Support for Innovations and Innovative Behavior: A Moderating Effect of Power Distance in Innovative Behaviour of Middle and Lower Level Employees in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Research on practices of innovative behavior of organizational employees supports the notion that continuous support may be the predictors of effective innovation implementation in contemporary organizations. Extant studies stress that various ways of support gained for innovations is related to fruitful innovations within an organization and identified managerial, organizational and cultural support as key elements of support for innovations. Generally, level of support for innovations may vary as per the power distance in different hierarchical authorities in contemporary organizations. However, relatively few studies have tested how and why management, organization and organizational culture support relate to innovative behavior and largely ignored the influences of power distance in organization hierarchical levels. Accordingly, the main aims of the present study are to investigate whether the support for innovations affect the innovative behaviour of middle and lower level employees and to examine the role of power distance as a moderator, in in social distance process. To advance the understanding of these, simple regression analysis and moderator regression analysis were performed to test hypotheses with a sample size of 76 middle level employees and 44 lower level employees from Sri Lanka. The study found that there is a positive direct effect of support for innovations and innovative behaviour as an overall effect and separately for both middle and lower level employees. Further, power distance moderates the overall impact of the positive relationship between support for innovations and innovative behavior in general with an antagonistic effect, a synergistic effect with middle level employees and no effect with lower level employees. Present study makes several theoretical contributions to social cognitive theory and social distance theory of power represents in hierarchies. Further, managerial contributions of the present study make domestic firms successful through better focus on innovation support which facilitate innovative behaviour of employees. Besides, the power differences can be considered in different managerial levels of an organization in emerging more focus on innovative behaviour to gain sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Employee innovative behaviour, support for innovations, power distance, middle and lower level employees in Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Research on association between innovation support and innovative behavior of employees supports the notion that different consequences of individuals which leads to organizational success may be the predictors of different organizational behaviour (Lukes and Stephan, 2017). Therefore, it is vital for an organization to identify factors of its success, which can be measured from organizational performances and employee behaviors. More innovation support and implementation of innovative ideas of employees are the two main factors that have been regarded as key success factors for effective organizational performance to achieve its long term objectives (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Lukes and Stephan, 2017). Contemporary organizations emphasize that it is essential for employees to advance new creative and innovative ideas for the long run survival of the organization which has identified as the corporate entrepreneurship (Srivastava and Agrawal, 2010; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Scott and Bruce, 1994). Therefore, it is evident that innovative beheviour of employees has identified as a key success factor for most of the organizations due to new applications of the business setting. The employee innovative behaviour is viewed as behaviors through which employees generate or adopt new ideas and make consequent efforts to implement them within an organization (Lukes and Stephan, 2017).

Extant studies indicated that various causes of innovative behaviour namely management support, culture, leadership, team behaviour, organization and individual attributes in all management levels are related to support for innovations (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Hammond, et al., 2011). Emphasizing management/ supervisor support, organization culture and organizational support as the main drivers of support for innovations. Managerial support found to be a perception that an employee's supervisor is supportive of new and innovative ideas (Oldham and Cummings, 1996), organizational support includes the organization making resources available for the implementation of new ideas and the encouragement of innovation including top management support and use of rewards (Hunter et al., 2007) and organizational culture includes the context of the organization based on work tasks and environment (Lukes and Stephan, 2017).

However, the nature of innovative behaviour of various hierachical level employees of an organization is different based on their work tasks and job roles. It is emphasized that middle level management performs more on innovations than frontline management of an organization as it has identified as one of the key responsibilities of middle management is to leave the organization more innovative and creative. As per Engle, et al. (2017) middle level employees are committed to implement innovative practices within the organization with enough top-level management support. Similarly, Engen and Magnusson (2015) underlined that middle management should take the leading role to develop more innovations among fronline management. Further, according to Brown (2012) specific middle management behaviour contributes to develop novel ideas and innovations within an organization. In contrast, Behn (1995) illustrated that it is very hard to convince frontline employees to be innovative as part of their job role. Additionally, Liu, et al. (2016) illustrated that this may be a result of experience and positions holding in the status hierarchy. In contrast they expressed that employees with longer position tenure are not supporting to develop innovtions within the organization than employees in shorter position tenure. Besides, Mukherjee and Ray (2009) further explained innovative work behaviour of different management levels may differ based on the stress levels each individual is facing. Therefore, it is evident that the arguments are contradictory on innovative behaviour of different management level employees in an organization.

Yet, it is evident from the practices of contemporary organizations that they are struggling to create required innovative behaviour among employees due to more focus on short term survival and market competition. Further, it may not perform in an environment where the managers are more authoritative and organization climate is not supportive on employee innovative behaviour in various management levels (Lukes and Stephan, 2017 as cited in Houseet al., 2004). Further, research on power distance in different cultural backgrounds show that power relationships formed among individuals, groups and organizations are a source for various individual and organizational outcomes. Therefore, understanding of power distance is especially important in organizations because, power is fundamental to all relationships, is inherent in hierarchical organizations, and affects many organizational processes and outcomes (Anon., 1997). This can be theoretically rationalized from the Social Distance Theory of Power where high power distance people feeling more distance than low power people (Magee and Smith, 2013).

In a high power distance culture, employees may react less positively because of its emphasis on power-sharing organizational structures and practices (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2018 as cited in Spreitzer,2008). Therefore, it is evident that employees with high power distance organizations are less likely to focus more on positive organizational and individual outcomes. As Rao and Pearce (2016) low power distance among the managerial levels will lead to high organization performances, team collaboration and innovations. On the other hand, due to high power distance, employees will refuse to support their supervisors, even though they are willing to provide guidance and support (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2018). Hence, this study focuses on addressing the research problem, 'whether support for innovations effect the innovative behaviour of middle and lower level management employees in Sri Lanka?'. This relationship will be more strengthened or weakened due to the power differences and distances created based on positions in organizational hierarchies. With this background, potential relationship between support for innovations and innovative behaviour of employees in middle level employees and lower level employees moderates on power distance, which is not explored in the previous literature and is called for more research in the future. In support, it measures the impact of support for innovations and innovative behaviour of middle and lower level management and examines whether the power distance moderates the direct association as the key research objectives derived.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section two briefly reviews the previous literature pertaining to innovation support, innovative behaviour of middle and lower level employees and power distance among different managerial levels. Section three outlines the research method. Section four presents the study's empirical results. The last section discusses the research findings, followed by a presentation of the potential research limitations and future research avenues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovations bring an additional value to an organization and it is widely accepted for an effective performance in the long run (Yuan and Woodman , 2010). Therefore, it is a responsibility of any organization to create an environment which promotes more innovations within the organizational set-up. Further, development of innovative behaviour within the workplace may be the main path way to various organizational outcomes such as corporate entrepreneurship (Lukes and Stephan, 2017), sustainable competitive advantage, winning the market competition and diversification strategy formulation.

Apart from the studies that have focued mainly on leadership (Pieterse, et al., 2010; Hoch, 2013) a variety of factors has been studied as important antecedents to innovative behaviour of employees within the workplace, such as managerial, organizational and cultural support (Lukes and Stephan, 2017), work groups and personal traits (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Srivastava and Agrawal, 2010). Moreover, out of all the factors, it is identified that organizational climate, organization support and manager support are key factors to enhance innovations within a workplace (Park and Jo, 2018; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Al-Hawari, et al., 2019; Sönmez and Yildirim, 2019). Managerial support provides a countless backing to promote more employee outcomes within an organization including innovations. Additionally, the direction and guidance of managers/superviors towards employees create more opportunities and autonomy to be creative and loyal in work behaviours. Similarly, Rooney, et al. (2009) expressed managerial support is encouraging additional employment results in organizations. Therefore, managrial support plays as a key driver on employee motivation to develop more favourable outcomes in the workplace. With regard to the organizational support and culture Hunter, et al. (2007) focused on the organization making resources available for the implementation of new ideas and the encouragement of innovation including top management support and use of rewards which result in various positive individual outcomes within an organization.

One of the key imperative individual outcomes for an organization is the employee novel ideas which lead to generate more innovative behaviour among employees and corporate entrepreneurship in the long run. The term innovative behavior represents the intentional behaviour of an individual to introduce and/or apply new ideas, products, processes, and procedures to his or her work role, unit, or organization (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Similarly, innovative behaviour of an individual is a result of ideas (idea generation and idea implementation) of an individual in the workplace which results on new processes and products (Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Binnewies, et al., 2007). It is evident from the existing literature that the understanding of employee innovative behavior can range from various innovative activities. An important aspect of innovative behaviour is to communicate the innovative idea to the colleagues and mangers to get the feedback (Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Howell , et al., 2005). Once the innovative idea is communicated and permitted, further resources such as time, money and people are allocated to start the implementation process. Involving others (Howell , et al., 2005) will be an added advantage for the implementation of the innovative idea. A key

challenges would be to overcome obstacles and develop the innovation outputs at the completion (Lukes and Stephan, 2017).

Furthermore, existing literature indicated that innovation support within a workplace gives more autonomy for employees to facilitate employee innovations (Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Sönmez and Yildirim, 2019; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Park and Jo, 2018). Additionally, support of managers, organizational resources and organizational culture helps to motivate various levels of employees to develop innovations to achive company goals and objectives in the long run. Further, Scott and Bruce (1994) illustrated that employee behaviour is based on the relationship with the manager and organizational culture, especially in employee behaviour towards innovative ideas. Similarly, Sönmez and Yildirim (2019) and Yuan and Woodman (2010) expressed the importance of supervisor support and oganizational climate to dvelop more innovations within an organization. Therefore, the below hypothesis can be developed to investigate the direct effect between support for innovations and innovative behaviour of employees.

Hypothesis 1: Support for innovations positively affect the innovative behaviour of employees.

Hypothesis 1a: Support for innovations positively affect the innovative behaviour of middle level employees.

Hypothesis 1b: Support for innovations positively affect the innovative behaviour of lower level employees.

As Daniels and Greguras (2014) employees are reacting in different ways compared with power differences in organizational hierarchy. Further, employees will response negatively to such managerial support and resource allocations towards positive individual outcomes (Tepper, 2007). Solidity of the power or the authority among positions will or will not create a support for innovations which results on innovative behavior of individuals (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Daniels and Greguras, 2014). Moreover, power distanace plays a key role in organizational culture and manger support with various employee outcomes such as innovations, team collaboration and team performance (Rao and Pearce, 2016). Therefore, below hypothesis can be developed to measure the moderating effect of power distance on support for innovations and innovative behaviour of employees.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship between support for innovations and innovative behaviour of employees is moderated by power distance

Hypothesis 2a: Relationship between support for innovations and innovative behaviour of middle employees is moderated by power distance

Hypothesis 2b: Relationship between support for innovations and innovative behaviour of lower level employees is moderated by power distance

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

The sample of this study consisted of 120 employees consists with 76 middle level employees, 44 lower level from various industries in Sri Lanka such as information technology, banking, apparel, telecommunication and industries. This sample is chosen based on convenient sampling strategy due to hierarchical structure and the duties and responsibilities of middle and lower level employees in the selected industries, and easy identification and reliable testing of the power differences in organization hierarchy. The self-administered questionnaires were delivered based on survey strategy to middle and lower level employees to measure support for innovations, innovative behavior and power distance which are the main variables of the study.

Variables and Model

Employee innovative behaviour, the dependent variable of the present study was measured using seven dimensions: idea Generation, idea Search, idea Communication, implementation (starting activities), involving others, overcoming obstacles and innovation outputs using 23-items of Innovative behavior inventory developed by Lukes and Stephan (2015). The independent variable, support for innovations was measured using three dimensions: managerial support, organizational support and organizational cultural support, modified innovation support inventory developed by Lukes and Stephan (2015). This study used one moderator variable; power distance which was measured using 6- items scale developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988). The working definitions of the constructs are presented as follow.

Table 1: Working Definitions of the Constructs

Construct	Working Definition
Innovative behaviour of employees	The intentional behaviour of an individual to introduce and/or apply new ideas, products, processes, and procedures to his or her work role, unit, or organization.
Support for innovations	Managerial support can be described as a perception that an employee's supervisor is supportive of new and innovative ideas.

	Organizational support includes the organization making resources available for the implementation of new ideas and the encouragement of innovation and use of rewards. Organizational culture includes the context of the organization based on work tasks and environment.
Power distance	Power Distance has been defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

Source: (Scott and Bruce, 1994; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Hunter, et al., 2007)

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Coefficients of variables

	Mean	**SD**	**IB**	**PD**	**PD-M**	**PD-L**	**IB-M**	**IB-L**
IS	3.27	0.734	0.639**	0.153	-	-	-	-
IB	3.76	0.440	-	0.242**	-	-	-	-
PD	3.25	0.548	-	-	-	-	-	-
ISM	3.09	0.666	-	-	0.124	-	0.667**	-
ISL	3.59	0.744	-	-	-	0.208	-	0.771**
PD-M	3.25	0.532	-	-	-	-	0.317**	-
PD-L	3.26	0.581	-	-	-	-	0.057	-
IB-M	3.72	0.520	-	-	-	-	-	-
IB-L	3.81	0.243	-	-	-	-	-	-

IS= Innovation Support, IB= Innovative Behaviour, PD= Power Distance, ISM= Innovation Support- Middle Level, ISL= Innovation Support- Lower Level, PD-M= Power Distance- Middle Level, PD-L= Power Distance- Lower Level, IB-M= Innovative Behaviour- Middle Level, IB-L= Innovative Behaviour- Lower Level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Note. (1) Between .1-.3: Small Effect. (2) Between .3-.5: Medium Effect. (3) Above .5: Large Effect

An examination of correlations revealed a significant association among the variables. Overall, the patterns of the correlations among support for innovations and innovative behaviour were much similar to the expected results as the direct effect was significant at 99% in correlation matrix. As per the results it demonstrates that there is a large effect between support for innovations and innovative behaviour in middle level employees and medium effect in lower

level employees. However, the correlation effect is not significant between support for innovations and power distance with both middle level employees and lower level employees.

The results of the regression used to test the hypotheses of support for innovations, innovative behaviour and power distance are exposed as follow.

Table 3: Regression Results for Support for Innovations, Innovative Behaviour and Power Distance

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Intercept	2.502** (17.558)	2.161** (10.033)	2.122** (9.835)
IS	0.384** (9.032)	0.370** (8.732)	0.374** (8.855)
Power Distance		0.119* (2.089)	0.128* (2.260)
IS X PD			-0.042*** (-1.499)
R	0.639	0.656	0.664
R^2	0.409	0.430	0.441
Adjusted R^2	0.404**	0.420**	0.426**
R^2 change	0.409	0.430	0.441
F change	81.583**	44.135**	30.486**

Source: Survey data
Dependent variable: Innovative Behaviour
Note: Data are standardized regression weights. IS= Support for Innovations; PD= Power Distance
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .1.

These results show that support for innovations had a positive relationship with innovative behaviour ($\beta = 0.384$, $p \leq 0.05$) which is supported for hypothesis 1 and consistent with evidence from previous studies (Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Srivastava and Agrawal, 2010; Yuan and Woodman , 2010). Further, with regrds to the survey results, the outcomes of the moderation effect is at ninety five percent (95%) significant similar to previous research findings (Daniels and Greguras, 2014; Liu, Ge, and Peng, 2016; Rooney, et. al., 2009) concerning middle and lower level employees in Sri Lanka. Adjusted R^2 value of 0.426 represents the overall impact of support for innovations with interaction effect of power

distance on innovative behaviour (F=30.486, $p \leq 0.01$). Based on the outcomes, an Antagonistic effect is represented from power distance moderating variable to support for innovations and innovative behaviour as proposed in hypothesis 2. It represents both support for innovations and power distance predict innovative behaviour in the same direction but opposite to each other. The importance of support for innovations is weakened the presence of the power distance for innovative behaviour.

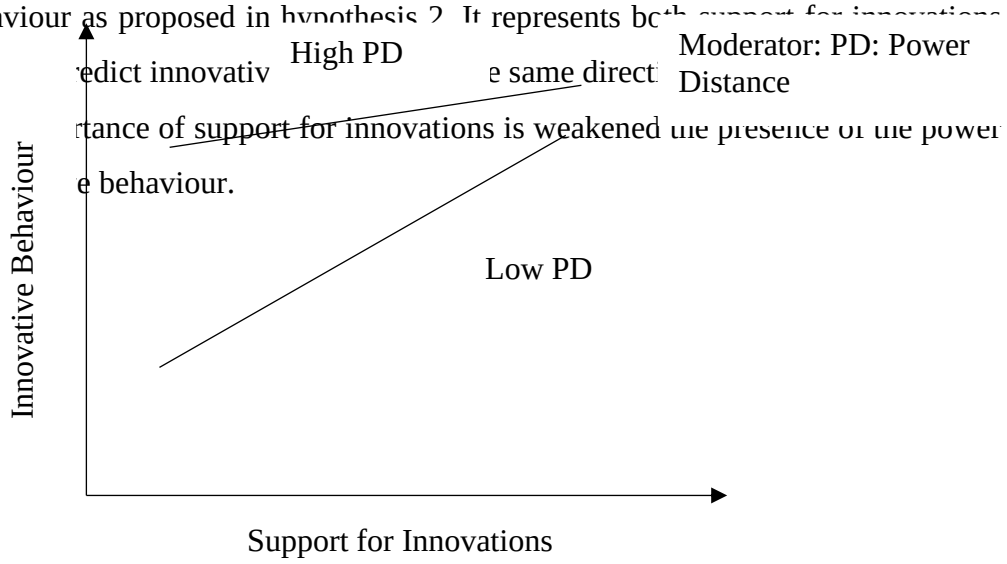

Figure 1: Antagonistic Effect

Table 4: Regression results for Support for Innovations, Innovative Behaviour and Power Distance of Middle Level Employees

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Intercept	2.114** (9.885)	1.431** (4.542)	1.412** (4.199)
IS	0.667** (7.700)	0.637** (7.644)	0.638** (7.537)
Power Distance		0.237** (2.848)	0.244* (2.629)
IS X PD			0.016*** 0.171)
R	0.667	0.707	0.707
R^2	0.445	0.500	0.501
Adjusted R^2	0.437**	0.487**	0.480**
R^2 change	0.445	0.500	0.501
F change	59.285**	36.546**	24.050**

Source: Survey data
Dependent variable: Innovative Behaviour
Note: Data are standardized regression weights. IS= Support for Innovations; PD= Power Distance
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .1$.

These results show that support for innovations had a positive relationship with innovative behaviour of middle level employees ($\beta = 0.667$, $p \leq 0.01$) which is supported for hypothesis 1a as suggested. This finding is consistent with evidence from previous studies (Engle, et al., 2017; Brown, 2012). Further, with regards to the survey results, the outcomes of the moderation effect is at ninety percent (90%) significant concerning middle level employees in Sri Lanka. Adjusted R^2 value of 0.480 represents the overall impact of support for innovations with interaction effect of power distance on innovative behaviour ($F=24.050$, $p \leq 0.01$). Based on the results, there is Synergistic effect from power distance moderation variable to support for innovations and innovative behaviour of middle level employees as proposed in hypothesis 2a. It represents both support for innovations and power distance predict innovative behaviour in the same direction. The importance of support for innovations is strengthen the presence of the power distance for innovative behaviour.

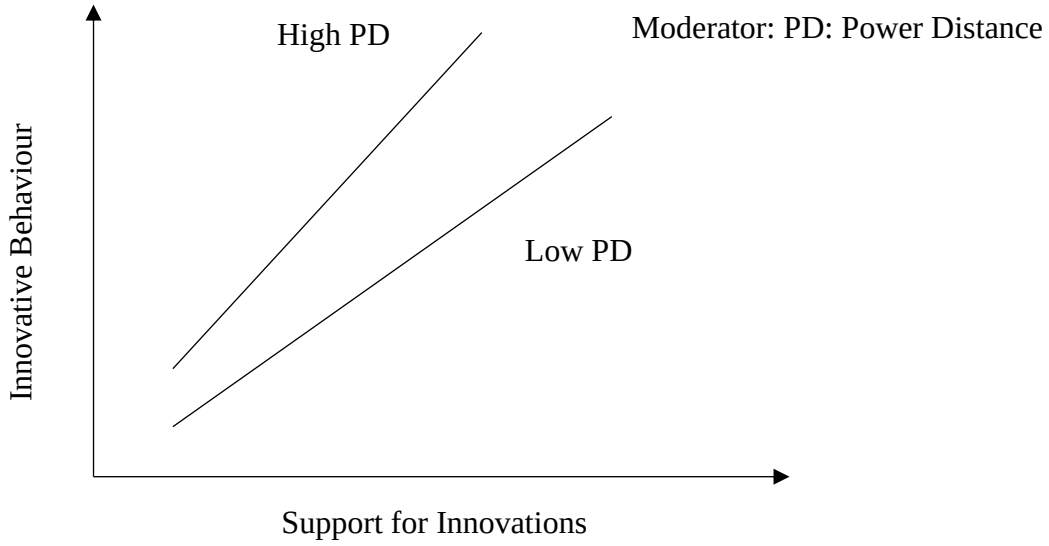

Figure 2: Synergistic Effect

Table 5: Regression results for Support for Innovations, Innovative Behaviour and Power Distance of Lower Level Employees

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Intercept	2.910** (24.774)	0.031** (18.698)	3.052** (13.647)
IS	0.771** (7.853)	0.794** (7.925)	0.795** (7.808)
Power Distance		-0.108*** (-1.076)	-0.125*** (-0.780)
IS X PD			0.022 0.140)
R	0.771	0.779	0.779
R^2	0.595	0.606	0.607
Adjusted R^2	0.586**	0.587**	0.577**
R^2 change	0.595	0.606	0.607
F change	61.756**	31.574**	20.552**

Source: Survey data
Dependent variable: Innovative Behaviour
Note: Data are standardized regression weights. IS= Support for Innovations; PD= Power Distance
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .1.

These results show that support for innovations had a positive relationship with innovative behaviour of lower level employees ($\beta = 0.771$, $p \leq 0.01$) which is supported for hypothesis as suggested in hypothesis 1b. Yet, with regards to the survey results, the outcomes of the moderation effect is not significant concerning lower level employees in Sri Lanka. This finding is consistent with evidence from previous studies (Liu, et al., 2016; Mukherjee and Ray, 2009). However, adjusted R^2 value of 0.577 represents the overall impact of support for innovations with the moderation effect of power distance on innovative behaviour ($F=20.552$, $p \leq 0.01$).

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND AVENUE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study not only reproduces but also covers prior research on the direct consequence and moderating consequence on power distance of the association between the support for innovations and innovative behaviour of middle and lower level employees. In answering research questions and objectives, the present study mainly focuses on innovative behaviour of both middle and lower level employees in Sri Lanka. First, the results of this study replicates earlier findings (Engle, et al., 2017; Brown, 2012; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Srivastava and Agrawal, 2010; Yuan and Woodman, 2010) of establishing positive direct effect of support for innovations on innovative behaviour of employees and indicates that the power distance is a significant determinant of positive direct association (Daniels and Greguras, 2014; Liu, Ge, and Peng, 2016; Rooney, et. al., 2009). Moreover, the findings based on middle level and lower level employees innovative behaviour further illustrated that a significant support on innovations in an organization context will further extend their behavioural outcomes.

Prominently, as hypothesized, the present study extends previous (Engle, et al. 2017; Engen and Magnusson, 2015; Brown 2012) research by investigating the moderating role of power distance on the direct association of support for innovations and innovative behaviour of middle and lower level employees in Sri Lanka. This enrichment of employee performance is important as previous researches have indicated regarding the tendency of high and low power distance manager and employee to enhance innovative behaviour. In a high power distance culture, employees may react less positively because of its emphasis on power-sharing organizational structures and practices (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2018 as cited in Spreitzer,2008) which is evident from the findings of middle level employees innovative behaviour and low power distance among the managerial levels will lead to high organization performances, team collaboration and innovations (Rao and Pearce, 2016). Moreover, due to high power distance, employees will refuse to support their supervisors, even though they are willing to provide guidance and support (Tripathi and Bharadwaja, 2018). Yet, as per the results of the lower level employees indicates that the power differences will not be a significant factor for the direct impact between support for innovations and innovative behaviour which replicates from the early research findings (Behn, 1995; Liu, et al. 2016).

In conclusion, despite the importance of innovation support in organizations, this research examines the promising mechanisms through which support for innovations influences employee effective innovative behaviour, which has been lacking. The present study makes an important contribution by examining how support for innovations based on managerial support, organizational aupport and cultural support influence employee behaviors, both middle level and lower level employees by displaying the prominence of power distance. Moreover, lower level employees in organizations are willing to occupy in innovative and novel ideas within the organization set-up without much concerning about power distance among hierachical levels if they receive an adequate support. This may be as they are engaging more on day-to-day practices of the organization set-up. Therefore, this study delivers a thoughtful meassage on how innovation support influences middle and lower level employee innovative behavior.

Theoretically, the discoveries of this study deliver considerations for two forms of work. First, the direct association of support for innovations and innovative behaviour of both middle and lower level employees, which was rationalized from social cognitive theory that enhances more novel ideas of employees through enough social support and learning practices within a workplace. It further, discloses that innovation support is vital for the innovative behaviour of employees of a workplace identified by previous research (Riaz, Xu, and Hussain, 2018; Lukes and Stephan, 2017; Srivastava and Agrawal, 2010) and innovative behaviour of employees was generalized. Second, the moderating role of power distance revealed by this study and previous research (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Daniels and Greguras, 2014; Tepper, 2007; Rao and Pearce, 2016) backings the theoretical argument and make assistances to the social distance theory of power.

Furthermore, findings of this study are important in an organizational set-up as they expand the consideration of antecedents for innovative behaviour of employees in workplace. An encouragement to develop innovative ideas within employees through employee empowerment and autonomy will be a caused to gain sustainable competitive advantage through corporate entrepreneurship in the long run. Further, managerial support can be encoraged by enough communications and value proposition within the organizational context. Consequently, power gaps between management levels will be reduced and employees will feel free to express their new and innovative ideas to others to get a support. Similarly, friendly organizational climate, culture and resources will empower employees to produce more innovations within the organization.

Collecting data from respondents in multiple industries at a given period of time was a potential limitation of this present study. Nevertheless, future research might consider one industry with a longitudinal research design examining perceptions of support for innovations, innovative behaviour and power distance of middle and lower level employees in multiple times over a long period of time. The present study inspires prospect researchers to carry out the same study again with the change of research method to a qualitative research as respondents have not given the confident answers based on questionnaire technique. The scholars would be able to notice and recognize responses of respondents if they can conduct the study through experiment or interview method as a data collection tool which results more exciting responses with the close by observing approaches among the investigator and the respondent.

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