

Power distance essay

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Power Distance

After the study of 88, 000 IBM employees working in sixty-six countries in different parts of the world, Hofstede Geert—a Dutch cultural anthropologist—ranked countries in a scale of one to a hundred on individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 2001).

Through his research, Hofstede Geert developed four cultural dimensions, which are very useful when analyzing a country's cultural value. This research paper provides an in-depth discussion into one of the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede, power distance. In addition, this research paper investigates the implication of power distance on the attitudes and behavior of learners.

Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members in the society expect and accept unequal power distribution within a culture (Baumann, 2007). High power distance countries have centralized power with very hierarchies. For example, in an organization, subordinates may view management as benevolent and thus follow every instruction without any questions.

In high power distance countries, parents teach respect and expect obedience from their children. The relationship between parents and children is distant because children tend to fear their parents rather respect them. Teachers in high power distance countries are feared but also admired because they possess wisdom. Students view themselves as inferior to their

teachers. Individuals in high power distance countries command respect from their subordinates, which makes their relationship very formal.

According to Jacko and Sears (2003) high power distance relationship may hinder information flow from to suburbanites to their superior because the subordinates are not expected to contribute to any decisions made by superiors.

Furthermore, Samovar and McDaniel (2009) assert that high power distance countries have engrained culture, which encourages inequality in to the minds of subordinates, which helps individuals in power to concentrate power at the top. These cultures teach members of the society to accept that not all people in the society are equal and every one should assume their rightful place. House (2004) also posits that in low distance countries, power is decentralized and they have flatter organization structures. Subordinates and superiors in organizations have a less formal relationship and they tend to relate as equals. For example, superiors value the input and opinion of subordinates in the decision making process. According to Dash, Bruning, and Acharya (2009) the difference in salaries between superiors and subordinates is relatively small compared to high power distance countries. Although parents expect respect from their children, they relate like pears. On low power distance countries, the relationship between students and teachers is only formal when in classroom setup and although students have to respect their teachers, they can relate less formally (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede power distance cultural dimension has profound effect on the attitude and behavior of learners. Both high and low power distance cultural

values have their advantages and disadvantages. Learner's attitudes and behavior are greatly influenced by the culture, which is dominant in a country or learning institution. Student exchange serves to show the difference between high and low power distance cultures. When exchange students from low power culture countries visit high power distance countries in most instances they suffer from cultural shock because they are not used to the freedom of speech and other factors, which are the norm in high power distance countries.

In high power distance countries, the relationship between students and teachers is very formal (Hofstede, 2001).

The formal relationship has both positive and negative influence on a student's behavior and attitude. To show respect for the teacher the student may work hard and adopt a positive attitude towards his or her studies. The students who work hard and get good grades in school are obedient and are praised in the community.

On the other hand, a student's learning experience is passive and he or she may fail to express his or her opinion in presence of a teacher for fear of being seen as disrespectful thus discouraging participative learning. The student may not be in a position to develop their public speaking skills because they are taught from a tender age to maintain silence in front of superiors, which includes teachers. The student may fail to speak up on problems he or she is facing thus overtime they tend to lag behind others who may not be experiencing the same problem. For example as student who is poor in math may fail to consult the teacher thus, end up failing.

In low power distance, countries students tend to relate with their teachers less formally although they are expected show respect towards all elders. Students who are not focused on learning may take the opportunity because of the freedom they have to be disrespectful to their teachers and disrupt learning for other students. On the other hand, students have an opportunity to enhance their learning experience through researching and expressing their opinion on various topics learnt in class.

Although most scholars agree with Hofstede Geert's cultural dimensions, some critics argue that the scope of the research was narrow and should not have been taken to represent an entire country. According to Jacko and Sears (2003) other scholars argue that despite globalization, the differences between high power and low power distance country will not change because the culture is already engrained into the minds of the people and being passed on from generation to generation.

According to Phongpaibul (2007) the data collected through Hofstede research is out of date and due to globalizations most culture are becoming more liberal as the world adopts a global culture to facilitate international trade. The data was collected through questionnaires, which, put the reliability of the study to question, and in addition, studies on IBM employees should not be taken to represent the whole countries cultural values.

In conclusion, power distance is the extent to which less powerful members of the society accept inequality perpetuated by their superiors. Countries are divided into two major categories as low and high power distance. In high power distance, power is centralized while in low power distance it is

decentralized. A relationship between superiors and subordinates in low power distance countries is informal while it is formal in high power distance countries. Both high and low power distance countries have cultural values that have negative and positive impact on learner's behavior and attitude. In low power distance countries students view their teachers as role models and the admiration encourage them to work hard. On the other hand, learning in low power distance is not consultative because students fear their teachers. In high power distance countries students have the opportunity to consult with their teachers and express their opinion freely. On the other hand, students may take advantage of the freedom to disrupt learning and be disrespectful to their teachers.

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