The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of power distance on leadership in tourism industry. This paper aimed to understand behaviours in leadership contexts and the aspects of power distance affecting these behaviours. The findings of the paper depict that where power distance is concerned, a leader in the tourism industry needs to be someone who is evasive and a win/win problem solver.

Keywords: Power Distance, Leadership, Tourism Industry, Behaviours

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the value of entrepreneurial leadership is essential in the rapidly growing tourism industry (Taskov, Metodijeski, Dzaleva, & Filipovski, 2011). Gupta, MacMillan, & Surie (2004) described entrepreneurial leadership as direction that produces committed situations to accumulate and consolidate a ‘supporting cast’ of participants who are committed to create value.

One of the single largest and leading industries in the world today is tourism. This segment has been widely known as the major significant service industry (Schumacher, 2007). We focus on this particular industry due to its unique function that brings social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects to create services and add value to cultural heritage (Mosbah, & Abd Al Khuja, 2014).

Mathieson & Wall (1982, 2011) assert that tourism ismovement of individuals who are willing to travel outside their familiar locational environment. It also includes events and activities assumed during their stay in various different destinations, and the facilities and services created to cater their needs. The industry encompasses a wide cross section of component activities including the providing of transportation, accommodation, recreation, food, and related services (Australian Department of Tourism & Recreation, 1975) that provide tourists with memorable experiences.

Leadership is an aspect that cannot be separated from the tourism industry since providing service is their major responsibility requiring the labor force to place communicative skills as top priority. It is vital for the management of this particular sector to have these core skills to ensure their success in such communication sensitive industry.

Within the context of cross cultural leadership massively influenced by the globalized market, the leadership style and behaviours are dictated by the power distance which measures the methods where status, title as well as power are circulated in an organization. For example, in low-power distance countries like United Kingdom and Sweden (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), there are higher probability that they will be more focused on participative leadership; before making any decisions the subordinates will be consulted, as such giving access to shared decision-makings.

In contrast, countries with high power distance like France and Japan (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), where every authority powers are cumulative in the hands of the employees, it is more probable that superior employees or employers will assume a leadership with authoritarian styles and will nearly review their subordinates with a specific end goal to encourage more elevated amount of fulfillment, performance, and efficiency. According to Goolaup & Ismayilov (2011), because of the differences of the power distance level displayed in various companies in different countries, the ways they practice business and deal with customers differ as well.

In Malaysia, where this study was based upon, the Malay culture places a very high regardon societal position, social class and titles of people. There is tendency to give much power to those at the highest point of an association, organization or hierarchy. The gap of status would plausibly create communication obstructions, in which higher-level leaders may think their association is performing great, while the subordinates are hesitant to present new thoughts.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the influences of power distance on leadership in tourism industry. This current research will be guided by the following research questions:

1- Is there a significant difference between character and behaviour in leadership within the tourism industry?
2- What aspects of power distance influences leadership in tourism industry?
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study evolves around the concept of leadership and how power is displayed and observed in the context of a tourism industry in Malaysia.

Winston & Patterson (2006) assert that leaders tend to choose, prepare, and teach while prompting their followers. More often than not, the leaders would do this towards those that have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills. The leaders will direct them to fulfil the organization’s goals and target which will lead to the followers to expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a focused and organized effort to fulfil the mission and objectives with full acceptance. Besides that, traditionally a leader is viewed as a person who has a formal leadership position, and who, by the authority of his/her leadership position, leads an organization towards goals that have been set (Johannessen & Ska˚lvik, 2013).

Power distance

The way power is distributed among the members of the organization can be seen as the power distance within the group. In some cultures, individuals respond positively to higher degree of unequally distributed power than other cultures.

According to Hofstede (1991), the affiliation between the employers and superior officers with the employees and the subordinates in a society with lower power distance is one of interdependence in contrast to dependence in a high distance culture. This could influence the communication comprehension in a situation. Comprehension is one of communication skills that allow understanding between mutual parties to achieve common goals. It does not only mean to get the messages across but also confirm that the messages are understood as well as to ensure that the messages sent are accurate and cohesive.

Hofstede (1980), in his earlier study, recognized four cultural dimensions; masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and individualism/collectivism. Afterward, as a fifth dimension, he added future orientation and for a sixth dimension he stated it was indulgence/restraint (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). A specific national culture can be characterized as the dimensions basically focus on how to communicate, how different behaviours are viewed, the beliefs, the attitudes and task performances within the community and consequently in organizations and institutions.

Triandis et al. (1986) anticipate that the most suitable way to understand and comprehend culture is by identifying the dimensions of cultural differences. The two aspects of power distance, which are behaviour and characteristics, display the trend of leadership.

Authoritative augmentation of entrepreneurial activities is a sign of enterprise behavior (Wennekers & Thurik, 1999). It is significant to differentiate the specific elements that impact achievement in the organizations of tourism that the identity of its business person could control the implementation of a small venture of tourism (Hill & McGowan, 1996).

Power distance, the fourth dimension in Hofstede’s (1980) model of cultural dimensions, explains the inequalities presented in various societies. Another definition to further explain the essences of power distance is the length where the society willingly agree to the statement that power and authority in organization and institution is delegated in an uneven manner. Then again, it is to the degree in which the assistants are not likely to display their dissatisfaction with their employers. The higher ups are not probable to discuss with their employees regarding the process of decision-making (Hofstede, 2001). It can be said that inequality is shown in the relationship between the leaders and their subordinates within organizational contexts.

Naturally, this communication skill includes creating a vision or an idea of the future organizations, constructing a tactical strategy to accomplish set vision or a goal, as well as presenting the vision with all the members of the organization.

Goolaup & Ismaily (2011) claim that to define leadership, three key elements should be discussed: group, influence, and goals.

In order to illustrate and justify the findings of this study a conceptual framework is created that includes the power distance from Hofstede’s Culture Dimensions Theory (see Figure 1). Hence, the current study applies the displayed framework to explore the aspects of power distance in leadership in tourism industry.

III. METHODOLOGY

The target group for this research comprises of employees that work in urban environment in Malaysian with a focus in tourism industry. A total
number of 41 participants were chosen. The questionnaire of the research for this study is referred to the leadership perceptions scale in Nampushi’s (2015) research that came from the survey designed for the International GLOBE-Study (Part 1), which addressed leader behaviours. The main data of this study is extracted from the questionnaires completed by the respondents. Quantitative method using the correlation test was employed for the study.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have revealed that leadership is represented by a few items that correspond to the significance of power.

In order to justify and rationalize this study, the discussion is aligned along two different models that have been formulated and labelled as Element 1 and Element 2. The model combines Hofstede’s (2001) National Culture Dimension and Nampushi’s (2015) The two elements which further explained in the following section.

Element 1
First of all, it is interesting to note that the participants of this study have identified good leadership with evasive characteristics (refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2: Power Distance in Element 1

The finding reflects that the participants believed that a leader can exert power distance via displaying evasive features. It was also discovered that there are three other variables that are closely related to Evasive characteristics: Dictatorial, Mediator, and Confidence Builder. The correlation results of these items are strongly positive (p value is less than 0.01). Being strategically evasive means to keep good relationship with subordinates by refraining from giving out negative comments (Nampushi, 2015). Therefore, this finding indicates that by being indirect rather than being too direct can be more effective in communicating messages in the Malaysian context.

This finding leads to a deduction that evasiveness displayed by leaders is useful in influencing others, especially subordinates. Prewitt et al. (2011) claim that ability to influence others positively by setting an example is good leadership. Normally, this ability includes creating a long-term colorful vision for the organizational future, planning a tactical arrangement for achieving that vision, and also extensively sharing the vision with everyone who belongs to the association.

Thus with the four identified items – power distance, dictatorial, mediator, and confidence builder – a leader is able to exert power in managing his/her subordinates effectively in the tourism industry.

Element 2

The participants of this study have also identified this variable - Win/win Problem Solver - as another crucial item that can reflect power. This variable correlates with Clear (easily understood) variable with p value below 0.05.

Figure 1: Power Distance in Element 2

As indicated by Selvarajah, Duigan, Suppiah, Lane, & Nuttman (1995), leadership behaviour has typically been perceived as the states of mind, values, and styles of leaders which are exact to the management task performance.

The data of the study has identified win/win problem solver as an important component a leader should have. They are capable of identifying solutions that could satisfy individuals that have different and contradicting interests. Effective behaviour of a win/win problem-solver includes aspects of low-power distance where leaders are required to obtain and share the information to solve any conflicts as well as elements of high-power distance where leaders hold more authority to control and give orders to his/her subordinates in a clear manner. The leaders must also be able to provide solutions when face with conflicts. This matter is also expected in high-power distance as outcome relies on the decision made by the superior (Hofstede, 2001).

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to learn that these behaviours and characteristics are perceived to be effective leadership skills in communication-sensitive tourism industry.
since it is generally supposed that being direct rather than evasive is a better way of communicating. This study has found that when it comes to certain contexts people perceive leadership differently. Being evasive can be a great strategy when working in high context cultures which gives leaders the authoritative power. In tourism industry where communication skills are deemed as the core assets one should have, this study provides new insight as to how employees perceive leaders by their indirectness in the Malaysian context.

REFERENCES