

# Power Distance, Communication, and Safety: A Study on Aircraft Maintenance Workers <sup>(\*)</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study examines the influence of organizational power distance on communication, voice behavior, and safety-related decisions in the aviation maintenance sector. In this high-risk field, precision and collaboration are critical. Using a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 aircraft maintenance technicians from four companies. Thematic analysis identified four main categories: social withdrawal, acquiescence to power, instrumental use of power, and sensitivity to others' judgments, which refers to the tendency of employees to consider the opinions and reactions of their peers and superiors before speaking up or making decisions. Our findings reveal a significant aspect of the aviation maintenance sector. While many employees are willing to speak up when they disagree with the majority, some—especially younger and less experienced technicians—prefer to remain silent due to hierarchical pressures and fear of retaliation. This behavior contributes to organizational silence, which may hinder the detection of safety threats. Participants also strongly opposed favoritism, linking it to the unethical instrumental use of power. While some viewed strict leadership as necessary for enforcing discipline, others emphasized the importance of respectful, human-centered management. The study underscores the urgent need for participatory management practices in the aviation maintenance sector. Power distance is not static but shaped by organizational culture, self-confidence, seniority, and perceived psychological safety. To reduce risks and promote safety, organizations must prioritize the development of participatory management practices, transparent communication structures, and environments that support speaking up without fear. These findings contribute to broader discussions on organizational culture and safety in high-stakes industries like aviation.*

**Keywords:** Aviation, Organizational Power Distance, Communication, Safety Culture, Aircraft Maintenance Technicians

## Original Research Article

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# Güç Mesafesi, İletişim ve Emniyet: Uçak Bakım Personeli Üzerine Bir Araştırma (\*)

Özlem ÇAPAN ÖZEREN (\*\*)

## Öz

Bu çalışma, havacılık bakım sektöründe örgütsel güç mesafesinin iletişim, çalışanların görüş bildirme ve fikir paylaşımı konusundaki davranışları (literatürde "voice behavior" olarak geçen) ve emniyetle ilgili kararlar üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Hassasiyet ve iş birliğinin kritik olduğu bu yüksek riskli alanda, nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmış ve dört farklı şirkette görev yapan 13 uçak bakım teknisyeniyle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Tematik analiz sonucunda dört ana kategori belirlenmiştir: sosyal geri çekilme, güce razı olma, gücün araçsal kullanımı ve başkalarının yargılarına duyarlılık. Bu son tema, çalışanların fikirlerini ifade etmeden veya karar almadan önce çevrelerindeki kişilerin ve üstlerinin görüşlerini ve tepkilerini dikkate alma eğilimini ifade etmektedir. Bulgularımız, havacılık bakım sektörüne özgü önemli bir noktayı ortaya koymaktadır. Katılımcıların bir kısmı çoğunlukla aynı fikirde olmadıklarında görüşlerini dile getirmeye istekli olsalar da, özellikle genç ve deneyimsiz teknisyenler, hiyerarşik baskılar ve misilleme korkusu nedeniyle sessiz kalmayı tercih etmektedir. Bu durum, emniyet risklerinin fark edilmesini engelleyebilecek örgütsel sessizliğe yol açmaktadır. Katılımcılar ayrıca kayırmacılığa güçlü biçimde karşı çıkmakta ve bunu, gücün etik dışı araçsal kullanımının bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirmektedir. Bazı çalışanlar katı liderliği disiplin sağlamak açısından gerekli görürken, diğerleri saygılı ve insan odaklı bir yönetim tarzının önemini vurgulamıştır. Çalışma, havacılık bakım sektöründe katılımcı yönetim uygulamalarının gerekliliğine dikkat çekmektedir. Güç mesafesi durağan bir yapı değildir; örgüt kültürü, özgüven, kıdem ve algılanan psikolojik güvenlik gibi unsurlar tarafından şekillenmektedir. Emniyeti artırmak ve riskleri azaltmak için, örgütlerin şeffaf iletişim yapıları, korkusuzca görüş ifade etme ortamları ve katılımcı yönetim anlayışlarını önceliklendirmeleri gerekmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, havacılık gibi yüksek riskli sektörlerde örgüt kültürü ve emniyet üzerine yürütülen literatüre anlamlı katkılar sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Havacılık, Örgütsel Güç Mesafesi, İletişim, Emniyet Kültürü, Uçak Bakım Teknisyenleri

## Özgün Araştırma Makalesi

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## Introduction

Current research has increasingly focused on the non-technical aspects of aviation accidents, with numerous studies conducted on human factors,<sup>1</sup> which systematically explore the interaction and optimization between individuals, technology, and organizations.<sup>2</sup> The factors contributing to accidents in aviation are closely related to both individuals and organizations.<sup>3</sup> New safety approaches view human error as the outcome of underlying systemic issues,<sup>4</sup> where organization-wide behaviors or structural flaws can predispose individuals to make mistakes.<sup>5</sup> As a result, cultural factors that may expose human errors leading to accidents have become a key focus of research.<sup>6</sup> This shift in perspective has led researchers to examine not only individual actions but also the broader cultural environments that shape those actions. The potential impact of this research on improving aviation safety is significant, and it is now understood that employees are influenced by the culture they belong to and tend to act by that culture's values.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vala Lale Tüzüner, "Pilotlarda Ekip Kaynak Yönetimi Becerileri" In *Havacılık Psikolojisi: Kavramlar, Araştırmalar, Uygulamalar*, edited by Pınar Ünsal and Seda Çeken, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 137.

<sup>2</sup> J. Matthew Beaubien and David P. Baker, "A Review of Selected Aviation Human Factors Taxonomies, Accident/Incident Reporting Systems and Data Collection Tools." *International Journal of Applied Aviation Studies* 2, no: 2 (2002): 12; Scott Shappell et al., "Human Error and Commercial Aviation Accidents: An Analysis Using the Human Factors Analysis and Classification System." *Human Factors* 49 no:2 (2007): 227. <https://doi.org/10.1518/001872007X312469>; Awatef Ergai et al., "Assessment of the Human Factors Analysis and Classification System (HFACS): Intra-Rater and Inter-Rater Reliability." *Safety Science* 82 (2016): 393; Damien Kelly and Marina Efthymiou, "An Analysis of Human Factors in Fifty Controlled Flight into Terrain Aviation Accidents from 2007 to 2017" *Journal of Safety Research* 69 (2019): 155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2019.03.009>

<sup>3</sup> Tarık Güneş, Uğur Turhan, and Birsan Açikel. "Hava Aracı Bakım Teknisyenlerinin Nitelikleri ve Yetkinliklerinin Önemi." In *Havacılık Psikolojisi: Kavramlar, Araştırmalar, Uygulamalar*, edited by Pınar Ünsal and Seda Çeken, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 532.

<sup>4</sup> Nektarios Karanikas, "Correlation of Changes in the Employment Costs and Average Task Load with Rates of Accidents Attributed to Human Error" *Aviation Psychology and Applied Human Factors* 5, no. 2 (2015): 107. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2192-0923/a000083>

<sup>5</sup> James Reason, "Achieving a Safe Culture: Theory and Practice" *Work & Stress* 12 (1998): 297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678379808256868>

<sup>6</sup> Ashleigh Merritt and Daniel Maurino, "Cross-Cultural Factors in Aviation Safety." In *Cultural Ergonomics (Advances in Human Performance and Cognitive Engineering Research, Vol. 4)*, edited by Michael Kaplan, (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 147. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3601\(03\)04005-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3601(03)04005-0); Wen-Chin Li et al., "The Differences of Aviation Human Factors between Individualism and Collectivism Culture" In *Human-Computer Interaction. Interacting in Various Application Domains: 13th International Conference, HCI International 2009, San Diego, CA, USA, July 19-24, 2009, Proceedings, Part IV*, edited by Julie A. Jacko (Berlin Heidelberg: Springer, 2009), 723. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-02583-9\\_78](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-02583-9_78); Barry Strauch, "Can Cultural Differences Lead to Accidents? Team Cultural Differences and Sociotechnical System Operations," *Human Factors* 52, no. 2 (2010): 246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720810362238>.

<sup>7</sup> Duygu Anuk, "Pilot Seçiminde Psikolojik Özelliklerin Önemi ve Değerlendirilme Yöntemleri." In *Havacılık Psikolojisi: Kavramlar, Araştırmalar, Uygulamalar*, edited by Pelin Ünsal and Seda Çeken (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 128.

Employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace are shaped by a three-layered cultural model.<sup>8</sup> The first layer is national culture, which individuals are born into and which tends to resist change. The second layer is the organizational culture, which embodies the organization's core values, policies, and operational practices. These components form the foundation of the safety culture and management systems. The third layer is professional culture, which encompasses the norms, values, and beliefs learned through professional training and shared practices.<sup>9</sup> Organizational culture, which plays a critical role in shaping employee behavior, is also a significant determinant of a hazardous environment that may lead to accidents.<sup>10</sup>

## 1. Human Factors, Cultural Dimensions, and Power Distance

According to ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization), organizations promote effective safety practices by fostering a safety culture that facilitates safety reporting.<sup>11</sup> Safety culture -an extension of organizational culture- reflects the values and communication practices that shape how safety is perceived and managed. In essence, safety involves the prevention of errors and violations that could result in accidents, making it an ongoing and active component of an organization's operations. Reason<sup>12</sup> argues that safety culture consists of five essential characteristics,<sup>13</sup> the first of which is reporting culture. A reporting culture refers to an environment where employees can openly express their concerns regarding flight safety without fear of being questioned or blamed. It also entails an atmosphere of trust, where employees feel comfortable "confessing" their mistakes.<sup>14</sup> Organizations that foster a robust safety culture prioritize feedback on all incidents, emphasizing investigating underlying causes of unsafe actions rather than penalizing unintentional errors. In this context, fostering an environment of open and effective communication is essential for building and maintaining a strong safety culture within the organization.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Helmreich and Ashleigh C. Merritt, *Culture at Work in Aviation and Medicine: National, Organizational, and Professional Influences* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 1998), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Helmreich and Merritt, *Culture at Work in Aviation and Medicine: National, Organizational, and Professional Influences*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Özlem Çapan Özeren, Şener Odabaşoğlu, and Güray Tezer, "Investigation of Organizational Power Distance Levels of Pilots Working on Airlines in Turkey: Flight Safety and Professional Courtesy Dilemma," *Journal of Aviation* 6, no. 2 (2022): 187, <https://doi.org/10.30518/jav.1110524>; Jing, Hung-Sying, C. J. Lu, and Shang-Jee Peng, "Culture, Authoritarianism and Commercial Aircraft Accidents," 341.

<sup>11</sup> International Civil Aviation Organization, *Doc 9859 AN/474 Third Edition — 2012 International Civil Aviation Organization Safety Management Manual (SMM)*, (2012), 22, 24. [https://www.icao.int/sam/documents/rst-smssp-13/smm\\_3rd\\_ed\\_advance.pdf](https://www.icao.int/sam/documents/rst-smssp-13/smm_3rd_ed_advance.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> James Reason, "Achieving a Safe Culture: Theory and Practice," 305.

<sup>13</sup> M. Dominic Cooper, "The Safety Culture Construct: Theory and Practice" In *Safety Cultures, Safety Models*, edited by Claude Gilbert, Benoît Journé, Hervé Laroche, and Corinne Bieder (Springer Briefs in Applied Sciences and Technology. Cham: Springer, 2018), 49. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95129-4\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95129-4_5)

<sup>14</sup> James Reason, "Achieving a Safe Culture: Theory and Practice," 305.

<sup>15</sup> Seda Çeken and Hakkı Aktaş, "Uçuş Ekiplerinde İletişim" In *Havacılık Psikolojisi: Kavramlar, Araştırmalar, Uygulamalar*, edited by Pelin Ünsal and Seda Çeken (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022), 200.

Research on culture suggests that it broadly affects individuals at cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral levels.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Hofstede and colleagues identified five key dimensions of culture—individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and masculinity-femininity—through their research involving 80 countries.<sup>17</sup> Power distance refers to hierarchical structures such as gender, age, social status, economics, politics, race, and seniority and how these factors are perceived regarding privilege or inferiority. Research indicates that influential individuals are seen as superior in high-power-distance cultures. In contrast, those with less power often accept their position and show loyalty and obedience to their leaders.<sup>18</sup> As a cultural dimension, individualism has been shown to be inversely related to power distance, highlighting the power imbalance between younger individuals and those in senior positions within a society.<sup>19</sup> Gorodnichenko and Roland found that individualism is linked to values like personal freedom, opportunity, achievement, progress, and recognition while neglecting harmony, cooperation, and relationships with superiors. Their research reveals that nations with elevated power distance tend to experience higher airline accidents, whereas countries with greater individualism demonstrate lower accident rates.

Enomoto and Geisler expanded this research by adding new parameters to further examine the relationship between cultural dimensions and aviation accidents.<sup>20</sup> Their study confirmed that nations with high power distance are more prone to aviation accidents, while those with high individualism tend to have lower accident rates.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Maintenance Errors, Communication, and the Culture of Silence

According to a study, maintenance failures account for a substantial 12% to 18% of global aviation accidents, resulting in a staggering cost of \$7 billion or more to the industry.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Michael Knoll et al., “International Differences in Employee Silence Motives: Scale Validation, Prevalence, and Relationships with Culture Characteristics Across 33 Countries” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 42, no. 5 (2021): 625, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2512>

<sup>17</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Michael A. Daniels and Gary J. Greguras, “Exploring the Nature of Power Distance: Implications for Micro- and Macro-Level Theories, Processes, and Outcomes.” *Journal of Management* 40, no. 5 (2014): 1204, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314527131>; Stephen Bochner and Beryl Hesketh, “Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, and Job-Related Attitudes in a Culturally Diverse Work Group.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 25, no. 2 (1994): 250, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022194252005>; Bradley L. Kirkman et al., “Individual Power Distance Orientation and Follower Reactions to Transformational Leaders: A Cross-Level, Cross-Cultural Examination,” *Academy of Management Journal* 52, no. 4 (2009): 749, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.43669971>

<sup>19</sup> Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gérard Roland, “Which Dimensions of Culture Matter for Long-Run Growth?” *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 101, no. 3 (2011): 493.

<sup>20</sup> Carl E. Enomoto and Karl R. Geisler, “Culture and Plane Crashes: A Cross-Country Test of The Gladwell Hypothesis” *Economics and Sociology* 10, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-789X.2017/10-3/20>

<sup>21</sup> Enomoto and Geisler, “Culture and Plane Crashes: A Cross-Country Test of The Gladwell Hypothesis,” 289.

<sup>22</sup> Hamad S. J. Rashid, Simon. Place, and Graham Braithwaite, “Investigating the Investigations: A Retrospective Study in the Aviation Maintenance Error Causation” *Cognition Technology & Work* 15 (2013): 171.

When serious incidents are included in these accidents, the rate increases to 23%.<sup>23</sup> It is alarming to note that maintenance-related causes of aviation accidents are 6.5 times more likely to result in fatalities than others.<sup>24</sup> Aviation maintenance services are not only a very challenging job field<sup>25</sup> but also full of cultural and climate influences that lead to unsafe and risky practices.<sup>26</sup> Aircraft maintenance workers operate in a complex work environment that requires teamwork skills in cooperation, coordination, and communication with other employees.<sup>27</sup>

Communication is not just a tool but a crucial factor in preventing aviation accidents and incidents.<sup>28</sup> The most essential factor that determines attitudes towards communication and coordination in aviation is the motivation of individuals to communicate and coordinate with other members of the team.<sup>29</sup> Various reasons motivate employees to remain silent due to the potential costs of speaking up.<sup>30</sup> While poor communication is a primary factor contributing to conflicts,<sup>31</sup> behaviors such as expressing opinions and addressing problems to improve conditions in the workplace can also be perceived as actions that challenge authorities, disrupt routines, and threaten group order.<sup>32</sup> In high-risk sectors such as aviation, effective and open

<sup>23</sup> Rashid, Place, and Braithwaite, "Investigating the Investigations: A Retrospective Study in the Aviation Maintenance Error Causation," 171.

<sup>24</sup> Neelakshi Majumdar et al., "An Analysis and Review of Maintenance-Related Commercial Aviation Accidents and Incidents" In *Digital Human Modeling and Applications in Health, Safety, Ergonomics and Risk Management*, edited by Vincent G. Duffy (Cham: Springer, 2023), 532, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35748-0\\_36](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35748-0_36)

<sup>25</sup> Gülsen Serap Çekerol and Emre Aydın, "Uçak Bakım Teknisyenlerinin Kişiler Arası Çatışma Çözme Yaklaşımlarının Takım Algısına Etkisi" *Mersin Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü E-Dergisi* 3, no. 1 (2019): 40, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/913073>

<sup>26</sup> Karen B. Marais and Matthew R. Robichaud. "Analysis of Trends in Aviation Maintenance Risk: An Empirical Approach." *Reliability Engineering & System Safety* 106 (2012): 104-118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.res.2012.06.003>; Öznur Usanmaz, "Training of the Maintenance Personnel to Prevent Failures in Aircraft Systems," *Engineering Failure Analysis* 18, no. 7 (2011): 1684, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.engfailanal.2011.02.010>

<sup>27</sup> David C. Kraus and Anand K. Gramopadhye, "Effect of Team Training on Aircraft Maintenance Technicians: Computer-Based Training Versus Instructor-Based Training," *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics* 27, no. 3 (2001): 152, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-8141\(00\)00044-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-8141(00)00044-5)

<sup>28</sup> Çekerol and Aydın, "Uçak Bakım Teknisyenlerinin Kişiler Arası Çatışma Çözme Yaklaşımlarının Takım Algısına Etkisi," 26.

<sup>29</sup> Hakkı Aktaş, "Sivil Havacılık İşletmelerinde Beşerî Faktörler Perspektifinden Uçuş Ekibi Kaynak Yönetimi: Sivil Havacılık İşletmeleri Pilotlarının Kişilik Yapıları ile Uçuş Ekibi Kaynak Yönetimi Tutumları Arasındaki İlişki" (Yayımlanmamış doktora tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2011), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth W. Morrison, "Employee Voice and Silence" *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 1 (2014): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328>; Elad N. Sherf, Michael R. Parke, and Sofya Isaakyan, "Distinguishing Voice and Silence at Work: Unique Relationships with Perceived Impact, Psychological Safety, and Burnout" *Academy of Management Journal* 64, no. 1 (2021): 115, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.1428>

<sup>31</sup> Emel Arslan, "Analysis of Communication Skill and Interpersonal Problem Solving in Preschool Trainees" *Social Behavior and Personality* 38, no. 4 (2010): 523, <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2010.38.4.523>

<sup>32</sup> Van Dyne, Linn, Lary L. Cummings, and Judi McLean Parks. "Extra-role Behaviors: In Pursuit of Construct and Definitional Clarity (A Bridge Over Muddied Waters)." In *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 17, edited by Barry M. Staw and Lary L. Cummings, 247-285. Bingley, UK: JAI Press, 1995, 247.



communication and employee feedback are critical in preventing accidents.<sup>33</sup> The success of maintenance is possible through communication and teamwork.<sup>34</sup> Because it was revealed that a lack of communication caused 15.80% of maintenance errors, it was also found that 16.60% of communication-related maintenance errors were between managers and employees.<sup>35</sup>

Aircraft-maintenance technicians operate in time-pressured, uncertain environments in which the line between correct and incorrect procedures is often blurred and supporting information may be scarce. In these challenging conditions, healthy communication, reporting, and coordination play a pivotal role in preventing potential errors.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, uncertainties stemming from hesitation and lack of communication during the operation process can pose a significant threat to flight safety. As we delve into the following section, we'll see how power distance can further hinder open communication, leading employees to withhold their opinions and refrain from sharing their thoughts due to respect for seniority, fear of punishment, embarrassment, and fear of deterioration of relationships. The high hierarchy among the teams can also create a communication barrier when one employee considers his/her task superior.

### 3. Power Distance, Social Approval, and Safety Culture

Power distance is essential in defining power relations between individuals.<sup>37</sup> This concept describes the degree of inequality between individuals with less power and those with more power within the same social structure. Power distance shows significant differences between societies with high and low power distance, and this situation also affects organizational cultures. In societies with high power distance, people find it difficult to express their concerns to more powerful individuals and avoid challenging this hierarchical structure.<sup>38</sup> Especially in organizations with a strong hierarchical structure, employees avoid giving feedback in situations that go wrong and prefer to remain silent due to fear of retaliation.<sup>39</sup>

As discussed earlier, in organizations with a strong hierarchical structure, employees may avoid giving feedback due to fear of retaliation or disrupting authority. This communication avoidance can result in missed opportunities to detect and correct errors, potentially compromising safety. As a part of organizational culture, power distance is considered one of four basic dimensions.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Nadine Bienefeld and Gudela Grote. "Speaking Up in Ad Hoc Multiteam Systems: Individual-Level Effects of Psychological Safety, Status, and Leadership within and across Teams" *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 23, no. 6 (2014): 930, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2013.808398>

<sup>34</sup> Darko Virovac, Anita Domitrović, and Ernest Bazijanac, "The Influence of Human Factor in Aircraft Maintenance" *Promet-Traffic & Transportation* 29, no. 3 (2017): 263, <https://doi.org/10.7307/ptt.v29i3.2068>; Güneş et al., "Hava Aracı Bakım Teknisyenlerinin Nitelikleri ve Yetkinliklerinin Önemi," 534.

<sup>35</sup> Virovac, Domitrović and Bazijanac, "The Influence of Human Factor in Aircraft Maintenance," 262.

<sup>36</sup> Rashid, Place, and Braithwaite, "Investigating the Investigations: A Retrospective Study in the Aviation Maintenance Error Causation," 172.

<sup>37</sup> Yılmaz İlker Yorulmaz vd., "Örgütsel Güç Mesafesi Ölçeği Geçerlik ve Güvenirlilik Çalışması" *Trakya Eğitim Dergisi* 8, no. 4 (2018): 673, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/562548>

<sup>38</sup> Knoll et al., "International Differences," 625.

<sup>39</sup> Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, 83.

<sup>40</sup> Solmaz, G., and C. Serinkan. "Örgütlerde Güç Mesafesinin Örgütsel Sessizlik ile İlişkisi: Bir Alan Araştırması." *Yeni Fikir Dergisi* 12, no. 25 (2020), 17

As a part of organizational culture, power distance is considered one of four basic dimensions.<sup>41</sup> The first is “legitimizing power”; this dimension is defined as employees’ acceptance of the unequal distribution of power within the organization and making efforts to legitimize this situation. Hierarchically superior individuals legitimize their power based on laws, rules, and regulations.<sup>42</sup> This situation is also socially reinforced by proverbs such as “Order cuts iron” or “Water belongs to the young, words belong to the elder.”<sup>43</sup> The second dimension, “instrumental use of power,” involves using power to achieve goals without regard for ethical standards. The concept of nepotism, characterized by granting privileges to individuals based on personal closeness rather than merit, is a typical reflection of the ‘instrumental use of power’ dimension within power distance. In such cases, power is utilized not in line with ethical or organizational principles but to serve individual or group interests. This highlights the urgent need for a deeper understanding of power dynamics to address such issues. The third dimension, “accepting power,” reflects the internalization of unequal power structures and the uncritical acceptance of leaders’ views. Lastly, “acquiescence to power” refers to individuals accepting the situation based on the belief that they cannot influence managerial practices, often indicating a culture of fear where people comply with dominant groups’ directives.<sup>44</sup>

The need for social approval, which is widely observed in countries with collectivist cultures such as Turkey, causes individuals to act according to the expectations of their environment rather than their wishes and expectations.<sup>45</sup> This need causes individuals, particularly in business settings, to refrain from sharing their opinions and accept the existing hierarchy without question to gain social approval. As the need for approval grows, communication between individuals diminishes, potentially leading to adverse outcomes in business processes. In environments where communication and coordination are crucial, avoidant and defensive behaviors become more common, adversely impacting organizational effectiveness and productivity.<sup>46</sup> As the desire for social approval grows, individuals are more inclined to stay silent and refrain from voicing criticism or negative opinions.

This can lead to severe consequences in high-risk industries such as the aviation sector. In industries such as aviation, where safety is at the forefront, employees must be able to express themselves clearly and openly. For a healthy safety culture to develop, employees need to be able to communicate honestly, directly, and constructively with each other and with their managers.<sup>47</sup> In this context, creating an organizational structure that minimizes the need for social approval and encourages open communication is indispensable for ensuring safety in the aviation industry.

<sup>41</sup> Yorulmaz vd., “Örgütsel Güç Mesafesi Ölçeği Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması,” 677.

<sup>42</sup> Yorulmaz vd., “Örgütsel Güç Mesafesi Ölçeği Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması,” 681.

<sup>43</sup> Yorulmaz vd., “Örgütsel Güç Mesafesi Ölçeği Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması,” 681.

<sup>44</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

<sup>45</sup> Çapan Özeren, Odabaşoğlu, and Tezer, “Investigation of Organizational Power Distance Levels of Pilots Working on Airlines in Turkey: Flight Safety and Professional Courtesy Dilemma,” 187.

<sup>46</sup> Knoll et al., “International Differences,” 626.

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Jakubowski-Spector, “Facilitating the Growth of Women Through Assertive Training” *The Counseling Psychologist* 4, no. 1 (1973): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100007300400107>



Power distance and the need for social approval significantly influence organizational culture in different ways. In high-power-distance organizations, employees often struggle to give feedback to their superiors and prefer to remain silent in negative situations. In such environments, the need for social approval is strong, leading to reduced open communication and an increased fear of challenging authority. This can create serious risks, especially in sectors like aviation, where safety is a priority.

The lack of feedback makes it harder to prevent operational errors and accidents. Emphasizing the potential for operational success through open communication, it is crucial for aviation organizations to foster a culture that encourages employees to share their thoughts and feedback freely. This approach not only helps in identifying potential hazards and errors early but also instills a sense of optimism about the future, thereby enhancing safety and operational success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to explore the influence of organizational power distance on the communication patterns of aircraft maintenance engineers and technicians, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of workplace interactions.

The hypothesis suggests that organizational power distance may influence individuals who prioritize social approval over defending the truth or those who display excessive professional courtesy, even in inappropriate contexts. It assumes that individuals who overly value others' opinions and are willing to compromise safety for management approval are more influenced by high power distance cultures.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study's data collection methods carry the risk of biased responses, especially on issues such as power distance and social approval. The fact that the Research is based on personal experiences will make obtaining accurate and unbiased results difficult.

### **Research Model**

For this study, we employed qualitative research methods, a robust approach to understanding the motivations related to organizational power distance and the need for approval. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 participants from four different companies, centered around four main themes. It is essential to mention that one participant opted out after the interview, requesting that their recording not be used and voluntarily withdrew from the study.

Demographic information of the 13 participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants**

Participant	Gender	Education	Age	Occupation	Experience
P1	Male	Graduate	37	Aeronautical Engineer	12 Years
P2	Male	Bachelor's Degree	25	Technician	5 Months
P3	Male	Associate's Degree	53	Technician	32 Years
P4	Male	Bachelor's Degree	38	Technician	12 Years
P5	Male	Bachelor's Degree	23	Technician	6 Months
P6	Male	Bachelor's Degree	31	Technician	10 Years
P7	Male	Bachelor's Degree	30	Technician	8 Years
P8	Male	Bachelor's Degree	52	Technician	33 Years
P9	Male	Bachelor's Degree	54	Technician	37 Years
P10	Male	Associate's Degree	24	Technician	4 Years
P11	Female	Bachelor's Degree	33	Technician	10 Years
P12	Female	Bachelor's Degree	22	Technician	1 Year
P13	Female	Associate's Degree	26	Technician	4 Years

In the interview, 12 questions were asked to the participants to better understand the survey results from a psychosocial and cultural perspective. The researchers converted the transcripts of the interviews, which were recorded with the participants' permission, into written texts.

Figure 1 shows the scales and sub-dimensions used for the research and the questions sought in the in-depth interviews.

**Figure 1: In-depth Interview Questions Used in the Study**

**1. Theme-1: Social Withdrawal**

What do you do when you disagree with the majority?

- > Do you object or stay silent?
- > What is the reason behind this attitude?

**2. Theme-2: Acquiescence to Power**

How do you behave if you think your words will not influence management?

- > Would you still express your opinion?
- > What motivates this decision?

**3. Theme-3: Instrumental Use of Power**

How do you feel about a manager giving privileges to close associates or relatives?

- > Do you find it acceptable or object to it?

Do you think harsh and commanding managerial behavior is acceptable?

- > Why?

**4. Theme-4: Sensitivity to the Judgments of Others**

How important is others' approval and affection to you?

Have you ever avoided doing something you believed was right because others did not approve?

How do you feel when you are not liked or are negatively judged?

## Method

### Reliability and Validity

One of the accepted methods to ensure reliability in qualitative studies is to establish credibility.<sup>48</sup> In this context, participant validation, referred to as internal validity, has been conducted. The data collected from the field has been deciphered and sent to participants for confirmation, and their approval has been obtained. Additionally, the literature method has been adopted to ensure reliability, and the questions formulated have been based on a literature review.

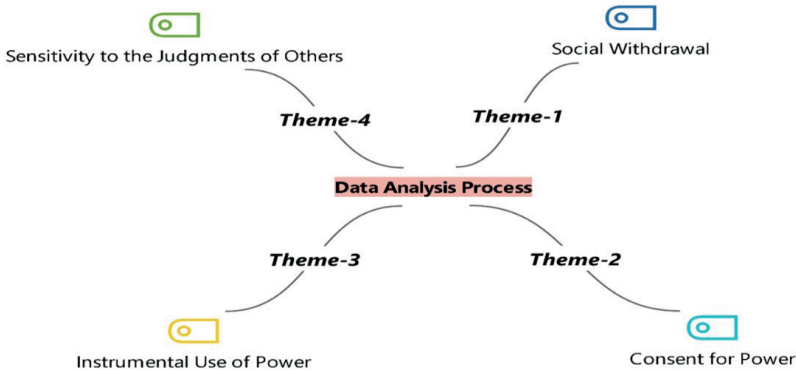
Expert opinion has been embraced to ensure the validity of the data. An expert researcher in qualitative studies was consulted, and consensus among codes was reached before proceeding to the data analysis phase.

### Data Analysis Process

The research used the computer-assisted analysis program MQXQDA 20 to analyze qualitative data. The basis of the study was the ‘Qualitative Analysis Cycle’ expressed by Yin and translated into Turkish by Kurnaz.<sup>49</sup>

Data collection from the field is considered the first stage of the process. The second stage comprises the disaggregation of the collected data. The third stage involves reintegration and interpretation of the coded and disaggregated data. The process concludes with interpretation of the integrated data and the drawing of conclusions.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 2: Data Analysis**



<sup>48</sup> Hatice Başkale, “Nitel araştırmalarda geçerlik, güvenirlik ve örneklem büyüklüğünün belirlenmesi” *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Hemşirelik Fakültesi E-Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2016): 24.

<sup>49</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 178; Zeynep Kurnaz, “Türkiye’de Siyasal Korku ve Akademik Hayatın İnşası.” (Yayımlanmamış Doktora Tezi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, 2016), 13.

<sup>50</sup> Bayram Balci, “Endüstri 4.0 ve İstihdam İkilemi: İşverenlerin Bu İkilem Üzerine Görüşleri” In *İktisadi ve İdari Bilimlerde Araştırma ve Değerlendirmeler*, edited by Ferhat Çıtak (Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi, 2023), 61.

Coding is considered one of the most essential processes in qualitative studies.<sup>51</sup> The questions developed based on the literature were made meaningful through coding. In this research, the inference process was applied during the data analysis. Automatic coding or pre-codes were not determined. The hierarchy process of themes > sub-themes > codes was followed, and thematic coding was conducted.

In this study, the Alt Code Statistics, Code-Theory Model, Code-Sub Code-Sections Model, and Hierarchical Code-Sub Code Models were applied.

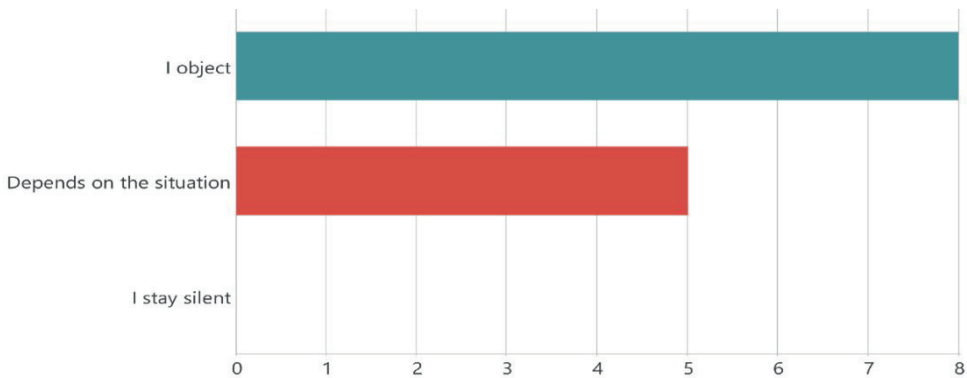
## Findings

The qualitative findings were classified into four distinct themes. These include findings related to social withdrawal, findings related to acquiescence to power, findings related to instrumental use of power, and findings related to sensitivity to others' judgments.

### Theme-1: Social Withdrawal

The aim was to investigate how individuals react when disagreeing with the majority's views in the aviation industry workplace. Figure 3 presents findings regarding the participants.

**Figure 3: Response to Not Agreeing with Majority Decisions in the Workplace**



The findings regarding how participants react when they do not agree with the majority in the workplace, as generated with the Code Matrix Browser, are presented. In this context, while 8 participants objected to this situation, five stated that their reaction varies depending on the situation. It was found that none of the participants preferred to remain silent.

The majority of participants' views on the majority's decision are as follows:

I don't keep silent. I mean, I definitely express my opinion (P3, Location 4). Of course I object. I try to find a solution (P4, Location 4). I definitely object because I object because I base it on a specific source (P8, Location 8). I object if I am not satisfied (P12, Location 6).

<sup>51</sup> Corrine Glesne, *Nitel Araştırmaya Giriş*. Translated by Ali Ersoy and Pelin Yalçınoglu. (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2012), 140.

The general attitude of the people around you also affects your willingness to express a different opinion. In other words, you can either be timid, or you can be more active at work, or you can think it through and say it that way. Or you prefer not to say anything. I am not one of those who prefer not to say anything (P1, Location 8).

Actually, as a matter of fact, we have a job that affects everyone's lives. Hundreds of thousands of people fly on the airplanes we repair, so when I see any problems in any environment, I can explain this to my managers with peace of mind (P2, Location 2).

We proceed within the rules in aviation. Therefore, everyone's decisions are taken based on those rules. That's why you don't have much chance to oppose, since everything is clear. But of course, there are some issues that you object to in internal decisions. I try to object as much as I can, but if not, I try to adapt (P5, Location 6).

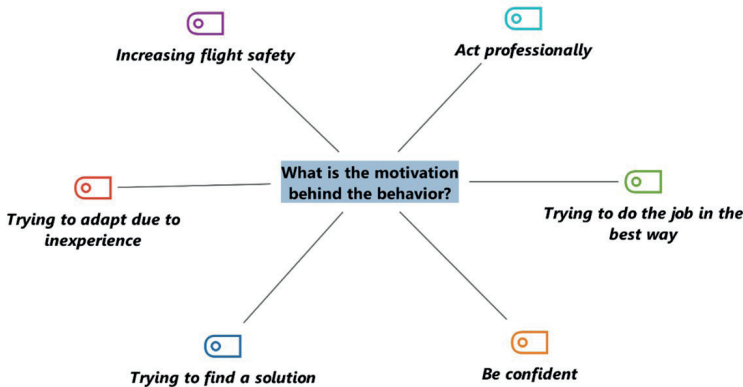
In general, when I encounter this kind of situation, I don't object, but I put forward my own opinion and say that if there is something that everyone accepts and there is a situation where I conflict with it, either I am wrong or there is a glitch in the opinion of the society. First of all, I open this up for discussion. If I think I am wrong and they convince me, then I agree with that view, I mean, with peace of mind (P7, Location 2).

We can say all our thoughts up to a certain point. After a certain point, we experience a blockage, and I think that I can now express my own thoughts or make objections (P11, Location 5). In our sector, unfortunately, authority goes one click higher than respect. Because sometimes you cannot say what you want to say (P13, Location 5).

We can say all our thoughts up to a certain point. After a certain point, we experience a blockage, and I think that I am now able to express my own thoughts or make objections (P11, Location 5). In our sector, unfortunately, authority goes one click higher than respect. Because sometimes you cannot say what you want to say (P13, Location 5).

In case of disagreement with the views accepted by the majority in the workplace, it was aimed to investigate the motivation behind the behavior of individuals. In this context, the findings regarding the participants are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Motivation Behind the Behavior of Decision Making**



In the figure 4 created with the Code Theory Model, the findings regarding the motivation behind the participants' reaction even though they disagreed with the majority decision are shown. It's worth noting the participants' professionalism, which was a key motivator, along with their commitment to flight safety, doing their job in the best way possible, trying to adapt to the process due to inexperience, self-confidence, and their eagerness to offer a solution.

The participants, who were [specific role or background], shared the following insights on behavioral motivation:

I mean, it is both professional and, for example, the unit I work in is very international. Because there are almost people of every nationality. I mean, there are also people from Europe. There are people from our Middle East Region or Anatolia or from America and so on, from various regions, from various nationalities or racial or religious or various backgrounds (P1, Location 12).

I think trying to do your job in the best way possible is related to this, so we can say that I would behave in this way because I accept that it is right (P2, Location 6). I am a person who respects myself and respects my job (P9, Location 11).

I think my motivation here actually stems from my self-confidence. I can interpret it like that. I trust myself (P3, Location 10). I think this is more related to self-improvement and self-confidence (P11, Location 5).

In the end, since we are all focused on solving a problem at work, we need to find solutions. Our motivation is always focused on doing better, so of course we try to find solutions (P4, Location 6).

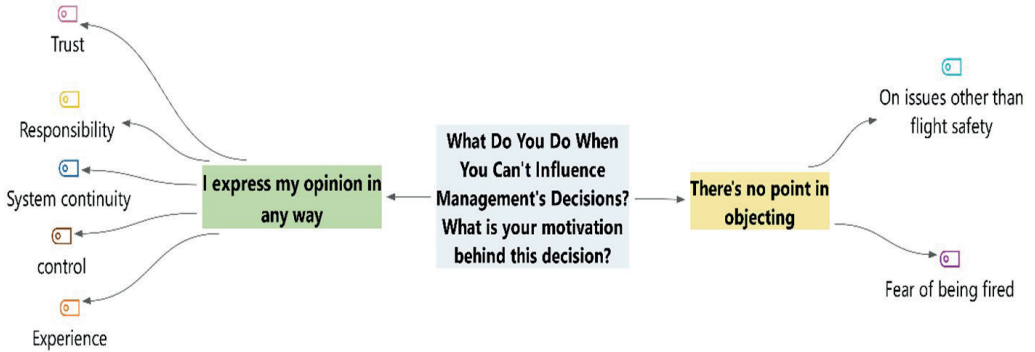
Since it is based on experience, I don't have the experience of objecting to such things at the moment. So my motivation is to adapt (P5, Location 8). Registries are working here. There is also a record of their position or reputation or speaking up or being able to speak in public (P10, Location 21).

It is all about flight safety. You know, in the airplanes we build, in the work we do, we actually entrust the lives of the people who will fly in that airplane (P7, Location 6). We never compromise on flight safety (P8, Location 21).

## Theme-2: Acquiescence to Power

It was aimed at investigating the views of the participants who thought that they could not influence management decisions in the face of this situation and what motivated them to hold this view. In this context, the findings regarding the participants are presented in Figure 5.



**Figure 5: Opinions of Participants Who Cannot Influence Management Decisions**

The Hierarchical Code-Sub-Code Model illustrates how participants behave when they feel unable to influence their managers' decisions and the motivations underlying these behaviors. In this context, several participants indicated that they still choose to voice their opinions despite their lack of influence. The primary motivations include trust, a sense of responsibility, system continuity, oversight, and accumulated experience. Conversely, other participants noted their reluctance to voice objections, with key reasons being the fear of job termination and concerns unrelated to flight safety.

The views of the participants regarding the decisions of the managers are as follows:

I take it into consideration and say it. At least this has been my practice so far (P3, Location 16). I mean, even if I know that it will not change, at least I say what I think (P5, Location 12). Since our job is safety management, there are some truths in safety management that the other side should accept anyway, even if they don't like it. Whatever the necessary legislation or techniques are, we need to do them (P1, Location 16).

In our company, we received an e-mail in the last weeks. If we have a problem in any situation, as you said, we cannot share it with our managers or we can share it but we cannot find a solution. They created a hotline for these issues (P2, Location 8).

I mean, if the other side doesn't listen to me no matter what, I will express my views on the part that affects me and as I said, at the end of the work we do, we are held responsible for our own actions because we are responsible for all the responsibility, and we have to go on what we know is right and let's continue to defend what we know is right (P4, Location 10).

If the result doesn't change, I don't make any effort (P10, Location 28). We express our opinions in the environment of coworkers, but frankly, in that situation, I cannot stand up and reproach the managers about this (P11, Location 33).

If it has something to do with the system and its existence, as I said, it cannot be left alone (P1, Location 16). The delays we will experience cause delays in the airplane and the flight. This causes the operation to be disrupted (P7, Location 26).

Since we are fully responsible and the lives of many people are entrusted to us, we need to be careful in our actions (P4, Location 18). In the sector, people are directly responsible for what they do, directly responsible to whom, to the law, to civil aviation, to the labor law, so I would not accept anything too extreme (P9, Location 16).

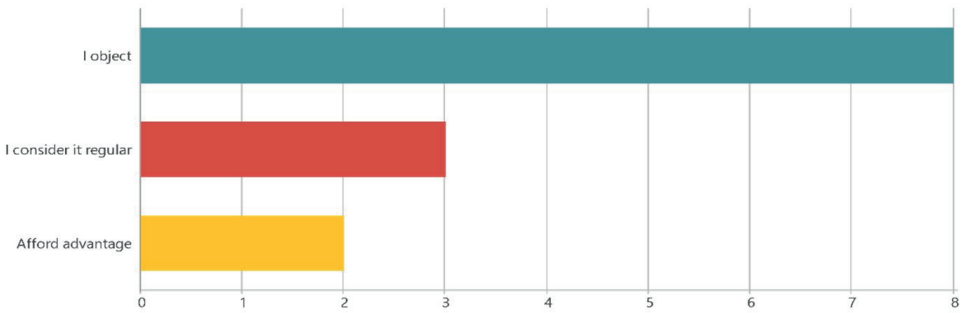
Since it is based on experience, I do what I trust in the sector (P5, Location 20). I trust my profession, and if I become unemployed, I can find a job elsewhere (P6, Location 42). I keep quiet until flight safety. If flight safety is in question in any way, I will speak up no matter what (P10, Location 41).

As a company, we use two different systems where we can express our requests and statements on this issue anonymously. In other words, having two different control mechanisms both inside and outside and being able to trust these control mechanisms and express what you think is wrong in any way (P13, Location 8-19).

### Theme-3: Instrumental Use of Power

The aim was to investigate the participants' reactions to this situation if the workplace managers favored people with the same worldview or close to themselves. In this regard, the findings related to the participants are illustrated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Participants' Views on the Favoritism of Managers**



The figure generated using the Code Matrix Browser highlights the participants' perspectives on managerial favoritism towards certain employees. Their views are not just data points but integral to our understanding of this issue. In this context, most participants indicated that they strongly reacted to any perceived favoritism. A smaller portion of the participants mentioned that their responses were either neutral or driven by their self-interest.

The participants' views on managers showing favoritism towards specific employees are summarized as follows:

I mean, frankly speaking, I am against preferences made between people with your background in a professional environment based on emotional, cultural, etc. rather than technical or professional points (P1, Location 22).

I object to this. I mean, I object to any kind of privilege. I object to it. In fact, if there is another privilege other than one's own opinion, I would object to that too. I mean, I am in favor of people working under equal conditions in work environments (P3, Location 20).

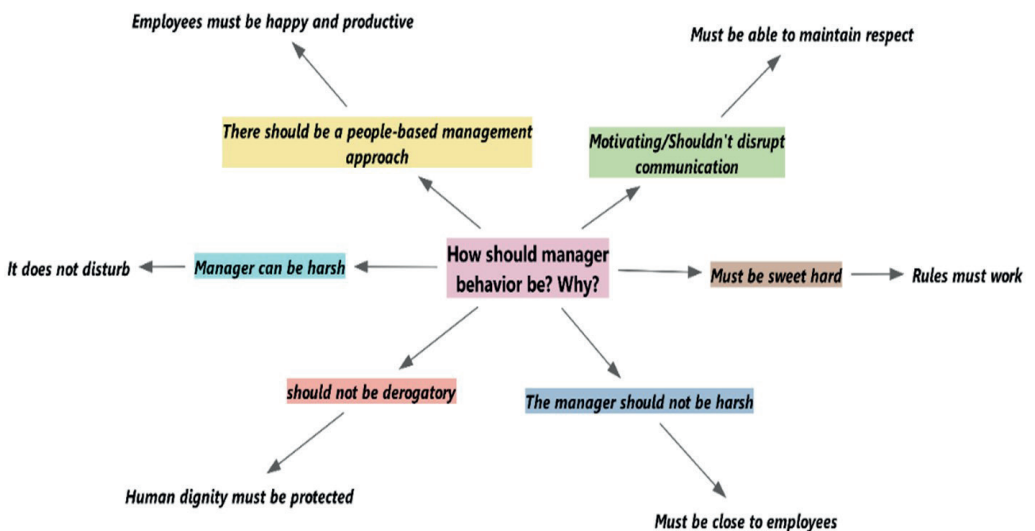
We inevitably encounter these situations, but at this point, in some cases we cannot do anything. No matter how much we object, they can do whatever they want because they have the authority and power. But as I said, even if we object, it is not finalized (P4, Location 20).

What I encounter is the granting of extra privileges to someone else, I mean, I'm frankly not interested in those parts myself. Let me speak for myself. You know, it may be difficult for someone else, you may not like it. My only problem is that if there is a situation that I deserve or if it will create a situation that will prevent me from advancing in my career, then I start to do something, that's when it starts to bother me. Other than that, I have never actually been in such a situation (P7, Location 32).

We show our reaction, but I don't know to what extent it is applied. As Turkish society, we like to segregate very much. For example, when we meet someone, we are immediately asked about their hometown. We try very hard to establish a connection. If we don't like their hometown, we ask about their team. We always try to unite with people (P10, Location 43).

The study aimed to explore how participants perceived their managers' harsh or authoritarian behavior. In this regard, the findings related to the participants' evaluations are detailed in Figure-7.

**Figure 7: Participants' Views on Managers' Behaviors**



In the figure created with the Hierarchical Code-Subcode Model, the findings of the participants regarding the harsh and overbearing behaviors of their managers are shown. In this context, while some participants stated that managers' behaviors should not be harsh and overbearing, others stated that they should be harsh or sweetly harsh. According to the participants, managers should not be harsh; on the contrary, they should be close to their employees, they should not exhibit humiliating behaviors and protect human dignity, they should be motivating and maintain respect, they should adopt a human-based management approach and ensure that employees are happy and productive. It was also suggested that managers should strike a balance between being kind and assertive, as this is viewed as the most effective way to enforce rules properly. Employees typically perceive this level of strictness as both normal and acceptable.

If there are people who will not disrupt the communication of the environment too much or who can motivate people more or who are more respectful to people, who will not jeopardize the future of the system in the system they are in, and then, apart from that, if there are people who can tolerate differences regardless of what they are, who can maintain their respect even when there are things that are contrary to them, as I said, you will definitely prefer them among equals (P1, Location 22).

I mean, I actually like it more when managers are a bit closer to their employees. Otherwise, I wouldn't want to have a very harsh manager (P2, Location 30)

It doesn't bother me in terms of style, in terms of tone, that the manager is harsh and imperious. I don't believe that companies can be governed by democracy. I mean, a company is not like a state. There is an owner. This company has a purpose. It has a quality policy. I think it is not necessary to behave in such a democratic way as it is necessary to manage the situation in accordance with them (P3, Location 28-32).

When I put myself in their shoes, sometimes I can understand their harshness, because what I mean by harshness is that there should be a distance so that it works with rules. I mean, too much sincerity leads to problems at work. You know, not taking it seriously and so on. That's why I say that in some cases, in general, rather than bilateral relations, you should be a little harsh in some cases, but you should also adjust it sufficiently. When I say harsh, I don't mean like mobbing, but there should be a little more appropriate harshness (P5, Location 26).

After a certain point, we intervene when the other person is unable to defend himself/herself, whether it is humiliation or exceeding certain limits of humanity (P4, Location 32).

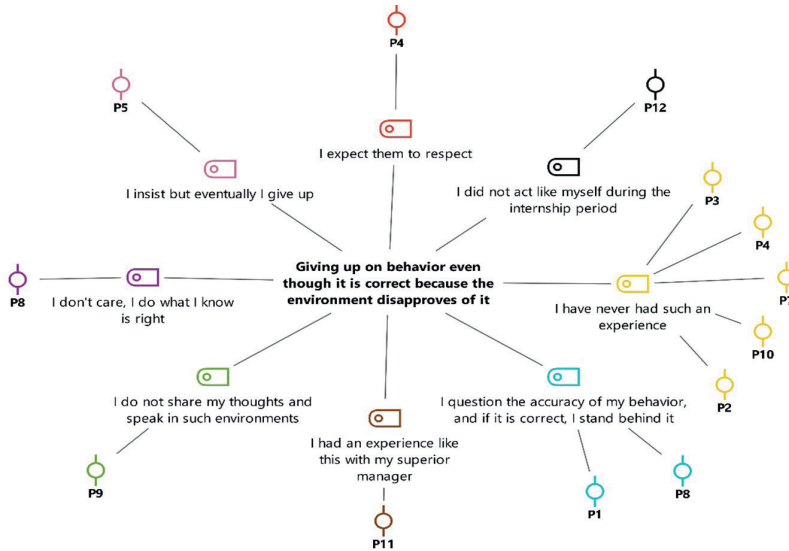
I have always avoided and disliked places where there is no human-based management approach. Societies that prioritize people are always happy, productive and efficient. They enjoy life (P9, Location 46).

#### **Theme-4: Sensitivity to the Judgments of Others**

It aimed to investigate the question, "Have you ever had behaviors that you felt uncomfortable with and stopped doing because the people around you disapproved of them even though you

thought they were right?” In this context, the findings regarding the participants are presented in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Behaviors Abandoned Due to Environmental Disapproval**



In the figure created with the Code-Subcode-Sections Model, the findings related to giving up on their behaviors due to the disapproval of the environment, even though it is thought to be correct by the participants, are stated. Most participants stated that they had yet to experience such an experience in their business life. On the other hand, while some participants stated that they had this problem with their managers, some participants emphasized that they continued their behaviors that they knew to be right, that they should be respected in this regard, and that they preferred not to talk about it if they did not.

The participants' views on the act of giving up their behaviors are as follows:

In my current position, for example, there was a job that I thought was not suitable. My manager, his immediate superior, everyone agreed with me, for example. But we couldn't get the person at the top to change his/her mind. Now I am the one who is going to do the work, and I am actually exposed to it. You published this document. You wrote it. This is wrong. I am directly exposed to these ridiculous things (P11, Location 93). In the company where I did my internship, I acted like a person I was never like so that they would like me. No lie. Because it was my first experience (P12, Location 51).

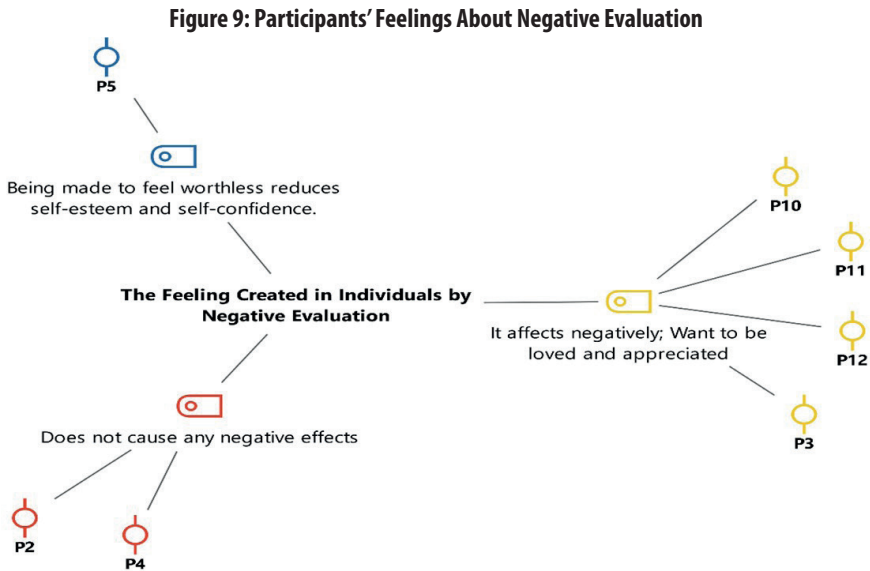
I first question the correctness of what I do from an outside perspective, and if it is correct, I stand behind my behavior (P1, Location 26). I get respect for what I do, but when I don't, I don't care about it, I think it is right and I am doing what I know is right (P8, Location 55).

I mean, to be honest, I have not experienced such a situation. But if it had happened, I would have looked first, I mean, why do so many people think negatively against my opinion? You know, maybe their opinion is right in the face of my opinion (P2, Location 52).

Like I'm persistent, but at some point I have to give up. I mean, I give up at some point. Yes, because after all, I am my manager, I am sure that it is right, I insist, I try to explain as much as I can, but of course the manager has the final say (P5, Location 54). I don't share, I don't talk, but my own truths are mine. There is nothing to do about it, it is the way I behave, my actions, they do not change (P9, Location 62).

I did not think of such a specific issue at the moment (P3, Location 73). I guess not (P7, Location 56). I have not had such an experience (P2, Location 52; P4, Location 46; P10, Location 86).

The question, "Do you feel worthless or hurt when people evaluate you negatively or dislike you?" was investigated. Figure 9 presents findings related to the participants in this context.



In the figure derived from the Code-Subcode-Sections Model, the findings illustrate participants' responses to negative evaluations and whether they felt devalued. Notably, the majority expressed that such feedback had a detrimental impact on them, and they conveyed a desire for recognition and appreciation, similar to others. One participant specifically mentioned that negative assessments diminished their self-worth and confidence. However, it is essential to highlight that a more resilient subset of participants reported being unaffected by these evaluations, demonstrating their inner strength and confidence.

Participants' views on negative evaluation are as follows:



Nobody has to like anybody. But in a work environment, if I am doing my job right, I just try to focus on my job. I mean, nobody has to like anybody, but they have to respect each other in the environment. The rest would not be very important for me to be honest (P2, Location 58).

Of course I feel it, it is a very natural human emotion and everyone wants to be loved and appreciated. I mean, of course, if this does not happen, I would feel that way, I mean I can feel it (P3, Location 52). I would definitely be negatively affected. That is related to my temperament. It affected me to the point of depression and anxiety. I mean, I am still undergoing treatment for it, but I think it is related to my personality. Internalizing the issue more like this is related to this. It happened, it happens (P11, Location 95).

Of course, I mean, it is very important for me to be able to express my ideas and have them adopted. I mean, this is important for everyone. This increases your self-esteem. I think it takes your self-confidence one step further as a person. So it is definitely very important for me to be able to convey my ideas to the other side and it is also very important for me to be taken seriously (P5, Location 46).

It doesn't affect me. After all, we work in a big business. We don't work with the same person every day. We can work with more than one person. The person we work with one day, maybe ten days later we work together again. So, of course, as you said, it is human nature to want to be loved. We may want something as an impulse, but the fact that they don't like me doesn't really bind me professionally. As I said, within the point of respect (P4, Location 48).

## Results and Discussion

This study, employing a qualitative approach, has unearthed significant insights into the complex interplay between power distance, managerial attitudes, and employee behavior in the aviation maintenance sector—a domain where safety is of utmost importance. The data gleaned from participant interviews were meticulously categorized under four main themes: social withdrawal, acquiescence to power, instrumental use of power, and sensitivity to others' judgments. Each theme serves as a guiding light, revealing how internal power dynamics and individual self-confidence shape employees' communication preferences and decision-making processes, particularly in the context of safety.

Under the theme of Social Withdrawal, it was observed that most participants did not remain silent when they disagreed with the majority view. Instead, they chose to express their opinions. This finding aligns with Reason's definition of safety culture, emphasizing that open communication and feedback are foundational to maintaining safety. However, some participants reported feeling "blocked" and struggling to voice their opinions, supporting Morrison's and Sherf et al.'s view that silence is contextual and selective.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Morrison, Elizabeth Wolfe. "Employee Voice and Silence." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 1 (2014): 173–197.

In the theme of Acquiescence to Power, some participants stated that even when they believed their input would not influence managerial decisions, they still chose to speak up. This behavior supports Bienefeld and Grote's findings that psychological safety encourages voice behavior. Conversely, the fear of job loss or the belief that speaking up would not change outcomes contributed to silence.<sup>53</sup>

A particularly notable finding is that younger and less experienced technicians were likelier to remain silent. These individuals felt they were positioned lower in the organizational hierarchy and believed their opinions were unlikely to be valued. Morrison and, Detert, Burris have emphasized that employee tenure and status significantly affect voice behavior. Furthermore, Hofstede notes that in high power distance cultures, authority is associated with age and status<sup>54</sup>. This creates an environment where new ideas are only accepted when expressed by senior or experienced employees.

Under the Instrumental Use of Power theme, most participants strongly opposed favoritism shown by managers to their close associates or those sharing similar views. This supports Redding's argument that unethical use of power undermines organizational justice and motivation.<sup>55</sup> Views on harsh and authoritarian leadership varied: some criticized such behaviors, while others argued that strictness was necessary for enforcing rules. These perspectives align with the leadership theories of Yukl and Bass, who highlight the role of both transformational and directive leadership styles<sup>56</sup>.

In the Sensitivity to Others' Judgments theme, most participants stated that they did not change their behavior due to social disapproval. However, some—particularly early in their careers—admitted to modifying their behavior to gain social acceptance, reflecting Goffman's impression management theory<sup>57</sup>. Participants' emotional responses to negative evaluations also varied. While some were adversely affected, others maintained professional composure, supporting Eisenberger et al.'s findings on the buffering effects of perceived organizational support<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Bienefeld, Nadine, and Gert Grote. "Silence That May Cost Lives: A Multilevel Process Model of Voice in Healthcare Teams." *Academy of Management Journal* 57, no. 5 (2014): 1414–1431; Detert, James R., and Amy C. Edmondson. "Implicit Voice Theories: Taken-for-Granted Rules of Self-Censorship at Work." *Academy of Management Journal* 54, no. 3 (2011): 461–488.

<sup>54</sup> Detert, James R., and Ethan R. Burris. "Leadership Behavior and Employee Voice: Is the Door Really Open?" *Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 4 (2007): 869–884; Hofstede, Geert. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001; Hofstede, Geert. "Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context." *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2011): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>

<sup>55</sup> Redding, F. S. "Individualization Is a State of Mind." *Music Educators Journal* 59, no. 3 (1972): 24–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3394205>.

<sup>56</sup> Yukl, Gary A. *Leadership in Organizations*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2013; Bass, Bernard M. "From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision." *Organizational Dynamics* 18, no. 3 (1990): 19–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(90\)90061-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S).

<sup>57</sup> Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959.

<sup>58</sup> Eisenberger, Robert, Robin Huntington, Steven Hutchison, and Debora Sowa. "Perceived Organizational Support." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (1986): 500–507.

Overall, these findings show that even in hierarchical environments like aviation maintenance, the impact of power distance is not static but influenced by confidence, seniority, organizational culture, and safety awareness. Employees' choices to speak up, conform, or remain silent are shaped by contextual factors, perceived risk, and psychological safety. Moreover, this study highlights the significant influence of power distance on employee behavior in aviation maintenance, where safety is paramount. Power distance affects how employees perceive managerial actions, especially concerning favoritism and differing opinions on strict management styles. These dynamics often result in organizational silence, which can hinder open communication, which is vital for safety. Understanding these dynamics can help aviation maintenance organizations identify and address potential safety risks, thereby enhancing their safety culture.

While some employees overcome hierarchical barriers and speak up, many remain silent due to fear of retaliation or feeling that their input is undervalued. This silence, often referred to as 'organizational silence', allows safety risks to persist, particularly in aviation maintenance, where minor errors can have severe consequences. Favoritism and strict management styles further exacerbate these challenges by reinforcing power imbalances and discouraging transparency.

To address these issues, organizations must strive to foster a participatory management culture where all employees, regardless of rank, feel empowered to express their ideas. Such a culture not only fosters trust, collaboration, and accountability but also holds the potential to significantly enhance safety culture. Employees in high-power-distance organizations often conform rather than challenge inappropriate practices, making sustaining a safe work environment harder. Therefore, an open, empowering communication climate is not just essential, but also a beacon of hope for a safer future.

Future research should continue to explore how power distance influences employee behavior across diverse cultural and organizational contexts. Additionally, expanding access to detailed accident reports in Turkey would support safety culture and provide invaluable educational material for training and continuous improvement. The journey towards a safer aviation maintenance sector is ongoing, and these research avenues are crucial stepping stones that we are all part of.

Establishing a participatory management structure that values mutual respect and open communication alongside authority is essential for achieving organizational safety<sup>59</sup>.

#### Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, several recommendations are offered to foster a safer, more equitable, and participatory environment in aviation maintenance. First, it is essential to create psychologically safe communication spaces where younger and less experienced employees can freely express their opinions.

Rather than promoting authoritarian leadership styles, managers should adopt a human-centered and transformational leadership approach. Targeted training programs focused on communication and leadership should be implemented. Transparent evaluation systems must be established to combat favoritism and ensure that promotions, rewards, and task distribution are based on objective criteria.

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, Dominic. *Improving Safety Culture: A Practical Guide*. Chichester: Wiley, 2018.

Psychological safety and voice culture should be reinforced at individual and organizational levels. The workplace should encourage learning from mistakes and foster a growth-oriented atmosphere. Junior employees should be actively included in technical evaluations and problem-solving discussions to ensure that competence, rather than age or seniority, determines participation.

Finally, safety reporting systems and feedback mechanisms should be more visible and accessible. These systems should not be viewed merely as procedural tools but as essential components of an internalized safety culture. Implementing these recommendations will enhance the organization's overall safety and efficiency.

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