



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MODERN TRENDS IN
SOCIAL SCIENCES
(IJMTSS)

www.gaexcellence.com/ijmtss



THE EFFECT OF POWER DISTANCE IN SHAPING PROJECT PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Mohammed Ahmed Abdulla Al Jasmi^{1*}, Raja Nazim², Roszi Naszariah Nasni Naseri³, Rina Rachmawati⁴

¹Department of Business Management; Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

 maaljasmi33@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9595-3128>

²Department Of Business Management & Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Economics, Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI)

 rajanazim@fpe.upsi.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0934-0485>

³Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Melaka, Malaysia

 roszinaseri@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7500-6090>

⁴Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

 rinarachmawati@mail.unnes.ac.id

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8594-5040>

*Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 26.07.2026

Revised date: 09.08.2026

Accepted date: 30.08.2026

Published date: 09.09.2026

To cite this document:

Al Jasmi, M. A. A., Nazim, R., Naseri, R. N. N., & Rachmawati, R. (2026). The Effect of Power Distance in Shaping Project Performance: A Quantitative Study. *International Journal of Modern Trend in Social Sciences*, 9(35), 13-29.

Abstract:

This paper has explored the direct effect of power distance on the performance of projects and has hypothesized that collaboration moderates the relationship between power distance and project team performance in Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA). Based on the Hofstede cultural dimensions framework and the Social Exchange Theory, a cross-sectional quantitative survey with 368 respondents (response rate = 79.1%) that were employed in multicultural infrastructure projects, stratified random sampling was conducted on the basis of the department and nationality groups. Validated five-point Likert scales were used to measure power distance, collaboration and project performance (time, cost and quality), with all three indicating high internal consistency (Cronbachs α = .910 power distance, 0.950 collaboration and 0.918-0.991 across the three sub-dimensions of project performance). The analysis of the data was performed with the help of hierarchical moderated regression (Hayes PROCESS Model 1) in SPSS. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 364) = 13.53$, $p < .001$, explaining 10.0% of the variance in project performance ($R^2 = .1004$). The direct impact of power distance on project performance was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.1294$, $p = .1344$) and the interaction between the power distance and collaboration was not significant ($\beta = -0.0662$, $p = .4386$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.0015$) but the interaction between collaboration and project

performance was significant ($\beta = 0.2743$, $p = .001$). This evidence indicates that formal governance, standardized processes, codified relation of authority in a highly institutionalized utility organization like DEWA may preclude behavioral manifestation of hierarchical cultural orientation, and limit its ability to independently influence, or buffer its influence on project outcomes. The paper leads to a better understanding of the different ways structural cultural dimensions act in contrast to interactional dimensions in strictly controlled project settings.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMTSS.935002 **Keywords:**

Collaboration, DEWA, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Moderated Regression, Power Distance, Project Performance



© The authors (2026). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact ijmtss@gaexcellence.com.

Introduction

One of the original dimensions of culture described by Hofstede is power distance that is used to explain how less powerful individuals within institutions and organizations accept and expect the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2011). A high-PD(power distance) national culture has subordinates that respect the authority and seldom question the managerial decisions; a low-PD national culture has employees who want to be consulted and participate more freely in the decision-making process. The UAE is always ranked in the list of the highest power distance societies in the Hofstede global index, which is a cultural orientation that exists, in large institutions of the country, alongside a workforce that is overwhelmingly comprised of expatriate professionals who have very different and often more egalitarian cultures (Hofstede, 2016).

The score of UAE on the original Hofstede scale is 90 out of 100 on the power distance index, which is one of the highest in the world and indicates the presence of strong expectations related to hierarchy, seniority, and centralized decision-making authority (Hofstede, 2021). This strain is of particular topicality in Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA), a strategic government utility, where Emirati nationals are concentrated in the top management whilst expatriates, comprising the vast majority of operational and technical workforce, execute multi-year, complex infrastructure projects - a balance that is consistent with the overall Emiratization strategy of the UAE. The further financial and strategic growth of DEWA within the broader context of the GCC energy industry predetermines its project governance framework as a situational context of exploring the interaction between national cultural orientation and organizational structure (Iyer et al., 2025). This stratification implies that the majority of daily project relations are among, but not within, power-distance orientations, which increases the

importance of learning whether coordinated delivery can be compromised by the potential costs of hierarchy when working in a coordinated manner (Ochieng & Price, 2010).

The broader UAE organizational-behavior literature highlights the reasons why power distance should be given empirical consideration, as opposed to incidental attention. The conditioning of leadership style to performance in UAE smart-government organizations has been demonstrated by national culture (Almansoori & Ahmad, 2023a, 2023b), the orientation towards power-distance has been identified to mediate the relationship between leader character strength and trust and resilience in regional organizations (Mohammad et al., 2026), and a unique framework of Gulf leadership communication has been suggested to describe the combination of directive and relational communication that defines the Emirati managerial practice (Nickerson and Goby, 2017). Similar comparative studies of British and Arab project managers also indicate a national-cultural divergence in planning behavior (Rees-Caldwell and Pinnington, 2013), and case-based findings of a construction project in the UAE provide a direct relationship between leadership, culture, and team communication and project success (Al Qubaisi et al., 2015). The research papers prove that power distance is located near the heart of the operation of leading, coordinating, and delivering projects in the UAE and not a peripheral or purely theoretical phenomenon.

Power distance literature and project outcomes are however fragmented. Other studies identify high power distance with inhibited communication, extended decision-making process, and less innovation relative to multicultural project teams (Ochieng and Price, 2019), whereas others indicate that the negative performance implications of high-power distance are context-dependent, depending on leadership style and team-based collaborative practice instead of uniform (Chabika et al., 2024; Kanya and Johan, 2025). Much of this evidence, though, is based on research that considers power distance as one of many packaged cultural-diversity measures, or that is based on qualitative and case-based research, the independent, quantitative estimated impact of which on project performance, and its interaction with collaboration, is less well-tested in a single Gulf utility setting.

This research addresses that gap by separating power distance as the predictor of interest and testing (1) whether power distance has a direct impact on project performance at DEWA, and (2) whether collaboration mediates the impact of power distance. By framing power distance as a structural, hierarchy-oriented dimension (as opposed to interactional dimensions, like individualism-collectivism or masculinity-femininity), one can pose an exact theoretical question: can the orientations of an employee toward authority influence project delivery once there is a highly formalized, rule-governed system, and can collaboration within a team affect the relationship between the two?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

This paper is based on two complementary theories: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and the Social Exchange Theory.

The concept of national culture according to Hofstede Culture Dimension Theory (Hofstede, 1980, 2001) is expressed in terms of a series of dimensions, one of which is the power distance that is the extent to which unequal allocation of power is held tolerable by less powerful people within institutions and organizations. Power distance is hypothesized as a structural, hierarchy-

based dimension, separable into interactional dimensions like individualism-collectivism or masculinity-femininity, in that it functions primarily by accepting authority, and formal role differentiation instead of daily norms of interpersonal exchange. In the organizational settings, high power distance is hypothesized to be manifested as a centralized decision-making process, limited upward communication, and directive leadership over participative leadership (Hofstede, 2011), a tendency that is echoed by regional data on paternalistic leadership, where trust in a leader and employee voice operate as a result of, and not despite, strong hierarchical distance (Nazir et al., 2025), and by evidence that participative leadership has institutionally contingent benefits to the performance of employees (Khassawneh and Elrehail, 2022).

This structural explanation is complemented by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which describes the mechanism of the rise of collaborative relationships in the face of hierarchical limitations. The interactions between social beings are dictated by mutual gain of resources, trust and obligation; as long as the team members are assured that their collaborative contribution will be returned with equal measure of fair treatment, the members will be more ready to cooperatively work across hierarchical boundaries. The reciprocity logic is supported by regional evidence: in UAE organizations, employee trust and perceived justice influence the task performance via the mediating and moderating functions of autonomy and organizational culture (Mousa Alriyami et al., 2024), in a UAE-specific context, organizational justice, leadership, and psychological empowerment are joint predictors of citizenship behaviors that are beyond the formal job requirements (AlHammadi and Abu Elanain, 2024). Applied to this study, SET provides the basis to hypothesize that collaboration might shield the constraining effects of high-power distance on communication in that it provides a channel of information exchange based on trust that is operated to some degree without being dependent on formal hierarchical role. Combining these theories, power distance is defined as a possible limit on project performance and collaboration is a theoretically viable, but empirically challenged, way of compensating that limit.

Power Distance and Project Performance

The concept of power distance (PD) indicates the willingness of weaker members of an organization to establish an unequal power distribution (Hofstede, 2011). The low-PD cultures like the UAE would expect subordinates to struggle to challenge authority and make objections that might influence work with others and project performance. High PD may prevent open communication and slack collective decision-making in institutionalized hierarchical relationships, but structured authority may also help clarify roles and simplify chains of command at specific project phases. Ochieng and Price (2019) discovered that hierarchical rigidity often decreases the effectiveness of multicultural project teams by limiting participation and occasionally limiting innovation. The leaders of successful projects are likely to equalize power distance within multicultural teams with the help of adaptive practices that expand participation without neglecting hierarchical norms (Livermore, 2022). The UAE public-sector infrastructure evidence also suggests that quality of project governance and management of stakeholders, but not power distance per se, best explains the variation in project outcomes (Khan et al., 2021), and socially aversive personality traits among project managers have an independent, negative effect on project performance in the UAE (Al Naqbi et al., 2026), meaning that non-power distance factors often dominate performance differences in this context.

There is mixed evidence on the size of power distance-performance relationship. Kanya and Johan (2025) discovered in a large-scale study of multicultural project teams in five countries of the GCC that misalignment in power distance orientation among team members was the most significant single predictor of project communication failure, with this effect being the highest during phases of a project where cross-functional coordination was critical, which is exactly the type of phase according to which the complex infrastructure portfolio of DEWA is characterized. Chabika et al. (2024), in turn, demonstrated that the impact of power distance on project performance is not consistently negative, but the association varies based on leadership style, where adaptive leaders who clearly negotiate hierarchical expectations significantly reduce the adverse impact. This contingency pattern of leadership aligns with UAE evidence that transformational leadership can influence employee performance in part by creating digital transformation and organizational agility (Almazrouei and Alnahhal, 2026), and with evidence that authentic leadership can facilitate work engagement and citizenship behavior in a UAE petroleum-industry organization structurally similar to DEWA (Al Sahi Al Zaabi et al., 2016). The differences in planning-behavior between British and Arab project managers have been found to be related to the real, culturally patterned variation in the exercise of authority (Rees-Caldwell and Pinnington, 2013), and a multicultural-perspective investigation of construction project performance also found national cultural background to be a salient influence on delivery outcomes (Sandhu and Khan, 2018). Since the workforce structure of DEWA is such that, Emirati nationals are concentrated in the uppermost positions, whereas expatriates of diverse nationalities are in the technical and operational positions, the practical and conceptual stakes of empirically testing the power distance-performance relationship are high in this context. This brings about the initial hypothesis:

H1: *Power distance is a key factor in determining project performance.*

Collaboration as a Moderator between Power Distance and Project Performance

Power distance may limit open communication in project teams that work in high-PD societies because employees will be reluctant to voice their concerns or suggest alternatives to those in authority which can negatively affect project performance (Hofstede, 2011). Collaboration, which may be seen as the degree of involvement of the staff members in collective decision-making, the ability to share information and the idea of mutual accountability towards each other, can be plausibly viewed as a tool that could be used to bridge the gap that hierarchy introduces. The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) is based on the idea that collaboration thrives on mutual trust which can encourage the low-ranking members to cooperate regardless of their hierarchical limitations. Organized team-based practice can thus be used to counterintuitive impacts of power distance by making communication more democratic; cross-cultural collaborative practice lessens power distance-based conflict in multicultural teams (Chaudhry et al., 2021), and collective coping practices in UAE construction project teams rely on the organizational culture around the team, as opposed to hierarchy itself (Badi, 2024). Knowledge-sharing behaviour mediates the connection between visionary leadership and innovative work behaviour among UAE employees (Alobeidli et al., 2024), which is another plausible channel via which collaboration may mitigate the communication-constraining influences that steep hierarchy is typically believed to have.

The empirical evidence of this moderating pathway is also inconsistent. Kanya and Johan (2025) discovered that the negative performance impact of high-power distance in multicultural project teams can be significantly mitigated by high-quality collaborative practice, such that high-power-diversity multicultural teams with high-quality collaboration would perform equally well as culturally homogenous teams. The hypothesized process is that teamwork

creates psychologically safe communication environments where high-power-distance individuals feel free to contribute without violation of cultural norms of deference; it is similar to findings that humility in leadership itself facilitates employee voice via a moderated mediation relationship (Siachou et al., 2025). This results in the second hypothesis:

H2: *The moderating effect of collaboration on the relationship between power distance and project performance is significant.*

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the conceptual framework that was tested is presented in Figure 1. The independent variable is indicated as the power distance, the dependent variable is the performance of the project (measured on the basis of time, cost, and quality), and collaboration is the hypothetical moderator of the power distance-project performance relationship.

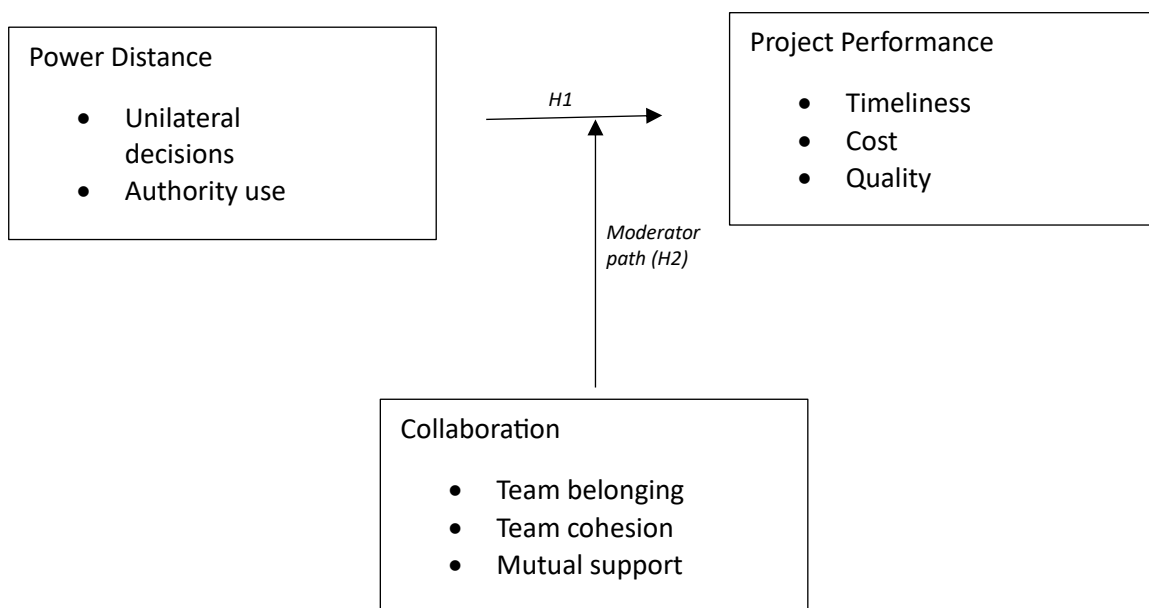


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methods And Materials

Research Philosophy and Design

In line with the positivist orientation of the study, the study made the assumption that the relationship among power distance, collaboration, and project performance could be objectively measured and statistically tested without depending on the researcher. It followed a deductive approach: the propositions were formulated in advance, based on the Cultural Dimensions Theory and the Social Exchange Theory developed by Hofstede, and then tested empirically with quantitative survey data, instead of have propositions develop inductively. The research, therefore, took a quantitative, cross-sectional survey study design as data were collected at a single time among project personnel throughout DEWA by way of a structured and self-administered questionnaire.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The study population included the employees of DEWA who were engaged in the multicultural infrastructure projects. With sample size determined using the table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to estimate the sample size of a known population, and cross-validated with G-Power sample-size guidance to determine the required sample size in cross-validation analysis of regressions (Faul et al., 2009), a minimum sample size of 368 respondents was required. The stratified random sampling made sure that there is proportional representation of departments (Operations, Project Management, Management, and Human Resources) and nationality groups. The questionnaires were administered both online and through the post; following removal of responses that were not finished, and careless respondents, a final workable sample of 368 respondents was retained, representing a response rate of 79.1%.

The final sample was 60.9% male (n = 224), 37.5% female (n = 138), and 1.6% preferred not to disclose gender, with the largest age band (33.2%) aged 31-36 years. The whole sample was representative of the multicultural composition of DEWA nationally: the UAE nationals made the largest proportion (26.9%), then there were South Asian (19.6), other nationalities (19.0), GCC except the UAE (10.3), African (9.2), East Asian (8.7), and Western nationals (5.7). The operations (37.0%), Management (22.8%), Project Management (21.2%), and Human Resources (16.3) departments were the main sources of respondents (97.0% of the sample) with each department contributing a specific age-band frequency (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 368)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	224	60.9
	Female	138	37.5
	Prefer not to say	6	1.6
Age	18-26 years	24	6.5
	27-30 years	63	17.1
	31-36 years	122	33.2
	37-40 years	76	20.7
	Above 41 years	83	22.6
Nationality	UAE	99	26.9
	South Asian	72	19.6
	Other	70	19.0
	GCC (excluding UAE)	38	10.3
	African	34	9.2
	East Asian	32	8.7
	Western	21	5.7

Measures

All constructs were assessed by five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that were tailored to the DEWA setting after being subjected to expert-reviewed content validity evaluation and pilot-tested. The measurement of power distance used six items based on the conceptualization of hierarchical decision-making preference by Hofstede and kept in their original form since they directly address hierarchical decision-making preferences on

which the environment of DEWA is built. All the six items were rated as highly relevant by an expert panel (I-CVI = 0.92); the scale is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Measurement Items for Power Distance

No.	Item	Source
1	Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates.	Guzmán-Rodríguez et al. (2023)
2	It is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates.	
3	Managers should seldom ask for the opinions of employees.	
4	Managers should avoid off-the-job social contacts with employees.	
5	Employees should not disagree with management decisions.	
6	Managers should not delegate important tasks to subordinates.	

Working together was assessed using four items that reflected shared decision making, exchange of information and shared accountability of members in the project team. Project performance was measured in three sub-dimensions multidimensionally, and these were time, cost, and quality with three items each showing schedule adherence, budget control and conformance to quality standards. Cronbachs alpha was used to measure reliability with 0.70 as the lowest acceptable value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All the five constructs had a high level of internal consistency as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability of Study Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Power Distance (IV)	0.910	6
Collaboration (Moderator)	0.950	4
Project Performance – Time	0.991	3
Project Performance – Cost	0.964	3
Project Performance – Quality	0.918	3

Data Screening and Preliminary Analysis

Before the hypothesis testing, the data were filtered on missing values, multivariate outliers, multicollinearity, non-normality and common method bias. Mahalanobis distance did not indicate any serious multivariate outliers: the critical chi-square at $p < .001$ was 24.322 and the largest value of this distance was 23.56, thus all 368 cases were included in the analysis.

Tolerance and VIF statistics were used to evaluate multicollinearity. In the case of power distance, tolerance was 0.983 and VIF was 1.017; tolerance was 0.282 to 0.983 (all above the critical threshold of 5) and VIF was 1.017 to 3.542 (all below the critical mark of 5), which means that multicollinearity was not a significant concern.

Skewness and kurtosis were used to assess normality, the values of skewness and kurtosis of ± 2.0 (skewness) and ± 7.0 (kurtosis) are acceptable. The skewness and kurtosis of power distance were 1.477 and 6.877 respectively (within the threshold) and project performance had skewness of 0.251 and kurtosis of -0.763. The data was thus considered to be nearly normal and appropriate to be used in parametric regression.

Harman single-factor test was used to evaluate common method bias (CMB); in case a single factor explained over half of the total variance the chance of bias would be severe. The former explained 42.910 which was less than the critical value and was complemented by procedural remedies such as a section break between independent and dependent variable measurement and reverse-worded power distance items. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic = 0.956 and significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 33,510.656$, $df = 1431$, $p < .001$) confirmed the sampling adequacy.

Data Analysis

The sample characteristics were summarized using descriptive statistics and the bivariate relationships were tested using Pearson correlations. Simple two-way moderation followed the Hayes PROCESS macro-Model 1 to test hypotheses with hierarchical moderated multiple regression in SPSS (Hayes, 2018). The mean-centered of power distance and collaboration was calculated, followed by the regression of project performance on power distance and collaboration in the first step, and the interaction term in the second. To justify the moderation hypothesis, a large value of the interaction coefficient was needed, as well as a meaningful change in R-Squared. $p < .05$ was used as the statistical significance level.

Results

Descriptive and Correlational Findings

Bivariate correlations between the core constructs in the study showed that power distance had a very weak and non-significant relationship with project performance ($r = -.009$) and collaboration ($r = .048$), which was later found to be supported by the regression results provided below. Collaboration, in turn, was moderately negatively related to project performance ($r = -.356$) at the bivariate level, which, as will be noted later, inversely changes when the interaction effects of collaboration are included in the overall moderated regression model.

Table 4: Bivariate Correlations among Power Distance, Collaboration, and Project Performance

Construct	1	2	3
1. Power Distance	—		
2. Collaboration	$r = .048$	—	
3. Project Performance	$r = -.009$	$r = -.356$	—

Direct Effect of Power Distance on Project Performance (H1)

The regression model as a whole was found to be statistically significant, $F(3, 364) = 13.53$, $p < .001$ and had explained approximately 10.0% of the variation in project performance ($R^2 = .1004$). There was no statistically significant predictor between power distance and project performance ($\beta = -0.1294$, $p = .1344$) and collaboration, entered as a main effect in the same model, was statistically significantly related to project performance ($\beta = 0.2743$, $p = .001$). H1 was thus not sustained: independently, workers orientation to hierarchy and authority does not translate into an objective increase or decrease in the project time, cost or quality outcomes at DEWA.

Moderating Effect of Collaboration (H2)

The interaction term (power distance $\times$ collaboration) was not found to be statistically significant ($\beta = -0.0662$, $p = .4386$). The difference in variance attributed to the interaction term was small ($\Delta R^2 = .0015$) and the resulting F-test value of the variation in R^2 was not significant, $F(1, 364) = 0.60$, $p = .4386$. H2 was not thus supported. Teamwork had no effect on the vigor or the path of the relationship between power distance and project performance, despite the teamwork being an important, positive predictor of project performance in the identical model.

Table 5: Hierarchical Moderated Regression Results (Model: $F(3, 364) = 13.53$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .1004$)

Hypothesis	Path	β	p	ΔR^2	Decision
H1	Power Distance $\rightarrow$ Project Performance	-0.1294	.1344	—	Not Supported
—	Collaboration $\rightarrow$ Project Performance (main effect)	0.2743	< .001	—	Significant
H2	Power Distance $\times$ Collaboration $\rightarrow$ Project Performance	-0.0662	.4386	.0015	Not Supported

Discussion

The observation that power distance did not have a significant predictive power on project performance at DEWA either directly or in interaction with collaboration, is contrary to the five-country GCC study by Kanya and Johan (2025), where the misalignment of power distance was the strongest predictor of project communication failure. A possible reason is the institutional environment of DEWA. Being a large, formally regulated, publicly owned utility, DEWA has standardized procedures and decision rights, recorded reporting relationships, which can anticipate the behavioral expression of individual differences in hierarchical orientation. In a setting where the formal structure predetermines who makes decisions and through which medium, the individual comfort of an employee with hierarchy has fewer

opportunities to influence the results of delivery independently, which is in line with the hypothesis according to which structurally oriented cultural dimensions act in a different manner than interactionally oriented do in strictly controlled settings (Patwary et al., 2023). This is one of the forms of institutional absorption: institutionalized relations of authority reduce the field within which cultural orientations of value may autonomously influence behavior in projects such that results are more directly influenced by the discipline of the process than by individual preference hierarchy.

This meaning is not in conflict with, but is consistent with, the fact that the performance implications of power distance vary depending on the leadership style, as found by Chabika et al. (2024). In case the institutionalized management systems at DEWA are already fulfilling the role of adaptive, hierarchy-negotiating leadership, the incremental buffering role collaboration would otherwise serve to play the moderating role collaboration theorized in the context of the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) would play would be correspondingly less of a variance to be explained: the role of organizational structure would have fulfilled the moderating role the collaboration between institutions is theorized to play. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the role of national culture on UAE smart-government performance is conditional on the institutional apparatus that it surrounds instead of a driver by itself (Almansoori and Ahmad, 2023a, 2023b), and that socially aversive personality traits, but not hierarchy orientation, mediate a more identifiable relationship between national culture and UAE project performance (Al Naqbi et al., 2026) — implying that any remaining power-distance residue in the Gulf context operates through individual disposition, but not institutional cultural orientation.

It is important to note that collaboration had a positive and substantial direct relationship with project performance despite the absence of moderation of the relationship between power distance and collaboration. This implies that collaboration is a widely helpful team process here, not a process specifically related to overcoming the effects of hierarchical friction: open communication and accountability among team members work better in terms of time, cost, and quality, irrespective how hierarchically oriented are its members. This is generally in line with the evidence that organizational culture, as opposed to hierarchy-specific dynamics, determines collective coping strategies among UAE construction teams (Badi, 2024), and that perceived justice and trust determine task performance via autonomy and culture in UAE workplaces overall (Mousa Alriyami et al., 2024).

The demographic structure of the sample provides another perspective of the interpretation. The overwhelming source of respondents was Operations, Management, Project Management, and Human Resources functions, where project workflows are usually the most proceduralized at DEWA; whether the null power distance results can be credited to institutional governance cancelling hierarchical impacts, this tendency should show itself specifically in these functions, and a future study of disaggregating by department would test this directly. The high proportion of both Emirati nationals and South Asian, East Asian, African, and Western expatriates also indicate that the null result is unlikely to be due to inadequate cultural-background variance: the teams of DEWA are heterogeneous in terms of power distance, which supports the fact that it is the organizational structure, but not the lack of diversity, that explains the attenuated relationship which is also supported by evidence of the UAE cases where formal communication structure, and not the cultural background, were the driving force of coordinated delivery (Al Qubaisi et al., 2015).

Theoretical Implications

These results narrow the use of the Hofstede cultural dimensions framework in the project performance research by hinting that not all dimensions work the same in institutionally dense organizations. Formal governance mechanisms can substantially lead to the reduction of power distance as a structural dimension that is oriented to the acceptance of hierarchy, but not interactional dimensions like individualism-collectivism or masculinity-femininity. This difference provides a more specific theoretical explanation of when and where cultural dimensions are apt to have an effect on project results and recommends that future models of integration should recognize structural and interactional cultural dimensions as distinct predictors instead of considering all six Hofstede dimensions as functionally similar predictors. This is in addition to wider UAE organizational-culture studies, where performance is more closely predicted by organizational culture than by any single cultural-dimension score (AlShehhi et al., 2021), and studies of corporate culture effects on employee attitude and productivity in UAE organizations (Cherian et al., 2021) - both of which suggest organization-level rather than individual-cultural-orientation explanations of performance variance.

Practical Implications

To project managers and human resource practitioners in DEWA and other similar GCC utility companies, these findings imply that cultural diversity management in project teams does not necessarily have to be oriented towards the power distance orientation of individual employees. Rather, a structural protection against hierarchy-related coordination costs might be already effective when formal project governance, standardized communication protocols, and a well-documented decision rights are continued to be invested in, as evidence suggests that governance and stakeholder management, but not cultural hierarchy orientation, consistently explain performance variation in regional projects in the public sector infrastructure (Khan et al., 2021). In practical terms, institutional absorption as recorded here is best executed by three concrete aspects of the governance structure of DEWA. First, gated project-reporting cycles, i.e. compulsory stage-gate reviews at design, procurement, and commissioning gateposts, channel route decisions through the standardized checkpoints instead of at the whims of any one manager, and in this way the possibility of a manager making outcomes dependent on his or her own comfort with the idea of hierarchy is constrained. Second, RACI-based accountability matrices in which the person to be Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed on each deliverable are pre-established give authority and decision rights clear prior to the exercise of authority, so that the exercise of authority is an attribute of the assigned role, not an attribute of how an employee is oriented toward power distance. Third, digital workflow and document-control systems, including enterprise project-management systems with inherent approval routing and audit trails, make decisions based on timestamps and records, and are not dependent on who is in a positional position, further constrain the opportunity to allow individual hierarchical orientation to drive project results. To replicate this buffering effect, project managers and HR practitioners in DEWA and similar GCC utilities ought to not only put the special emphasis on the fidelity and faithful enforcement of these three mechanisms in particular, but not to believe that generic or partial investment in the concept of governance will do the same structural protection. Meanwhile, since collaboration was also positively related to project performance independently, and vice versa, managers must persist with structured collaboration and mutual accountability systems, not necessarily to mitigate power distance, but because collaboration seems to be a widely beneficial influence on project outcomes on its own, complemented by the type of strategic and technological investment that

enables ambidextrous, sustainable delivery in UAE public-sector organizations (Leem et al., 2025).

Limitations and Future Research

The research has a number of limitations to it. First, the cross-sectional design cannot be causally inferred; longitudinal designs would enable the researchers to investigate whether the relationship varies during the project phases, especially the high-coordination phases, like design handover or commissioning, when the hierarchical friction may be most important. Second, the study involved one utility company in the UAE which might create a constraint to the overall generalization to other sectors or governance-maturity conditions. Third, the measurement of all the constructs was self-report, but the single factor test by Harman and procedures remedies counters this issue. Fourthly, the moderation model is based on the use of one moderator, which is collaboration; other factors, like adaptive leadership style, could moderate the relationship better. Future studies can experiment whether the moderating effect of formal governance, suggested in this paper, cuts across organizations of different institutional formalization levels, include leadership style as a further moderator, and the power distance and other Hofstede dimensions in less formally governed project-based organizations.

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, it is possible to make a number of recommendations to DEWA and similarly structured GCC utility organizations. To start with, instead of considering power distance as a risk to diversity that needs special mitigation programs, companies can get better and dependable performance returns by further investing in the formal governance systems and documented decision rights that seem to already limit the negative impacts of hierarchical orientation. Second, since collaboration was a positive and independent predictor of performance, the project sponsors must remain about to resource organized collaboration practices as a global performance driver, instead of a response to hierarchy. Third, this relationship should be re-tested periodically by human resource functions as the composition of the workforce at DEWA continues to be Emiritized because the governance-attenuation explanation provided here is unique to the structural maturity of the organization at that time. Lastly, other researchers who conduct similar studies in less formally governed organizations such as smaller contractors in the supply chain of DEWA might find that power distance has a more observable impact in those instances where governance systems are less mature.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at the direct relationship between power distance and project performance and also the collaboration moderated relationship between power distance and project performance among 368 project employees in Dubai Electricity and Water Authority. The direct impact of power distance on project performance as well as the relation between power distance and collaboration were found to be statistically insignificant whereas collaboration itself has turned out to be a significant positive predictor of project performance. Such results indicate that in a highly institutionalized state-owned utility with high formal governance, power distance does not necessarily have the independent effect on project outcomes as observed in less structurally regulated multicultural project environments. The research adds a narrowly focused, quantitatively based test of the power distance-project performance relationship and a structural governance interpretation of how this relationship

can decay in highly regulated organizational contexts, as a basis to future comparative research of GCC utility and infrastructure organizations.

-
- Acknowledgements:** The authors would also like to acknowledge Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) who helped offer the organizational context in which this study was conducted. The positive criticism provided by colleagues, internal reviewers, and academic supervisors is well received. This research did not receive any particular grant, whether in the not-for-profit, commercial, or public sectors.
- Funding Statement:** No Funding
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Modern Trends in Social Sciences (IJMTSS).
- Ethics Statement:** Throughout the research process, the researcher observed a number of ethical considerations including confidentiality, anonymity, respect of human participants and getting informed consent from the participants before data were gathered from them. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes
- Author Contribution Statement:** This manuscript is the result of the efforts of all the authors. The lead author was Mohammed Ahmed Abdulla Al Jasmi who took part in conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and overall draft. Rajan served as the overall supervisor, providing academic guidance and critical supervision. The other co-authors assisted in the academic support, institutional supervision, and critical revisions. All authors were involved in reviewing and approving the final manuscript.
-

References

- Al Naqbi, K. K. M., Ojiako, G. U., Chipulu, M., Al-Mhdawi, M. K. S., & Alakashee, B. A. (2026). The relationship between socially aversive personality of project managers and project performance: Evidence from the UAE. *Project Leadership and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plas.2026.100216>
- Al Qubaisi, J. M. L. F., Abu Elanain, H. M., Badri, M. A., & Ajmal, M. M. (2015). Leadership, culture and team communication: Analysis of project success causality - A UAE case. *International Journal of Applied Management Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJAMS.2015.071149>
- Al Sahi Al Zaabi, M. S., Ahmad, K. Z. B., & Hossan, C. G. (2016). Authentic leadership, work engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors in petroleum company. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-01-2016-0023>
- AlHammadi, A., & Abu Elanain, H. M. (2024). Enhancing organizational citizenship behavior in a non-western context of the UAE: the role of organizational justice, leadership and psychological empowerment. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JABS-08-2023-0310>
- Almansoori, K. A. I., & Ahmad, A. N. A. (2023a). Assessing mediating effect of national culture on the relationship of leadership style with UAE smart government organizational performance. *International Journal of Sustainable Construction Engineering and Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.30880/ijscet.2023.14.03.033>
- Almansoori, K. A. I., & Ahmad, A. N. A. (2023b). Ranking of leadership styles and national culture factors affecting smart government organizational performance. *International Journal of Sustainable Construction Engineering and Technology*. <https://doi.org/10.30880/ijscet.2023.14.03.010>
- Almazrouei, M., & Alnahhal, M. J. (2026). Transformational leadership and employee performance in UAE public sector: the role of digital transformation and agility. *International Journal of Public Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-06-2025-0094>
- Alobeidli, S. Y., Zamberi Bin Ahmad, S., & Jabeen, F. (2024). Mediating effects of knowledge sharing and employee creativity on the relationship between visionary leadership and innovative work behavior. *Management Research Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-02-2023-0144>
- AlShehhi, N., Alzaabi, F. M., Alnahhal, M. J., Sakhrieh, A. H., & Tabash, M. I. (2021). The effect of organizational culture on the performance of UAE organizations. *Cogent Business and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2021.1980934>
- Badi, S. M. (2024). Relationship between organisational culture and collective coping strategies in project teams: an exploratory quantitative study in the UAE construction industry. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-12-2021-0685>
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Chabika, R. C., Müller, R. A., Van Schalkwyk, H., van Schalkwyk, J., & van Rensburg, L. R. (2024). Cultural forces shaping social influences: The role of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 13(8), 87-101. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i8.3748>
- Chaudhry, I. S., Paquibut, R. Y., & Tunio, M. N. (2021). Do workforce diversity, inclusion practices, and organizational characteristics contribute to organizational innovation? Evidence from the U.A.E. *Cogent Business & Management*, 8(1), 1947549.

- Cherian, J. P., Gaikar Vilas, B., Paul, R., & Pech, R. M. (2021). Corporate culture and its impact on employees' attitude, performance, productivity, and behavior: An investigative analysis from selected organizations of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc7010045>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using *GPower 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses*. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41*(4), 1149-1160.
- Guzmán-Rodríguez, L. E., Arizkuren-Eleta, A., Agarwala, T., & Bornay-Barrachina, M. (2023). Individual characteristics on multicultural team performance: does the role played by leaders and team members matter? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1281422. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1281422>
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1), 8.
- Hofstede, G. (2021). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. SAGE Publications.
- Iyer, S. S., Mehrotra, A., Raji, B., Arora, R., & Subramanian, R. (2025). Economic analysis of DEWA's strategic positioning and financial performance in the GCC energy sector: A cost-benefit assessment of strategic opportunities (2010-2024). *International Journal of Accounting and Economics Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.14419/mvgtwd59>
- Kanya, N., & Johan, A. (2025). Inclusive leadership and ethnic diversity: Enhancing team performance and reducing work delays. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23, 3006. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-sajhrm_v23_n1_a3006
- Khan, A., Khan, M. W. A., Panigrahi, S. K., Sajid, M. R., & Rana, F. (2021). Improving the performance of public sector infrastructure projects: Role of project governance and stakeholder management. *Journal of Management in Engineering*. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)ME.1943-5479.0000886](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)ME.1943-5479.0000886)
- Khassawneh, O., & Elrehail, H. (2022). The effect of participative leadership style on employees' performance: The contingent role of institutional theory. *Administrative Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12040195>
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30(3), 607-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308>
- Leem, M. A., Khalil, K. A., & Ubaid, A. M. (2025). Strategic and technological drivers of ambidexterity and sustainability: Impact assessment in UAE project-based public sector organizations. *Journal of Engineering Research (Kuwait)*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jer.2024.11.008>
- Livermore, D. (2022). *Cultural intelligence: Improving your CQ to engage our multicultural world*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Mohammad, T., Khassawneh, O., Bourini, I. F., & Abdelhakim, M. N. (2026). Leader character strength and organizational outcomes: the roles of ethical climate and power distance orientation in building trust and resilience. *International Studies of Management and Organization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2026.2642245>
- Mousa Alriyami, H., Alneyadi, K., Alnuaimi, H., & Kampouris, E. (2024). Employees trust, perceived justice, on task performance: Mediating and moderating role of autonomy and organizational culture. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2024.103647>

- Nazir, S., Asadullah, M. A., Khadim, S., & Asghar, H. (2025). Unlocking innovative work behaviors: exploring the impact of paternalistic leadership, trust in a leader, employee voice and external locus of control. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-09-2024-0920>
- Nickerson, C., & Goby, V. P. (2017). New lamps for old: The Gulf leadership communication framework. *International Journal of Business Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416687055>
- Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Ochieng, E. G., & Price, A. D. (2019). Managing cross-cultural communication in multicultural construction project teams: The case of Kenya and UK. *International Journal of Project Management*, 28(5), 449-460.
- Patwary, A. K., Mohd Yusof, M. F., Bah Simpong, D., Ab Ghaffar, S. F., & Rahman, M. K. (2023). Examining proactive pro-environmental behaviour through green inclusive leadership and green human resource management: an empirical investigation among Malaysian hotel employees. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 6(5), 2012-2029.
- Rees-Caldwell, K., & Pinnington, A. H. (2013). National culture differences in project management: Comparing British and Arab project managers' perceptions of different planning areas. *International Journal of Project Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2012.04.003>
- Sandhu, M. A., & Khan, A. (2018). Improving performance of construction projects: Multi-cultural perspective. *International Journal of Business Excellence*. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBEX.2018.088316>
- Siachou, E., Chaudhuri, R., Chatterjee, S., Kastanakis, M. N., & Barouta, M. (2025). Is humility in leadership a promoter of employee voice? A moderated mediation model. *European Management Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2024.02.004>