

The Moderating Effect of Psychological Power Distance on Symmetrical Internal Communication enhancing Autonomous Motivation: Empirical Study Hotel Industry in Thailand

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Abstract

The symmetrical internal communication which widely studied in various research fields especially to enhance the productivity of the institutions. The paper researched the effect of symmetrical internal communication on the autonomous motivation of 128 hotel employees in Thailand, where the power distance is prominently held and practiced within society. Therefore, the power distance according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions in the 1980s considered a practical concept which recently developed in 2023 the psychological conceptualization focused on the individual level of analysis consisted of power, conflict with authority figures, prestige, hierarchy, and social distance. The study defined the psychological power distance into three dimensions that differently moderated the effect of symmetrical internal communication on autonomous motivation which examined the positive relation.

Keywords

Symmetrical internal communication; Autonomous motivation; Psychological power distance; Hotel industry in Thailand

1. Introduction

The prior study emphasized the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication in intending the image and creating the hotel industry's sustainability[14], which mentioned the motivation in building reputation and credibility. Moreover, respect and clear communication suggested in building an environment to support the autonomy needs of humans[16]. It suggested communication involved to encourage and assist. [6]Jung, H. S., & Yoon, H. H. (2014) indicated that hotel employees especially front-house positions provided tremendous use of emotions that affected their positive acting in terms of emotional intelligence, then it suggested the prominent of the autonomous motivation to improve how emotions perceived and lead to social interaction more effectively[13].

In terms of cultural dimensions, the moderating effect of power distance strengthened the relationship between spiritual leadership and autonomous motivation in Chinese organizations with high power distance [18]. Moreover, the cultural context as the psychological power distance suggested people who held high power distance empowered the quality of communication [1] caused by having a conflict with authority figures.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Symmetrical Internal Communication(SC)

The symmetrical internal communication known as the most effective strategy within organizations[8], which flows the symmetrical dialog between individuals or groups. The symmetrical internal communication often applied within the institutions to increase performance specifically the hospitality industry[7], also indicated a positive effect on work engagement[11]. The symmetrical communication examined increasing the employee-organization relationship [8] and even provided positive feedback and trust of the organization.

2.2. Autonomous Motivation(AM)

It considered pure motivation which indicated the highest quality of motivation according to self-determination theory(SDT) the 1970s [16], to fulfill human needs based on autonomy, competence, and relatedness in taking action[4]. The autonomous motivation contained two sub-components in the study: intrinsic motivation referred to their interest in an activity [16]. For example the curiosity of students in studying unseen things. Another sub-component is identified regulation appeared when individuals are not spontaneously attracted to the activity, it defined the importance of the activity, for instance a worker is working hard to achieve the bonus or personal goals [12]. Even though the extrinsic motivation such the identified regulation is not intrinsic, it is characterized by the sense of freedom and willingness to make decisions. Two of these sub-components: intrinsic motivation and identified regulation often studied among educational studies and combined as autonomous motivation (e.g. [12], [16])

The autonomous motivation demonstrated the most self-determination that intrinsically motivated the interest in taking action[11]. While symmetrical internal communication applied to equalize the output and input information between individuals or groups including increasing understanding and decreasing conflicts[8] influence the autonomy when the employees feel heard and valued, competence of the communication that clarifies their expectations, and relatedness when the organization fosters a sense of belonging[9] based on SDT in the workplace[4].

H1: The symmetrical internal communication positively influences the autonomous motivation

2.3. The psychological power distance (PPD)

The study considered the individual level of interpretation regarding their perception of power distance value according to the cultural dimensions theory developed by Geert Hofstede in the late 1970s. Power distance identified the social hierarchy in which the inequality of power and authority is acceptable [5]. To empirically investigate focusing on decision-making, the psychological power distance is suggested to moderate employee behaviors[1]. Additionally, power distance is considered a prominent practice in Thailand, where the subordinates expect their supervisors to tell them what to do, as well as the centralization system prominently provided in Thai society[3].

Power(P) determined the formal right of an individual to influence the actions of others[2]. This ability allowed people with power to make a decision without consulting with subordinates in society with a high value of power distance[3]. When the power recognized and unequally distributed in the organization or institution will contribute to the authority[2]. Power distributed by various sources for instance the position of power in the organization, the potency and recognition gained through the organizational chart of the hierarchy of authority[2].

Conflict with authority figures(CA) states the inappropriate behavior to challenge a high position or power figure because the subordinate is less likely to confront or disagree with their boss in order to eliminate the negative effects on their status in high power distance society[1]). Although the involvement in the conflict causes frustration and stress that could distract concentration, having a conflict could point out the existing problems which not only develop the organizational performance but also the organizational environment including the employee-organization relationship[2].

Hierarchy and prestige(HPR) Hierarchy describes the clear hierarchical construction among hierarchical orientations where centralized decision be preferred[1]. Prestige referred to the natural extension in power distance study that individuals with high power distance tended to gain status symbols and be looked up to by others[1]. [3]Buriameathagul, K. (2013) mentioned power distance characteristics in Thailand created a respect that had the ability to influence the behaviors of employees. In Thai society, the hierarchical system consists of a higher and lower levels whereas the lower level defines younger generation[15]. Moreover, the prestige that could be gain from various sources including in the hierarchical society, believed as a better life for Thai families[10] Social distance(SD) represents the nonverbal action that expressed as the manner in Thai society to respect others[15]. High power distance tended to avoid the interaction with different levels and show symbolic space between them[1].

However, these characteristics of the psychological power distance created freedom in workplaces[1] where the clear chain of command emphasized the formal communication influencing their autonomous motivation to serve a service. According to the prominent norms in Thailand where the collectivist society perceived the importance of member relationships [3] based on indigenous practices of high power distance, the characteristics could influence the relationship between symmetrical communication and autonomous motivation.

H2a: Power moderates the relationship between the symmetrical internal communication and autonomous motivation.

H2b: Conflict with authority figure moderates the relationship between the symmetrical internal communication and autonomous motivation.

H2c: Hierarchy and prestige moderates the relationship between the symmetrical internal communication and autonomous motivation.

H2d: Social distance moderates the relationship between the symmetrical internal communication and autonomous motivation.

3. Methodology

The online questionnaire conducted through Google Forms during the graduate study, shared on social platform including Facebook that mostly used in Thailand including Facebook, and LINE.

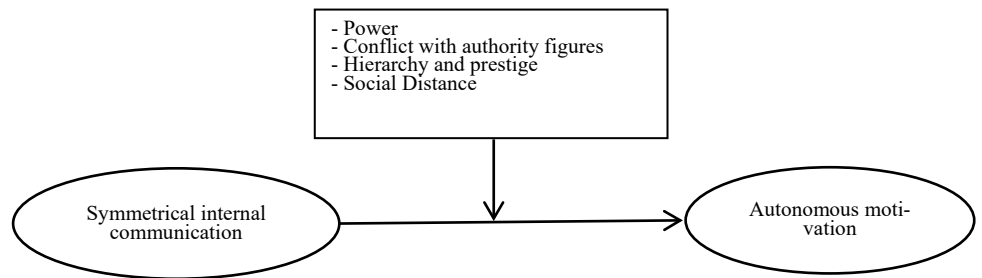


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3.1. Demographic profile

The 128 participants had experienced working in hotel industry contained 74 female, and 54 male participants. The online questionnaire surveyed the respondents' age, highest education, experience year, and the position based on the level of customer interaction as shown in Table 1. Most of them worked as the reception (n=51, 39.8%) in the hotel who served service and often interacted with customers.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

	Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	0 = female	74	57.8
	1 = male	54	42.2
Age	1 = less than 21 years old	5	11.7
	2 = 21-35 years old	62	48.4
	3 = 36-45 years old	30	23.4
	4 = 46-55 years old	13	10.2
	5 = more than 55 years old	8	6.3
Education	1 = high school	18	14.1

	2 = associate's degree	17	13.3
	3 = bachelor's degree	77	60.2
	4 = graduate degree	8	6.3
	5 = doctoral degree	8	6.3
Experience	1 = less than 1 year	31	24.2
	2 = 1-3 years	62	48.4
	3 = more than 3 years	35	27.3
Position	1 = manager	28	21.9
	2 = housekeeping and F&B	26	20.3
	3 = reservation clerk	23	18
	4 = reception	51	39.8

3.2. Construct

The six variables all used 5-Likert scale from 1= “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Firstly, the symmetrical internal communication(SC) adopted four items from [8]Kang, M., & Sung, M. (2017). An item was “Most communication between managers and other employees in our company can be said to be two-way communication”, Cronbach’s alpha 0.889. Secondly, there were eight items adopted from [16]Vansteenkiste, M., Sierens, E., Soenens, B., Luyckx, K., & Lens, W. (2009) measured the autonomous motivation(AM) in terms of intrinsic motivation and identified regulation which the item was “I am working in general because it's fun”, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.925. Lastly the moderating variable of the psychological power distance adopted four dimensions according to the study from [1]Adamovic, M. (2023) contained 1) three items of power(P), an item was “Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates”, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.857, 2) three items of Conflict with authority figure(CA) scale, an item was “People at lower levels should carry out higher level requests without questions”, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.928, 3) Hierarchy and Prestige(HPR) adopted six items for example “Distinct reporting relationships are extremely important to me”, the Cronbach’s

4. Results

The factor loading demonstrated the observed indicators well explained by the latent construct higher than 0.5 threshold that considered significant and determined the reliability and validity model. The confirmatory factor analysis examined the composite reliability of the independent variable (SC) and dependent variable(AM) with the acceptable value of 0.864 and 0.913 respectively, additionally the moderating variables; Power, Conflict, Hierarchy and Prestige, and Social distance following 0.855, 0.821, 0.911 and 0.807 gradually which shown the variables were valid and consistently examined the further analyze. Moreover, as shown in table 2 all variables tested the average variance extracted(AVE) higher than 0.5 suggested the validity of the construct due to measurement error evaluated the measurement model and suggested good convergent.

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

The correlation table demonstrated a strong relation between the independent variable(SC) and the dependent variable(AM), as the dimensions of psychological power distance in

terms of conflict with authority figure(CA), hierarchy and prestige(HPR), and social distance(SD). In contrast, the power shown no relation with autonomous motivation(AM) as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. The factor loading and AVE

Variables	Items	loading	AVE
Symmetrical internal communication ($\alpha=0.889$)	Most communication between managers and other employees in our company can be said to be two-way communication (SC1)	0.841	0.614
	Our company encourages differences of opinion(SC2)	0.705	
	The purpose of communication in our company is to help managers to be responsive to the problems of other employees(SC3)	0.771	
	Employees are not afraid to speak up during meetings with supervisors.(SC4)	0.810	
Autonomous motivation (Intrinsic motivation and Identified regulation) ($\alpha=0.925$)	I am working in general because I want to learn new things.(ident1)	0.662	0.576
	I am working in general because it is personally important to me.(ident2)	0.516	
	I am working in general because this represents a meaningful choice to me.(ident3)	0.549	
	I am working in general because this is an important life goal to me.(ident4)	0.729	
	I am working in general because I am highly interested in doing it.(tr1)	0.829	
	I am working in general because I enjoy doing it.(tr2)	0.899	
	I am working in general because it's fun.(tr3)	0.902	
	I am working in general because it's an exciting thing to do.(tr4)	0.872	
Power ($\alpha=0.857$)	Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates.(P1)	0.848	0.664
	It is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates.(P2)	0.800	
	Managers should seldom ask for the opinions of employees.(P3)	0.795	
Conflict with authority figure ($\alpha=0.928$)	People at lower levels should carry out higher level requests without questions.(CA1)	0.845	0.605
	I believe that when in disagreement with adults, young people should defer to elders.(CA2)	0.773	
	Employees should not disagree with management decisions.(CA3)	0.710	
Hierarchy and Prestige ($\alpha=0.908$)	Distinct reporting relationships are extremely important to me.(H1)	0.721	0.631
	A clear chain command is extremely important to me.(H2)	0.802	
	Definite lines of authority are extremely important for me.(H3)	0.819	
	Gaining respect is an important value that serves as a guiding principle in my life.(PR1)	0.781	
	It is extremely important for me to obtain status.(PR2)	0.823	
	It is extremely important for me to be looked up by others.(PR3)	0.815	

Social distance ($\alpha=0.863$)	Managers should avoid off-the-job social contacts with employees.(SD1)	0.759	0.582
	I believe that people in positions of power should try to increase their social distance formless powerful individuals.(SD2)	0.755	
	Organizations should have separate facilities, such as eating areas, for higher-level managers.(SD3)	0.774	

As shown in Table 4, the samples cutoff the outliers of the Mahalanobis distance to enhance the robustness of the studied model. Furthermore, the independent variable(SC) centered the value reducing the multicollinearity which was beneficial for regression analysis to compare the main effect and the interaction terms. Additionally, the tolerance and VIF of independent variables including the interaction terms appeared to have no multicollinearity issue at the value above 0.1 and below 0.5 threshold respectively. The random scatter pointed around the unstandardized predicted value line analyzed the variance of the residual, which was constant across levels of independent variables. Consequently, the histogram appeared a bell-shaped curve suggesting normal distribution of the residuals. The model fit indices examined r-squared and adjusted r-squared values of 0.356 and 0.329 respectively as a study of organizational behavior suggested the moderate fit for the empirical model.

Table 3. The mean value, standard deviation, and correlations

Variables	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	SC	AM	P	CA	HPR	SD
Symmetrical internal communication(SC)	3.83	1.00	1					
Autonomous motivation(AM)	4.03	0.89	.603**	1				
Power(P)	3.07	1.33	.273**	.106	1			
Conflict with authority figures(CA)	3.33	1.45	.367**	.230**	.554**	1		
Hierarchy and Prestige(HPR)	4.07	0.91	.196*	.285**	.294**	.448**	1	
Social distance(SD)	2.88	1.36	.270**	.190*	.344**	.151	.405**	1

Notes: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

The theoretical model examined the direct and moderating effect through linear regression SPSS23. The results have shown that symmetrical internal communication positively enhanced autonomous motivation ($B=40.718$) at a significant level of .001, which caused positive outcomes[4]. In practice, the Thai hotel industry where people held prominently cultural norms, hierarchy and prestige(HPR) significantly influenced increasing the autonomous motivation in applying symmetrical internal communication ($B=0.016$). Con-

trarily, power (P), conflict with authority figure(CA), and social distance (SD) shown no significant difference in moderating the relationship between the symmetrical internal communication(SC) and the autonomous motivation (AM).

The examination interpreted the positive effect of the symmetrical internal communication (SC) enhancing the autonomous motivation of hotel workers, only the hierarchy and prestige(HPR) shown a positively moderating impact on the relationship. The findings revealed that autonomous motivation that intrinsically motivated not only influenced by applying symmetrical internal communication which could influence both identified and intrinsic motivation, but also the combination between symmetrical internal communication and hierarchy and prestige occurred among hierarchy societies like Thailand where obtained a clear chain command and the hierarchical structure. Therefore, these cultural practices could create autonomy in the workplace, that everyone be respected especially in higher positions or even ages according to Thai norms. Prioritizing the hierarchy and prestige, they determined the autonomous motivation that determined their working goals as the meaningful choice.

Nevertheless, power(P), conflict with authority figure(CA), and social distance(SD) revealed no significant difference to moderate the relationship between symmetrical internal communication and autonomous motivation. Hence, the key findings confirmed H1 and H2c were positive, yet other hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2d were rejected.

Table 4. The coefficients linear regression result

Independent Variables	Dependent variable	B	SE	t	Perception
SC	→ AM	40.742***	5.944	6.851	supported
P*SC		-0.003	0.005	-0.653	no supported
CA*SC		-0.001	0.004	-0.212	no supported
HPR*SC		0.016**	0.003	2.551	supported
SD*SC		-0.002	0.004	-0.594	no supported

Notes: SC=symmetrical internal communication, AM=autonomous motivation, P=power, CA=conflict with authority figure, HPR=hierarchy and prestige, SD=social distance, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

5. Discussions

The findings of 128 hotel workers in Thailand revealed that autonomous motivation, intrinsically motivated, can be influenced by applying symmetrical internal communication which emphasizes trust, openness, and credibility[8]. The symmetrical internal commu-

nication encouraged different opinions and resolves problems which is productive for managers. The study illustrated the effective communication type influencing the motivation defined by individuals and the positive perception for their own sake.

The study evaluated the moderating role of psychological power distance (PPD) in the relationship between symmetrical internal communication (SC) and autonomous motivation (AM) among hotel workers in Thailand where people held a high power distance cultural context. The results corroborated H1 demonstrated a significantly positive influence between SC and AM ($B=148.405$, $***p<.001$) aligning with the self-determination theory (SDT) and prior research on the role of open communication in fulfilling the autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs of humans [16]. Furthermore, H2c was supported revealing the hierarchy and prestige (HPR)-a dimension of PPD-positively moderated the relationship ($B=0.061$, $**p<.01$). This underscores the cultural specificity of Thailand's hierarchical norms, where people respect the authority and status symbols that enhance the efficacy of SC in fostering motivation. Conversely, power (P), conflict with authority figures (CA), and social distance (SD) exhibited no significant moderating effects.

As shown in Figure 2, symmetrical internal communication slightly influenced autonomous motivation at values of hierarchy and prestige (HPR). Moderating effect of HPR defined considering its mean value ($\bar{x}=4.10$). Thus, the lower and higher is mean-1SD was 3.24, and mean+1SD was 4.96 respectively.

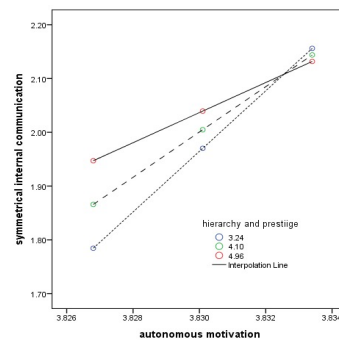


Figure 2. The conditional effect of X on Y at values of HPR

Table 5. The conditional effect of X on Y at value of HPR

Hierarchy and Prestige (HPR)	Effect	se	t	95% LLCI	ULCI
mean-1SD	56.307	8.331	6.759	39.8139	72.8004
mean	42.144	5.499	7.734	31.3560	52.9310
mean+1SD	27.980	6.359	4.400	15.3897	40.5701

The conditional effects indicated that symmetrical internal communication had a statistically meaningful effect on autonomous motivation at specific level of HPR as shown in Table 5. The finding interpreted that hierarchy and prestige(HPR) stressed the moderating effect on the relationship. On the other hand, power(P), conflict with authority figures(CA), and social distance(SD) that had no significantly moderating effect, besides revealed the significant at specific values; mean-1SD, mean, and mean+1SD. The examination assumed the practical relevance of these moderator variables. However, the results emphasized the consistent effect of symmetrical internal communication across P, CA, and SD, but not moderated by them.

Therefore, cultural norms specifically occurred within society and appeared as the organizational orientation that practiced in building organizational behaviors. The power distance is prominently determined in Thai culture, especially within organizations where various sources of power distance are provided. The psychological power distance emphasized the individual analysis of the dimensions of psychological power distance. The findings suggested that psychological power distance's structural and rational aspects may be less salient in shaping autonomous motivation within symmetrical internal frameworks. This distribution advances the discourse on organizational communication by integrating Hofstede's cultural dimensions(1980) with contemporary psychological conceptualizations of psychological power distance[1], emphasizing the necessity to contextualize the communication strategy within cultural contexts.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study bridges Hofstede's macro-level cultural theory with micro-level psychological power distance, demonstrating that hierarchy and prestige—a dimension often overlooked in traditional PPD studies—play a critical role in moderating communication outcomes. It extends SDT by illustrating how cultural norms interact with autonomy-supportive communication to shape motivation. As the prominent practice of the psychological power distance, hierarchy and prestige positively affected symmetrical internal communication in enhancing autonomous motivation. The hierarchy structure existed setting the responsibility in the workplace. In terms of identified regulation as the extrinsic motivation that individuals recognized the value of activities, and intrinsic motivation inherently occurred for the interest in the engagement of an activity. The study indicated that applying symmetrical internal communication increases identified regulation and intrinsic motivation in terms of autonomous motivation.

By deconstructing PPD into distinct components, the research challenges the enormous treatment of power distance in prior literature. The non-significant effects of power, conflict, and social distance suggest that not all PPD dimensions uniformly influence organizational dynamics, urging scholars to adopt a more granular approach. Related to the cultural dimensions, the power distance that has been in decades, the study emphasized the presence of hierarchy and prestige combined with the symmetrical internal communication to develop the positive outcomes influenced by autonomous motivation. Based

on the empirical study in the hotel industry in Thailand, the customer-oriented service employee preferred symmetrical internal communication with their superordinate, and the motivation to serve the service during long hours. The cultural practices that have been existed driving the organizational system studied the relations and found the significantly moderating effects of hierarchy and prestige.

5.2. Practical Implications

For hospitality managers in high power distance cultures, fostering symmetrical internal communication (e.g., two-way feedback, inclusive decision-making) can be complemented by explicit recognition of hierarchical norms. For instance, pairing open communication channels with formal acknowledgments of seniority or status (e.g., titles, and recognition programs) can enhance autonomous motivation without undermining cultural values. Organizations could develop training modules that equip leaders to balance egalitarian communication with hierarchical respect. Policies could institutionalize “hierarchy-aware” SC practices, such as structured forums where junior employees present ideas to superiors in culturally sanctioned formats. While SC promotes autonomy, its effectiveness in high power distance settings depends on aligning it with employees’ cultural expectations. For example, autonomy-supportive practices involve delegating responsibilities within clearly defined hierarchical roles to mitigate role ambiguity.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study involved 128 participants, which may not be sufficient to generalize the findings across Thailand’s hotel industry or other high power distance cultures. However, the study that assumed a relatively homogeneous cultural context, and the different regions within the country could influence the results. Furthermore, the future study should include a larger and more diverse sample, covering different industries (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, education) and roles within the hospitality sector (e.g., back-of-house staff, management). This would enhance the generalization of the findings, that be able to seek insights the diversity and compare in broader scope of data. The lack of the statistical power found caused a weak effect that could detect the significant effect. Conduct comparative studies across countries with varying levels of power distance (e.g., low power distance cultures like Sweden or Denmark vs. high power distance cultures like China or India) which help researchers to determine whether the findings are culture-specific or universally applicable. According to Hofstede’s cultural dimension (1980), other cultural dimensions (e.g. individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance) suggested moderating the relationship to completely investigate the role of cultural dimensions. Additionally, the further study should explore other types of motivation (e.g., extrinsic motivation, amotivation) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how symmetrical internal communication influences different motivational profiles. Finally, the researcher could expand the moderating effect of the new conceptualization of psychological power distance on other variables including leadership style,

and the centralized decision making.

This study underscores the imperative of culturally nuanced communication strategies in global organizational practices. By harmonizing symmetrical communication with the hierarchical ethos of high power distance cultures, firms can cultivate motivated workforce that thrive at the intersection of autonomy and cultural respect. These insights enrich theoretical paradigms and offer a pragmatic road-map for fostering sustainable employee engagement in culturally diverse settings.

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