




The impact of personal sense of power on unethical decision-making: a moderated mediation model of love of money motive and power distance orientation

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Abstract Previous studies posit that people with hierarchical power/status are more prone to making unethical decisions. However, these studies, for the most part, are silent about the possible influence of the psychological state of power (personal sense of power) on unethical decision-making. Based on the approach–inhibition theory of power, in this study, we developed a moderated mediation model to examine the influence of personal sense of power on unethical decision-making via the love of money motive and examined power distance orientation as a possible boundary condition influences this relationship. To this end, using a survey questionnaire, we collected multi-time and multi-source data from Sri Lankan banking industry. The results revealed that personal sense of power has an effect on unethical decision-making directly as well as indirectly via love of money motive. In addition, we found that the association between

personal sense of power and love of money motive is weaker when an individual possesses a higher power distance orientation. This study highlights several managerial and theoretical implications.

Keywords Approach–inhibition theory of power · Unethical decision-making · Personal sense of power · Power distance orientation · Love of money motive

Abbreviation

UDM Unethical decision-making

Introduction

We traditionally define a person who has the power to control valued resources as a powerful person (Anderson et al. 2012). This power is linked to formal hierarchical ranks, which enable power holders to significantly affect others through actions such as punishment and resource distribution (Magee & Galinsky 2008). However, when two people have control over the same resources and have the same hierarchical rank, these two individuals could use their power differently due to their differing psychological states of power. One individual could use his power over others to punish and withhold resources, while another may not use this power to punish or withhold resources. Thus, hierarchical power/social power associates with different levels of psychological states

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of power. However, most examinations of unethical behaviour have questioned why people in higher hierarchical positions/status or social power make unethical decisions (Liu et al. 2020; Dubois et al. 2015; Piff et al. 2012), often overlooking the influence of the psychological state of power on unethical decision-making (UDM).

Therefore, power is not only about controlling resources or having a superior social position (Galinsky et al. 2003), it also a “psychological state”, a feeling about or belief in one’s ability to affect others (Anderson et al. 2012, p. 314). Psychological state is referred to as personal sense of power. Personal sense of power differs from socio-structural power. Sometimes, but not always, hierarchical authority coincides with personal sense of power (Anderson et al., 2006; Anderson et al. 2012). Beyond the impact of individuals’ socio-structural positions, their psychological states related to their power can determine their real influence over others and predict actual behaviour.

The personal sense of power has a more significant influence on behaviour than the actual power possessed (Smith et al. 2008). Previous scholars have pointed out the importance of personal sense of power in predicting behaviour such as leader and supervisor behaviour (Ju et al. 2019; Hoogervorst et al. 2012; Brockner et al. 2021), consumer behaviour (Liu & Mattila 2017), employees’ silence behaviour (Morrison et al. 2015) and an individual’s risky behaviour (Anderson et al. 2006). These studies focus primarily on the positive impact of personal sense of power on different aspects of human behaviour. Although these studies are essential and inspiring, boundary conditions and the underlying mechanisms influencing the effect of the personal sense of power on negative behaviours such as UDM remain poorly understood (Anderson et al. 2012). Therefore, fundamental research questions remain unanswered, such as whether an individual’s personal sense of power influences UDM and what psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions are involved in understanding personal sense of power in relation to UDM. It is crucial to attend to these questions because findings on answers may help authorities take steps to reduce UDM in their organisations.

To address these research questions, the current researchers employed the approach–inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al. 2003). In this theory, Keltner et al. (2003) pointed out that powerful people are more

likely to engage in socially inappropriate ways as they have less concern for others. Thus, centred on this postulation, we propose that the personal sense of power will influence UDM positively. In addition, this theory explains that powerfulness is related to the behavioural approach system and that powerlessness is linked to inhibition (Keltner et al. 2003). The behavioural approach system is activated when rewards and opportunities exist (Keltner et al. 2003). In particular, Keltner et al. (2003) specified that “the presence of attainable rewards and opportunities activates approach-related processes that help the individual pursue and obtain goals related to these rewards” (p. 1363). Based on this view, we argue that personal sense of power associates with UDM as because of the activation of approach behaviour due to the love of money motive. The love of money motive shows a deep desire and aspiration for money, which has been associated positively with making money as well as with UDM (Tang 2016). Therefore, we study the love of money motive as a feasible mediator between personal sense of power and the UDM relationship.

Further, underpinned by the theory of approach–inhibition power, we also argue that power distance orientation plays a critical role as a boundary condition. This theory posits that cultural difference, which plays out in society as power distance, is a factor that facilitates the approach behaviour of powerful individuals (Keltner et al. 2003). Yet, this assumption has been minimally researched (Lin et al. 2019). Therefore, we propose in this study that a high level of power distance orientation, a cultural value, is a factor that elevates an individual’s personal sense of power. Therefore, we examine the moderating effect of power distance orientation between personal sense of power and the UDM relationship via the love of money motive. Power distance is mainly considered at the societal level by scholars (Hofstede’s cultural values), yet studies have found that power distances vary greatly at individual levels (Farh et al. 2007). Power distance at the individual level is power distance orientation (Kirkman et al. 2009). Individuals’ power distance orientation determines how far they acknowledge the uneven power distribution in organisations (Clugston et al. 2000; Farh et al. 2007).

The current research makes several contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, while the existing literature focuses on the impact of hierarchical status/

power on UDM, the current researchers examine the effect of the psychological state of power on UDM. Moreover, previous studies have focused on the positive impact of personal sense of power on behaviours. For instance, the manner in which personal sense of power motivates goal pursuit (Galinsky et al. 2003), the manner in which a low sense of power influences charismatic leadership (Hoogervorst et al. 2012), and the manner in which personal sense of power improves employee voice behaviour (Lin et al. 2019) have all been investigated. However, there has been a marked dearth of research that studied negative behaviours. Therefore, our study enhances the knowledge of the impact of personal sense of power on unique and hitherto unexplored human behaviour. To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet explored the impact of personal sense of power on UDM. Second, we explore the underlying mechanisms of why and when personal sense of power in an individual activates approach behaviour, resulting in possible unethical decisions. In doing so, we identify the love of money motive as a mediating mechanism and power distance orientation as a boundary condition on personal sense of power and UDM relationship. Thirdly, we address the call for more research to understand the boundary conditions of the personal sense of power by Anderson et al. (2012).

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

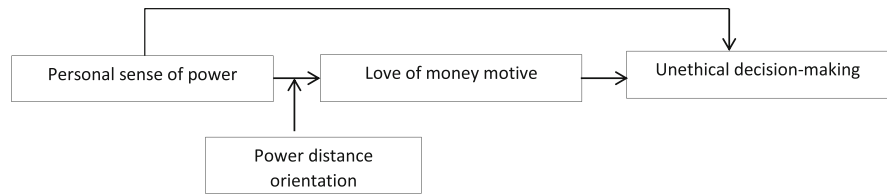
The approach–inhibition theory of power and unethical decision-making

The approach–inhibition theory of power is a helpful theoretical framework for comprehending the impact of a person’s sense of power on unethical behaviour. The approach–inhibition theory of power is grounded in personal sense of power, which captures people’s beliefs of their own power or lack thereof (Anderson et al. 2012; Keltner et al. 2003). This theory explains the activation of approach behaviour and inhibition behaviour by powerful and powerless individuals, respectively (Anderson & Berdahl 2002; Keltner et al. 2003). The existence of opportunities and rewards turns on the approach system that assists powerful individuals in pursuing goals related to these rewards. Individuals with power would generally be more

sensitive to rewards, as well as to other people’s characteristics that are significant to goal and reward accomplishment because they are predisposed to experiencing positive affect and approach goals and incentives (Keltner et al. 2003). Heightened power associates with reflexive social cognition rather than deliberate reasoning because the approach system promotes the drive towards desired goals with less regard for social repercussions. Therefore, the theory posits that due to the activation of approach behaviour, powerful persons may engage in socially inappropriate behaviours (where these socially inappropriate behaviours are not ethical) (Keltner et al. 2003). In this study, we believe that the desire and enthusiasm for money (the love of money motive) activates the approach behaviour of a high personal sense of power individual, so much so that that person may engage in UDM. In the literature of the UDM, the love of money motive is viewed as evil (see Tang & Chen 2008; Tang 2016). Love of money, in particular, is favourably associated with earning money and receiving bonuses and rewards (Tang & Chen 2008). Therefore, we argue that high sense of power individuals’ approach behaviour is activated by their love of money motive and that this could lead to UDM. Similarly, we propose that power distance orientation may have a moderating effect on personal sense of power and the UDM relationship via the love of money motive based on the inhibition theory of power and its emphasis on the influence of culture on personal sense of power (Keltner et al. 2003). Thus, the approach–inhibition theory of power is useful and even fundamental in understanding the influence of personal sense of power on UDM (Fig. 1).

Personal sense of power and unethical decision-making

According to the theory of approach–inhibition of power, powerful individuals have less orientation towards societal consequences; rather, they focus on attaining rewards by whatever means possible. Consequently, they may tend to behave in socially inappropriate ways (Keltner et al. 2003) and may not be aware of the societal impacts of their behaviours. Since powerful persons are generally associated with a high sense of power (Keltner et al. 2003), it is more likely that a heightened personal sense of power person will behave in more socially inappropriate

Fig. 1 Research model

ways. Because it breaches the core principles of ethics and is morally undesirable to the broader society, socially inappropriate behaviour can be viewed as unethical (Trevio & Brown, 2005; Jones 1991). An ethical decision is “both legal and morally acceptable to the larger community, whereas an unethical decision may be regarded as either illegal or morally unacceptable to the larger community” (Jones 1991, p. 367). Reduced societal orientation means that powerful people have less ethical awareness, which often prevents a high sense of power person from acting ethically. Anderson and Galinsky (2006) pointed out that a high sense of power person often engages in risky behaviour and is more likely to violate ethical norms. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested.

Hypothesis 1 Personal sense of power positively influences UDM.

Personal sense of power and the love of money motive

According to the approach–inhibition theory of power, a person with high power is driven to rewards and opportunities (Keltner et al. 2003). Attraction to rewards can lead to an increasing desire for money, and an intense desire for money is known as the love of money motive (Tang & Chen 2008; Tang 2016). Therefore, the love of money motive is closely associated with making money and approaching lucrative rewards (Tang 2016). The approach–inhibition theory also posits that powerful people are quickly attracted to rewards such as money (Keltner et al. 2003). This underlines the fact that the mindset of a powerful person is influenced by the love of money motive so that they are attracted to rewards quickly. Interestingly, previous researchers have found that if a person does not have status or social power, that person attempts to gain personal sense of power by purchasing status-related (luxury) products. In other words, these consumers willingly pay a high price for

these products to acquire a feeling of power (Rucker & Galinsky 2008). Therefore, to buy status-related products, money (and a great deal of it) is essential. Thus, personal sense of power becomes linked to an enhanced love of money motive. Similar outcomes have been discovered in Garbinsky et al. (2014), where a feeling of powerfulness leads to the love of money, which is reflected in the purchase of status-related products. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 Personal sense of power positively influences the love of money motive.

Role of the love of money motive

The love of money has been identified as the “root of all kinds of evil”, and thus, it clearly associates with UDM (Tang & Chen 2008; Tang 2016). It has also been argued that the love of money motivates individuals to be less concerned about ethical values and more bent on earning money. Focus on money naturally reduces concern for others, and this can decrease awareness of social norms. Employees may attempt to gain bonuses by fabricating financial statements or getting involved in theft of corporate property since the love of money motive is favourably associated with making money. Earlier studies have also confirmed this view by empirically examining how the love of money affected UDM (Gbadamosi & Joubert 2005; Khanifah et al. 2019; Vitell et al. 2006). According to Goldberg and Lewis (1978), the love of money and ethics clash with one another. Therefore, we hypothesise as follows.

Hypothesis 3a The love of money motive positively influences UDM.

In this study, we suggest that a potential mediating mechanism between a person’s sense of personal power and UDM is the love of money motive. According to the approach–inhibition theory of power, when powerful people receive incentives, their

approach behaviour is activated, which subsequently drives them to act in socially inappropriate ways (Keltner et al. 2003). Anderson and Galinsky (2006) examined how personal sense of power persons engage in risky behaviour in achieving payoffs, often ignoring potentially negative outcomes resulting from their risky behaviours. Similarly, we argue that those with power-hungry mindsets are less likely to be concerned about others and that their motive is to accumulate more money by any means, irrespective of how harmful their behaviour would be to others. Therefore, the possibility that individuals with a high personal sense of power will engage in UDM will depend on their love of money motive. On the basis of these justifications, the following hypothesis is put forth:

Hypothesis 3b The love of money motive mediates the relationship between personal sense of power and UDM.

Power distance orientation's moderating effect

According to the approach–inhibition theory of power, individual cultural values, such as power distance, alter the influence of a person's sense of power on an individual's ability to affect, focus and engage in various human behaviours (Keltner et al. 2003; Lin et al. 2019). Moreover, scholars have specified that personal sense of power and hierarchical power does not always equate (Anderson et al. 2006; Anderson et al. 2012). Power distance orientation produces the approach behaviour of the powerful and reduces inhibition (Keltner et al. 2003). We contend that the power distance orientation will enhance the impact of a person's sense of power on the motivation to pursue financial gain.

Power distance orientation is the belief in power and authority (Kirkman et al. 2009). Thus, the higher the power distance orientation, the more tolerant individuals will be of inequality; in other words, the more they will accept inequalities in power in an organisation or community. High power distance individuals accept hierarchical power and status differences (Hofstede 2001). Thus, individuals with high hierarchical power and status will focus more on rewards and show less concern for lower-ranking individuals (Liu et al. 2020; Tepper 2007). Furthermore, individuals who have a great deal of power in power distance societies believe that they are entitled to resources and privileges

(Sanyal 2005). Therefore, persons with a high sense of personal power may be more likely to initiate approach-related targets like rewards. As a result, higher power distance orientation will reinforce approach behaviour in such a way that personal sense of power persons will act with a more intense love of money motive. Based on the logic presented above, the following hypothesis is presented forth:

Hypothesis 4 The relationship between a person's love of money motive and their personal sense of power is moderated by power distance orientation, and as a result, this association is stronger when power distance orientation is higher than when it is lower.

A moderated mediation model

We suggest that the power distance orientation moderates the indirect impact of personal sense of power on UDM via the love of money motive. By making this suggestion, we show that at various levels of power distance orientation, the indirect impact of a person's perception of power on UDM varies. People differ in their levels of power distance orientation, and the suggested indirect relationship (Hypothesis 3b) will be impacted in such a manner that it tends to enhance UDM when a person with a strong personal sense of power exhibits a greater level of power orientation. Thus, we expect power distance orientation and personal sense of power to interact when affecting the love of money motive, which in turn will influence UDM. We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 The indirect effect of personal sense of power on UDM via the love of money motive is moderated by power distance orientation, i.e. this indirect effect is lower rather than greater when the power distance orientation is higher.

Method

Sample and procedure

Due to the fact that bank branches in Sri Lanka have reported numerous cases of UDM, this study was undertaken in the banking industry (De Silva et al. 2018). We (with the help of a five-member research team) collected multi-time and multi-source data from bank branch managers and their subordinates using

survey questionnaires to collect data on different variables at different times from managers and their subordinates. This is to reduce method bias, as specified by Kock et al. (2021) and Podsakoff et al. (2011). We used a coding system to match manager–supervisor data at Time 1 and Time 2.

At Time 1, we requested demographic data from the managers (i.e. gender, age, education, organisational tenure and income level) and requested them to comment on their love of money motive and personal sense of power. Simultaneously (at Time 1), we asked the subordinates working under managers to rate their managers' UDM and to mention their work tenure under the respective managers. One month after Time 1, at Time 2, managers commented on their power distance orientation.

We distributed 500 survey questionnaires to bank branch managers who represented all 2,876 Sri Lankan commercial bank branches (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2018). We set the sample size at 500 with an allocation for non-response (Krejcie & Morgan 1970). We used the convenience sampling technique to randomly distribute the 500 survey questionnaires after proportionally allocating them based on the total number of branches each commercial bank holds. We individually visited the branches and obtained consent from the individual branch managers and their subordinates before administering the questionnaire. We also explained the procedure carefully before administering the questionnaire. To reduce social desirability bias, we emphasised in the cover note that there are no “right or wrong” answers and encouraged participants to respond honestly. Also, we stated that the data would only be utilised for scholarly purposes. Further, to encourage honesty, we asked respondents not to mention their names, bank names or branch names. We also provided managers and their subordinates with return envelopes. After a week, we followed up with telephone calls, and this resulted in 333 questionnaires containing the correct manager–subordinate code being returned (Time 1). Using the same code at Time 2, we collected 314 questionnaires. However, after matching codes, only 305 questionnaires were usable from both Time 1 and Time 2.

Fifty-three per cent of bank managers were men, and 97% were more than 28 years of age. Ninety-six per cent of managers held at least a diploma and 32.5% held graduate and postgraduate degrees. More than 50% of managers had work experience of more than

15 years, and all managers earned an income above LKR 80,000 (exchange rate: Rs 1 = US\$ 0.0050 approximately). Subordinates' average work tenure with a particular manager was 3–5 years.

Measures

Both managers and subordinates rated the questionnaire items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = *strongly disagree*” to “5 = *strongly agree*”.

At Time 1, we measured managers' personal sense of power using Anderson and Galinsky's (2006) 8-item personal sense of power scale and love of money motive utilising the love of money scale of Tang and Chiu (2003), which consisted of 16 items. The love of money scale is a second-order construct with four lower-order constructs: “money as success”, “money as a motivator”, “money as a measure of importance” and “money to feel rich”. Also, at Time 1, we used a vignette adapted from Hoyt and Price (2013) to measure UDM. The vignette, which had been adapted for the Sri Lankan banking sector, was to be read by subordinates, who were then required to respond to a six-item questionnaire. Three senior academics and two bank managers validated the vignette to confirm its appropriateness for the banking industry in Sri Lanka. We carried out a separate pilot study to ensure the reliability and validity of the vignette and the questions ($\alpha = 0.780$). The six scale items assessed managers' propensity to make unethical decisions.

Further, control variables were measured at Time 1. The other UDM researchers have controlled the potential impacts of gender, age, education and tenure (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Wang et al. 2021). Following these researchers, we controlled managers' age, gender, educational level and work experience statistically. We also controlled subordinates' work tenure under the respective manager. At Time 2, we used a 6-item Dorfman and Howell (1988) to measure power distance orientation.

Data analysis and results

Common method variance (CMV)

We used procedural and statistical approaches to control CMV (Spector 1994). In attempting to reduce

CMV at the design stage of the questionnaire, we only adapted validated and empirically tested scales and separated the variables to create psychological separation. Also, we gathered information from supervisors and subordinates at different periods of time. As a post hoc statistical procedure, Harman's single factor test was performed using an un-rotated principal component factor in SPSS to test for any CMV. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for less than 20% (threshold of 50%) (Podsakoff et al. 2003) of the total variance explained, and therefore, that single factor does not account for a major part of the variance. We also used the common latent factor (CLF) test with AMOS 21.0 and compared the regression weights (standardised) with the CLF and without the CLF. The differences in standardised regression weights for all items were below 0.2, except for two items that measured personal sense of power. However, these items were removed from the model refinement stage due to lower factor loadings. This confirms that CMV is not a major concern for the study (Gaski 2017).

First-order measurement model evaluation

To evaluate the initial first-order measurement model, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on seven factors (success, motivator, riches, importance, power distance orientation, UDM and personal sense of power). Using first-order CFA, we measured the goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices, validity and reliability of the model. In the initial first-order measurement model, the GOF indices showed an adequate fit $\{\chi^2 = 986.429, df = 573, P = 0.000, CMIN/df = 1.722, RMSEA = 0.049, GFI = 0.840, CFI = 0.922, TLI = 0.914, RMR = 0.080\}$ (Fan et al. 2016; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Hu & Bentler 1999). We refined the measurement model by deleting the items which had low regression weights (< 0.45) (Comrey & Lee 1992; Stevens 2002; Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). We deleted two items of personal sense of power ("In working with others...even when I try", "I am not able to get my way"; "In working with others...if I want to", "I get to make the decisions") from the model and achieved the following goodness of fit by re-running the measurement model. An acceptable satisfactory fit was produced using the first-order refined measurement model $\{\chi^2 = 734.142, df = 506, P = 0.000, CMIN/df = 1.451, RMSEA = 0.039, GFI = 0.878,$

$CFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.950, RMR = 0.059\}$ (Fan et al. 2016; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Hu & Bentler 1999).

Then, we tested the internal consistency of the measures using Cronbach's alpha values and established the convergent validity of the variables using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), as the values obtained were greater than the recommended thresholds of 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1998) and 0.5 (Hair et al. 2011), respectively. Meanwhile, we also established the convergent validity of the items using factor loadings, which were greater than 0.5 in the refined model (Hair et al. 2006), indicating that the items were significant ($P < 0.001$). Table 1 contains the reliability and validity of the variables and items of the refined first-order measurement model. The square root of AVE was higher than the correlation among the latent variables (Table 2), and this establishes discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker 1981).

Second-order measurement model evaluation

It was required to run a second-order CFA since one of the constructs, the love of money motive, is a second-order construct (Anderson & Gerbing 1988). To assess the distinctiveness of the second-order, four-factor model, we carried out a series of CFAs and compared the model fit indices with alternative models. In addition, we used the Akaike information criterion (AIC) of each model to compare the alternative models. In model comparisons, the AIC is a fit index that is used to find the better fitting model, where the model with the lowest AIC value is found to have the best fit. The results of the hypothesised model, the four-factor model, showed an acceptable fit $\{\chi^2 = 734.142, df = 506, CMIN/df = 1.451, RMSEA = 0.039, GFI = 0.878, CFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.950, RMR = 0.059\}$ (Fan et al. 2016; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Hu & Bentler 1999) and compared to other alternative models, this model fitted well (see Table 3).

To test the second-order measurement model's convergent validity, we recalculated the composite reliability value (composite reliability = 0.626) and found it to be greater than 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi 1998). We ensured reliability using Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha = 0.852$). As the square root of AVE was greater than the correlation among the constructs, it was

Table 1 Validity and reliability

Variable/Construct and items	FL	CR	α	AVE
Success		0.854	0.844	0.599
LOM1: Money is how I compare each other	0.615			
LOM2: Money represents my achievement	0.881			
LOM3: Money is a symbol of my success	0.865			
LOM4: Money reflects my accomplishments	0.701			
Motivator		0.836	0.832	0.564
LOM5: I am motivated to work hard for money	0.860			
LOM6: Money reinforces me to work hard	0.797			
LOM7: I am highly motivated by money	0.739			
LOM8: Money is a motivator	0.581			
Rich		0.828	0.808	0.547
LOM9: Having lot of money is good	0.722			
LOM10: It would be nice to be rich	0.794			
LOM11: I want to be rich	0.658			
LOM12: My life will be more enjoyable, if I am rich and have more money	0.703			
Important		0.858	0.857	0.603
LOM13: Money is valuable	0.775			
LOM14: Money is good	0.776			
LOM15: Money is an important factor in the lives of all of us	0.776			
LOM16: Money is attractive	0.779			
Sense of power		0.898	0.808	0.602
SP1: In working with others....I can get people to listen to what I say	0.838			
SP2: In working with others....my wishes do not carry much weight®	0.869			
SP3: In working with others....I can get others to do what I want	0.754			
SP4: In working with others....even if I voice them, my views have little influence®	0.842			
SP5: In working with others....I think I have a great deal of power	0.797			
SP6: In working with others....my ideas and opinions are often ignored by others®	0.489			
Power Distance (PD)		0.858	0.855	0.503
PD1: Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates	0.756			
PD2: It is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates	0.751			
PD3: Managers should seldom ask for the opinions of employees	0.668			
PD4: Managers should avoid off-the-job social contacts with employees	0.739			
PD5: Employees should not disagree with management decisions	0.706			
PD6: Managers should not delegate important tasks to employees	0.625			
Unethical decision-making (UDM)		0.870	0.867	0.535
UDM1: My branch manager would be willing to pass on incorrect information to others if it gives him a competitive advantage	0.514			
UDM2: My branch manager would be willing to engage in what some might say are sneaky (cunning) tactics	0.626			
UDM3: My branch manager would be willing to do a favour for others if that would get him special treatment in this competition	0.817			
UDM4: My branch manager would justify any misrepresenting of facts/information in order to safeguard the integrity	0.876			
UDM5: My branch manager will justify the decisions that could potentially harm others while benefitting his plan	0.801			

Table 1 continued

Variable/Construct and items	FL	CR	α	AVE
UDM6: In order to achieve a goal, my branch manager will justify the acting in non-compliance of laws, regulations, standards and business codes if it is certain that no one will find out	0.691			

FL Factor loading, CR Composite reliability, α Cronbach's alpha

All FL were significant at the $p \leq 0.001$

®: Reverse coded

Table 2 Discriminant validity and correlation: First-order measurements

	UDM	Success	Motivator	Rich	Importance	SP	PD
Unethical decision-making (UDM)	0.732						
Success	0.185	0.773					
Motivator	0.166	0.595	0.751				
Rich	-0.052	0.166	0.198	0.739			
Importance	-0.049	0.054	0.198	0.731	0.776		
Sense of power (SP)	0.391	0.114	0.087	0.110	0.039	0.776	
Power distance (PD)	-0.101	0.048	0.054	0.083	0.180	0.080	0.709

Diagonal elements: Square root of AVE

Correlation: off-diagonal elements

Bold values is to separate the diagonal elements (square root of AVE) and to indicate that the square root of AVE was higher than the correlation among the latent variables

Table 3 Fit comparisons of alternative factor models

Model	χ^2	df	P value	χ^2/df	AIC	CFI	GFI	TLI	RMSEA
Four-factor model ^a	734.142	506	0.000	1.451	912.142	0.955	0.878	0.950	0.039
Three-factor model 1 ^b	932.060	519	0.000	1.796	1084.060	0.919	0.850	0.912	0.051
Three-factor model 2 ^c	899.500	519	0.000	1.733	1051.500	0.925	0.853	0.919	0.049
Three-factor model 3 ^d	1578.755	520	0.000	3.036	1728.755	0.791	0.716	0.775	0.082
Two-factor model ^e	935.857	520	0.000	1.800	1085.857	0.918	0.849	0.912	0.051

^aHypothesised model

^bSP and LOM combined, DP and UDM distinct

^cPD and LOM combined, SP and UDM distinct

^dSP and PD combined, LOM and UDM distinct

^eSP, PDI and LOM combined, UDM distinct

determined that the second-order measurement model had discriminant validity (see Table 4).

Structural model and hypotheses testing

Direct effects

We conducted SEM to assess the hypotheses. We incorporated control variables (gender, age,

educational level, work tenure of subordinates with a particular manager and managers' work experience). In the first step, we tested the full mediation model, including the love of money motive. This model had an adequate fit $\{\chi^2 = 702.179, df = 343, CMIN/df = 2.047, RMSEA = 0.059, GFI = 0.858, CFI = 0.918, TLI = 0.909, RMR = 0.105\}$ (Fan et al. 2016; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Hu & Bentler 1999). Table 5 presents the regression results of the study.

Table 4 Discriminant validity and correlation of second-order constructs and descriptive statistics

	LOM	SP	UDM	PDO	Mean	SD
Love of money (LOM)	0.578				3.08	1.04
Sense of power (SP)	0.138	0.776			3.56	1.14
Unethical decision-making (UDM)	0.200	0.391	0.732		2.92	1.02
Power distance orientation (PDO)	0.090	− 0.080	− 0.101	0.709	4.35	0.67

Diagonal elements: Square root of AVE

Correlations of constructs: off-diagonal elements

SD Standard deviation

Bold values is to separate the diagonal elements (square root of AVE) and to indicate that the square root of AVE was higher than the correlation among the latent variables

Table 5 Regression results

	Love of money motive		Unethical decision-making	
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
Control variables				
Age	0.012 (0.102)	0.011 (0.102)	0.067 (0.138)	0.042 (0.136)
Gender	− 0.052(0.074)	− 0.047 (0.074)	0.101 (0.100)	0.069 (0.099)
Education level	0.029(0.041)	0.026(0.041)	0.081 (0.056)	0.080 (0.056)
Work experience	− 0.043 (0.062) [†]	− 0.042 (0.062) [†]	− 0.095 (0.084) [†]	− 0.055 (0.082) [†]
Work tenure of subordinates with the manager	0.100 (0.109)	0.094 (0.109)	0.040 (0.146)	0.048 (0.145)
Independent variable				
Personal sense of power	0.143 (0.042) [†]	− 0.023 (0.049)	0.370 (0.057)***	− 0.135 (0.054)***
Moderator				
Power distance orientation		− 0.024 (0.067)		− 0.403 (0.098)***
Two-way interaction				
Personal sense of power x Power distance orientation		0.153 (0.012)**		0.527 (0.011)***
Mediator				
Love of money motive			0.143 (0.118)**	0.124 (0.117)**
R2	0.036	0.038	0.198	0.509

[†] $P < 0.1$; ** $P < 0.05$; $P < 0.001$ ***

Standardised regression coefficients are shown (standard errors)

Accordingly, there is a significant relationship between personal sense of power and UDM (Model 2a: $\beta = 0.370$, $p = 0.000$), and therefore, the results supported Hypothesis 1. Personal sense of power and love of money motive related as hypothesised ($\beta = 0.133$; S.E = 0.040), but at ($p < 0.1$), and therefore, we accepted Hypothesis 2. The next hypothesis was about the relationship between the love of money

motive and UDM, and we accepted it at $p < 0.05$ (Model 2a: $\beta = 0.143$).

Analysis of mediation

Using the 2000 bias-corrected bootstrapping technique, we then tested the partial mediation model containing the direct effect of personal sense of power

on UDM. This direct-effect model exhibited a significant relationship ($\beta = 0.392$; S.E = 0.057; $P = 0.000$), and the model fit indices recorded these values $\{\chi^2 = 185.210, df = 53, P = 0.000, CMIN/df = 3.495, RMSEA = 0.091, GFI = 0.907, CFI = 0.935, TLI = 0.920, RMR = 0.90\}$. The indirect-effect model presented adequately good fit indices $\{\chi^2 = 702.179, df = 343, P = 0.000, CMIN/df = 2.047, RMSEA = 0.059, GFI = 0.858, CFI = 0.918, TLI = 0.909, RMR = 0.105\}$ (Fan et al. 2016; Kline 2005; Steiger 2007; Hu and Bentler 1999). As illustrated in Table 6, the results supported the hypothesis related to mediation (Hypothesis 3b), revealing that the love of money motive ($\beta = 0.02$, S.E = 0.017; $p < 0.1$) partially mediates the association of personal sense of power and UDM.

Analysis of moderation

Hypothesis 4 indicated that the power difference would moderate the love of money motive and personal sense of power relationship. To test this, we used the multiplication method. In doing so, they performed the structural model using the interactive term between the moderating variable and the independent variable. As indicated in Table 3, the interactive term (personal sense of power x power distance orientation) was significantly related to the love of money motive (Model 1b: $\beta = 0.153, p < 0.05$). However, the moderation made the impact of personal sense of power on the love of money motive insignificant (Model 1b: $\beta = -0.023, p = 0.749$). Therefore, this implies that greater power distance orientation reduces the impact of personal sense of power on the love of money motive, as opposed to the postulation. We proved this by conducting a simple slope analysis and plotting the interaction as per the recommendation of Aiken and West (1994). As depicted in Fig. 2, when power distance orientation was lower than when it was

higher, a stronger association existed between an individual's personal sense of power and the love of money motive. Therefore, the study results did not support Hypothesis 4.

In order to evaluate the moderated mediation, we looked at the indirect effects of personal sense of power on UDM at two levels of power distance orientation (-1 standard deviation and + standard deviation) using bootstrap estimates and a bias-corrected confidence interval (95%) analysis. Accordingly, the results revealed that the conditional indirect effect, reflected in the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2018) of personal sense of power on UDM, was not significant, as the null of zero did not fall between the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval {conditional indirect effect = 0.0005; Boot SE = 0.0054; 95% bootstrap CIs from -0.0081 to 0.0097} (Preacher et al. 2007). Therefore, the research findings did not support Hypothesis 5.

The outcome of the hypotheses is summarised in Table 7.

Discussion

Most often, prior studies have described how social power/status affects UDM (Liu et al. 2020). Nonetheless, it is still under-researched how a person's sense of power impacts UDM. Therefore, our aim was to examine the impact of personal sense of power on UDM, along with its possible underlying mechanism, in order to explore a boundary condition. By suggesting a moderated mediation model, we discovered that the love of money motive partially mediates the relationship between personal sense of power and UDM. Contrary to what we hypothesised, power distance orientation moderated the association between personal sense of power and the love of money motive in such a way that it is lessened in high

Table 6 Results of mediating analysis of 2000 bias-corrected bootstrapping technique

	Direct Path SPUDM	Indirect Path SPLOMUDM	Total effect
β coefficient	0.370	0.020	0.367
P value	0.001	0.090	0.000
Decision	Supported at $P < 0.1$	Supported at $P < 0.1$	Partial mediation

2000 resamples at 90 per cent confidence interval ($P < 0.1$)

SP personal sense of power, UDM unethical decision-making, LOM Love of money motive

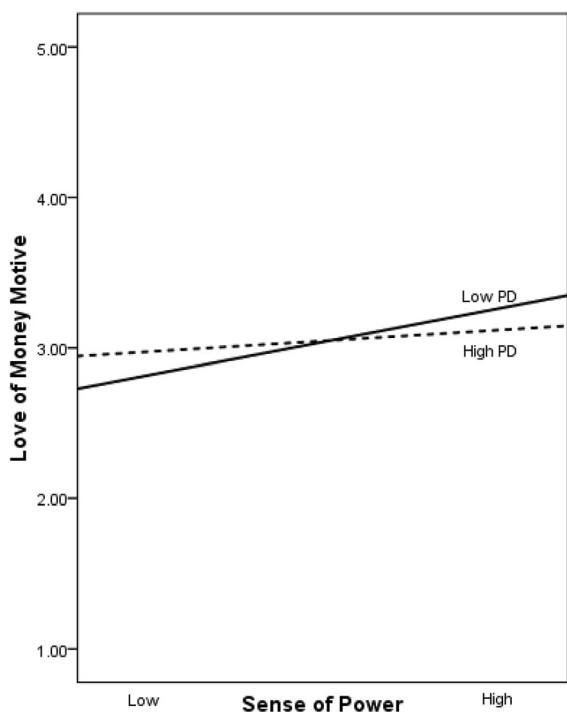


Fig. 2 The relationship between personal sense of power and love of money motive under conditions of high and low power distance orientation. *Low PD* Low power distance orientation, *High PD* High power distance orientation

Table 7 The outcome of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Outcome
Hypothesis 1	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Supported
Hypothesis 3a	Supported
Hypothesis 3b	Partial mediation
Hypothesis 4	Not supported
Hypothesis 5	Not supported

power distance orientated individuals. Moreover, the results did not support the overall moderated mediation model. However, these research findings make several important contributions to theory and practice.

Theoretical implications

There are several key theoretical contributions stemming from this study. First, the research study enriches the theoretical and empirical literature in the area of ethical decision-making. In particular, although the growing number of works on ethics has focused on the

effect of social power/status, the psychological effect of power on UDM has been under-researched. Drawing from the theory of approach–inhibition of power, our study investigated why and when UDM is affected by an individual’s personal sense of power (Anderson & Berdahl 2002; Keltner et al. 2003). Our results propose that the love of money motive activates the approach behaviour of individuals with a high personal sense of power individuals, inducing them to make unethical decisions. This research, therefore, improves the understanding of the psychological mechanism through which an individual has a high personal sense of power makes unethical decisions. As such, this explanation extends the scope of the ethics literature to include the manner in which personal sense of power (and powerlessness) influences UDM.

Second, existing literature on personal sense of power has called for research that yields theoretically important outcomes and mediators that will help paint a complete picture of psychological power (Anderson et al. 2012). Our study contributes to the personal sense of power literature from two perspectives. First, we explored the effect of personal sense of power on negative behaviours such as UDM. Past research has focused primarily on the positive effects of personal sense of power (e.g. Hoogervorst et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2019; Brockner et al. 2021), albeit the existence of a handful of studies that investigate its negative effects (e.g. Anderson et al. 2012). Anderson et al. (2012) have explained that personal sense of power is not always antisocial, but our results reveal that when making decisions in higher positions (since managers were selected as the sample), personal sense of power often influences people to make unethical decisions. Our results revealed that there is a greater direct influence from personal sense of power on UDM than an influence from the indirect effect. This means that although the love of money motive plays a motivating role in influencing approach behaviour, personal sense of power is, in itself, a powerful factor that affects unethical decision-making at higher levels. This could be a particular reason for the greater prevalence of Sri Lankan bank managers who engage in UDM. Further, looking at the partial mediation of the love of money motive (Hypothesis 3b) emphasises that other possible mediation mechanisms could exist (Zhao et al. 2010). For instance, status, verbal appreciation for job performance, bonuses and other inducements could be the other possible mediating mechanisms that can

be expected from the reward perspective. Future researchers can study these mediating mechanisms. Second, it was suggested by Keltner et al. (2003) that the individual cultural value of power distance may moderate the relationship between power and behaviour, and this hypothesis has been empirically tested (Lin et al. 2019). Also, more studies on boundary conditions are recommended by Anderson et al. (2012) in order to clarify the nature of the impact of personal sense of power on UDM. This study provides evidence for a fresh explanation of the approach–inhibition theory of power by studying the moderating effect of power distance orientation on the relationship between a personal sense of personal power and the love of money motive.

In accordance with previous research (Liu et al. 2020; Sanyal 2005), we originally postulated that high power distance orientation would induce approach behaviour and strengthen the influence of individuals' personal sense of power on their love of money motive. Also, in the moderated mediation model, we postulated that power distance orientation moderates the indirect effect of personal sense of power on UDM via the love of money motive in such a way that this indirect effect is weaker when power distance orientation is higher rather than lower. However, our results evidence that the effect of personal sense of power on the love of money motive is actually weakened by the moderating effect of power distance orientation, and we found that the moderated mediation model was not significant. These results are consistent with the arguments of some researchers (e.g. Javidan et al. 2006; Kirkman et al. 2009), who claim that higher power distance-oriented persons hardly go beyond their normal, specified job role to behave in a counter-productive manner (Kirkman et al. 2009). Instead, they are more often motivated to behave in a manner that benefits their superiors because of the respect and the distance they maintain (Javidan et al. 2006). Therefore, higher power distance orientation will not act as a motivator that induces approach behaviour in these managers (like in managers in the sample). In other words, higher power distance orientation could actually inhibit approach behaviour. In addition, the possible argument for the rejection of the moderation effect could be that in Sri Lanka, banks have a high level of segregation of duties to reduce the risk of fraud through collusion (Engdahl 2014). Therefore, maintaining a high distance would be difficult for managers

to get the work done in a high segregation office structure because of increased dependency. Therefore, the level of power distance orientation is affected by the organisation's work structure and organisational culture. Although this study emphasises the significance of taking power distance orientation into account when studying the relationship between a person's sense of power and UDM, additional research is required to confirm these findings.

Managerial implications

Our research has some significant practical implications. First, organisations should take steps to reduce personal sense of power in their employees as it often leads to an increase in UDM. To this end, organisations should implement strategies that reduce employees' psychological feeling of power over others by promoting equality and interdependency. In this regard, the segregation of duties will foster dependency on others (Engdahl 2014), which may help in settling power at equal levels. However, flattening an organisational structure cannot be advised to reduce the personal sense of power since a high level of power distance orientation will moderate the results as explained. Therefore, tall organisation structures with an open-door policy could be considered an effective strategy that could reduce personal sense of power and maintain cultural power distance.

Second, our findings indicated that the love of money motive influences the approach behaviour of a personal sense of power person. Therefore, it is necessary to create a culture that reduces the focus on money and work towards creating a culture that promotes ethics. As part of creating an ethical culture, organisational employees should be more aware of the critical factors that lead to UDM. For example, organisations should emphasise that personal sense of power and the money motive often lead to UDM and deviant behaviour. According to Mazar et al. (2008), reminding employees of their duty and sense of honour might minimise future unethical behaviours.

Limitations and future research

This study has a few limitations despite its merits. The love of money motive appears to have a small, indirect effect, but it is an important mechanism through which personal sense of power activates approach behaviour.

However, there could be other alternative mechanisms that activate approach behaviour, such as greed, self-interest and materialism. Therefore, instead of focusing exclusively on one mechanism, future studies could examine two or more mediating mechanisms to explain the impact of personal sense of power on UDM. In addition, we examined culture as a possible boundary condition. Future research can explore other boundary conditions, such as differences in individual emotions, moral virtues, personality traits and other contextual factors, such as organisational culture. Further studies could also investigate whether personal sense of power is related to UDM in group contexts and flat organisations. These investigations will strengthen the personal sense of power's capacity to explain behaviour.

Although this study has been carried out on a sample of bank managers in Sri Lanka, in an industry where there have been many claims of ethical transgression, it could be beneficial to investigate these relationships in different samples using different methodologies. Different samples may have various levels of power (e.g. different cultures: Western, European, Eastern; employee levels: lower level, middle level) and such examinations will improve the generalizability of the current results. Furthermore, we used only a single vignette, which focuses primarily on an internally competitive situation, to measure UDM. As there are obviously numerous alternate situations that could occur in the banking industry, employing a single vignette to analyse an employee's ethical intentions would only show intentions particular to that vignette.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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