

Power Distance in the Courtroom. Theoretical and Empirical Study

Description for the General Public

The concept of power distance understood as one of the dimension of organizational culture has been developed in organizational sciences. Power distance (referring here only to one of its aspects related to consciousness) need to be understood as expectations and acceptances of members of the given organization on how the process of power relations should be performed (is being performed). This "pattern" of performing power relations may vary - from "small" (flattening hierarchy) to "high" (upholding hierarchy) power distance. Walking in the footsteps of the pioneering works of G. Hofstede many studies has unveiled the huge impact of power distance on a number of fundamental organizational processes, such as circulation of knowledge within organization, knowledge management and innovation gathering.

In our opinion, courts, if we take into account the unique character of goals and values pursued by them, can be regarded as a special kind of organization with a particular organizational culture. Then, we could rise the question: how the power distance ("small" or "large") influences judicial decision-making? The main objective of the project is to identify how the power distance influences the lay participant-defendants' satisfaction from courtroom hearings. Thus, planned research is focused on the power distance in the courtroom. In order to determine its impact on other important variables within the judicial decision-making, qualitative and quantitative empirical research techniques will be employed (passive observation of court hearings and laboratory experiment based on the Moot court scheme).

It is worth pointing to the broader background of the planned research. The literature review shows that there is a lack of theoretical research (as well as empirical research integrated with it) on microsocial factors of judicial decision-making processes such as architecture and space of courtroom, communication models or symbols and court rituals (particular aspects are scattered across various highly specialized sub-disciplines). Planned research, which are focused on power distance link these various threads to each other and fulfill a noticeable gap in studies on judicial application of law. Our research can be also regarded of fundamental significance for general reflection and, further, practically oriented proposals to reform broadly understood judiciary.