Relational Maintenance Strategies among Mexican Coworkers

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Abstract

This study sought to expand our understanding of the communication behaviors between Mexican coworkers. This involved examining the relational maintenance behaviors that take place between coworkers in Mexican organizations and the impact these behaviors had on the workers job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Since Mexico is considered to be a collectivistic country it was also assessed in order to examine its possible influence on coworkers. The findings indicated that culture played a significant role in Mexican employees' use of relational maintenance behaviors and their satisfaction and commitment. Additionally, it appeared that Mexican employees engaged in relational maintenance behaviors as a result of their collectivistic culture to fulfill interpersonal needs. Further, significant relationships were found between the coworker relational maintenance behaviors and communication and job satisfaction and organizational commitment. A detailed discussion was also provided highlighting the implications of these findings to organizational communication scholars and business professionals alike.

1. Relational Maintenance Strategies among Mexican Coworkers

Hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens live and work in Mexico, and the U.S.-Mexican border is regularly crossed in both directions by more people than any other international border in the world. Further, Wild, Wild, and Han (2006) commented on the level of U.S. investment in Mexico, particularly in the assembly sector named (the Maquiladoras) where U.S. firms ship parts to organizations located in Mexico (both U.S. and Mexican owned), attracted by the low wages, to assemble products such as refrigerators, calculators, laptop computers, and mobile phones. With such a significant number of U.S. and Mexican managers and workers interacting with one another in a shared work environment, an appreciation of each other's communication practices and culture has become increasingly important for those involved.

With respect to the communication between coworkers in the workplace, many scholars conceptualize organizations as systems or webs of interpersonal relationships built on communication interactions (Wheatley, 2001). Further, positive organizational relationships can increase organizational effectiveness and may contribute to an organization's financial wellbeing (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). More recently, Myers and Johnson (2004) made the distinction between workplace relationships and organizational peer relationships with the latter being comprised of employees at the same hierarchical level who have no direct authority over each other. These coworker relationships have been noted as important sources of friendships and have a positive influence on job satisfaction (Zalesny & Ford, 1990).

Cahill and Sias (1997) reported that generally employees develop relationships with their coworkers to provide them with a source of friendship. Myers and Johnson (2004) added that these peer relationships are essential to the organizational socialization process, and are associated with positive organizational outcomes such as increased production, satisfaction, and retention. Although studies have provided evidence for the effect of workplace friendships, they fall short of providing a clear explanation of why and how these friendships are developed and maintained, the role of culture, and what purpose they serve.

Specific to the current study is the work of Hofstede (1980, 1983, 2001) who originally identified four cultural factors (e.g., masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and collectivism vs. individualism) thought to differentiate one culture from another. Hofstede's work was highlighted here because he conducted the largest cross-culture study to date including 50 countries and 116,000 participants. The following will briefly explain each of Hofstede's cultural factors. Masculinity vs. femininity can be classified as to the extent that cultures minimize or maximize the social sex role division. In Mexico the cultural factor of masculinity vs. femininity is characterized by a distinct delineation of roles within the family, with an authoritative husband-father who ideally is the breadwinner and a submissive wife-mother who cares for the home and rears the children. Hofstede (1983) found Mexico to be a "masculine" culture with male and female roles clearly defined in society.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's low level of tolerance for uncertainty. Mexico is considered to be high in uncertainty avoidance meaning that in an effort to minimize or reduce uncertainty, strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations are adopted and implemented. The goal of this population is to control everything in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected. As a result of this high Uncertainty Avoidance characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse (Hofstede, 1983). In the Mexican culture, familiarity and security are emphasized and importance is placed on upholding traditions and preserving family values as well as the attitude of living for today. Mexicans seek present satisfaction and prefer "known" results to "unknown" future outcomes.

Power distance refers to the extent to which inequality among persons in different positions of formal power are viewed as a natural (and even desirable) aspect of the social order (Hofstede, 1983). In other words, *power distance* refers to the degree to which an individual prefers his or her supervisor to dictate what needs to be done and how. The norms of high power distance cultures (e.g., Mexico) legitimize differences in decision-making power between those who are in high power positions vs. those who are in low power positions (Hofstede, 1983). The literature suggests that Mexican employees, in general, value their subordinate role within the organization and expect that superiors direct them and in return their organization will support and sustain them (Stephens & Greer 1995).

Of particular interest to this study was the cultural factor of collectivism which was used here to highlight the influence of culture on the communication practices among Mexican coworkers. According to Hofstede (1980, 1983, 2001), Mexico is shown as being a collectivist country, where the "group" (family) is preferred over individual roles. The Mexican household is rooted in an intricate extended system of families and friends, based entirely on their collectivist beliefs. The need for survival strengthens the familial bond, because the problem of one becomes a problem for the entire family. Extended families have been the prevailing form of family arrangement in Mexico. It is common for grandparents and other relatives to live with an extended Mexican family. Relatives may also include immediate family members, distant relatives, close family friends, long-standing neighbors, in-laws, and godparents. In addition, nuclear households, even though they are physically distanced and not part of the household production, remain part of the extended web of family. Mexican families assist extended family members with monetary assistance like lodging, work, money; as well as, non-monetary assistance, like emotional support and advice.

The cultural dimension of collectivism was highlighted in the current study because it appears to have a possible role in facilitating the use of relational maintenance behaviors to enhance or maintain interpersonal relationships with coworkers. Therefore, it is reasoned here that in collectivistic countries, such as Mexico, cultural practices are particularly important drivers in regulating the communication behaviors between coworkers. Based on the growing interest of foreign countries doing business in the Mexican market or moving operations to Mexico, understanding the interpersonal dynamics that take place within the Mexican workplace warrants special attention.

The key assumptions of this study are that coworker relational maintenance behaviors are influenced by culture, enacted through communication, and may serve to fulfill the interpersonal needs of Mexican workers. Further, the study of coworker relational maintenance from an interpersonal needs framework is important because it provides an explanation as to why coworkers engage in maintenance behaviors. Further support for the value of this study was offered by Dindia (2002) who indicated that research examining relational maintenance in the work setting

needs to be expanded beyond the supervisor-subordinate relationship to include coworkers because coworker relationships are pivotal to organizational success.

Prior research indicates that nearly 40 per cent of U.S. firms send their managers and employees to other countries without any form of cultural preparation, and those members who did receive training, on average, managed less than one day (WI & NFTC, 1996). In response, the current study sought to examine the communication interactions between Mexican employees working for Mexican owned organizations located in Mexico. More specifically, the goal of the current study was to benefit scholars and practitioners alike by increasing our understanding of the influence culture and communication have on Mexican coworkers and the impact these elements have on the job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment of those workers. In doing so, these findings should provide managers and employees who cross cultural boundaries with information to improve the communication between them and their new workforce. As a result, the organization and its employees would jointly benefit from the resulting job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

In addition to the cultural dimension of collectivism, another factor that may lead employees to engage in relational maintenance behaviors is their desire to fulfill interpersonal needs. Therefore, The Theory of Interpersonal Needs (Shutz, 1958, 1966) was used here as a theoretical framework to help elucidate why coworkers in Mexican organizations engage in relational maintenance behaviors and to realize the associated benefits.

2. Theoretical Rational

According to The Theory of Interpersonal Needs (Shutz, 1958, 1966) individuals have the need to include others in activities and to be included (inclusion needs); the need to control others and be controlled (control needs), and to give affection to others and in turn receive affection from them (affection needs). This framework makes clear the notion that individuals seek human contact and build interpersonal relationships in an effort to satisfy one or more of these needs. Research by Knapp and Vangelisti (1999) indicated that people with strong inclusion needs tend to be socially active, seek out opportunities to interact with others, are often cheerful and enthusias-

tic, and express satisfaction with their social interactions. Shutz (1958) defined control as a need to attain satisfactory relations in the domains of control, influence, and power. Shutz (1958) argued that each of us needs to feel that sometimes we are in charge of a situation. Lastly, Shutz (1958, 1966) defined affection as a need to attain satisfactory relations in the domain of love and affection. However, Knapp and Vangelisti (1999) argued that although the concept of affection is generally associated with intimate behavior, it may incorporate other behaviors such as helping someone with a task, taking an interest in another's problems, or having someone endorse your self-image. Shutz (1958, 1966) further argued that these interpersonal needs parallel biological needs in importance and their non-fulfillment leads to emotional and motivational disturbances.

Prior research indicates that employees engage in communication interactions with coworkers in order to satisfy their interpersonal needs for pleasure and inclusion (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Similarly, in U.S. firms, Madlock & Booth-Butterfield (2012) made the association between coworker relational maintenance behaviors and fulfillment of interpersonal needs. Given that interpersonal needs are universal (apply to people of all cultures) (Shutz, 1966) it is reasoned here that Mexican coworker may engage in relational maintenance behaviors to fulfill interpersonal needs as well. For example, behaviors such as helping someone with a task and taking an interest in another's problems are collectivistic behaviors that fall under the interpersonal need for inclusion and may be related to relational maintenance behaviors such advice giving and shared tasks. Given the possible link between relational maintenance behaviors, interpersonal needs, and culture; the following will highlight the inclusion of relational maintenance strategies in greater detail.

3. Relational Maintenance Strategies

Since the 1990's there has been a great deal of attention placed on relational maintenance behaviors (Canary & Zelley, 2000) with a specific focus on romantic couples by examining what partners do "to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition" (Dindia & Canary, 1993, p. 164). Stafford and Canary's (1991) original typology of relationship maintenance strategy was comprised of five factors: positivity (interacting with partners in a cheerful, uncritical manner); openness (directly discussing the nature of the relationship and disclosing one's desires for the

relationship); assurances (communicating one's desire to continue with the relationship); social networks (relying on common affiliations and relations); and sharing tasks (performing one's responsibilities to assist with overall task completion). In order to offer a more complete picture of relational maintenance behaviors, two additional strategies were developed by Stafford, Dainton, and Haas (2000) which included conflict management (being patient, understanding, and cooperating), and advice giving (includes both giving and seeking advice).

Even though organizations have been characterized as webs of interpersonal relationships and that organizational relationships can increase organizational effectiveness and contribute to an organization's financial wellbeing (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999), few studies have examined how these workplace relationships are developed and maintained. Prior research involving relational maintenance strategies has primarily focused on the superior subordinate relationship (see Waldron, 1991; Waldron & Hunt, 1992). However, of greater interest here involves the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in between Mexican coworkers. Based on the notion that coworker relationships are status neutral, relational maintenance strategies are likely to reflect a genuine desire by the worker to build and enhance these relationships with their coworkers. Coworker relationships are unlike superior/subordinate relationships which may be predicated on the notion of future economic gain or mitigated by high power distance as found in Mexican organizations. Since employees in Mexican organizations seek to be involved in an engaging work environment (Davis & Nayebpour, 2004; Peterson, Puia, & Suess, 2003), it is possible that relational maintenance behaviors between coworkers are used to fulfill that end. Thus, an examination of the relational maintenance behaviors that take place between Mexican coworkers is especially salient to this study because their collectivist culture may have an influence on these behaviors.

In following with the relational maintenance research between U.S. coworkers conducted by Madlock and Booth-Butterfield (2012), the variables of communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment were also considered here. Specifically, Madlock and Booth-Butterfield found that relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by coworkers were positively related to their communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. These variables also appear to buttress prior research examining the association be-

tween relational maintenance strategies involving friends, family, and relational partners. For instance, research examining relational maintenance strategies among family, friends, and romantic partners revealed strong positive relationships between the use of relational maintenance strategies and relational commitment (Stafford & Canary, 1991), relationship satisfaction (Dainton, 2000), and communication satisfaction (Stafford et al., 2000). Therefore it was reasoned here that a similar association to those listed above may be found between Mexican coworkers. Therefore, communication satisfaction was included in this study and will be considered in greater detail below.

4. Communication Satisfaction

Communication satisfaction in the workplace has been defined as satisfaction with various aspects of the communication that occurs in the organization, such as the amount and quality of information available (Crino & White, 1981). Various studies examined the importance of communication on organizational success and have shown that communication quality is associated with employees' job satisfaction, performance, productivity, and commitment (Clampit & Downs, 1993). Generally, positive coworker interactions have been found to strongly influence worker's attitudes of job satisfaction and commitment (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). However, to date little research has examined the communication practices within Mexican organizations that take place among coworkers. Even less research has focused on the influence relational maintenance behaviors between Mexican coworkers have on their communication satisfaction. Given this lack of research, coupled with the possibility that Mexican coworkers engage in relational maintenance behaviors because of their culture and to fulfill interpersonal needs, it is reasoned here that such behaviors will also contribute to their communication satisfaction. Further, it could be extrapolated that Mexican workers who are satisfied with the communication interactions between them and their coworkers may also report being satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, job satisfaction was included in the current study.

5. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1297). The most common factors leading to worker stress and dissatisfaction are those emanating from the nature of the job itself, within which interpersonal relationships between employees take place (Kenny & Cooper, 2003). According to Korte and Wynne (1996), a deterioration of relationships in organizational settings resulting from reduced interpersonal communication between workers negatively influences job satisfaction, and sometimes leads to employees leaving their jobs. Cummins (1989) added that job satisfaction was found to be highest among employees who experienced interpersonal relationships with their coworkers. According to Randall (1993), research on commitment and job satisfaction has entered an international phase including countries like Mexico; however, these studies are still relatively scarce. Since prior research examining coworkers in the U.S. has indicated a link between the use of relational maintenance strategies and the job satisfaction and commitment of coworkers, it is reasoned here that similar outcomes will also be found with Mexican coworkers. Based on prior research indicating that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are associated with coworker relationships (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), organizational commitment was also considered in the current study.

6. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been conceptualized in a number of ways. For example, Ferris and Aranya (1983) conceptualized organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization as well as the willingness to exert effort and remain in the organization" (p. 87). Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) defined organizational commitment as the strength of an employee's emotional attachment to the organization and the acceptance of the organization's goals and values. Both of the prior definitions emphasize involvement and emotional attachment which are components that can be found in the interpersonal relationships between coworkers. From an organizational perspective, coworker friendships have been found to enhance levels of organizational commitment

(Rawlings, 1992), which saves companies time and money due to reduced absenteeism and lower turnover rates (Cohen, 1992).

Prior research indicates strong positive relationships between organizational commitment and personal characteristics such as increased well-being and job related characteristics such as satisfaction and productivity (Mowday et al., 1982). Further, Meyer and Allen (1997) highlighted specific antecedents of organizational commitment including a positive organizational climate, met expectations, person-job fit, and needs being met. For the current study, these needs that are being met may include the interpersonal needs for inclusion, control, and or affection, predicated by workplace friendships developed and maintained through the use of relational maintenance strategies. Additional research indicates that factors such as culture, proximity, similarity, interpersonal interaction, leadership, and reciprocity enhance employees' levels of organizational commitment (Haslam, 2001). Therefore, it is anticipated that a collectivistic culture, relational maintenance strategies, and interpersonal needs will enhance the organizational commitment of Mexican coworkers as well.

7. Hypotheses and Research Questions

Prior research examining U.S. organizations found that employees engage in relational maintenance strategies to enhance or maintain their relationships with coworkers and to fulfill interpersonal needs (see Madlock & Booth-Butterfield, 2012). It is reasoned that perhaps to even a greater degree, because of their collectivistic culture, employees who work in Mexico may engage in relational maintenance behaviors with coworkers to fulfill their interpersonal needs. Therefore, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H1:   Mexican employees will report using relationship maintenance strategies when communicating with coworkers.

The assumption that groups are socially bound together and that individuals are obligated to act in a particular fashion (Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002) seems to be the central theme of collectivism. The concept of collectivism suggests that group membership determines one's

identity; the individual should sacrifice their own goals for the good of the group; satisfaction is derived from carrying out the expected social role; and emotional restraint is valued as a method of ensuring group harmony. Features associated with collectivism include being concerned with the in-groups' fate and giving its' goals priority over ones' own; maintaining harmony, interdependence and cooperation and avoiding open conflict within the in-group. Reciprocity is a key requirement among in-group members, who operate within a related network of interlocking responsibilities and obligations. Based on what we know about collectivistic cultures it is reasoned here that collectivism will be related to Mexican coworkers' use of relational maintenance strategies. As a result, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H2:   The cultural factor of collectivism will be positively related to the use of relational maintenance behaviors by Mexican coworkers.

Because of its collectivistic culture and the growth of production facilities in Mexico, the influence of culture on employees' communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment should be explored. By understanding the nature of these attitudes we may begin to honestly understand the impact culture has on productivity, attachment, turnover, and affect. This study can help develop our knowledge and ability to explain, predict and control attitudes and behaviors among Mexican workers. As a result, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H3:   The cultural factor of collectivism will be positively related to the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of Mexican employees and their communication satisfaction with coworkers.

Another area of interest related to the current study involves the association between the relational maintenance behaviors of Mexican coworkers and their job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Given the positive outcomes associated with relational maintenance behaviors found in prior research, the following hypothesis and research questions were advanced:

H4: Relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers will be positively related to their job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

RQ1: Which relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers will serve as the greatest predictor of their organizational commitment?

RQ1a: Which relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers will serve as the greatest predictor of their job satisfaction?

RQ1b: Which relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers will serve as the greatest predictor of their communication satisfaction?

8. Method

Participants

Participants were 179 working adults from a variety of organizations ($n = 118$, 66% male) and ($n = 61$, 34% female). Their overall tenure ranged from 3 to 25 years ($M = 8.7$, $SD = 6.2$), and age ranged from 20 to 56 ($M = 29$, $SD = 7.3$). They reported working for a variety of organizations including; service 52.7%, high tech 10.4%, manufacturing 24.7%, and other 12.2%.

Procedures

The survey used for the current study was originally written in English, translated into Spanish by a bi-lingual Professor and back translated into English by another bi-lingual Professor at the same university to ensure that no meaning was lost during the translation. The sample included full-time non-managerial working adults of Mexican origin who worked for Mexican owned and operated organizations located in Mexico. The participants were recruited by the primary author as well as undergraduate and graduate business majors at a mid-sized University located in the Southern region of the United States. The business students who assisted in recruiting participants either currently live in Mexico and commute to school or were originally from Mexico and

now live in the U.S. whose primary or extended family still lives and works in Mexico. These students were placed in teams based on the geographic location in Mexico where they or their family members live in order to attempt to include participants from a geographically disperse range of organizations in Mexico. To ensure that the participants were Spanish speaking employees working for organizations in Mexico they were given an email address in which they were asked to report their name, the name of their organization, and a contact number. Participants were then asked to return the completed questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the author. They were also asked to place their name, as it appeared in the prior email, on the lower right hand corner of the envelope. Confidentiality, and anonymity were insured because the author was the only person to handle the completed questionnaires and no link between the envelope and the survey was established. Only envelopes containing the participant's name that matched the one on an email were used in the study. Of the 350 original questionnaires 197 were returned resulting in a 56.2% return rate. Of the 197 returned questionnaires, 18 could not be used due to missing data leaving 179 questionnaires used in the current study.

Measures

Organizational Commitment was operationalized with the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) as was the original scale. The scale is intended to measure employee attachment to the organization, for example, "I am proud to tell others that I am part of the organization". Prior studies reported reliabilities ranging from .82 to .92 and strong validity (Barge & Schlueter, 1988). Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .89 ($M = 44.9$, $SD = 8.42$).

Job satisfaction was measured by the eight-item Abridged Job In General Scale (AJIG) (Russell et al., 2004). A 5-point Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used in the current study instead of the original scale formatting (i.e., using 0 for "no," 1 for "?" and 3 for "yes) to be consistent with other parts of the questionnaire. The scale is comprised of single word or short statements regarding an employee's overall perception of their job (e.g.,

Good, Better than most, Undesirable). Prior research (Russell et al., 2004) indicated that the AJIG Scale had strong reliability with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .92.

Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .87 ($M = 28.9$, $SD = 4.9$).

Communication Satisfaction was measured with the 19-item Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (ICSI) developed by Hecht (1978). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) as was the original scale. A slight modification was made to the original scale with a lead in sentence (When communicating with my coworkers I feel...) preceding each statement such as: "conversations flow smoothly". Prior research reported scale reliability of .94 (Madlock, 2008).

Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .89 ($M = 83.6$, $SD = 12.8$).

Collectivism was measured by the 4-item measure of power distance developed by

Dorfman and Howell (1988). This measure was used because it has been used in prior studies that focused on collectivistic cultures similar to that of Mexico. A sample item reads: "In the workplace, group welfare is more important than individual rewards." The 4-item instrument was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) as was the original scale. Prior research indicated scale reliability of .74 (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007). Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the current study was .84 ($M = 13.87$, $SD = 2.58$).

Relational Maintenance Strategies (coworkers) was measured by the 22-item modified Relational Maintenance Scale (Madlock & Booth-Butterfield, *in press*) based on the 31-item Stafford et al. (2000) relational maintenance scale. The items were reworded to accommodate the work setting (see Table 1 for the scale). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) as was the original scale. Cronbach's alpha for the 22-item scale was as follows; assurances ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 16.4$, $SD = 3.5$), openness ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 11.8$, $SD = 2.9$), conflict management ($\alpha = .82$, $M = 12.7$, $SD = 3.2$), shared tasks ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 20.7$, $SD = 4.8$), positivity ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 6.9$, $SD = 2.0$), advice giving ($\alpha = .77$, $M = 10.7$, $SD = 3.4$), and social networks ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 12.1$, $SD = 3.1$).

Table 1

Coworker Relational Maintenance Scale

Assurances

_____1. I tell my co-workers that I enjoy working with them.

_____2. I imply that our relationship has a future.

_____3. I tell my co-workers how much they mean to me.

_____4. I talk about plans for the future with my co-workers.

_____5. I simply tell my co-workers how I feel about them.

Openness

_____6. I talk about my fears with my co-workers.

_____7. I disclose what I need or want from my co-workers.

_____8. I am open about my feelings with my co-workers.

Conflict management

_____9. I apologize to my co-workers when I am wrong.

_____10. I cooperate in how I handle disagreements.

_____11. I listen to my co-workers and try not to judge.

_____12. I am understanding.

Shared tasks

_____13. I help equally with the tasks that need to be done.

_____14. I offer to do things that aren't "my" responsibility.

_____15. I do my fair share of the work we have to do.

_____16. I do not shirk my duties.

Positivity

_____17. I act cheerful and positive around my co-workers

_____18. I try to be upbeat when we are together.

Advice giving

_____19. I tell my co-workers what I think they should do about their problems.

_____20. I give co-workers my opinion on things going on in their lives.

Social networks

_____21. I like to spend time with the same friends as my co-workers.

_____22. My co-workers and I have common friends and affiliations.

9. Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that employees would engage in relationship maintenance strategies when communicating with coworkers. To some degree all seven of the relational maintenance strategies were utilized by Mexican coworkers. However, it was deemed by the author that a mean score of five or greater on a seven-point scale was a sufficient indicator of relational maintenance use between coworkers. As a result, the data indicated that 88.7% of the employees in this study reported using the relational maintenance strategy of *social networks*; 86.6% reported using *advice giving,* and 88.2% reported using *shared task* strategies. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the cultural factor of collectivism would be positively related to the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers. Results of Pearson's correlational analysis indicated significant positive relationships between all of the variables. The strength of the following relationships for all the correlational analyses were based on the guidelines set forth by Cohen (1988, pp. 77-81). The three most prevalent relationships with collectivism involved the relational maintenance behaviors of social networks, shared tasks, and advice giving. Specifically, the cultural factor of collectivism was weakly related to social networks $r = .29, p < .001$, shared tasks $r = .28, p < .001$, and advice giving $r = .28, p < .001$. As a result, the hypothesis was supported (see Table 2 for all the correlational analyses).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that there would be positive relationships between the cultural factor of collectivism and Mexican employees' job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Results of Pearson's correlational analysis indicated significant positive relationships between the variables, which supported the hypothesis. Specifically, collectivism was weakly related to communication satisfaction $r = .27, p < .001$, organizational commitment $r = .29, p < .001$, and job satisfaction $r = .28, p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that there would be positive relationships between the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers and their job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Results of Pearson's correlational analysis indicat-

ed significant positive relationships between the variables, which supported the hypothesis. The three most prevalent relational maintenance behaviors were reported here (see Table 2 for all the correlational analyses). Specifically, shared tasks was strongly related to communication satisfaction $r = .51$, $p < .001$ and had moderate relationships with organizational commitment $r = .45$, $p < .001$ and job satisfaction $r = .42$, $p < .001$. Advice giving was moderately related to communication satisfaction $r = .41$, $p < .001$, organizational commitment $r = .39$, $p < .001$, and job satisfaction $r = .37$, $p < .001$. Lastly, social networks was strongly related to communication satisfaction $r = .53$, $p < .001$, organizational commitment $r = .51$, $p < .001$, and job satisfaction $r = .50$, $p < .001$. As a result, the hypothesis was supported.

Table 2
Correlations among Coworker Relational Maintenance and Employee Outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Assurances	---										
2 Openness	.17*	---									
3 Conflict Management	.19*	.21**	---								
4 Shared Tasks	.24**	.20**	.18*	---							
5 Positivity	.28**	.15*	.22**	.21**	---						
6 Advice Giving	.24**	.22**	.19*	.25**	.19*	---					
7 Social Networks	.22**	.19*	.23**	.44**	.21**	.42**	---				
8 Organizational Commitment	.19*	.17*	.21**	.45**	.22**	.39**	.51**	---			
9 Job Satisfaction	.21**	.16*	.22**	.42**	.27**	.37**	.50**	.78**	---		
10 Communication Satisfaction	.19*	.10	.21**	.51**	.30**	.41**	.53**	.39**	.32**	---	
11 Collectivism	.21**	.15*	.20**	.28**	.22**	.28**	.29**	.29**	.28**	.27**	---

Note: ** statistically significant at $p < .01$, * statistically significant at $p < .05$

Research question 1sought to answer the question; which of the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers would serve as the greatest predictor of their organizational commitment? Based on the results of hypothesis 1 and 4 shared tasks, social networks, and advice giving were included here. Using multiple regression, organizational commitment was regressed on a combination of the predictor variables, $R^2 = .171$, F (3, 175) $= 53.34$, $p < .001$. Standardized regression coefficients indicated that social networks was the greatest predictor of organizational commitment ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) followed by shared tasks ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$), and advice giving ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$).

Research question 1a sought to answer the question; which of the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers would serve as the greatest predictor of their job satisfaction. Based on the results of hypothesis 1 and 4 shared tasks, social networks, and advice giving were included here. Using multiple regression, job satisfaction was regressed on a combination of the predictor variables, $R^2 = .159$, F (3, 175) $= 62.47$, $p < .001$. Standardized regression coefficients indicated that social networks was the greatest predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) followed by shared tasks ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), and advice giving ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$).

Research question 1b sought to answer the question; which of the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers would serve as the greatest predictor of their communication satisfaction. Based on the results of hypothesis 1 and 4 shared tasks, social networks, and advice giving were included here. Using multiple regression, communication satisfaction was regressed on a combination of the predictor variables, $R^2 = .232$, F (3, 175) $= 78.21$, $p < .001$. Standardized regression coefficients indicated that social networks was the greatest predictor of communication satisfaction ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) followed by shared tasks ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), and advice giving ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$).

10.Discussion

The global economy has created a reality where relationships between U.S. organizations and other countries such as Mexico have become a way of life for businesses. With respect to Mexico, the predominance of prior research has focused on management employee relations, specifi-

cally examining how U.S. managers should lead Mexican workers (DeForest, 1994; Lindsley, 1999). However, prior research has all but ignored the importance of coworker relationships in Mexican organizations. Given that research conducted in the U.S. has indicated that interpersonal relationships between coworkers can increase organizational effectiveness, is an important source of friendships, and increases production, satisfaction, and retention (Myers & Johnson, 2004); the influence of coworker interactions in Mexican organizations appears warranted.

The goal of the current study was to benefit scholars and practitioners alike by increasing our understanding of the influence culture and communication have on Mexican coworkers and the impact these elements have on the job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment of those workers. In doing so, these findings should provide organizational members who cross cultural boundaries with information to improve the communication between them and their new coworkers. As a result, the organization and its employees would jointly benefit from the resulting job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. With these objectives in mind, the current study revealed some interesting findings. Of initial interest here involved the use of relational maintenance behaviors by Mexican coworkers.

All seven of the relational maintenance strategies were utilized by Mexican coworkers, with social networks, advice giving, and shared tasks most prevalent. These findings appear to support the claim that the use of relational maintenance strategies by coworkers may be an attempt to fulfill interpersonal needs. For example as Mexican coworkers engage in the relational maintenance behaviors of social networks, shared tasks, and advice giving they are also fulfilling the interpersonal need for affection, which involves behaviors such as helping someone with a task and taking an interest in another's problems. The relational maintenance strategies of advice giving and shared tasks may also be related to the importance placed on the extended family as found in the Mexican culture. For example, Mexican families assist extended family members with monetary assistance, lodging, help with work, emotional support, and advice (Falicov, 2001). These extended families include immediate family members, distant relatives, close family friends, long-standing neighbors, in-laws, and godparents have been the prevailing form of family arrangement in Mexico (Falicov, 2001).

In addition to interpersonal needs, the current study sought to extend the reasons Mexican coworkers engage in relational maintenance strategies to include the cultural factor of collectivism. Since Mexico is a collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 2001) where extended familial ties are common, it is plausible that Mexican employees engage in relational maintenance behaviors with coworkers because of their culture. The current findings also indicated the culture has a positive impact on the relational maintenance behaviors, communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of employees in Mexico. Further, these findings may be better explained by the Theory of Independent Mindedness (see Infante, 1987), which is based on the premise that when societal and organizational cultures are congruent employees tend to be more satisfied and productive than if the cultures were incongruent (see Infante, 1987). According to Infante (1987), the TIM is a uniquely communication-based theory that seeks congruency or similarity between the culture created within the specific organization (i.e., micro-culture) and the larger culture (i.e., macro-culture) within which the organization operates (Infante, 1987). This cultural coordination is the foundation of the theory. Traditionally, the Mexican workforce has been pictured as familial in that they employees work together for the good of the organization, not for individual gain, and are satisfied and committed to one another and the organization (DeForest, 1994). According to the TIM, these values should be reflected and cultivated in organizations located in Mexico, resulting in cultural congruency between the micro and macro cultures. This theory poises that cultural congruency will bring about motivated, satisfied, and productive employees. This information is important for managers and employees who cross cultural boundaries into the Mexican workforce because it highlights the value of cultural awareness in the workplace.

Another finding of interest indicated that the relational maintenance strategies engaged between Mexican coworkers had a stronger relationship with their communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and their organizational commitment than did collectivism. At first blush this finding appears unique but upon further inspection it is possible that the relational maintenance behaviors engaged in by Mexican coworkers may simply be reflective of their collectivistic culture. As Mexican coworkers engage in the relational maintenance behaviors of social networks, shared tasks, and advice giving they are behaving in a fashion that it congruent with their collectivistic culture. Since the work related outcomes of job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and

organizational commitment have been consistently associated with increased productivity and profits (see Clampit & Downs, 1993), the relevance of the current findings should be of interest to organizational communication scholars and businesses professionals alike. Therefore, organizations that cross cultural boundaries either by means of their geographic location or in the form of customer/client relationships should understand the value of culture and the importance of coworker relationships.

11. Limitations, Future Direction

Even though the current study improved our understanding of the communication behaviors between Mexican coworkers, it is not without shortcomings. It would have been useful to have had a qualitative component to the current study. A rich methodology may have been able to tease out nuances that survey research could not by tapping into the actual reasons why Mexican employees engage in relational maintenance strategies and the interpersonal needs they fulfill. The current study also served as a preliminary investigation into the association between culture, relational maintenance strategies between Mexican coworkers, and their job satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Given the impact communication interactions between Mexican coworkers appear to have on the employees and the organization, future researchers may want to further examine the communication interactions between that take place between coworkers in Mexican organizations. One such examination may include Hofstede's (1980, 1983, 2001) other cultural indications (e.g., masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance) to assess the impact they have on coworkers in organizations located in Mexico.

12. References

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