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IMPACT OF POWER DISTANCE ON DECISION QUALITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY*

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Abstract. International projects increasingly rely on cross-cultural collaboration under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure, and incomplete information, making decision quality a critical but difficult-to-measure determinant of project performance. Despite its importance, comparable project-level indicators of decision quality are rarely available for cross-country analysis. This study addresses this gap by examining whether cross-national differences in hierarchy acceptance are systematically associated with decision-environment integrity, used as a proxy for comparable decision-quality conditions in international project contexts. Drawing on a conceptual framework that links power distance to decision quality through voice, information sharing, and challenge capacity, the study adopts a parsimonious, proxy-based cross-national design. Empirically, it uses a matched-country dataset of 69 countries combining Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) and the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The analysis applies distributional testing, Pearson correlation, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, and cluster analysis. The results reveal a strong negative association between PDI and CPI ($r = -0.663$, $p < 0.001$) and a statistically significant regression relationship ($CPI = 88.850 - 0.601 \times PDI$; $R^2 = 0.439$), indicating that higher hierarchy acceptance co-occurs with weaker integrity conditions of the decision environment. Cluster analysis further identifies two stable decision-environment profiles combining hierarchy acceptance and integrity conditions. The findings do not imply cultural determinism but highlight a systematic vulnerability pattern: in higher-hierarchy contexts, decision quality becomes more dependent on compensatory governance mechanisms that preserve voice, escalation, documentation, and independent review. The study contributes by providing a transparent, reproducible macro-level test of a theoretically specified decision-quality mechanism and by translating cultural differences into governance-relevant insights for international projects.

Keywords: decision quality; project management; voice mechanisms; Power Distance Index (PDI); Hofstede's cultural dimensions; Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

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1. Introduction

International projects increasingly depend on cross-cultural collaboration among partners who operate with different managerial routines, communication norms, and expectations about authority. Under these conditions, project performance is shaped not only by planning and execution practices, but also by the quality of decisions made when time is scarce, uncertainty is high, and information is incomplete (Lawani et al., 2023; Cantarelli, 2025; Sommer, 2024). In this article, decision quality is conceptualized as a process-level property, expressed through the completeness of relevant information, explicit consideration of risks, systematic comparison of feasible alternatives, and a traceable justification that remains defensible as project conditions evolve (Hjelle et al., 2024; Lukas et al., 2025). Because comparable project-level decision-quality metrics are not available for large-scale cross-country testing, this article approximates decision quality indirectly via decision-environment integrity, treating the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (Transparency International, 2025) as a contextual indicator of the institutional conditions that enable transparent, accountable, and defensible decision-making. This proxy-based design supports cross-country comparability but does not constitute a direct or causal measurement of project-level decision quality.

In cross-cultural settings, decision quality is challenged by culturally specific assumptions about who may legitimately participate in decision-making and how openly concerns may be communicated. Power distance (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010) is central because it captures whether hierarchical asymmetry and unequal authority are treated as normal and legitimate. High power distance typically corresponds to more centralized decision processes, indirect disagreement, and stronger status constraints on speaking up; lower power distance is more compatible with participative interaction and upward voice, potentially improving the informational basis of decisions (Adamovic, 2023; Kwan et al., 2024). Evidence shows that when employees fail to speak up under ambiguous threats, problems remain unnoticed and opportunities are overlooked, directly weakening decision quality (Park et al., 2024). The voice channel is also shaped by cultural moderation and by leader-follower fit in power distance orientations (Guzman & Fu, 2022; Toufighi et al., 2024). In this study, power distance is treated as cross-national variation in Power Distance Index (PDI) (Geert Hofstede.com, n.d.) that project partners bring into cross-cultural collaboration, and the empirical test evaluates whether this variation is systematically associated with integrity conditions of decision environments.

Growing engagement in international project cooperation provides a relevant context for motivating the proposed mechanism, because many cross-border projects involve partners with systematically different expectations about authority and legitimate challenge. Thus, existing research on China's global project partnerships shows that hierarchical expectations constitute a durable source of coordination friction and performance variation in cross-border projects (Zhao & Kudiņš, 2025). However, the empirical test in this article is conducted strictly at the country level using a matched-country dataset ($N = 69$). In this context, China and Latvia are referenced not as focal cases for bilateral or region-specific comparison, but as analytically grounded illustrations of how different positions within the PDI–CPI space can generate distinct coordination expectations in international projects. Their inclusion serves to clarify the governance relevance of hierarchy acceptance differences identified in the results, rather than to support cultural or regional profiling. The analysis therefore deliberately avoids region-based generalizations and instead evaluates variation in power distance at the level of individual countries, spanning a broad range of hierarchy-acceptance and integrity configurations across the global cultural landscape.

Accordingly, this article examines whether cross-country variation in hierarchy acceptance, captured by Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI), is systematically associated with decision-environment integrity, which is used as a proxy for comparable decision-quality conditions in international project contexts. The contribution of the study is threefold. First, it specifies a theoretically grounded mechanism linking power distance to decision quality through constraints on voice, information sharing, and upward challenge. Second, it introduces a transparent, proxy-based operationalization that enables reproducible correlation, regression, and cluster analyses using publicly available country-level indicators. Third, it derives a two-profile typology of decision environments by jointly clustering PDI and the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI, 2024), providing an analytically tractable way to anticipate governance frictions in cross-border projects. The remainder of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature; Section 3 develops the hypotheses and

presents the research methodology; Section 4 reports the empirical results; Section 5 discusses implications for cross-cultural project governance; and Section 6 concludes with limitations and directions for future project-level validation.

2. Literature review

Decision quality is a major driver of project success because critical choices are routinely made under uncertainty, time constraints, and incomplete information. Evidence from complex-project research indicates that performance depends not only on execution but also on the quality of decision formation at the front end: teams must combine experience-based judgment with available evidence and translate it into a defensible course of action (Lawani et al., 2023). In project governance, the practical implication of Kahneman's work is primarily procedural: improving outcomes requires decision procedures that reduce systematic bias rather than ex post documentation of choices (Cantarelli, 2025). Experimental findings further suggest that justification pressure can alter project-selection behavior, implying that decision quality includes the transparency and defensibility of reasoning, not merely the final outcome (Lukas et al., 2025). Decision analytics research likewise shows that the structuring and visualization of information can change interpretation and choice even when the underlying data remain constant (Hjelle et al., 2024).

Studies of high-stakes multi-agency coordination show that decision quality often fails not due to lack of expertise but due to weak information sharing, unclear escalation, and fragmented accountability – exactly the process conditions that governance must standardize (Philpot et al., 2025).

For operationalization, decision quality can be approached through observable proxies such as informational completeness, explicit risk consideration, systematic comparison of alternatives, and traceability of rationale. At the organizational level, information sharing is positively associated with decision quality, while trust reduces defensive routines that otherwise limit learning and improvement (Alduais et al., 2023). These process-oriented proxies are particularly relevant for cross-cultural project research because they specify how decision quality can be diagnosed in practice, even when direct standardized cross-country decision-quality metrics are unavailable.

Power distance captures the extent to which unequal authority is treated as acceptable and legitimate. In Hofstede's framework, this country-level dimension shapes hierarchy acceptance, leadership patterns, and information flows within organizations (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Although Hofstede-type indicators remain widely used, recent work emphasizes the need for careful interpretation in cross-national applications due to measurement and construct-use limitations (Jan et al., 2024; Ouyang, 2025). At the individual level, psychological power distance reflects subjective hierarchy acceptance and conditions reactions to leadership, with direct implications for project coordination and escalation behavior (Korkmazurek, 2024; Li et al., 2023). In the present study, these insights justify treating the Power Distance Index (PDI) as a parsimonious, country-level baseline that is theoretically connected to how authority expectations shape decision processes.

The mechanism most relevant to decision quality is voice: whether team members raise concerns, surface weak signals, and challenge assumptions before commitments become costly. Under ambiguous threats, silence increases the likelihood that problems remain unnoticed and opportunities are missed, weakening the informational basis of decisions (Park et al., 2024). Cultural norms also condition whether participative leadership translates into speaking up, indicating that voice is culturally contingent rather than purely procedural (Toufighi et al., 2024; Zheng, 2025). At the dyadic level, leader–follower congruence in power distance orientation affects voice, particularly under conditions of trust and perceived organizational support (Guzman & Fu, 2022). These findings are consistent with evidence that high power distance suppresses behaviors required for accurate deliberation and effective challenge (Kwan et al., 2024). In engineering contexts, constrained upward communication is associated with unreported defects and costly rework (Alsanoosy et al., 2019). Cross-country studies in construction project management similarly report cultural effects on communication and coordination practices (Amoah, 2023; Eyiah et al., 2025). Where dissent carries social or career risk, teams may substitute deliberation with compliance and post hoc justification, limiting error detection and learning

(Mehmood et al., 2024; Imran et al., 2025). Misfit between leader and member behaviors can further translate into performance penalties (Hernaes et al., 2023).

Thus, evidence from team research shows that psychological safety supports upward voice, error reporting, and willingness to challenge assumptions, which improves the informational basis of collective decisions in iterative project settings (Alami et al., 2024). A broader organizational-culture perspective also supports the idea that shared norms shape how decisions are discussed, challenged, and legitimized, affecting whether corrective information is integrated before commitments escalate (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Cross-national project research faces an asymmetry in measurement: standardized cultural indices are available at the country level, whereas directly comparable numerical indicators of project decision quality are rarely available as ready-made cross-country metrics (Ouyang, 2025). To enable systematic testing, the present study links the Power Distance Index (PDI) to a compatible institutional proxy (CPI, 2024), allowing correlation, regression, and clustering rather than purely narrative inference (Geerthofstede.com, n.d.).

Cross-national studies increasingly use Hofstede's dimensions as macro-level predictors in matched-country designs, which supports the feasibility of country-level cultural operationalization when project-level metrics are not comparable (Zidkova et al., 2025).

This study avoids broad cultural profiling and deliberately focuses on a single cultural predictor to preserve a clear causal mechanism. Among Hofstede's dimensions, power distance is theoretically closest to the "voice/contestability" channel: it conditions whether subordinates question decisions, provide upward feedback, and trigger timely escalation before commitments become irreversible. Prior empirical work in cross-cultural project contexts has likewise emphasized hierarchy acceptance as a primary driver of decision-process openness and corrective feedback cycles (Zhao & Kudiņš, 2025; Zhao et al., 2025).

This study deliberately focuses on PDI as the only cultural predictor to preserve interpretability and keep the analytical "red line" on decision quality rather than cultural profiling. Power distance is the Hofstede dimension most directly tied to the proposed decision-quality mechanism in projects because it structures the legitimacy of upward influence, dissent, and escalation, thereby shaping whether weak signals and risk information enter decision preparation (Guzman & Fu, 2022; Adamovic, 2023; Park et al., 2024). Methodologically, PDI is also the only cultural metric in the study that is uniformly available, reproducible, and comparable across the countries included in the empirical dataset (Geerthofstede.com, n.d.). Prior exploratory evidence by the authors is retained only as contextual motivation for why authority norms matter in international cooperation and does not replace the peer-reviewed evidence that supports the mechanism (Zhao et al., 2025; Zhao & Kudiņš, 2025).

3. Research methodology

Because direct cross-national numerical measures of project decision quality are unavailable, the hypotheses are formulated in a way that remains consistent with the proposed mechanism while aligning with the feasible operational proxy approach. The formulated research hypotheses are as follows;

H1. Higher PDI is associated with lower decision quality relevant outcomes as captured by the study's operational proxy, consistent with reduced informational completeness and weaker challenge capacity under higher hierarchy acceptance (based on Alduais et al., 2023; Park et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023).

H2. Voice behavior provides the core mechanism linking PDI to decision quality: higher PDI reduces voice and open challenge, which weakens the informational basis and defensibility of decisions (based on Guzman & Fu, 2022; Park et al., 2024; Toufighi et al., 2024).

The study adopts a cross-national comparative design to examine whether hierarchy-related cultural expectations are systematically associated with decision-quality-relevant outcomes in international project contexts. The analytical strategy is deliberately parsimonious and proxy-based: decision quality is not observed directly at the project level but is approximated through decision-environment integrity, while culture is introduced solely as an explanatory condition rather than as a multidimensional profiling exercise. Empirically, the study relies on a single cultural indicator and a single institutional proxy, which enables transparent and

reproducible estimation using parametric correlation analysis, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, and cluster-based classification on a matched-country dataset (N = 69). This design prioritizes interpretability and comparability over model complexity and is consistent with the study's non-causal, mechanism-testing orientation.

The cultural predictor is PDI (Geerthofstede.com, n.d.), taken from the Hofstede-based country comparison dataset, which captures the extent to which unequal distribution of authority and hierarchical asymmetry are accepted as legitimate at the national level. Decision-quality-relevant outcomes are operationalized using CPI 2024 (Transparency International, 2025), which serves as an institutional proxy for the integrity, transparency, and accountability conditions under which decisions are prepared, justified, and contested. In the correlation analysis, PDI and CPI are treated symmetrically as continuous variables to assess linear association. In the regression analysis, CPI is specified as the dependent variable and PDI as the explanatory variable, allowing a directional test consistent with the proposed mechanism linking hierarchy acceptance to weaker decision-environment integrity. This operationalization supports systematic cross-country testing while remaining explicit about the proxy nature and inferential limits of the outcome measure.

The empirical analysis uses a matched-country dataset (N = 69) in which PDI and CPI are both available for the same countries (Table 1). The analytical procedure includes four steps:

- (1) To determine the appropriateness of parametric measures of association, the distributional properties of both variables were examined prior to analysis. Normality was assessed using the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors significance correction, supplemented by Monte Carlo estimation of p-values. This procedure was applied to both indicators before selecting the correlation coefficient for subsequent analysis.
- (2) Given continuous scaling and parametric assumptions, the study examines the linear association between PDI and CPI using a correlation-based approach. Because the two indicators are oriented in opposite evaluative directions—PDI capturing hierarchy acceptance and CPI capturing institutional integrity – the analysis accounts for this directional interpretation when assessing the relationship between the variables.
- (3) To complement the correlation analysis with a directional test consistent with the proposed mechanism, the study applies a linear regression framework. An ordinary least squares (OLS) model is specified with CPI as the dependent variable and PDI as the explanatory variable. This specification allows the analysis to assess whether variation in hierarchy acceptance is systematically associated with variation in the integrity of the decision environment, while maintaining a parsimonious one-predictor design. The regression is estimated using standard OLS assumptions, and model outputs are reported in terms of coefficient estimates, statistical significance, and overall model fit.
- (4) To move beyond a single linear association and to derive an interpretable typology applicable to global cross-national project contexts, the study applies cluster analysis using PDI and CPI simultaneously. A hierarchical agglomeration procedure is employed to explore the latent cluster structure and to inform the selection of an interpretable clustering solution, with results reported accordingly. This approach identifies recurring “decision-environment profiles” reflecting how hierarchy acceptance and integrity conditions jointly shape decision contexts across countries.

There are some methodological limitations in this study. First, the study does not observe project-level decision quality directly. Decision quality is operationalized indirectly through an institutional proxy (CPI), which captures integrity, transparency, and accountability conditions of the decision environment rather than the quality of specific project-team decisions. While this proxy is theoretically aligned with the proposed mechanism and allows systematic cross-national testing, it cannot substitute for direct measures of decision processes, informational completeness, or deliberative quality at the project level. Second, the empirical sample is constrained by the overlap of publicly available indicators and is defined by the matched-country set in Table 1 (N = 69). The results should therefore be interpreted as evidence within the observed overlap of PDI and CPI coverage, rather than as a universal country census.

4. Research results

The empirical basis for the analysis is a matched dataset of PDI and CPI values across 69 countries (Table 1). This format provides a comparable cross-country framework for testing how hierarchy acceptance relates to decision-environment integrity, used here as a proxy for decision-quality conditions in international project contexts.

Descriptively, the dataset covers a wide spread of cultural hierarchy acceptance. The lowest PDI values are observed in Austria (11), Israel (13), and Denmark (18), while the highest values occur in Malaysia (104) and the Slovakia (100) (Geerthofstede.com, n.d.). CPI also varies substantially, ranging from very low scores such as Venezuela (10) and Russia (22) to very high scores such as Denmark (90) and Finland (88) (Transparency International, 2025). This dispersion is analytically important because it indicates that the sample contains both low- and high-hierarchy environments and both low- and high-integrity environments, enabling meaningful association testing rather than a narrow-range comparison.

Table 1. Cross-country values of PDI and CPI

No.	Country	Power Distance Index (PDI)	Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)
1	Argentina	49	37
2	Australia	38	77
3	Austria	11	67
4	Bangladesh	80	23
5	Belgium	65	69
6	Brazil	69	34
7	Bulgaria	70	43
8	Canada	39	75
9	Chile	63	63
10	China	80	43
11	Colombia	67	39
12	Costa Rica	35	58
13	Croatia	73	47
14	Czech Rep	57	56
15	Denmark	18	90
16	Ecuador	78	32
17	El Salvador	66	30
18	Estonia	40	76
19	Finland	33	88
20	France	68	67
21	Germany	35	75
22	Great Britain	35	71
23	Greece	60	49
24	Guatemala	95	25
25	Hong Kong	68	74
26	Hungary	46	41
27	India	77	38
28	Indonesia	78	37
29	Iran	58	23
30	Ireland	28	77
31	Israel	13	64
32	Italy	50	54
33	Jamaica	45	44
34	Japan	54	71
35	Korea South	60	64
36	Latvia	44	59
37	Lithuania	42	63
38	Luxembourg	40	81
39	Malaysia	104	50
40	Malta	56	46
41	Mexico	81	26
42	Morocco	70	37

43	Netherlands	38	78
44	New Zealand	22	83
45	Norway	31	81
46	Pakistan	55	27
47	Panama	95	33
48	Peru	64	31
49	Philippines	94	33
50	Poland	68	53
51	Portugal	63	57
52	Romania	90	46
53	Russia	93	22
54	Serbia	86	35
55	Singapore	74	84
56	Slovakia	100	49
57	Slovenia	71	60
58	Spain	57	56
59	Suriname	85	40
60	Sweden	31	80
61	Switzerland	34	81
62	Taiwan	58	67
63	Thailand	64	34
64	Trinidad and Tobago	47	41
65	Turkey	66	34
66	U.S.A.	40	65
67	Uruguay	61	76
68	Venezuela	81	10
69	Vietnam	70	40

Note: PDI refers to Hofstede’s Power Distance Index, a country-level cultural indicator measuring the extent to which unequal distribution of power and hierarchical authority is accepted as legitimate. PDI values range approximately from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate stronger acceptance of hierarchy and centralized authority, and lower scores indicate preferences for equality, consultation, and participative decision-making. CPI refers to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, which measures perceived public-sector corruption as an indicator of institutional integrity. CPI scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), with higher values reflecting stronger transparency, accountability, and integrity conditions relevant to contestable and auditable decision-making environments.

Sources: compiled by the authors based on the data from Geerthofstede.com, n.d.; Transparency International, 2025.

Table 1 provides the empirical foundation for the subsequent analysis by presenting matched country-level values of PDI and CPI for the full sample ($N = 69$). On this basis, the following section proceeds to assess the distributional properties of both variables and to evaluate their statistical relationship using correlation, regression, and cluster analyses.

Normality was assessed using the one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors significance correction and Monte Carlo estimation (10,000 samples). For PDI ($N = 69$), the test statistic was $D = 0.070$ with asymptotic $p = 0.200$ and Monte Carlo $p = 0.539$ (99% CI: 0.526–0.551). For CPI 2024 ($N = 69$), $D = 0.095$ with asymptotic $p = 0.200$ and Monte Carlo $p = 0.125$ (99% CI: 0.116–0.133). Because both distributions do not deviate significantly from normality ($p > 0.05$), Pearson’s correlation coefficient is appropriate for testing linear association.

Pearson’s correlation confirms a strong negative association between PDI and CPI ($r = -0.663$, $p < 0.001$). Because higher PDI indicates greater acceptance of hierarchical asymmetry while higher CPI indicates lower perceived public-sector corruption, the negative sign means that countries with higher power distance tend to display weaker integrity conditions of the decision environment. Importantly, the result is not driven by a narrow subset of cases: the dataset includes both high-PDI countries with low CPI (e.g., Russia: PDI 93, CPI 22; Venezuela: PDI 81, CPI 10) and low-PDI countries with high CPI (e.g., Denmark: PDI 18, CPI 90; Finland: PDI 33, CPI 88), which is consistent with the observed strong negative linear relationship.

Correlation does not establish direction or causality; therefore, to complement the association test with a directional estimate consistent with H1, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was estimated with CPI as the dependent variable and PDI as the explanatory variable.

Table 2. Regression coefficients

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Standard error	β		
(Constant)	88.850	5.227	-	16.999	< 0.001
Power Distance Index (PDI)	-0.601	0.083	-0.663	-7.241	< 0.001

Note: dependent variable - Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

Source: calculated by the authors using IBM SPSS Statistics based on the data from Geerthofstede.com (n.d.) and Transparency International (2025).

The estimated regression equation is:

$$\text{CPI} = 88.850 - 0.601 \times \text{PDI} \quad (1)$$

Substantively, the regression results indicate a clear and statistically robust negative relationship between hierarchy acceptance and decision-environment integrity. As shown in Table 2 and Equation (1), the non-standardized coefficient for PDI is negative and highly significant ($B = -0.601$; $t = -7.241$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher power distance is systematically associated with lower CPI values, that is, weaker institutional conditions for transparent, contestable, and auditable decision-making. The standardized coefficient is also large ($\beta = -0.663$), confirming the strength of the association in standardized terms. The model explains a substantial proportion of cross-country variance ($R^2 = 0.439$), which is notable given the deliberately parsimonious one-predictor specification. Interpreting the slope, a one-point decrease in PDI is associated, on average, with a 0.601-point increase in CPI; equivalently, a reduction in hierarchy acceptance of approximately 1.66 PDI points corresponds to an average increase of one CPI point. In descriptive terms, this magnitude implies that even moderate cross-national differences in hierarchy acceptance are associated with non-trivial differences in integrity conditions of the decision environment, reinforcing the substantive relevance of power distance for decision-quality-related outcomes rather than indicating a marginal or purely statistical effect.

To classify countries simultaneously by PDI and CPI, a cluster analysis was conducted. The number of clusters was determined using the hierarchical agglomeration schedule (Table 3): the final merge is accompanied by a sharp increase in the agglomeration coefficient, indicating that combining the remaining clusters would substantially reduce within-cluster homogeneity. In the last steps, the coefficient rises from 2.896 to 6.252, which supports a two-cluster solution (i.e., retaining two clusters before the final merge).

Table 3. Agglomeration schedule (last steps) used to justify the number of clusters

Stage	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Coefficient
66	1	4	2.587
67	2	5	2.896
68	1	2	6.252

Source: calculated by the authors using IBM SPSS Statistics based on the data from Geerthofstede.com (n.d.) and Transparency International (2025).

After selecting $k = 2$, cluster centers and membership distribution were computed (Table 4).

Table 4. Final cluster centers for PDI and CPI

Variable	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Power Distance Index (PDI)	74	43
Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)	37	71

Note: Cluster 1 includes: Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Suriname, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Venezuela, Vietnam. Cluster 2 includes: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Rep, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Korea South, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA, Uruguay.

Source: calculated by the authors using IBM SPSS Statistics based on the data from Geerthofstede.com (n.d.) and Transparency International (2025).

The clustering yields two stable decision-environment profiles. Cluster 1 ($n = 36$; 52.2%) combines higher power distance with lower CPI scores (mean PDI ≈ 74 ; mean CPI ≈ 37), reflecting hierarchy-dominant contexts where integrity conditions for contestable and auditable decisions are comparatively weaker. Cluster 2 ($n = 33$; 47.8%) combines lower power distance with higher CPI scores (mean PDI ≈ 43 ; mean CPI ≈ 71), reflecting decision environments with stronger integrity conditions and greater procedural contestability.

The cluster solution confirms that the relationship between hierarchy acceptance and integrity conditions is not merely a statistical artifact but also produces an interpretable classification of country contexts. At the same time, the profiles are not reducible to a single geographic region. The high-PDI/lower-CPI profile includes substantial concentrations across South and Southeast Asia, much of Latin America, and several Eastern and Southern European cases, alongside selected Eurasian and Middle Eastern contexts. The low-PDI/higher-CPI profile concentrates in Northern and Western Europe and the Anglosphere and includes several high-income Asian economies.

The data also show that the association is systematic but not mechanically uniform across all cases. For example, some countries combine comparatively higher PDI with high CPI (e.g., Singapore: PDI 74, CPI 84; Hong Kong: PDI 68, CPI 74), indicating that stronger integrity conditions can coexist with higher hierarchy acceptance. Conversely, some mid-range PDI cases still fall into the lower-CPI profile, indicating that integrity conditions vary even among countries with comparable hierarchy scores. These patterns reinforce the empirical logic of using both dimensions jointly: PDI captures hierarchy acceptance, while CPI captures integrity conditions, and their combination yields profiles that better represent the diversity of cross-national decision environments than either indicator alone.

China and Latvia illustrate two distinct positions within the PDI–CPI space that are analytically relevant for understanding coordination dynamics in international projects. China combines a relatively high level of hierarchy acceptance (PDI = 80) with a moderate CPI score (43) (Table 1), placing it within the high-PDI/lower-CPI decision-environment profile (Table 4). This configuration implies that decision processes in Chinese project contexts are more likely to be authority-centred, with upward challenge and open contestation playing a weaker role unless explicitly institutionalised through formal procedures. Latvia, by contrast, exhibits a substantially lower PDI (44) alongside a higher CPI score (59) (Table 1), situating it closer to the low-PDI/higher-CPI profile (Table 4) characterised by stronger integrity and contestability conditions. In joint international projects, this asymmetry creates a structural interface problem rather than a bilateral “culture clash”: Latvian partners may implicitly expect decisions to be justified through transparent reasoning and open discussion, while Chinese partners may rely more on hierarchical closure and role-based authority. The empirical association identified in *epшы* Section suggests that, without compensatory governance mechanisms, such projects face a heightened risk of misaligned expectations about voice, escalation, and legitimate dissent. Consequently, effective China–Latvia project cooperation depends less on cultural convergence and more on explicit procedural design—such as formal review gates, documented option comparison, and protected channels for issue escalation – that can bridge differences in hierarchy acceptance while preserving decision quality under shared international project governance.

5. Discussion of results

Section 4 reports a consistent pattern across correlation, regression, and clustering: higher power distance is associated with weaker integrity conditions of the decision environment, operationalized by CPI. The discussion interprets this pattern in decision-quality terms, evaluates the proposed voice-based mechanism, and clarifies what the findings do and do not imply for cross-cultural project governance. The empirical results provide consistent support for H1 and indirect, mechanism-consistent support for H2, within the limits of the study's proxy-based and cross-sectional design.

H1 proposed that higher hierarchy acceptance, captured by PDI, is associated with weaker decision-quality-relevant outcomes, as approximated by the integrity conditions of the decision environment. This hypothesis is strongly supported by the evidence. Across the matched-country sample, PDI and CPI exhibit a strong negative Pearson association. The regression analysis further confirms this relationship in a directional specification: higher PDI is associated with significantly lower CPI scores, with the model explaining a substantial share of cross-country variance. The consistency of results across correlation, regression, and clustering indicates that the association is systematic rather than driven by outliers or narrow regional subsets. Substantively, this pattern supports the interpretation that greater acceptance of hierarchical asymmetry co-occurs with institutional environments in which transparency, accountability, and contestability of decisions are comparatively weaker—conditions that are directly relevant to the defensibility and robustness of project decisions under uncertainty.

H2 proposed that voice behavior constitutes the core mechanism linking power distance to decision quality, such that higher hierarchy acceptance constrains open challenge and upward communication, thereby weakening the informational basis and defensibility of decisions. While the study does not directly observe voice behavior at the project or organizational level, the empirical findings are consistent with this mechanism. CPI captures institutional conditions under which decisions are scrutinized, justified, and exposed to challenge; lower CPI values indicate environments where contestation and accountability are more difficult to sustain. The observed negative association between PDI and CPI therefore aligns with the expectation that higher hierarchy acceptance constrains voice and challenge capacity at scale. This interpretation is reinforced by the clustering results, which reveal two recurring decision-environment profiles combining hierarchy acceptance and integrity conditions, rather than a purely linear continuum. Importantly, the presence of countries with high PDI but relatively high CPI (e.g., Singapore, Hong Kong) suggests that the mechanism is conditional rather than deterministic: strong integrity conditions can coexist with higher hierarchy acceptance when compensatory governance arrangements are present.

Taken together, the findings support the hypothesized mechanism in a non-causal but analytically meaningful sense. The results do not claim that hierarchy acceptance directly causes lower decision quality, nor that cultural context mechanically determines project outcomes. Instead, they identify a robust vulnerability pattern: where hierarchy is more strongly accepted, decision quality becomes more dependent on explicit governance mechanisms that preserve voice, escalation, documentation, and independent review. This interpretation is consistent with prior micro-level research on voice and psychological safety and extends it to a macro-level, cross-national comparative context.

The substantive meaning of the negative association is that hierarchy acceptance tends to co-occur with institutional conditions where decision contestability is harder to sustain. Where authority asymmetry is more widely treated as legitimate, information is more likely to move upward selectively, disagreement is more likely to be expressed indirectly, and decisions are more likely to close through authority rather than through transparent comparison of alternatives. Under the article's decision-quality framing, this increases the probability of informational incompleteness and weaker traceability of justification (Alduais et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023).

At the same time, the results are not evidence of cultural determinism and do not establish causality. The CPI-based outcome is an institutional proxy capturing integrity conditions of the decision environment rather than the quality of any specific project-team choice. The contribution is therefore best read as an empirically visible

vulnerability pattern: when hierarchy acceptance is higher, decision quality becomes more exposed to informal influence and authority-based closure unless governance arrangements preserve contestability and evidence-based justification (Cantarelli, 2025; Sommer, 2024).

The article's mechanism is anchored in the idea that voice and challenge capacity determine how much relevant information enters the decision process and whether weak signals are surfaced early. Recent evidence indicates that, under ambiguous threats, failure to speak up allows problems to remain unreported and opportunities to be missed, directly weakening the informational basis of decisions (Park et al., 2024). Hierarchy acceptance shapes this channel by changing the perceived legitimacy and personal risk of upward voice: in higher power-distance settings, challenging assumptions can be interpreted as disloyalty or disrespect, making self-censorship rational even when risks are known.

The mechanism is further reinforced by research showing that voice behaviour depends on leader–subordinate fit and on power distance orientations within dyads and teams (Guzman & Fu, 2022; Toufighi et al., 2024). This matters for cross-border projects because “power distance differences” appear not only between countries, but within multinational teams where members import expectations about authority and acceptable challenge. In this interpretation, the observed PDI–CPI association is compatible with a governance-relevant pathway: hierarchy acceptance constrains voice, which reduces the completeness and defensibility of decision rationales unless compensatory practices are deliberately designed.

Clustering in the joint PDI–CPI space adds interpretive value by translating a single linear tendency into two recurring decision-environment profiles. The typology does not replace the regression result; it complements it by offering a classification logic that is easier to use when anticipating governance frictions at project initiation. In particular, the cluster membership patterns reported in Section 4 illustrate that countries can share broadly similar governance-relevant configurations even when they differ in region or development level.

For project governance, the typology is useful because risk often arises from profile mismatch rather than from a marginal change in a single index. When partners come from different profiles, teams may disagree not only on outcomes, but on what constitutes legitimate challenge, how decisions should be justified, and whether procedural review is “normal control” or a face-threatening intervention. This aligns with broader evidence that cultural diversity in project teams requires explicit governance alignment to prevent coordination frictions from becoming systemic (Amoah, 2023; Eyiah et al., 2025).

The results imply governance consequences that follow directly from the mechanism. First, in higher-hierarchy contexts, decision quality becomes more dependent on preserving voice and challenge capacity. Practically, this requires escalation designs that make upward issue-raising legitimate and low-cost for status-distant actors, because informal norms alone do not reliably surface weak signals (Park et al., 2024; Toufighi et al., 2024). Framed this way, protected voice can be understood not only as a compliance safeguard but also as an element of an agile management ecosystem that supports organizational competitiveness under uncertainty (Rožman et al., 2023).

Second, traceable justification becomes a compensatory control. Where disagreement is indirect, decision logs, explicit option comparison, and review gates are often the only durable means to keep decisions contestable over time. This is consistent with the information-sharing logic: decision quality deteriorates when informational completeness falls, and can be protected when processes force the inclusion and documentation of relevant input (Alduais et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Related evidence from cross-organizational emergency management suggests that standard operating procedures can strengthen coordination and accountability, but their effectiveness depends on practical adoption conditions and inter-organizational buy-in (Steen-Tveit et al., 2024).

Third, when partners come from different decision-environment profiles, governance design should be treated as an interface agreement. Teams can reduce authority-anchored closure by negotiating, at project start, what counts as acceptable challenge, how dissent is recorded, and how independent review is triggered—thereby

reducing the probability that disagreements become personal or status-coded rather than evidence-based (Guzman & Fu, 2022).

The findings are bounded by the study's proxy-based design. CPI captures perceived public-sector corruption and therefore reflects integrity conditions of decision environments, not project-level decision processes. The cross-sectional association may also embed omitted institutional and economic factors that correlate with both culture and integrity. Finally, using a single cultural predictor is a deliberate choice for parsimony and reproducibility, but it cannot represent the full multidimensionality of culture emphasized in the broader Hofstede-based tradition (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010; Jan et al., 2024).

6. Conclusions

This study tested whether cross-country differences in power distance are systematically associated with decision-environment integrity, used as a proxy for comparable conditions of decision quality in international projects. Using a matched-country dataset ($N = 69$), the analysis shows a strong negative Pearson association between PDI and CPI ($r = -0.663$, $p < 0.001$) and a statistically significant OLS slope ($CPI = 88.850 - 0.601 \times PDI$; $R^2 = 0.439$). In other words, higher hierarchy acceptance tends to co-occur with weaker integrity conditions in which decisions are expected to be justified, challenged, and audited.

The substantive value of this evidence is not a claim that “high-PDI countries make poor decisions”, but a comparative signal about vulnerability: where hierarchy is more accepted, the decision environment is more likely to exhibit weaker transparency and accountability conditions, and project decision quality may therefore become more dependent on compensatory governance design. The two-profile classification derived from PDI–CPI clustering further supports the idea that international projects frequently combine partners embedded in systematically different decision environments, which helps explain why the same governance routines produce uneven coordination frictions across countries.

At the same time, the proxy-based cross-sectional design imposes clear limits on inference: CPI captures institutional integrity conditions, not the quality of specific team decisions, and the analysis does not establish causality. Future research should therefore validate the proposed mechanism at the project level by combining cultural distance measures with direct indicators of voice, escalation effectiveness, alternative generation, documentation quality, and independent review. The next step is to extend the parsimonious model with additional institutional and socioeconomic controls, as well as multi-level designs that connect country context to project governance outcomes, while preserving transparency and reproducibility of the empirical procedure.

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