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Power Asymmetries: An Analysis of Gaps between Hierarchical Levels and Organizational Culture

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Abstract

Workers are calling for a new psychological contract in which power differences are less asymmetrical and underrepresented voices are heard. In this context, the present study identifies the gaps between the three organizational hierarchical levels (strategic, executive and operational) with a focus on power asymmetries. Employing the case studies methodology, Denison's (1990) instrument is applied to measure the four dimensions (Adaptability, Involvement, Mission and Consistency) of organizational culture at a supermarket located in northern Chile that is part of a leading chain regionally and nationally. Information was collected through 163 surveys and analyzed using nonparametric statistics. The results reveal a high correlation between hierarchal levels and the dimensions of organizational culture. However, in four particular sub-dimensions (empowerment, capability development, core values, and agreement), the operational level feels that the higher hierarchal levels impose their power. As well as affecting their motivation and commitment, this compels the lower-level workers to take actions--in which informal power plays a key role--to reduce asymmetries. In sum, the relationship explored in this study between organizational culture, hierarchal levels and power is one that future research should examine in greater depth.

Keywords: Hierarchical levels, organizational culture, Denison model, subcultures, retail industry, power.

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Introduction

Organizations of today face various challenges, including changes in the external environment, greater internal complexity, and stiffer competition, all of which requires a more effective use of resources. In this context, even though organizations have been gearing their planning toward responding more effectively to turbulent environments, they are often divided internally between two or more hierarchal levels (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Halevy, Chou, Galinsky, & Murnighan, 2012). Each level presents certain distinctive patterns of behavior, which are validated by the constituent workers. Meanwhile, though voices the disappearance of hierarchies has been predicted for decades--a reaction to intrusive control hampering workers' innovation and commitment, and a product of emerging social media and technologies that drive anti-hierarchies--they remain an important part of organizations and continue to impact their day-to-day effectiveness (Pfeffer, 2013).

In addition, organizational culture, which effects these hierarchical levels, is attracting increasing academic attention (Cújar Vertel, Ramos Paternina, Hernández Riaño, & López Pereira, 2013), primarily as a factor that positively affects an organization's performance or productivity (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2014; Martínez Avella, 2010; Terán Varela & Lorenzo Irlanda, 2011). This is important for Chile given the country's economic slowdown, ongoing since 2012, (OECD, 2016), and the effects this has on business competitiveness. However, amid an otherwise gloomy outlook, the retail industry has kept up its growth, albeit at a slower pace, and the supermarket format in Chile, and in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, retains clear supremacy in Latin America. (Nielsen, 2015)

In light of the above, Denison's (1990's) model proposes that organizations must strengthen their organizational culture, as represented through the following four cultural traits or dimensions: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Martínez Avella, 2010; K. Zeng & Luo, 2013). However, organizational structure--specifically, hierarchal levels--and organizational culture impact each other (Janićijević, 2013), and so must be properly interlinked for organizations to become more effective.

The purpose of this study is to identify prevailing gaps between the organizational hierarchies (strategic, executive, and operational) and organizational culture at a retail company in northern Chile, with a focus on power asymmetries. The study contributes to the theorization of the different hierarchical levels, each of which is key to organizations achieving their objectives (Horton, McClelland, & Griffin, 2014). Moreover, it seeks to demonstrate the importance of "silent power" within organizations, in that the operational level is increasingly empowered to take decisions that can affect their organizational commitment (Giraldo Marín, 2012), and thus avail of various strategies to make themselves heard and reduce power gaps between hierarchal levels (Clark, 2010). It also provides an insight into the retail industry, which is on the rise in Latin America, especially in Chile (Nielsen, 2015). Finally, it stresses the importance of organizational culture and subcultures, especially those borne of the different hierarchical levels (Hofstede, 2011), and of monitoring and aligning these subcultures systematically so as not to affect organizational performance.

The study uses the Denison Organizational Culture Survey model (Denison & Neale, 1996), adapted to the Spanish language by Bonavia, Prado, and Barberá (2009), to analyze power, organizational culture, and the discrepancies between hierarchical levels. Denison's model contains four dimensions: involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission, measured through 60 items distributed across twelve sub-dimensions. To analyze the information collected, nonparametric tests are employed.

This article is divided into five parts. The first presents a framework of reference that addresses aspects of organizational hierarchy, power, organizational culture, and the Denison model; the second describes the methodology; the third contextualizes the case; the fourth presents and discusses the results; and the fifth and final part sets down the most relevant results of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational hierarchy and power

Human society and complex social systems, organizations included, have always structured themselves as hierarchical social groups (Sidanius, Pratto, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004). However, in recent times the conception of new organizational forms, such as virtual companies, has prompted a decline in organizational structuring around traditional hierarchies (Hüther & Krücken, 2013).

In a formal hierarchy, the roles and positions of members are clearly defined, and the social relations between members are legitimized. (Zeitlin, 1974) It is important to stress that power held at upper hierarchical levels generates counter-power in subordinates, though the structure and strength of this counter-power varies depending on whether it is formal or informal (Hüther & Krücken, 2013). That said, forms of leadership have been changing, and present-day administrators are characterized not by "commanding" but by "providing guidance", while workers do not "obey rules" but "engage proactively with company policies" (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011).

There are two strands of theory that not only contribute to understanding power in organizations, but serve to empower lower hierarchical levels. The first refers to psychological theories, which establish that power is localized to individuals who are prepared to do anything to achieve their objectives (Clark, 2010; Spreitzer, 1995). The tactics used include developing relationships with key figures, as well as identifying and exploiting the structural breaks that occur in the policies and procedures developed by organizations, among others.

The second is related to post-structuralism, and challenges classical organizational theories by arguing that not only is power distributed from the top down, but it can also flow laterally or from the bottom up (Clark, 2010; Foucault, 1980). Power can be acquired through any number of workplace situations, such as team meetings, coffee with friends, business lunches, and so on. These theories assume that each individual possesses bargaining power, regardless of their position within an organization.

Organizational culture

The conceptualization of organizational culture has evolved over the years; the earliest researchers adopted an anthropological perspective, giving way to a more nomothetic approach, followed by a historical culture versus climate debate and, most recently, a more eclectic focus. (Denison et al., 2014) Sackmann (2011) Have identified 45 studies of organizational culture between 2000 and 2009, showing that the concept remains valid. For the purposes of this study, organizational culture is understood as the combination of values, beliefs, symbols and models of behavior that regulate workers' behavior (Sanavi, Robati, & Sanavi, 2016).

In recent years, there have been numerous studies on organizational culture, focusing on a range of themes. For instance, Choo (2013) assesses the impact of information on organizational culture and organizational effectiveness; Carrillo (2013) and Cújar Vertel et al. (2013) focus on how the methods used to measure organizational culture have evolved; Glisson (2015) studies the relationship between organizational culture and climate; Martínez-León, Olmedo-Cifuentes, and Ramón-Llorens (2018) analyze the impact of organizational culture on career satisfaction; Janićijević (2013) explores the effects of organizational culture on structure; Ahmad (2012), Awadh and Alyahya (2013) and Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, and Shabbir (2012) examine the relationships between organizational culture and performance; and Moskovich and Achouch (2017) look into the impact that family business culture has on the relationship between owners and employees. However, there remain many aspects still to be investigated, not least the identification of new constructs that impact organizational culture (Cújar Vertel et al., 2013).

Organizational culture, organizational hierarchy and power

Organizational culture affects organizational structure--which encompasses the organizational hierarchies--and vice versa (Janićijević, 2013); in turn, both affect workers' behavior. Organizational culture impacts organizational structure by forming the interpretative schemes of top management, who select a suitable organizational structure model (James, James, & Ashe, 1990) in which each of the hierarchal levels possesses its own subculture (Hofstede, 1998) and degrees of power.

Hüther and Krücken (2013) argue that the approaches of organizational culture and ideology focus on the shaping of values and attitudes rather than the exercise of power in decision-making. In other words, values and attitudes are key to molding organizational culture, and power must adapt to the characteristics of each organization.

The literature review points to certain constructs associated with hierarchal levels that have a positive or negative impact on organizational effectiveness. There are various authors who argue that the effect is positive. For instance, Jahn and Black (2017) stress the importance of communication for supervisors to promote an affective climate that helps subordinates express their points of view without fear of reprisals; according to Hüther and Krücken (2013), power has a functional effect--through the different organizational levels--only if subordinates perceive that their superiors use it to sanction negatively or incentivize positively; for Sigler and Pearson (2000), empowerment helps to reduce power

gaps between supervisors and workers, as it allows each worker to feel equally valued by the organization; in turn, Vărzaru and Jolivet (2011) observe the existence of other factors that affect organizational effectiveness, such as greater worker autonomy, a new division of labor, and fewer formal mechanisms of control.

For Horton et al. (2014), workers on the same hierarchical level share values, expectations and interests that condition their behavior in relation to the day-to-day tasks they perform. Along similar lines, Anderson and Brown (2010), Parida and Kumar (2009), and Ronay, Greenaway, Anicich and Galinsky (2012) highlight the relevance of hierarchical levels for an organization to be competitive.

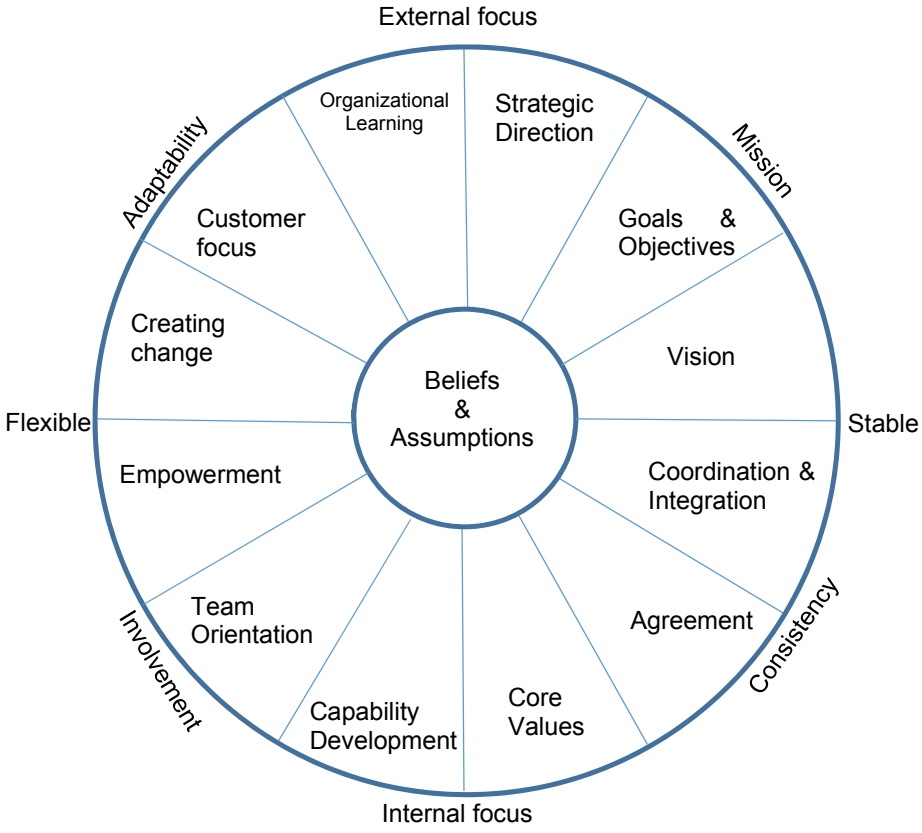
But despite these advances, few studies have analyzed the relationship between hierarchical levels, power and organizational culture (Kokina & Ostrovska, 2014; Zhou, Bundorf, Le Chang, Huang, & Xue, 2011). This is a gap that needs to be addressed, considering two important aspects that affect today's firms. First, workers are increasingly empowered in decision-making processes (Giraldo Marín, 2012); in particular, workers at the operational levels identify with their functional workgroups (Horton et al., 2014). Second, and relatedly, organizational culture needs to be monitored and aligned with subcultures (Hofstede, 1998) to prevent, for instance, decision-making that benefits a particular hierarchical level to the detriment of organizational effectiveness.

Denison's organizational culture model

As Cújar Vertel et al. (2013) have noted, several authors, such as Allaire and Firsirotu (1984), Hofstede (1998), Schein (2010), and Martínez Avella (2010), have focused on analyzing and measuring organizational culture by way of a range of instruments. Denison proposes a model based on classifications of organizational culture (Denison & Mishra, 1995) that focuses on the same types of cultural orientation proposed by Cameron and Quinn (2011): namely, flexibility versus stability and internal focus versus external focus (Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez, & Sanz-Valle, 2016). Denison's model is one of the most widely used in studies of this area. (Bonavia et al., 2009; Denison et al., 2014; K. Zeng & Luo, 2013)

Denison (1990) argue that organizational culture can be measured through four dimensions that are structured as a matrix, in which the dimensions of Involvement and Consistency are oriented toward internal integration, while Mission and Adaptability are oriented towards external adaptation. They also find that Mission and Consistency are oriented toward stability, whereas Adaptability and Involvement are oriented toward Flexibility (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Elements of the Denison model



Source: Denison Model https://www.denisonconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/introduction-to-the-denison-model.pdf

Next, each of the four dimensions will be described:

Involvement

Productive organizations empower their members, are organized into teams, and develop human capabilities across all levels. Regardless of the hierarchal level to which a worker belongs, they will demonstrate their commitment through the various activities they carry out in the organization, strengthening teamwork and promoting attainment of the organizational objective (Cruz Feria, 2005; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Martínez Avella, 2010).

Consistency

Productive organizations are consistent when objectives are properly integrated. The behavior of the individuals who comprise an organization is marked by a set of values that allow leaders and followers to make agreements, even when there are diverging opinions. Organizations with a strong culture have a considerable influence on people's behavior, whereby coordination & integration, agreements, and core values are the variables that

influence the degrees of consistency that an organization achieves (that is, the sub-dimensions) (Denison & Neale, 1996; Jofré, 2002; Martínez Avella, 2010).

Adaptability

For an organization to be productive, it must have internal integration and external organization. An organization that lacks the capacity to adapt to change will be unlikely to survive in its environment. Adaptive organizations assume risks, learn from mistakes, and introduce changes when required. The factors, or sub-dimensions, that contribute to adaptability are creating change, customer focus, and organizational learning (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Martínez Avella, 2010).

Mission

The mission represents a firm's reason for being. Successful organizations have a specific purpose and direction that define the strategic objectives for achieving organizational goals, as well as an evident vision of how they want to be in the future. Productive organizations have a clear direction, provided they do not change their primary mission. Culture plays an important role in supporting organizational vision (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Fey & Denison, 2003; Martínez Avella, 2010).

This model, through its four dimensions, forms the basis for measuring the organizational culture of the firm studied, and conducting an analysis of gaps between hierarchical levels.

Methodology

This is a deductive case study (Yin, 2017) in which the units of analysis are the hierarchical levels (strategic, executive, and operational) of a retail company (specifically, a supermarket) located in northern Chile. To identify the prevailing gaps between the hierarchical levels and the culture of the organization, the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (cited in (Denison & Neale, 1996)) was used as a data collection instrument. This instrument was chosen for its adaptability and applicability to other sectors and industries, thus assuring comparability; for its large number of cultural factors in comparison with other scales (Bonavia et al., 2009; K. Zeng & Luo, 2013); and for a construction that favors clear and concise data collection (Denison et al., 2014; Gómez Roldán & Ricardo Bray, 2012; Martínez Avella, 2010). All of these characteristics allow identification of the gaps between optimal performance (Y. Zeng, Jin, Guo, & Zhang, 2015) in terms of the three typical hierarchical levels within the business environment and, specifically, within the organization studied here.

As we have noted, the Denison Organizational Culture Survey is composed of four dimensions: Involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. In turn these are divided into twelve sub-dimensions: Empowerment, team orientation, capability development, coordination & integration, agreement, core values, creating change, customer focus, organizational learning, strategic direction & intent, goals & objectives, and vision. The instrument contains 60 items, distributed across the twelve sub-dimensions, to which respondents answered on a Likert scale ranging from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree).

The survey was applied to a sample of 163 of the supermarket's workers, of whom seven pertain to the strategic level, 26 to the executive level, and 130 to the operational level. These workers completed the survey in-person in November 2016. The sample amounts to 39% of the total supermarket workforce.

Characterization of the case study

The retail industry is currently growing in Latin America, despite navigating stormy seas; it represents around 70 percent of sales in Puerto Rico, Chile, and Brazil, followed by Mexico and Central America, where it has a share of some 55 percent (Nielsen, 2015). The industry is constantly innovating and is focusing its sales strategies on its largest consumers: baby boomers and millennials.

As noted, the study was conducted in a supermarket located in northern Chile. It is part of a chain that occupies second place in the Chilean retail industry, and which also has a presence in Argentina. The chain opened its first supermarket in 1976 and currently has around 50 stores throughout the country. It employs more than 17,000 people, of whom 60 percent are women.

The supermarket under study has a payroll of 415 employees, of whom four percent correspond to the strategic level, 16 percent to the executive level, and 80 percent to the operational level. Of this total, 80 percent are women. Of the sample of 163, more than 70 percent are 32 years old or over, and, in turn, approximately 40 are older than 40.

Instrument reliability and validity

To calculate the reliability of the instrument, two tests are applied: one to measure internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and another to measure composite reliability. For both cases, the results are above 0.70, which demonstrates that the instrument used is reliable (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016; Hernandez Sampiere, Fernandez Colladi, & Baptista, 2014). In addition, average variance extracted (AVE) is used to determine the validity of the instrument; results in excess of 0.5 are required, which means that 50 percent or more of the variance of the indicator variables must be explained. If the AVE is less than 0.5, then the measurement error is higher than the variance of the indicator explained by its latent variable, demonstrating a lack of convergent validity (Hair Jr et al., 2016). In this case, all dimensions have values greater than 0.5, evidencing the validity of the instrument. All of the values of convergent validity and reliability are presented in Table 1. Moreover, the correlation and AVE values obtained through the SmartPLS 3 statistical software package demonstrate that the square roots of the AVE (values in bold on the diagonal; see Table 2) are higher than the correlation between constructs (values below the diagonal). This implies that all of the latent variables analyzed achieve discriminant validity. Finally, the information collected in the present study is analyzed through nonparametric statistical testing, by way of the Kruskal-Wallis (test H) and Dunn tests. Two software packages are used to perform the analysis: Stata® and R®.

Table 1: **Reliability and convergent validity of the dimensions**

Dimensions of Organizational Culture	A > 0.70	CC > 0.70 and < 0.95	AVE > 0.50
INVOLVEMENT			
Empowerment (EM)	0.745	0.840	0.568
Team Orientation (TO)	0.786	0.862	0.610
Capability Development (CD)	0.703	0.818	0.532
CONSISTENCY			
Core Values (CV)	0.704	0.835	0.627
Agreement (AG)	0.769	0.852	0.591
Coordination & Integration (CI)	0.738	0.836	0.561
ADAPTABILITY			
Creating Change (CC)	0.754	0.845	0.577
Customer Focus (CUF)	0.737	0.836	0.560
Organizational Learning (OL)	0.626*	0.800	0.573
MISSION			
Strategic Direction & Purpose (CD)	0.825	0.885	0.659
Goals & Objectives (GO)	0.853	0.900	0.694
Vision (VI)	0.799	0.870	0.626

Note A = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted
*Value acceptable for exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2016)

Table 2 **Discriminant validity by dimension**

INVOLVEMENT			
	CD	EM	TO
CD	**0.729**		
EM	0.698	**0.754**	
TO	0.680	0.702	**0.781**
CONSISTENCY			
	AG	CI	CV
AG	**0.768**		
CI	0.590	**0.749**	
CV	0.602	0.517	**0.792**
ADAPTABILITY			
	OL	CC	CUO
OL	**0.757**		
CC	0.452	**0.760**	
CUF	0.550	0.396	**0.749**
MISSION			
	CD	GO	VI
CD	**0.812**		
GO	0.706	**0.833**	
VI	0.620	0.747	**0.791**

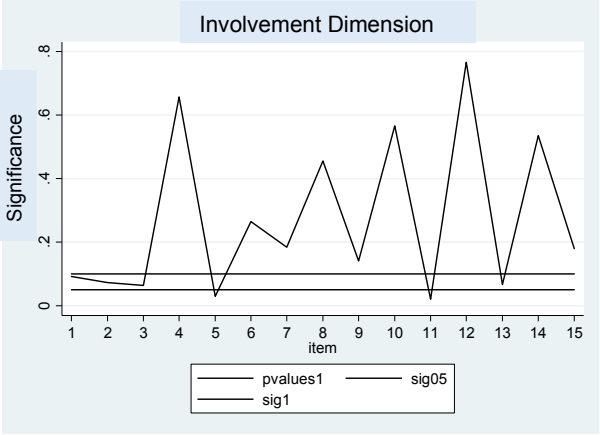
Note: The bold values on the diagonal are the square root of the AVE values; the values below the diagonal are the correlations.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the sample

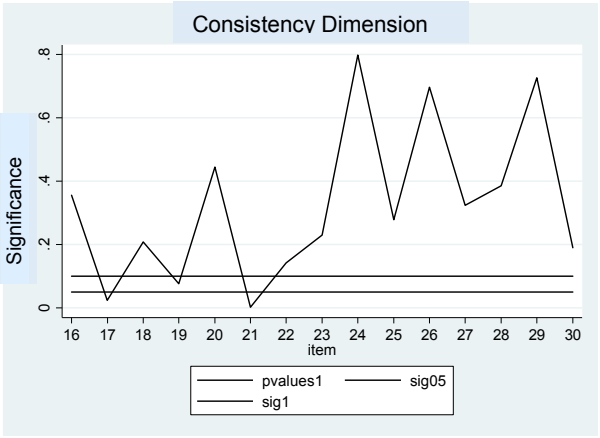
To determine whether there are significant differences across the three hierarchical levels in terms of the four dimensions analyzed (involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission), it must first be recalled that each dimension contains three sub-dimensions, each of which are in turn composed of five items. This means that fifteen items are captured at the moment each dimension is estimated. The Kruskal-Wallis H test is performed for each category, with a margin of error of five percent. This test is a non-parametric alternative to one-way ANOVA. The H test allows evaluation of whether or not there is difference between the groups when the variable of comparison is ordinal, as in this case (Weaver, Morales, Dunn, Godde, & Weaver, 2017). The results are shown in figures 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Figure 2 Involvement Dimension



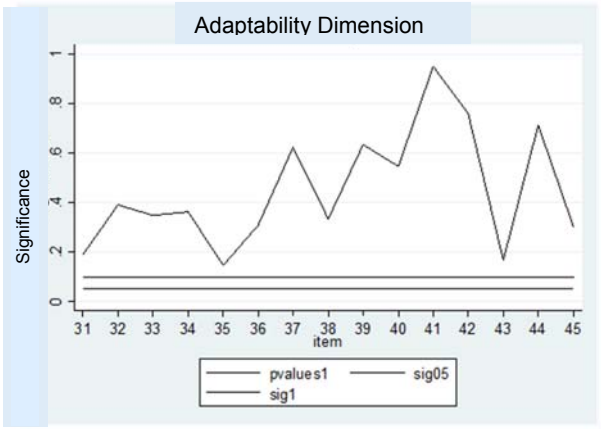
Source: Compiled by authors based on own calculations

Figure 3: Consistency Dimension



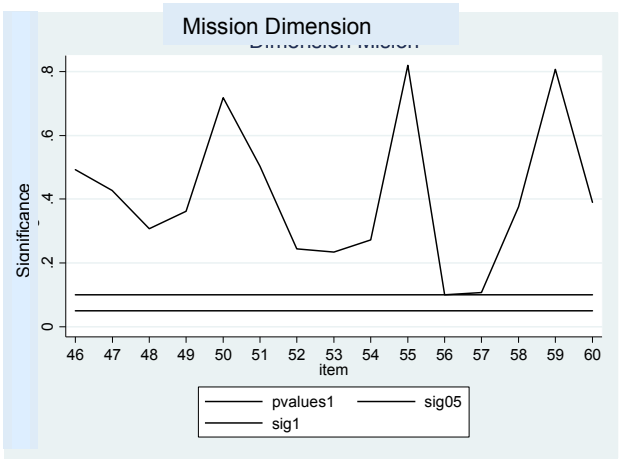
Source: Compiled by authors based on own calculations

Figure 4: Adaptability Dimension



Source: Compiled by authors based on own calculations

Figura 5: Mission Dimension



Source: Compiled by authors based on own calculations

To understand the graphs, it should be noted that the fifteen items that comprise a dimension are positioned on the horizontal axis of each one. The vertical axis contains the level of significance of the test based on the criteria that there are no differences between groups. To exemplify and clarify the results, two horizontal lines are proposed at a significance level of five and ten percent. Each time the test reports a “p” value below these values, it shows that there are in fact differences between the groups, but not the order of these differences between hierarchies.

Reviewing the above-mentioned graphs, it can be noted that there are only significant between-group differences for items 5, 11, 17 and 21 corresponding to the sub-dimensions of empowerment, capability development (from the involvement dimension), core values, and agreement (from the consistency dimension). This is indicative of the consistency of this survey; in 56 out of 60 items there is consistency between the three hierarchical levels in terms of cultural organization. After determining the items for which there are significant between-group differences, the Dunn test is performed for between-group comparison (non-parametric alternative to the post-hoc test) in order to identify which of the groups differ (Dagnino, 2014). The results are shown in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

The columns and rows of Table 3 show each of the hierarchies. The overlapping cells show the difference in the ranking between the column and the row. That is, a negative difference implies that the values in the row are greater than those in the column (in ordinal terms). Then, based on each of these differences, the “p” value is shown. As with the previous graphs, differences below five percent are defined as significant. For Item 5, which contains the statement “business planning is ongoing and involves everyone in the process to some degree”, a “p” value of below 0.05 is observed for differences between the operational and strategic levels. This may be because workers at the operational level feel that they are not considered in the planning of their work, while those at the strategic level believe that all levels are taken into account. Finally, it is important that workers at all levels have the freedom to plan their work (Krywkow & Hare, 2008) and, as a result, feel motivated and committed to the organization.

Table 3: **Dunn's test for Item 5**

Column Mean – Row Mean	Operational	Executive
Executive	-2.043817	
	0.0615	
Strategic	-2,152287	-0.939927
	0.0471	0.5285

For Item 11, which contains the statement “authority is delegated so that people can act on their own”, there are only significant differences between the executive and operational levels. Analysis of the discrepancy between both hierarchical levels reveals that workers

on the operational level do not feel empowered to make decisions, which could affect their levels of motivation and organizational commitment (Giraldo Marín, 2012).

Table 4: **Dunn's test for Item 11**

Column Mean – Row Mean	Operational	Executive
Executive	-2.161477	
	0.046	
Strategic	-2.124811	-0.845644
	0.0504	0.5966

For Item 17, which contains the statement "there is a characteristic management style and a distinct set of management practices", significant differences were only verified between the executive and operational levels. This may be because those at the operational level do not feel that there is a management style with a distinct set of practices, but, conversely, that the style is authoritarian and centralized, which affects workers' motivation and commitment (Contreras Torres & Castro Ríos, 2013).

Table 5: **Dunn's test for Item 17**

Column Mean – Row Mean	Operational	Executive
Executive	-2.646668	
	0.0122	
Strategic	-1.320203	-0.132328
	0.2802	1

For Item 21, "when disagreements occur, we work hard to achieve 'win-win' solutions", there are significant differences between the executive and operational levels, as well as between the executive and strategic levels. The results show that far from any pursuit of win-win solutions, workers at the operational level perceive that the victories are always achieved by the higher levels (Calderón Moncloa & Viardot, 2009), and this affects their level of commitment and motivation. However, here too there is a difference between the executive and strategic levels, which is striking considering that both levels ought to be aligned. However, it could be that the strategic level imposes its authority upon the executive level using a style that is not necessarily appropriate, making executive-level workers feel that they lose out when disagreements arise. In other words, what occurs are dysfunctional conflicts (Robbins, Judge, & Enríquez Brito, 2013) that have a negative impact on the levels of lower authority (Calderón Moncloa & Viardot, 2009).

Table 6: **Dunn's test for Item 21**

Column Mean – Row Mean	Operational	Executive
Executive	-3.512699	
	0.0007	
Strategic	0.805507	2.50623
	0.6308	0.0183

Overall, these results similar to those of a study with a sample of 3,437 employees who work at different types of hospital in China (Zhou et al., 2011). For instance, hospital managers assigned the highest values to the respective dimensions associated with organizational culture, just like the strategic level at the supermarket studied here. Likewise, in a study of 63 workers at a municipality in Latvia, the results point to vertical control and respect for authority (Kokina & Ostrovska, 2014); this attests to very marked gaps between the levels of power, as witnessed in the present study.

The results of both this and previous studies confirm the power gaps between hierarchical levels. But these gaps are particularly pronounced in the supermarket sector, where power is concentrated at the strategic levels (Abal Medina, 2007) and tasks at the operational level are highly structured, limiting decision-making prospects and creating an incentive for these workers to form and interact within functional workgroups (Horton et al., 2014).

Finally, drawing on the assertion that power generates counter-power (Hüther & Krücken, 2013) and the postulates of psychological theories and post-structuralism (Clark, 2010), lower hierarchical levels have adopted various strategies to obtain power and thus challenge not only superior levels, but organizational cultures as well. The voices of this "silent power" are being increasingly heard due to the pressure they exercise both within organizations and in society, fostering a new psychological contract that reduces power gaps. Silent power refers to the various strategies that workers use to increase their power, such as creating networks, managing structures and informal communication channels (Marín, 2012), and strengthening high-value teams through commitment (Venegas, 2009), among others, to reduce the gaps regarded by traditional theories as "normal" (Mariño-Arévalo, 2014).

As an example of this, in much of Latin America and elsewhere, society is taking to the streets to fight for decent work (Bolton, 2007; ILO, 2016) in the face of corrupt governments and employers who have increased their wealth at the cost of an increasingly unstable workforce.

Conclusions

The present study identifies the gaps between the three organizational hierarchical levels (strategic, executive, and operational) and the organizational culture at a retail company in Chile, with a focus on asymmetries of power. To this end, Denison's theoretical model and survey (Denison, 1990) are used to measure each dimension, with reference to psychological and post-structural theories of power (Clark, 2010).

The results show a high level of concordance between the hierarchical levels and organizational culture, validated by the predominant position of the supermarket under study. However, there are four items in which there are significant differences between hierarchical levels: two related to the empowerment and capability development sub-dimensions, associated with the involvement dimension; and two related to the core values and agreement sub-dimensions, associated with the consistency dimension. The results corresponding to these items indicate that workers on the operational level believe

their opinions are not taken into account, causing them to feel, in some cases, that certain decisions are imposed on them, affecting their motivation and performance.

The results of this study also show that organizations must, based on their cultural traits, consider what they can do to reduce the power asymmetries at the hierarchical levels; possible approaches include empowerment of the operational level as well as creation of communication channels to encourage workers to share their opinions, which is important given the valuable information they acquire through their daily interactions with customers.

This study urges us not to regard power gaps as something normal, in that new generations demand greater participation in decision-making and, thus, a new psychological contract that reconfigures the manager-worker relationship, empowering the latter through silent power and thus reducing power gaps.

The methodology used in this study can be replicated in other studies. However, the data analyzed is only valid for the supermarket that participated in this one.

One limitation of the study concerns the low number of observations at the strategic level. As such, future studies should apply the instrument to a group of firms from the same industry in order to obtain, at the aggregate level, a reasonable number of observations that allow for a more consistent analysis at this level. In addition, the items for which there is an inverse response in the instrument should be reviewed to determine whether they actually contribute to its consistency, since the results of the statistical analysis show certain inconsistencies.

Future studies could also apply this instrument to organizations in other industries that are notable for their clear distinction between hierarchical levels and their vast power asymmetries, such as mining, construction, and services. The silent power movement is here to stay, and if organizations wish to remain competitive, they must do so in more equitable conditions in which everyone is heard and, as a consequence, the gaps between managers and employees is closed.

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