

**A Comparative Study
of Employee/Superior Communication Style
between Finnish and Mexican Employees**

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Paper Presented at the 2006 ICA Conference. Dresden, Germany

Organizational Communication Interactive Paper Session:
Focus on Leadership, Socialization and Interpersonal Relations in Organizations

June 22 (Thursday) June 2006 from 12:00 to 1:15 pm
Terrace Room, Dresden International Congress Centre

Purpose and importance of this investigation

Effective communication in the workplace is one of the main challenges that multicultural/international (global) organizations are experiencing today. The importance of examining cultural differences in communication appears to be escalating, especially as our organizations become more diverse and intercultural relations are perceived as problematic. Little research has been conducted, however, to demonstrate how culture influences communication behaviors in general, and even less research regarding communication behavior in the workplace. The purpose of this international research is threefold: First, to discover and compare the communication styles of Finnish and Mexican employees when they communicate with superiors. Second, to explain the impact that gender, organizational, and national cultures have on communication style. Finally, to analyze the theoretical and practical implications of the findings in terms of the communication competencies needed for successful communication between employees and superiors. This pioneer study is part of an international research project aimed to evaluate and compare communication styles between employees and superiors in different cultures and countries, and also between male and female employees.

Methodology

The samples used for this research were collected in Finland and Mexico. The Finnish sample consisted of 109 employees that worked in factories (59%), sales departments (29%), and in the stock market (12%). In terms of gender, 58% were females and 46% males. The Mexican sample was collected in a private University in the northern part of the country and consisted of 107 employees: faculty (69%) and administrative and staff personnel (31%). The gender break-up was 77% females and 23% males.

The research instrument used for this study was Varona's (Copyright, 1995-2005)

Employee/Superior Communication Style Questionnaire (ESCSQ). This questionnaire was constructed to assess the frequency of communication behaviors displayed by employees when communicating with superiors. The questionnaire consists of 68 items and uses a one-to-five scale where 1 is "Never" and 5 is "Always". The questionnaire assesses the following 14 theoretical dimensions: Listening Skills, Nonverbal Communication, Verbal Communication, Formal/Informal Communication, Communication Content, Job Communication, Receiving Feedback, Communication Openness, Communication Channels, Conflict Management Communication, Giving Feedback, Decision Making Communication, Demographics and Communication, and Communication Outcomes. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each item and dimension using the SPSS application, as well as percentiles for each item in each sample. T-tests were conducted to compare Finnish and Mexican employees and male/female communication styles.

Findings and conclusions

One of the major general conclusions of this study is the confirmation of the theoretical position of the authors on how a "post hoc" cultural explanation of communication behaviors is a legitimate and valid way of theorizing on how communication is influenced by culture and, therefore, how it can be understood and explained from a culture perspective. The authors of this research are both in-group and out-group members of the cultures under study.

Another major theoretical conclusion drawn from this study is that every culture has its own communication style independently of the context where the communication takes place. The findings clearly demonstrate that the way Finnish employees communicate with their superiors is different from the Mexican employees (**Table 1**). For example, there are clear differences in terms on how Finnish and Mexican cultures view and manage conflict. In the Finnish culture, to confront conflict is not

	
Finnish employees	Mexican employees
Informal communication	Prefer formal communication
Explicit communication	Implicit communication
Nonverbal behavior: more distance	Nonverbal behavior: Use of hands, more touch...
Prefer to work alone; little communication with their superiors	Prefer to communicate more with their superiors
Listen carefully; also repeating and asking questions, to secure that they have understood their superior's instructions	Listen to their superiors, but do not repeat nor interrupt. If the instructions are not understood, try to solve the problem
Change their communication style according to the cultural characteristics (accent, sex, age) of their superiors	Do not change their communication style according to their superior's cultural characteristics
Reserved	Expressive

Table 1. Some differences in employee/superior communication style between Finnish and Mexican employees.

only appropriate but also encouraged as necessary. On the contrary, in the Mexican culture the norm is to avoid it.

This study also reveals that female and male communication styles in both countries share in common similarities and differences. The findings, though, seem to suggest that the differences may not be as acute as we tend to think. However, given the fact that differences do exist, it is very important to investigate

what they are within and among cultures.

Finally, the study also shows that a new type of superior (supervisor, manager) is needed in today's multicultural/international (global) organizations. Some of the new communication competencies that superiors need to possess for successful interaction with their employees are: First, awareness of their own cultural and communication characteristics. Second, knowledge of the cultural and communication styles of their employees. Third, the ability to value cultural and communication diversity as an asset for the organization. Fourth, to understand and manage (or to understand the differences as a result of) the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political situation of the country/culture affecting the communication style of the employees. Finally, to possess an intercultural communication style to be able to interact successfully with employees from different cultural backgrounds and communication styles. Only the combination of education, training and experience can generate this new type of superiors for today's global organizations. ■

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