can play into job performance. In a study conducted on salespeople in the United States, it was found that "managers are the most critical part of the work environment" and that "satisfaction with the supervisor is associated with positive attitudes and behaviors of salespeople towards the job". How employees are treated by superiors plays into job performance and how satisfied they are with their job. It is safe to say that employees in any organization that feel undervalued by superiors in their workplace will stop putting in as much effort.

Purpose

The goal of this project is to determine how people experience power distance in their own jobs, how it effects their work relationships, and how it effects their decision-making abilities within their organization. I want to investigate different factors that can contribute to power distance, such as organization factors, psychological factors, and the culture of the organization.

Methods

In order to gather information for this project, several peer-reviewed articles and journals were used. Through those articles and journals, information was gathered about work relationships, decision-making abilities, psychological factors, organizational factors, culture, and job performance. These items either contribute to power distance or are affected by it. Most of the sources used covered more than one of the factors that are talked about in this project, so they are exhibited in more than one of these areas as well. When researching this topic, it was found that a lot of these factors go hand in hand and can affect each other in both positive and negative ways based on the type of power distance that is being discussed. Being able to find more information about these factors and how they could affect each other was really interesting to find. It was also interesting to find that power distance cannot only be applied organizationally, but also individually. During the research stage of this project, similarly, almost all of the sources used many articles and journals conducted their own survey on the matter of power distance that focused on a particular group of people or certain setup factors. The Researchers often asked participants a series of questions about certain factors and came up with something to gauge if a company had a high-power distance orientation or a low-power distance orientation or how the factor contributed to power distance. All the results came back with numerical results that pertained to the response of a certain percentage of participants to a particular question asked in the study. Through analyzing surveys and questionnaires that are in published media, a survey was created to encapsulate different measurement factors of power distance in different industries.

Results

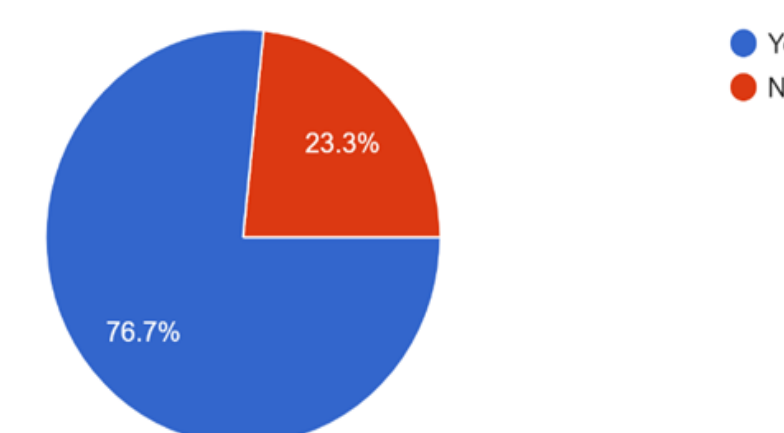
The survey mentioned above was conducted and it had a total of thirty participants. The respondents came from a wide variety of different jobs. 50% of the respondents were in the age range of eighteen to twenty-two, 36.7% of the respondents were in the age range of twenty-three to thirty, and each of the age ranges of forty-one to fifty and fifty-one to sixty made up 6.7% of the respondents. The participants of the survey were asked to answer or provide a few statements to twelve questions regarding certain aspects of their job or most present place of work. The questions that were created were similar to questions from previous research and sources used throughout this project that analyze different aspects of power distances. However, by conducting this small-scale survey, it can tell a lot about the power distance that an individual may experience at their job in whichever field of work it may be just from a few questions. Of course, if two participants come from the same field of work, that does not mean they will always have the same experience. A trend in the responses would be that a majority of respondents felt that their superiors worked towards having a more personal relationship with them, so this means that a majority of supervisors have a low-power distance orientation. Something that the findings reflected was that 70% of the respondents were not supervisors, but they had decision making abilities at their jobs and were included in the decision-making process as well. 26.6% of the respondents are supervisors and they said that they include their subordinates in the decision-making process. The findings were surprising, and they were interesting to analyze. The complete list of questions and data set can be found in Appendix A and B.

Through the extensive research that was performed, it was found that power distance does not only rely on the organization itself, but it also relies on the people who work for the organization. There are organizational factors that contribute to power distance such as the structure and certain rules or policies that are in place. Referring to the decision-making process and abilities that employees have, some organizational structures can limit who is involved with the decision-making process and that also goes for rules and policies. Some employees may not be involved because the company has policies that again, limit who is involved in the decision-making process because of confidentiality reasons or they feel like it would not be necessary to include more people in the decision-making process. Depending on the structure of the organization, the decision-making process could take longer because of the number of people involved in the process. The part of power distance that relies on the employees of the organization refers to the culture, work relationships, psychological factors, and job performance. The culture of the employees, which contributes to the overall culture of the company, may not be accepting of the high or low-power distance orientation that the company wants. It is up to those in higher-up positions to set the bar for what kind of power distance orientation they want to have to maintain in the workplace. It takes every single employee to maintain or change the orientation, but if the orientation that is trying to be established or maintained isn't accepted by the employees, they will not cooperate with that orientation. If these two factors are not on the same page, it will affect other factors like work relationships and job performance. Every individual has a different power distance orientation, so if an employee doesn't fit in with the power distance orientation that the organization has, they may not enjoy their job or the people they work with.

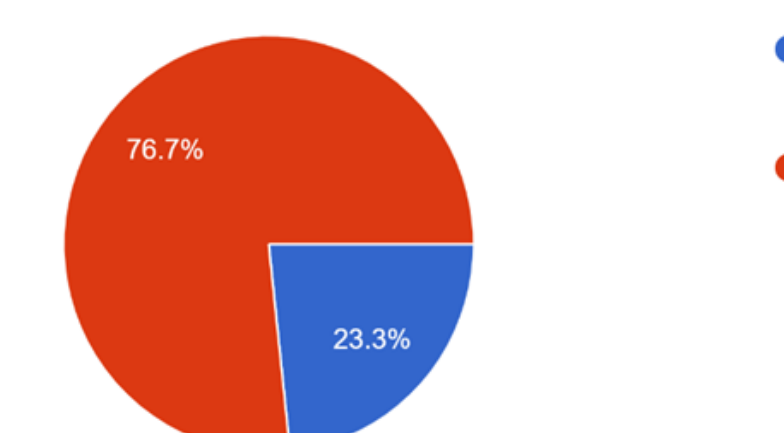
Conclusion

Throughout this project, several factors that are affected by power distance are discussed. This examination covers the areas of work relationships, decision making abilities, psychological factors, organizational factors, culture, and job performance. These can affect power distance and can also be affected by power distance. However, these factors both rely on the organization and the individual. It is important for organizations to take the power distance orientation of their employees into consideration when they are considering any changes. The level of acceptance of the power distance relies on the employees, if they reject the type of orientation the organization wants or is working towards, employees are not going to be satisfied and this can affect their job performance. A business also needs to take the culture of the business and its employees into consideration because it can greatly affect how the employees operate and how their business tyle works with others within the company and the company itself. Thinking about all of these different factors and how they are connected to power distance and how they all affect each other is so important. It is important to find a balance between all of these factors that work specifically for that organization, so they fit to the power distance orientation the organization wants. Any imbalance between these factors can greatly affect the organization, how the employees work together, and how they feel about the organization. Power distance is something that not a lot of people know about and how it can affect their jobs. Power distance is something that needs to be talked about more because it can help people evaluate different aspects of their job to see if it would be a good fit for them.

Do you feel like you fit into the culture of the organization?
30 responses

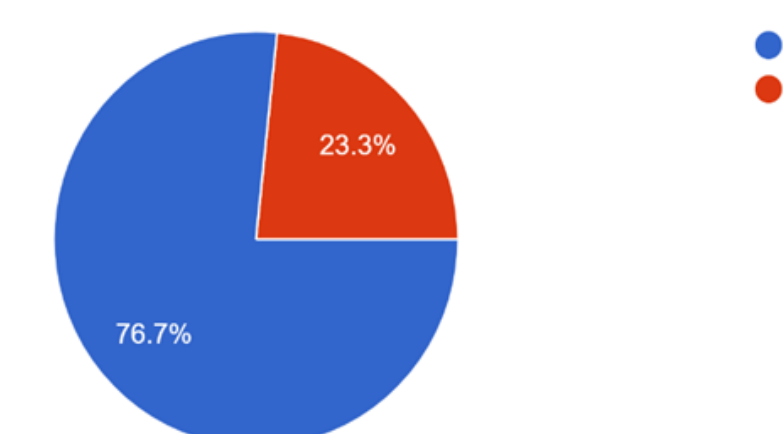


Would you say that your supervisor(s)
30 responses

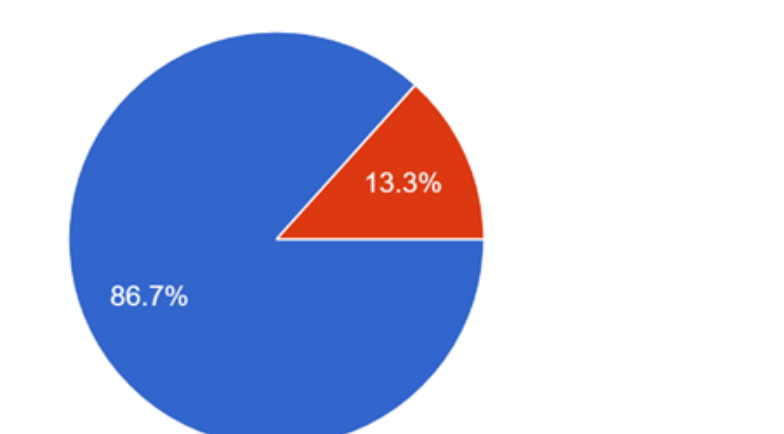


● don't try to form relationships with employees that go beyond the workplace
● have more personal relationships with employees

Do you feel your supervisor(s) treat you like a person first and an employee second?
30 responses

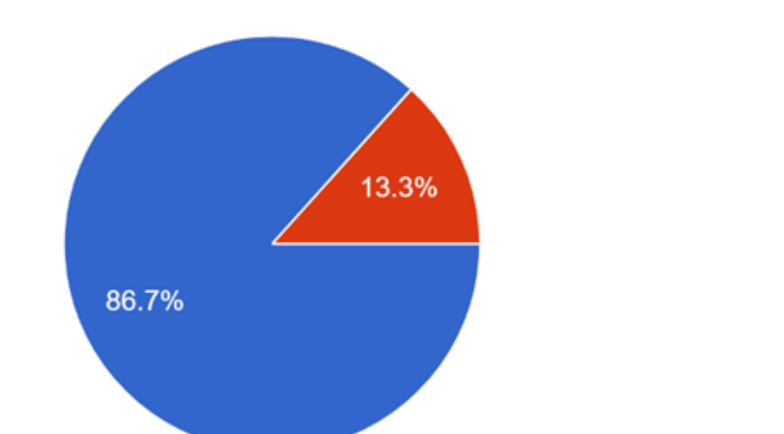


Do you have decision making abilities at your job?
30 responses

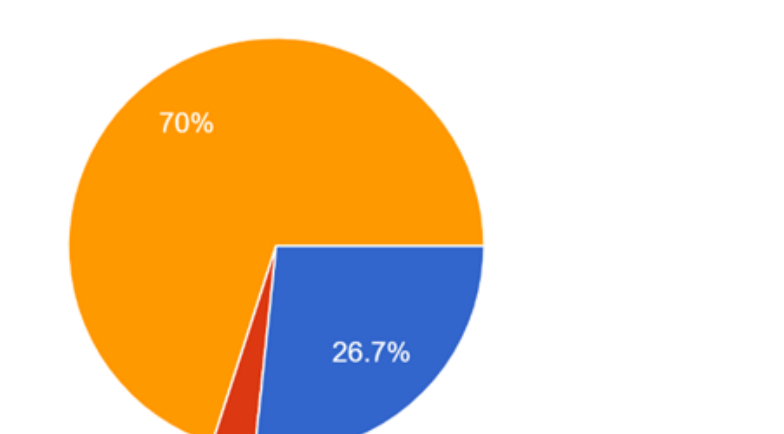


● Yes
● No

Do you feel involved with the decision making process at your job?
30 responses



If you are a supervisor, do include subordinates on the decision making process?
30 responses



● Yes
● No
● Does Not Apply