What Makes Managers Effective? A Qualitative Study in Mexico

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Much of management knowledge today has been derived from research in North American or Europe (Lau, 2002). The lack of global focus and slow progress in international management studies (Tsui, 2004) has resulted in very limited knowledge about organization management in regions like Mexico under study. Additionally, there are serious concerns about management research. One concern is the focus of management studies. It appears that much more effort has been made in understanding what managers do rather than how effective they are as managers. The exclusive focus on issues unrelated to managerial competence (e.g., the frequency of and amount of time devoted to managerial activities, O’Driscoll, Humphries, & Larson, 1991) reduced practical utility for differentiating “good” or “bad” managerial practices (Hamlin, 2004). Further, there is a concern about a lack of in-depth understanding of managerial behaviors and effectiveness resulted from using survey-based quantitative measures as dominant research methods (Alvesson, 2002).

This qualitative study explored managerial effectiveness in Mexico using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two questions guided this inquiry: (1) what managerial behaviors were perceived as effective? (2) What managerial behaviors were perceived as least effectiveness or ineffective? This study was informed by and built upon a body of research on managerial effectiveness initiated by Hamlin and his co-researchers (Hamlin, 1988; 2002; 2004; 2008; Hamlin, & Bassi, 2008; Hamlin, Reidy, & Stewart, 1997; Hamlin &
Serventi, 2008) and deviated from it by using multiple organizations as research settings. Three bodies of literature formed the theoretical foundations of this study: managerial leadership research as a whole, Mexican cultural values and impact on managerial leadership behaviors, and Mexican leadership studies (e.g. Davila & Elvira, 2007; Howell et al., 2007; Kras, 1994; Martinez, 2000; Rodriguez, 2005).

For data collection, we interviewed 42 participants from 9 organizations in Southeast Mexico using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT, Flanagan, 1954). Of the participants, 15 were non-managers, 13 were entry-level supervisors, 13 were middle-level managers, and 4 were senior managers. In the 60-90 minute individual CIT interview, each participant was asked to provide five concrete examples (critical incidents) of effective managerial behaviors and five least effective/ineffective behaviors, which he or she had observed in other managers within the past 6-12 months. A total of 369 CIs were collected of which 175 were examples of effective and 194 of ineffective managerial behaviors. Using the qualitative content analysis (as used by Hamlin & Cooper, 2007) and open coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1983), we reduced 369 CIs into 20 positive and 23 negative behavior categories, each comprising 3-10 same or similar CIs. The most prominent effective managerial behaviors identified by the participants included being supportive, caring, understanding, and fair, encouraging participation, open communication and empowerment, focusing on performance, and demonstrating strong ability of problem solving and conflict resolution. Among ineffective behaviors, authoritative leadership style was most frequently mentioned. These findings, while partially reflecting strong imprints of Mexican culture, also suggested a changing pattern of Mexican managerial leadership.

**References**


