

UDC068

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## **POWER MOTIVATION AND POWER DISTANCE REDUCTION THEORY**

Knowledge about hierarchy is diffused, and is apparently rarely applied to the organizational science. While most of the theories have touched on hierarchy at a fundamental level, however, they did so indirectly. Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in power as a fundamental force in social relations (Sturm and Antonakis, 2015).

The main goal of this research is to make a bridge between two theories: the power distance reduction theory and theory of power motivation. The study has challenged the assumption that the more power people have, the more they strive for power or the higher the power motivation, the more power people strive to acquire.

**Key words:** hierarchy, power, social distance, power distance reduction theory and theory of power motivation.

Knowledge about hierarchy is diffused, and is apparently rarely applied to the organizational science. In fact, hierarchy has rarely been investigated as an independent construct. Unfortunately, the omnipresence of hierarchy and its broad influence did not result in methodological approaches that use hierarchy as a central ingredient in research studies. While most of the theories have touched on hierarchy at a fundamental level, however, they did so indirectly. This happened due to the fact that “hierarchy had faded to the background, so much that one might think that the field no longer considers it a topic of great import” [9, p. 352]. We need to acknowledge that hierarchy is viewed through the lens of power and those two fundamental concepts are rarely separated as objects of study.

Nevertheless, the fact that hierarchy “has faded to the background” does not reduce its importance. For instance, [21] showed that we have an unconscious desire for hierarchy, [19] introduced the concept of interpersonal distance, and [3] proposed the concept of leaders distance.

Numerous studies used sociological paradigms of bureaucracy (Weber, 1947) and status [4; 2] to shed light on problems of power and hierarchy. Generally, hierarchy was studied from the perspectives of career promotion

(for instance through the glass ceiling concept), nepotism, conflicts, promotional ladder or organizational structure.

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in power as a fundamental force in social relations [20].

However, power has always been inseparable from hierarchy and seen as an external, exogenous factor possessed by individuals [8] as a result of structural system configurations and personality dominance. In addition, hierarchy has rarely been used as a construct that is studied on the micro-level; moreover, little attention has been paid to the study of the individual perception of hierarchy.

One of the first theories that has contributed to an increasing understanding of the behaviour of individuals in the hierarchical setting was *the power distance reduction theory*. The theory used the assumption that power is asymmetrical, and consequently, the amount of power possessed by each individual is different and people do not have equal power over one another [18]. Therefore, people's movement inside the hierarchy is determined by the desire to change this "magnitude of inequality" [18]. Mulder in [13] used the idea that power distance and magnitude of inequality become subjectively cognized due to an individual's evaluation of the status or hierarchical position as the individual perceives it.

Although power distance reduction theory studied behavioural and cognitive components of the hierarchical perception, it has overlooked the motivational component of the behaviour and the connection that exists between power motivation and hierarchical psychological distance.

The theory gave no explanation for the individual motivational stimulus assuming that when an individual enjoys power he becomes motivated to "aspire to more power" [15]. "A number of ... psychological processes conspire to create and acquire more power" involving hierarchy into the self-reinforcing process [9, p. 363].

Indeed, the theory has presented hierarchical distance reduction or upward hierarchical motion of a particular individual as the result of striving for power, but does not use power as an internal motivational factor in order to explain hierarchical power distance reduction and desire to reduce the psychological distance that arises between more and less powerful individuals.

The role of power motive or internal driving force was studied by McClelland (1975) [10], Veroff (1958) and Winter (1973) [22] as an individual reinforcing process. Kipnis (1972) and Tiedens (2007) studied power as an external possession, the result of social interaction or hierarchical differentiation. Hence, the power motivation has never been seen as a stimulus that reinforces an individual's ability to reduce the distance between individuals.

The main goal of this research is to make a bridge between two theories: the power distance reduction theory and theory of power motivation. The study has challenged the assumption that the more power people have, the more they strive for power or the higher the power motivation, the more power people strive to acquire. Those statements cannot be postulated as a universal ones ignoring the fact that power motive is not a homogenous by its nature.

The research question might be stated as the following: how does power motivation influence the tendency to reduce psychological (cognized) power distance taking into account that the power motive is not a homogenous construct? The paper will proceed as following. Firstly, I will explain power distance reduction theory, then I will provide a short description of power motivation as a non-homogenous internal drive for acquiring power, and finally, I will try to support a hypothetical connection between power distance theory and power motivation assuming that the power motive is not a homogenous in its nature. To reach this goal, I will use the main hypotheses of the power reduction theory and connect them with the power motivation concept.

*Power distance theory: analysis of the main concepts.* Since Mulder (1970) worked out the power distance reduction theory, it has contributed to the organizational science in three different ways. Firstly, it has placed a greater focus on the processes of an individual cognitive perception in the hierarchical space. According to the theory [16], the cognized power distance in the hierarchical structure is connected with the self-reflection of the individual within his hierarchical position. Therefore, the theory interpreted the perception of a gap that exists between more and less powerful individuals.

The second main contribution was an analysis of hierarchical behaviour as a separate concept or an introduction of the concept of the “costs of hierarchy”. Mulder (1977) considered those costs the “psychological price for exercising of power” [13, p. 11].

Finally, the theory was able to prove that not subject’s attitudes, but two other factors, namely the proximity and remoteness of individuals from a desired position, played the lead role in the decision to take over a more powerful position.

The introduction of the concept of hierarchical distance lowered the level of conceptual abstraction and allowed one to operationalize the psychological or social distance that existed between more and less powerful individuals. Considering that, the “hierarchical distance” paradigm has been used to explain the concept of organizational hierarchy and simultaneously helped to answer the question: “How does an individual perceive himself in “an

intermediate position within a power hierarchy” [15] or in the middle of his vertical mobility?” To put it differently, what are the “cognitive processes involved in decision making process about the power reduction”? Human behaviour was analyzed inside the hierarchical setting, highlighting the relationships, connections and psychological conditions of individual cognition during the power distance reduction or expansion.

Mulder (1977) in [13] analyzed how cognition happens on different levels of reality through the differentiation of thoughts about possible power distance reduction in the hierarchical setting. For instance, an individual may imagine actions that he needs to undertake in order to reduce the distance between him and more a greater power, or, he can undertake those actions in reality. According to the proposition, the “costs” of imagination inside the hierarchy are positively related to the actions that individuals undertake to overcome hierarchical (power) distance and are inversely related to the “level of reality” (real vs. imaginative) on which an individual acts. In other words, if an individual equalizes distance in reality, costs are rising, while imaginative equalization demands less costs and is even entirely costless.

The power distance paradigm has outlined its two main hypotheses. The “smaller the power distance, the stronger will be the tendency for the subject to reduce the power distance” [16, p. 108] and “individuals will strive to reduce the power distance (power difference) between themselves and more powerful person and to equalize” [13, p. 5]. The power distance was seen as an independent variable that was manipulated by the researchers and operationalized as the “the difference in power between a subject and a more powerful other” [16, p. 108]. The tendency to reduce power distance between the subject and the manager was measured as a dependent variable and was defined as “the tendency to take over the position of more powerful subject in the hierarchy” [16].

Mulder’s hypotheses had been supported on both the cognized (imagined) and real level. The experiments conducted by Mulder et al. (1971) showed that only power distance influenced the behaviour of subjects. Mobility based on success, evaluational aspects, on the level of individual performance, on personal abilities and self-esteem, did not explain the desire to reduce the power distance between more and less powerful individuals [16; 15].

*Power motivation: motive non-homogeneity* DeCharms (1968) referred to the motive as the disposition to strive for a particular type of satisfaction. In case of the power motive, it is a “strive for having control over others” [5, p. 316].

The theory of power motivation [22; 10; Atkinson, 1958] considered power as striving for control over others and assumed that power motivation would elicit specific powerful behaviour or “expresses itself in action” [12] such as gaining influence, seeking a position of authority, and displaying control over others.

Winter (1991) stated that the power motive is one key personal variable that forms power behaviour and that the “tendency to engage in power-oriented behaviour does not occur unless power motivation is aroused” [5, p. 302].

“People high in Power should enjoy the many opportunities for making decisions and having an impact... and they have been shown to be more successful managers” [12, p. 696]. To support this idea McClelland (1975) conducted a series of experiments when he aroused the power motive and showed that “psychological activation to power stimuli is closely associated with motivation of power” [10, p. 275] “individuals with high Power are more sensitive to power-related stimuli than to neutral stimuli. People with high power motivation have strong desire to be a leader and rise to a managerial position” [12, p. 697].

The theory assumed that the power motive is non-homogenous and may elicit different types of behaviour. The first type is avoidance behaviour that is caused by fear of power; the second type is approach behaviour that is caused by a hope for power (Winter, 1975). Fear of power is determined by the fear of negative consequences of acquiring power or by negative experiences in the past. Hope of power is determined by the hope of obtaining the positive consequences of acquiring power.

“Non-homogeneity” of power motivation has become apparent since different operationalizations of power motivation gave different resultant measurement scores. For instance, Veroff was more concentrated on scoring a system supporting the role of power motivation insofar “that overcompensates for feelings of inferiority” [22, p. 56]. Therefore, this methodology has used stress situations to arouse the “threatening aspects of power” [22, p. 56].

In contrast, Winter (1973) in [22] presented a power score as “the sum of approach and avoidance motives” that “predict different behaviour” [22, p. 79]. For him, a power score might help to test gradient hypotheses connected with power arousal. When avoidance of power decreases the approach behaviour or hope of power increases.

*Hypotheses.* Taking into account that power is an internal motive that drives the behaviour of an individual and makes them strive for control over others, we predict that a higher power motivation will influence the percep-

tion of less powerful individuals and will aspire them to move to a more powerful position. They will see the power distance as a shorter one due to their personal motivation to acquire more power.

On the one hand, Mulder (1977) mentioned that an economically rational theory sees power as a scarce commodity and compares “lack of power to hunger” [13, p. 6]. He also addressed that the “power reduction theory is a theory of addiction. The greater the resource to power is, the stronger the desire for it...” [13, p. 6]. The nearer the goal is the more people try to reach it. As Ng (1971) and Bruins, Wilke (1993) mentioned “the consumption of power intensifies the desire for more power” [6, p. 318]. That is why they theorised that “subjects that have experienced the actual exercise of power may have enjoyed it, and on this basis became motivated to aspire to more power” [16, p. 111]. On the other hand McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) reported that the power-motivation syndrome was shown as “predicted managerial success” [11] and stimulated upward mobility.

Therefore, there is evidence that when a particular individual evaluates propositions to take over a higher position he will be attracted by the level of control he will get over others. Formally, higher hierarchical positions always bring higher levels of control, which attracts power motivated individuals; in other words, desired control will lead to a different perception of hierarchical distance. For instance, Bruins and Wilke’s (1993) experiments showed that “only the motivation derived from the bureaucratic rule mediated that relationship between power distance and upward tendencies” [6, p. 239].

Given the abovementioned we can hypothesize the following:

H1: Assuming equal levels of hierarchical proximity between more and less powerful individuals, the power distance will be perceived as lower for those less powerful individuals who have a high power motivation and as higher for those less powerful individuals who have a low power motivation.

H2: Assuming equal levels of hierarchical proximity between more and less powerful individuals, the tendency to reduce the power distance will decrease for those less powerful individuals who have low a power motivation and will increase for those who have a high power motivation.

However, even among individuals with high power motivations, there will be some who will not acquire more power even if they predict or are attracted by higher levels of control.

As was stated above, power motivation leads to the evaluation of future powerful positions and depending on the domination of hope of power or fear of power, an individual will evaluate the power distance differently.

The nonhomogenous nature of power motivation assumes that “a strong desire for power does not necessarily lead to an upward tendency” [6, p. 244] and some individuals will demonstrate avoidance behaviour equalizing power with negative consequences. In this case, the power distance will be perceived as higher. In contrast, others may demonstrate approach behaviour and tend to predict positive consequences after which the power distance will be reduced. In this case, the power distance will be perceived as lower.

The same statement might be explained from the perspective of hierarchical costs. As Mulder (1977) in [13] stated, the process of power distance evaluation is connected with the “psychological price for exercising of power” or hierarchical costs that are positively related to the actions of hierarchical overcoming. The hierarchical distance will be shorter when the hope to acquire more power outweighs the fear of acquiring power. In other words, hierarchical costs will be lower if the previous experience of individuals with high power motives is connected with positive consequences. An individual implicitly assesses “outcomes of getting power” [22] and if a negative assessment is given more weight, we have the domination of fear of power and avoidant behaviour despite that this individual may have a high power motivation. The hope of power is associated with positive expectations after acquiring power or control. In this case, control is imagined as a pleasant and positive experience or even a cherished goal. The domination of hope leads to a domination of approach behaviour and the desire for a powerful position or control.

Given all of the above, we can hypothesize the following:

H2: Assuming equal levels of hierarchical proximity between more and less powerful individuals, the tendency to reduce power distance will increase for those less powerful individuals who have a high power motivation and stronger tendency to approach power or hope of power.

H3: Assuming equal levels of hierarchical proximity between more and less powerful individuals, the tendency to reduce power distance will decrease for those less powerful individuals who have a high power motivation and stronger tendency to avoid power or fear of power.

I proposed that the power motive influences how individuals perceive power distance; therefore, the tendency to reduce the power distance will be higher for those individuals who have a higher power motive since they see the power distance as a lower distance. However, the tendency to reduce the power distance will be different for all individuals with high power motivations depending on how they evaluate the final consequences of acquiring power.

Consequently, not all individuals with high power motivations will try taking over more powerful positions. Despite perceiving power distance as shorter, they will avoid power acquisition if they feel that the costs of acquiring power are high or if they feel that power will bring negative consequences for them. In this case they will avoid power. If high power individuals feel that the costs of acquiring power are low they will try to reduce the power distance between them and more powerful individuals.

Although Mulder insisted that the desire for power is the result of the learning process only, the hypotheses provided may support other evidence. The desire for power may derive from cognitive and motivational processes. That is why my primary aim in this review was to connect cognitive, motivational and behavioural constructs of power (Ng, 1980) through the connection of two theories: power motivational theory and power distance reduction theory.

Moreover, Mulder (1977) mentioned that the “quintessence of the theory is the hypothesis that the power distance reduction tendency will be stronger at a shorter power distance” [13, p. 21]. Hence, the theory did not provide a full explanation of why the power distance may be perceived as shorter by one individual and longer by another one.

In my view, the power reduction theory was not convincing enough in answering the question why someone desires a position with more power. Given the above discussion, my second aim was to show that the decision to reduce power distance and the costs of “hierarchical overcoming” are connected through the experience and personal evaluation of positive and negative consequences of power, even among those individuals who had high power motivations.

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## **ТЕОРІЇ МОТИВАЦІЇ ВЛАДИ ТА ЗМЕНШЕННЯ ДИСТАНЦІЇ ВЛАДИ**

Знання про ієрархію розповсюджені, але вони рідко застосовуються щодо організаційної науки. Хоча більшість теорій торкнулися ієрархії на фундаментальному рівні, проте це відбулося опосередковано. Останнім часом дослідники продемонстрували підвищений інтерес до влади як фундаментальної сили в суспільних відносинах, наприклад у праці Штурма і Антонакіса, 2015.

Головною метою статті є створення «мосту» між двома теоріями: теорією зменшення дистанції влади та теорією мотивації влади. У дослідженні було зроблено припущення, що чим більше у людей влади, тим більше вони прагнуть до неї, або чим вище мотивація влади, тим більше влади вони прагнуть отримати.

**Ключові слова:** ієрархія, влада, соціальна дистанція, теорія зменшення дистанції влади, теорія мотивації влади.

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## **ТЕОРИИ МОТИВАЦИИ ВЛАСТИ И УМЕНЬШЕНИЯ ДИСТАНЦИИ ВЛАСТИ**

Знание об иерархии распространены, однако они редко используются в организационной науке. Хотя большинство теорий изучают иерархию на фундаментальном уровне, однако этот процесс опосредованный. В последнее время исследователи демонстрируют повышенный интерес к власти как фундаментальной силе в общественных отношениях, например в работе Штурма и Антонакіса, 2015.

Основной целью статьи является формирование «моста» между двумя теориями: теорией уменьшения дистанции власти и теорией мотивации власти. В исследовании было поставлено предположение, что чем больше у людей власти, тем больше они стремятся к ней, или же чем выше мотивация власти, тем большей власти они желают получить.

**Ключевые слова:** иерархия, власть, социальная дистанция, теория уменьшения дистанции власти, теория мотивации власти.