

The Influence of Power Distance on Communication Apprehension among Workers in Palembang City

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui pengaruh jarak kekuasaan terhadap kecemasan komunikasi pekerja di Kota Palembang. Penelitian didasarkan pada Teori Kebebasan Berpikir. Desain penelitian adalah kuantitatif dengan menggunakan kuesioner sebagai instrumen penelitian. Responden adalah 100 orang pekerja di Kota Palembang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan dari jarak kekuasaan terhadap kecemasan komunikasi. Temuan menawarkan dukungan untuk nilai keselarasan budaya antara budaya masyarakat (makro) dan budaya organisasi (mikro). Hasil tersebut juga menunjukkan pengaruh yang positif, artinya apabila jarak kekuasaan meningkat, maka kecemasan komunikasi juga akan meningkat.

Kata Kunci: jarak kekuasaan, kecemasan komunikasi, teori kebebasan berpikir

Abstract

This research aims to determine the influence of power distance on communication apprehension among workers in Palembang City. The study is based on the Theory of Independent Mindedness. The research design is quantitative, utilizing a questionnaire as the research instrument. The respondents consisted of 100 workers in Palembang. The results of the study indicate a significant influence of power distance on communication apprehension. The findings provide support for the cultural congruence between societal culture (macro) and organizational culture (micro). The results also show a positive influence, meaning that as power distance increases, communication apprehension also increases.

Keywords: power distance, communication apprehension, theory of independent mindedness

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INTRODUCTION

Economic advancement is rapidly progressing. The number of organizations or companies is increasing alongside this progress. Business has become a way of life in various countries, including Indonesia. The awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship is driving economic growth. As a result, a reality is created where relationships within organizations or companies become one of the crucial elements to be considered in order to sustain the organization.

In connection with Indonesia, there are still very few studies focused on the management-employee relationship in the context of organizational communication that examines how leaders should lead their employees. This study employs The

Theory of Independent Mindedness as the theoretical foundation to explore the relationship between associated concepts.

The Theory of Independent Mindedness is a communication theory that also supports research in the fields of economics, business, and psychology. This research does not aim to directly test the theory, but rather seeks alignment between the culture created within a specific organization as microculture and the culture of the operating environment (macroculture) of that organization (Infante, 1987). Cultural coordination forms the basis of this theory.

Indonesia itself has a collectivist and cooperative culture. According to the Theory of Independent Mindedness, these cultural values should be reflected in organizations operating in Indonesia, resulting in alignment between micro and macro cultures. This theory states that cultural alignment within an organization will drive the development of motivated and productive employees. The theory also suggests that employees should be active members in decision-making and actively engage in exchanging ideas with organizational management. However, formal power and status cannot be reduced but need to be acknowledged and emphasized as they have become integral parts of organizational life in Indonesia.

Power plays a crucial role in shaping the culture reflected within an organization. Uneven distribution of power within an organization, according to the Theory of Independent Mindedness, can diminish worker satisfaction and productivity (Madlock et al., 2007). Decreased satisfaction and productivity arise due to the fear of interactions resulting from a power structure that maintains a significant distance. Therefore, the power distance construct is employed in this research to assess organizational/corporate culture through an evaluation of communication apprehension.

In Indonesia, Hofstede's research (2001) ranked it 15 out of 50 countries studied as a country with high power distance. This signifies an inequality among individuals in different formal positions within the organization, seen as a natural aspect of social order. Simply put, power distance indicates to what extent individuals prefer to be instructed on what and how to do things by those in higher positions of power.

Hofstede (2001) argues that cultural norms with high power distance legitimize differences in policy-making power between those in high positions of power and those in low positions. Conversely, countries with low power distance are more likely to share power and believe that they should have a role in the policy-making process. This underscores that cultural alignment determines how employees communicate and their work outcomes.

In countries with high power distance, like Indonesia, cultural practices among employees are crucial drivers in regulating communication behaviors among organizational members. Understanding the dynamics of communication in the workplace requires particular attention from organizational communication and business experts. The researchers selected Palembang City as the research locus, considering the absence of related studies conducted in the city. Furthermore, based on preliminary observations, Palembang City can be described as an area with a high power distance cultural norm. Workers in organizations with high power distance, as found in Palembang City, often find themselves uninvolved or neglecting communication dialogues with their superiors due to the nature of one-way communication from the top that occurs in these organizations. In other words, the influence of power distance on employees, such as telling them what and how things

should be done, can affect their communication behavior to the extent that they develop reluctance or avoidance in communicating with their superiors. Therefore, the current study is framed by the Theory of Independent Mindedness to test the influence of power distance on communication apprehension, hypothesizing that power distance significantly affects communication apprehension and has a positive relationship.

The Theory of Independent Mindedness (TIM) is a unique communication-based theory that also supports research in the fields of economics, business, and psychology (Infante, 1987). This theory seeks to understand the alignment or similarity between the culture created within a specific organization (micro) and the larger culture (macro) in which the organization operates (Infante, 1987). Therefore, cultural coordination is at the core of this theory.

TIM originated from the tendency of Americans to think and express themselves actively and independently rather than passively accepting the opinions of others. The theory assumes that the values held by the general society should be embraced and applied in the workplace so that employees can work more productively and the organization can function effectively. Therefore, this theory is used to assess the effectiveness of organizational communication based on two assumptions (Suminar et al., 2014), which are:

1. employees/workers prefer supervisors who grant them the freedom to express themselves and accept their self-concept; and
2. employees/workers who receive such treatment from their supervisors will benefit the organization because they will be more productive, feel more comfortable with their work, and have a greater commitment to the organization.

The theory argues that cultural alignment will result in motivated, satisfied, and productive employees. It also views organizations as part of a holistic system of a society, where individuals and organizations are part of a larger cultural system. According to TIM, the creation of organizations that facilitate open information exchange and employee voice leads to several positive organizational outcomes, including commitment, satisfaction, and productivity.

Power distance defines the extent to which a society accepts unequal power distribution within institutions or organizations (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). Power distance refers to how much an individual prefers to be told what and how to do things by people in higher positions of authority than themselves.

There are two cultural norms regarding power distance according to Hofstede (2001), namely high power distance culture and low power distance culture. High power distance legitimizes power differences in decision-making between those with high power and those with lower power. Conversely, low power distance culture tends to reduce power differences among individuals in various levels of formal decision-making authority.

In low power distance culture, individuals in positions with legitimate decision-making authority are more likely to share their power with those in lower positions of authority. In other words, in low power distance culture, lower-power holders are more likely to believe they should have a voice in the decision-making process. This suggests that cultural alignment between societal (macro) and organizational (micro) cultures is a key factor in determining how employees communicate with each other and their performance.

Not only at the cultural level, but power distance can also be tested at the individual level (Gudykunst and Lee, 2003). It would be too naive to assume that everyone in a country with a high power distance culture adheres to the same culture because power distance also has individual-level components that mediate the influence of power distance culture on individuals. Therefore, individuals vary in the extent to which they accept unequal power distribution. High power distance can create distance and promote hierarchy, whereas low power distance shortens the distance and promotes egalitarianism.

Communication Apprehension is a broad-based fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with or by others (Falcione, McCroskey, & Daly, 1977). This term was first conceptualized by McCroskey, who later played a significant role in research, leading to nearly 1000 articles and papers on communication apprehension published by 1983 (Payne and Richmond, 1984).

Individuals with high communication apprehension fear participating in communication interactions they perceive as more detrimental than beneficial to them. These individuals anticipate negative feelings and outcomes from communication, so they may choose to avoid it if possible or experience a lot of anxiety when communicating.

Several specific studies (Richmond and Roach, 1992; Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Madlock et al., 2007) have shown that employees have concerns about being negatively perceived by superiors and face difficulties in fitting into an organization. They often feel burdened when communicating with supervisors and choose to stay on the periphery of the organization. Even communicative employees may still have anxiety about job satisfaction, low status positions, and low organizational commitment. Consequently, employees may prefer to remain silent, believing that silence is more acceptable and will result in higher psychological well-being, thus avoiding potential negative outcomes such as resentment and hurt feelings. These factors can actually hinder creativity and reduce organizational productivity.

Indonesia, including Palembang, is an area with a high power distance and collectivist culture. Hofstede (2001) noted that countries or cities with a collectivist culture and high power distance are more likely to consider silence as more acceptable than speaking. As assumed by the Independent Mindedness Theory, if a country/region has a high power distance culture, organizations in that region must be able to adapt to the macro culture of their society, with the argument that employees joining an organization owned and operated in that region will experience situational communication apprehension within the organization or workplace.

METHODS

This research employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of power distance on communication apprehension. The quantitative approach is an objective approach that involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data and employs statistical testing. Measurement of variables and hypothesis testing related to explaining a relationship are emphasized in research that uses this approach (Neuman, 2013). The quantitative method was chosen because this study aimed to understand the causal relationship between the tested variables, namely power distance and communication apprehension. Therefore, this research follows the positivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm is used to obtain confirmations about cause-and-

effect relationships commonly used to predict general patterns of a social phenomenon (Amalia, 2012).

The data collection technique used in this research is a survey. Additionally, supporting data were obtained from the literature through relevant books and scholarly works related to the study. The survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to research respondents. The research respondents are workers in the city of Palembang, specifically those who are part of the workforce currently employed or engaged in work. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik), the total workforce employed in the city of Palembang as of August 2021 was 748.610, with a workforce participation rate of 75.9% for males and 52.21% for females. The determination of the sample was done using probability sampling techniques because every person had an equal chance of being selected. The method used was simple random sampling with the formula presented by Felix Kasim (Jasaputra, 2008) as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (d^2)}$$

N = population
n = sample
d = level of significance

Source: Jasaputra & Santosa (2008)

Based on the calculation formula above, a value of n was obtained as 99.986, which means a sample of 100 individuals was obtained. They were provided with questionnaires that had been tested for their validity and reliability. The questionnaire distribution results were then analyzed using simple linear regression analysis with the assistance of SPSS 25.0 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the hypothesis testing results, it was found that the independent variable influences the dependent variable, with power distance affecting communication apprehension among Palembang workers. This is indicated by the obtained t-test value of 15.64, which is greater than the critical t-table value of 1.97601 at a 10% level of significance.

The results of the correlational analysis also support the hypothesis by showing a significant positive relationship between power distance and communication apprehension, as indicated by the positive beta value. A positive relationship means that as power distance increases, communication apprehension also increases, and vice versa. The strength of the relationship between power distance and communication apprehension is indicated by the coefficient of determination, which is 0.652. This means that the power distance variable influences communication apprehension among Palembang workers by 65.2%, and the remaining 34.8% is explained by other variables.

Based on the research findings, it can be determined that power distance significantly influences communication apprehension among workers in the city of

Palembang. Palembang is one of the major cities in Indonesia. This finding is consistent with the work of Hofstede (2001), who reported that Indonesia ranks fifteenth in high power distance out of 50 countries studied.

The research results also confirm that the microculture within organizations or companies in Palembang seems to mimic or adopt the culture of its society (macro). In other words, it is clear that high power distance within organizations leads to employees experiencing fear in communication and using avoidance messages. Employees also appear to align with cultural norms in which they prefer communication conditions when they are given orders by those in higher authority, commonly referred to as superiors.

The research findings are intriguing because the hypothesis testing results clearly indicate a positive relationship between power distance and communication apprehension. This finding seems to be contrary to the perspective of the United States, where The Theory of Independent Mindedness was developed, in which power distance and communication apprehension are considered negative conditions to be avoided. Nevertheless, according to the theory, this finding is actually expected and desired for employees (Infante, 1987).

The idea that the current findings appear to contradict intuition stems from an ethnocentric perspective (e.g., the belief that one's own culture is superior to others) of the United States, which places a biased value on these findings from one cultural perspective. It is possible that in high power distance organizations like those found in Palembang, employees perceive communication apprehension differently from employees in U.S. companies. Communication apprehension is not considered a negative condition at all by Palembang workers. These conditions and behaviors are then expected parts of their work life and lead to the assumption that these conditions are actually preferred by Palembang employees.

The assumption of the Theory of Independent Mindedness, which emphasizes that freedom of expression for employees will encourage them to be more productive and comfortable with their work, does not align with these findings. This is suspected to be due to the differences in power distance and culture between Palembang (Indonesia) and the United States. Palembang workers, with a high power distance culture, are accustomed to receiving orders from superiors. This one-way communication style is seen as meeting the expectations of the workers, resulting in no disruption or increased psychological enthusiasm due to violated expectations.

Therefore, this research does not suggest that superiors in organizations or companies in Palembang should strive to induce communication apprehension believed to enhance productivity. Instead, the research findings indicate that superiors should always strive to meet the expectations of their workers. Workers with high power distance like in Palembang believe that their superiors know more than they do and care about them and their families while also considering the best interests of the organization. As a result, whenever there is a superior telling them what to do and how to do it, they reassure Palembang workers that by following these instructions, they will continue to have a job (because the organization will benefit), and in return, they can continue to work for their families. With such thinking, it is easy for Palembang workers to perceive themselves as being consulted or included in decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has empirically demonstrated to some extent that power distance influences communication apprehension, particularly among worker subjects. However, this study still has limitations. One limitation of the research is the lack of a clear explanation from the employees' perspective regarding their perception of what should be exempted from communication interactions involving job-related decisions. Therefore, further qualitative research can offer greater insights into the communication behaviors of supervisors and their employees and their relationship with cultural norms. Another limitation involves the sample size. A larger sample size is needed for accurate analysis of the gathered geographical information. It is expected that future researchers can address these limitations in their studies.

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