



Conceptualization and Management of Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in Three Guatemalan Organizations

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Abstract

This study investigated employees' and supervisors' conceptualizations of organizational commitment and communication satisfaction in three Guatemalan organizations. The study also examined differences and similarities in participants' views of management strategies based on levels of commitment and satisfaction. Self-administered surveys with open-ended questions were used to collect data. The content analysis of responses revealed three major findings. First, employees and supervisors were very similar in their conceptualizations of organizational commitment and communication satisfaction. Second, communication satisfaction was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, with the two most important dimensions the quality of the relationships among coworkers and between employees and supervisors. Third, organizational commitment was also conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, with identification with the organization's mission and work ethic as the two most important factors.

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Over the past two decades, the constructs of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment have been important variables of interest to organizational communication researchers (e.g., [Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilber](#), 1996; [Clampitt & Downs](#), 1993; [Hunt & Morgan](#), 1994; [Meyer & Allen](#), 1997; [Putti, Aryee, & Phua](#), 1990; [Wetzel & Gallagher](#), 1990). However, few studies have focused directly on the conceptualization and management of these two organizational variables from the perspective of employees and supervisors. Rather, extensive research has demonstrated the relationships between commitment and several other organizational variables, including: (a) absenteeism ([Larson & Fukami](#), 1984; [Steers](#), 1977); (b) leadership style ([Morris & Sherman](#), 1981); (c) communication openness (Argyris in [Housel & Warren](#), 1977); (d) job performance ([Steers](#), 1977); (e) turnover ([Angel & Perry](#), 1981); (f) gender differences ([Marsden, Kalleberg, & Cook](#), 1993); and (g) downsizing ([Cameron](#), 1994). According to [Reichers](#) (1985), most commitment and commitment-related constructs lack an emphasis on the individual's own experience.

Researchers have seldom asked organization members directly (or even indirectly) for their own perceptions and definitions of commitment and communication satisfaction. Thus, development and progress in this area of research should include an attempt to understand commitment and communication satisfaction from the standpoint of the individual employee.

The purpose of this study was to investigate employees' and supervisors' conceptualization of organizational commitment and communication satisfaction in three Guatemalan organizations. [Wiseman and Shuter's](#) (1994) review of the literature reveals that in general there is a lack of research on the conceptualization and management of organizational commitment in countries other than the U.S. Further, where such studies have been conducted, they usually examine other highly industrialized nations such as Japan and Germany. Therefore, a secondary rationale for this study is to extend the development of [international organizational communication research](#) to a Latin American country, in this case, Guatemala. Guatemala is especially interesting with respect to the constructs of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment because cultural differences vis-à-vis the U.S. suggest that both constructs should be conceived of in distinctive ways. Finally, this study complements and expands my previous research on the relationship between communication satisfaction and organizational commitment in the same three Guatemalan organizations ([Varona](#), 1996) by delving into conceptualizations and management of these constructs.

Situating the Study¹

The Republic of Guatemala (see [Guatemala Webpages Directory](#), [Lonely Planet World Guide-Guatemala](#), [Virtual Guatemala](#)) is located in Central America with a land extension of 67,712 sq. mi. (108,890 sq. km.) and a population of 11,558,407 (1998 est.) people ([O'Kane](#), 1999; see also [Guatemala-Quick Facts](#) and [Guatemala Web](#)). Guatemala's historical background unveils the political and economic elements that have shaped and continue to mold its social structure and labor force. A tradition of military domination and ethnic-class conflict that can be traced to before the Spanish conquest and colonial period has typified the history of contemporary Guatemala ([World History Archives](#)), especially during the 36 years of [military repression](#) from 1958-1994.

The arrival of the Spaniards in Guatemala caused the development of two different cultures: the [Indigenous](#) and the Ladino (a mixture of Spanish and Indigenous descent). Forty-four percent of the current population consists of Indigenous peoples in 23 different groups that have descended from the [Maya](#) and speak different languages (including Quiché, Cakchiquel, and Kekchi). The other 56% of the population are Ladinos or Mestizos (mixed Indigenous-Spanish ancestry). The Indigenous population, which lives mainly in the rural highlands of Guatemala, still lives according to the Mayan tradition. Their way of eating, dressing, celebrating, planting, and trading remains much the same as it was before the Spaniards. Although most of the Indigenous people are Catholics, their beliefs and practices consist of a syncretism of the Mayan and Catholic religions.

The Ladinos, who live mainly in the cities, speak Spanish, are Catholics, have adopted a western life style, work in the industry, trade, and services, control most of the resources of the country and political power. Spanish is the official language of the nation. Most of the people are Roman Catholic, although an intense penetration of Protestant denominations is taking place. [Distinct differences](#) exist between the urban areas and the dwellers in small towns. [Ruch](#) (1989) observed, "Life in the cities are generally influenced by European and American trends, while in the small towns and villages it has changed very little in their beliefs and lifestyles since the days before Columbus discovered America" (pp. 81-82). This blend of Mayan and Spanish Catholic traditions is the reason why the Guatemalan culture is one of the richest and most fascinating [cultures](#) in the Americas.

Guatemalan Cultural Dimensions

To address the Guatemalan cultural dimensions, [Hofstede's](#) (1991) cultural taxonomy (collectivism, power distance, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance) was used as an heuristic tool in the present study. The cultural generalizations that follow about Guatemalans should be read with the understanding

that although they may be valid to both the Indigenous and Ladino populations, they apply differently to each group and sometimes even within each group.

The Guatemalan culture is very high in *collectivism*. It ranked first among the countries that prefer collectivism (Hofstede, 1991). Guatemalans believe that social harmony is very important and, in general, people will try to avoid any personal conflict in their contacts with others. Accordingly, the Guatemalan people are willing to accept advice and assistance from others and prefer to work in groups when completing a task or project. Because of this low individualism, Guatemalans rarely will show disagreement, give direct criticism, or challenge knowledge and authority in the family, educational, religious, and business contexts.

Indigenous people, however, have a stronger sense of collectivism than Ladinos that reflects in the way they live in their communities. For the Indigenous people the community is the matrix of the person, because it is only in the community where the person can reach self-fulfillment. This is why Indigenous communities have developed values of hospitality, reciprocity, solidarity, and communal labor in ways that are not seen in the Ladino population (Padres Dominicos, 1994).

The Guatemalan culture is also characterized by *high power distance*. It ranked second among the countries that are high in power distance (Hofstede, 1991). Status/power differences among citizens and acceptance of those differences are quite pervasive in Guatemala. The two main factors that define the power distance in Guatemalan society are ethnic background and wealth. Traditionally, for example, Ladinos have looked down upon Indigenous people, regarding them as inferior because of the way they look, the way they talk, their lack of education, and the poverty in which they live. Accordingly, Indigenous people, who tend to see Ladinos as superior, show their respect by bowing and using submissive language when conversing with them. For example, some of the expressions they will use are "Sí, Señor" (Yes, Sir), "Como Usted diga Señor" (What you [the formal version of you] say, will be done, Sir). This high power distance is very noticeable in the workplace where company owners and top and middle managers enjoy almost absolute power and receive all forms of respect and submission from employees. Expressions of power distance in social and interpersonal interactions are more apparent within the Indigenous population than within the Ladinos.

Guatemalan culture is more on the *masculine* side of the spectrum of the masculine-feminine cultural category. This assertion contradicts to some extent the results of Hofstede's study (1991) that placed Guatemalan culture more on the feminine side. It ranked eleven among the countries that prefer femininity. Males are the ones who have the final say when it comes to all family related issues in both the Indigenous and Ladino societies. Guatemalans believe that men should be assertive and women should be nurturing. Sex roles are clearly differentiated. However, Guatemalans value feminine characteristics such as nurturing, caring, and good manners. Traditionally women have been relegated to domestic roles and their access to education and professional careers have been limited. Now women are taking more leading roles in most professional activities, such as the *Indigenous woman, Rigorberta Menchú*, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Guatemalan culture is high in *uncertainty avoidance*. It ranked third among the countries that prefer to avoid uncertainty (Hofstede, 1991). Consensus is desired and demanded when it comes to national goals. Tradition is supposed to rule people's behavior and change should be resisted. There is little tolerance for those who deviate from cultural norms and expectations. This cultural characteristic might explain the social and political violence that have characterized the history of Guatemalan people, especially in the last 45 years (Morrison & May, 1994). In the business world this cultural characteristic is reflected mainly on the need for rules and regulations to ensure certainty and security.

Guatemalan Organizational Characteristics

Undoubtedly, the characteristics of the Guatemala society are reflected in the culture of its organizations and businesses. Indigenous people work mainly in the agricultural field or in the lowest positions in the industry or service organizations. Ladinos own and manage most of the Guatemalan businesses, industries, and organizations.

In general, *Guatemalan organizations are ruled autocratically*. Owners and top management establish labor conditions, management policies, and the mission and direction of the businesses and institutions. The relationship between unions and management has always been very contentious. Union leaders of government institutions and in the private sector have been systematically repressed and murdered.

Decision-making in Guatemalan organizations is centralized. Input from lower levels in the organization is neither solicited nor encouraged. Generally, policies, procedures, and directions are imposed from superiors. Employees are expected to follow instructions and orders, pay respect and be obedient to their superiors. The organizational climate is characterized by submission. Although practices have changed somewhat in recent years, the road to democracy in Guatemalan organizations is a long way one. The supervisor-subordinate relationship tends to be paternalistic. It is common for the superior to be involved in the personal and family life of his/her employees.

Organizations emphasize protocol, deference to rank, and respect for authority in working relationships. Good manners in social interactions are greatly valued and expected. Formal language and the use of titles are expected when addressing superiors. Appropriate attire is extremely important in social interactions in general and when conducting businesses.

In summary, this section has presented a brief description of the Guatemala history and its cultural and organizational characteristics. This synopsis is essential to understand the contexts in which the Guatemalan organizations operate and their impact on the conceptualization and management of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Communication Satisfaction

Researchers have provided several definitions of communication satisfaction since [Level](#) (1959) first introduced the term. Based on research conducted exclusively in the U.S., the first definitions of communication satisfaction emphasized the construct's unidimensionality. [Thayer](#) (1969) defined the term as "the personal satisfaction a person experiences when communicating successfully" (p. 144). [Redding](#) (1978) in an analysis of several studies, reported that communication satisfaction was used to refer to the overall degree of satisfaction an employee perceives in the total communication environment. [Downs and Hazen's](#) (1977) and [Downs'](#) (1990) research indicates that communication satisfaction is a multidimensional construct. These researchers define the term as an individual's satisfaction with various aspects of communication in the organization, including organizational information, personal feedback, job information, supervisor communication, communication climate, horizontal communication, media quality, subordinate communication, top management communication, and interdepartmental communication. It is this multidimensional definition of communication satisfaction that guided the present study.

Based on these dimensions, [Downs and Hazen](#) (1977) and [Downs](#) (1990) developed the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire that has been used in several studies to assess communication satisfaction. These studies have produced several important results. First, the areas of greatest employee satisfaction are the supervisory communication and subordinate communication, while the area of least satisfaction tends to be the in personal feedback. Second, employees in managerial roles tend to be more satisfied with communication than those who are not. Third, communication satisfaction is positively and significantly related to job satisfaction ([Clampitt & Girard](#), 1993; [Lee](#), 1989; [Varona](#), 1988). Personal feedback, communication climate, and supervisory communication are the three factors that have had the strongest correlation with job satisfaction ([Downs](#), 1977; [Downs, Clampitt, & Pfeiffer](#), 1988). Fourth, the link between communication and productivity is more complex than previously assumed ([Clampitt & Downs](#), 1993). Finally, a positive but moderate relationship was found between communication satisfaction and organizational commitment ([Downs](#), 1991; [Downs et al.](#), 1995; [Potvin](#), 1991; [Putti, Aryee, & Phua](#), 1990; [Varona](#), 1996).

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been variously and extensively defined, measured, and researched but it continues to draw criticism for lack of precision and concept redundancy (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Morrow, 1983; Reichers, 1985). For example, organizational commitment may be seen as part of a larger cluster of constructs describing the individual-organizational relationship that includes organizational identification, job loyalty, job attachment, and job involvement (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998).

Reviewing the literature on organizational commitment (e.g., Buchanan, 1974; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Reichers, 1985) reveals that there are at least three different approaches to conceptualizing organizational commitment. First, the *side-bets (exchange) perspective* sees commitment as an outcome of inducement/contribution transactions between the organization and member. In this conceptualization, the individual perceives associated benefits such as pension plans as positive elements in an exchange that produces willingness to remain attached to the organization. Thus, commitment is defined as a function of the rewards and costs associated with organizational membership (Alutto, Hrebiniak, & Alonso, 1973; Farrell & Rusbult, 1981). Second is the *psychological perspective* which views organizational commitment as a three-component orientation. These components are: (a) an identification with the goals and values of the organization, (b) a willingness to focus strong effort toward helping the organization achieve its goals, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Buchanan, 1974; and Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Under this perspective commitment is defined as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Steers, 1977, p. 46). Third is the *attributions perspective* which defines commitment as a binding of individuals to behavioral acts that results when individuals attribute an attitude of commitment to themselves after engaging in behaviors that are volitional, explicit, and irrevocable (Reichers, 1985). Most recently Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) proposed a three-component model of organizational commitment that includes aspects of these three approaches.

The multiple commitment framework provides a more complex view for understanding organizational commitment (Becker & Billings, 1993; Cohen 1993b; Lawler, 1992; Gordon & Ladd, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Reichers (1985) suggests that organizational commitment can be understood as a part of a collection of multiple commitments to the various groups that comprise an organization. From this perspective, organizations are viewed as coalitional entities, as reference groups and as role settings. These coalitional entities and their constituencies espouse unique sets of goals and values that may be in conflict with the goals and values of other organizational groups. Thus the question, "What is an individual's commitment?" cannot be satisfactorily answered with the response "to meet organizational goals and values." Rather, specific groups and the goals of specific groups need to be identified, and these may then serve as the foci for the multiple commitments that individuals experience.

More recently, Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) have expanded Reichers's multiple commitment framework by linking identification to situated activities and communication. These multiple identifications with various groups and activities, both inside and outside the organization, constitute multiple commitments. This reconceptualization integrates the individual's actual experience of commitment with the organizational aspects of the construct.

Blau and Scott (1962) use the term "publics" to describe the various groups that benefit from organizational functioning. They distinguish four such publics: (a) rank and file employees, (b) clients/customers, (c) top managers/owners, and (d) the public at large. This view portrays organizations as political entities in that various subgroups or coalitions lobby for the attention of an organization to their own vested interests and particular goals. It seems likely that employees in organizations are committed, in varying degrees, to several distinct sets of goals and values, which may be those espoused by top management, as well as those espoused by customers and other relevant publics.

Reference group theory and role theory also support Reichers's theoretical framework. These two theories depict the multiple identification that individuals experience and the conflicts that can result from them. Gouldner (1957) defined reference groups as those with whom individuals identify and to whom they refer in making judgments about their own effectiveness. Social roles are the reflection of an individual's identification with reference groups. From this perspective, "the organization" is for many employees an

abstraction that is represented in reality by co-workers, superiors, employees, customers, and other groups that collectively comprise the organization.

To review, this section summarizes how the constructs of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment have been defined and researched in the U.S. This literature review is needed to assess the extent to which the findings of this study are similar or different from the U.S.

Research Questions

To assess the conceptualization and management of communication satisfaction and commitment by employees and supervisors in three Guatemalan organizations, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are the differences and similarities between employees and supervisors on their conceptualizations of communication satisfaction?

RQ2: What are the factors that foster and inhibit communication satisfaction, and what are organization members' suggestions for improving communication satisfaction?

RQ3: What are the differences and similarities between employees and supervisors on their conceptualizations of organizational commitment?

RQ4: What are the factors that foster and inhibit organizational commitment, and suggestions for improving organizational commitment?

Methods

Overview

Data for this study were collected in Guatemala City during one-week period. Self-administered surveys with open-ended and close-ended questions were used to gather data.

Participating Organizations

The participants for this study was drawn from three different private organizations located in Guatemala City. Initially, contacts were made with the top management officials of several Guatemalan organizations by means of a letter that explained the specific purpose, procedures, and benefits. The targeted organizations had an average of 100 or more members. From a total of six organizations that were contacted and invited to participate in this study three made a positive response to the research proposal. These three selected organizations were a school, a hospital, and a food factory. A total of 77 participants (44 employees and 33 supervisors) answered the self-administered survey that included open-ended and close-ended questions.

Organization One was a private Catholic school for middle-class female students, run by lay persons since its founding in 1905. The school was located in downtown Guatemala City and served 2,533 middle-class students. The owners were traditional and devoted lay Catholics who managed the school in line with the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. Daily praying, regular attendance to Mass, and the teaching of religion were mandatory practices in the school. The 99 faculty members were Ladinos and consisted of 96 females and 3 males. All these faculty members had university degrees in education-related fields or were in the process of earning one. The school provided four levels of education: two years of pre-school education; six years of elementary education, three years of junior high education; and three years of senior high education with optional majors in pre-school, elementary school, and high school teaching, bilingual secretaries, and accounting. A total of 25 people (25%) answered the self-administered survey (19 teachers and 6 supervisors).

Organization Two was a private Catholic children's hospital founded and operated by the Guatemalan Archdioceses since 1985. The hospital was located in a Guatemala City neighborhoods and served an average of 3000 children of poor families monthly. The hospital had a staff of 75 Ladino members whose educational levels varied from physicians with medical degrees to clerical and janitorial workers who had not finished elementary school. The hospital had, beside the General Director, an Administrative Director, and a Medical Director. None of the Directors had any management and training experience for the position they were holding. A total of 17 people (33%) answered the self-administered survey (8 employees and 9 supervisors).

Organization Three was a private snack food factory. Unlike the other two organizations, this food factory had developed a culture that was not inspired explicitly in Catholic teaching although most of the members were Catholics. Employees were Ladinos with a diverse range of educational backgrounds. Executives (3%) had the highest educational level with most of them holding university degrees. The majority of employees in the accounting, administration, and marketing/sales departments (18%) had some university studies. Maintenance and operational workers in the wafer production area (35%) had reached the junior high school level of education. Finally, employees working in the kitchens and in the snack production and packing areas (36%) had an educational level of elementary school or less. A total of 37 people (10%) answered the self-administered survey (17 employees and 20 supervisors).

Organizational and departmental representations were chosen using the convenience and quota non probability sampling techniques (Edwards et al., 1997; Fowler, 1988). Based on these techniques a convenient and available fixed percentage of participants were selected by the researcher using the following criteria: 10% of the employees for the organization with a population of over 200 employees, and 20% of employees for the other two organizations with fewer than one hundred employees. In order to get the best representation possible of management and supervisory positions, all the supervisors of the three organizations were surveyed.

Self-administered Surveys

The same form of self-administered survey with open-ended and close-ended questions was used for supervisors and employees. Survey content was organized into two sections: (a) *Communication Satisfaction*, with the following questions: How do you define communication satisfaction? What are the major factors that foster your satisfaction with the communication practices in this organization? What are the major factors that inhibit your satisfaction with the communication practices in this organization? What would you like to see done in this organization in order to improve communication? (b) *Organizational Commitment*: How do you define organizational commitment? What are the major factors that foster your organizational commitment? What are the major factors that inhibit your organizational commitment? What would you like to see done in this organization in order to improve organizational commitment? To assess the validity and reliability of the self-administered surveys for Guatemalan respondents, 10 Latin Americans demographically similar to the study participants completed the surveys. Necessary revisions were then completed to establish conceptual/linguistic and functional equivalence before the instruments were administered to the Guatemalan organization members who participated in this study. Respondents answered the survey form individually in writing.

Qualitative Analysis

Responses to the surveys were transcribed and content analyzed using the following steps, suggested by [Kaid and Wadsworth](#) (1989, pp. 293-315) to assure the validity and reliability of the data. First, categories to be applied to each question were defined. Second, a written coding instrument describing the categories to be used in analyzing answers was constructed for use by the both coders. Third, the researcher and additional coder categorized responses and intercoder reliability was determined. **All of the scores were at the 85% level or higher.** Fourth, Chi Square tests were performed across the responses. Finally, results of the coding processes were analyzed and reported.

Findings

Conceptualization of Communication Satisfaction

The first research question asked: What are the differences and similarities between employees and supervisors on their conceptualizations of communication satisfaction? *For Guatemalan employees and supervisors, the quality of the relationship in the communication process was the most important dimension in the conceptualization of communication satisfaction.* They indicated that communication satisfaction occurs when ideas are interchanged within a climate characterized by trust, respect, support, honesty, constructive feedback, and mutual understanding. Although the Guatemalan employees and supervisors conceptualized communication satisfaction as a multidimensional construct, the quality of the communication relationship among coworkers and between employees and supervisors was the main source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Most of the employees' and the supervisors' responses focused on issues related to *Communication Climate* (72% of employees' responses, and 57% of supervisors' responses), *Personal Feedback* (16% of employees' and 15% of supervisors' responses), and *Supervisor Communication* (12% of employees' and 11%, of supervisors' responses). Chi square analyses found no significant differences between employees and supervisors.²

Managing Communication Satisfaction

The second research question asked: What are the factors that foster and inhibit communication satisfaction, and what are organization members' suggestions for improving communication satisfaction? The main factors that fostered communication satisfaction in the area of communication climate (29% of employees' and supervisors' responses) were good interpersonal relationships and communication with clients, colleagues and supervisors. As one employee stated: "Good interpersonal relationships with my clients and coworkers" foster communication satisfaction. In the area of communication with superiors and top managers (32% of employees' and 18% of supervisors' responses), the major sources of communication satisfaction were the superior's willingness to listen, to trust, and to accept new ideas. Employees stated: "Supervisors are very open and trust us," "the positive feedback that we received for a job well done," and "our opinions are taken into account."

In contrast, *the major factors inhibiting communication satisfaction* in the area of *communication climate* (18% of employees' and 28% of supervisors' responses) were *lack of communication, lack of participation in decision-making, and personnel with negative attitudes.* For examples, employees stated: "Our opinions are never requested" and "a rude and negative attitude displayed by some people." In the area of *communication with superiors and top managers* (18% of employees' and 35%, of supervisors' responses) the major sources inhibiting communication satisfaction were *lack of two-way communication between supervisors and employees, lack of trust, lack of openness to new ideas and suggestions, and delaying solutions to problems and needs.* Representative responses included: "There is little two-way street communication between managers and employees" and "There must be more honesty between authorities and personnel."

Finally, the *actions mostly needed to improve communication satisfaction* in the area of *communication climate* (52% of employees' and 58% of supervisors' responses) were *workshops on human relations, motivation, and communication.* Employees and supervisors included these suggestions such as these: "To provide communication seminars and human relations workshops for everybody in the organization" and "To promote social events for the organization's personnel." In the area of *communication with superiors and top managers* (10% of employees' and 13% of supervisors' responses), the major strategies suggested were *that superiors needed to interact more frequently with their employees, listen to them, respect their suggestions, and provide direct feedback.* Suggestions in this area included: "Our supervisors have to allow more participation and listen to our opinions" and "[supervisors need] to respect the suggestions made by the people of the organization."

Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment

The third research question asked: What are the differences and similarities between employees and supervisors on their conceptualizations of organizational commitment? *The three most important dimensions in the conceptualization of organizational commitment by the Guatemalan employees and*

supervisors were identification with the organization's mission, giving one's best to do a good job, and performance of obligations in exchange for economic and social benefits. For example, respondents stated: "Feeling part of an organization, identifying with its mission, goals and philosophy" and "The willingness to give the best of oneself and do a good job in exchange for one's salaries."

The results of the open-ended question on defining organizational commitment revealed that both supervisors and employees conceptualized organizational commitment from three major perspectives. First, the *psychological* perspective was represented by 45% of the employees' and supervisors' responses. Second the *work ethic* perspective was represented by 41% of employees' responses and 51% of supervisors' responses. A third perspective that emerged, although not strongly, was the *exchange* perspective (14% of employees' responses and 3% of supervisors' responses). No significant differences were found between employees' and supervisors' responses.³

Managing Organizational Commitment

The fourth research question asked: What are the factors that foster and inhibit organizational commitment, and suggestions for improving organizational commitment? Among the factors that fostered organizational commitment, *personal factors* were by far the greatest motivators, accounting for 67% of employees' responses and 58% of supervisors' responses. *The main factors reported in this category were (a) serving the people whom benefit from what employees do in their organizations (mission commitment), (b) a strong sense of responsibility and dedication to work (work ethic), and (c) the desire for self-actualization and career advancement (personal needs, higher goals, and career commitment).* For example, respondents stated: "My willingness to do whatever it takes to do a quality job," "my commitment to the students of this institution," and "To become a better teacher." *Organizational factors* were reported as the second most important category of organizational commitment motivators (with 22% of employees' responses and 32% of supervisors' responses). *The topics most frequently mentioned in this category were (a) a sense of loyalty to the organization, (b) job security, and (c) economic incentives.* Employees and supervisors stated: "I feel thankful to this organization" and "I depend economically on this job." Last, *relational factors* accounted for 11% of employees' and 10% of supervisors' responses. The issues reported as motivators in this category were (a) the trust provided by superiors, (b) good communication with supervisors and coworkers, and (c) positive feedback provided by supervisors and clients. Responses in this category included: "The climate in this institution is very warm and friendly" and "I have a very good communication with my supervisor."

Relational factors were reported as the main cause discouraging organizational commitment, accounting for 35% of employees' responses and 40% of supervisors' responses. *The major inhibitors reported in this category were (a) lack of communication, (b) lack of appreciation or positive feedback, and (c) lack of trust.* Respondents stated: "Lack of positive feedback" and "lack of sincerity and unity that exists in this institution" as discouraging organizational commitment. *Organizational factors* were reported as the second most important category of organizational commitment inhibitors (with 24% of employees' responses and 11% of supervisors' responses). *The topics most frequently mentioned were (a) low salaries, (b) lack of task definition, and (c) unequal treatment of the organization' people.* *Personal factors* ranked last, with 9% of the employees' responses and 17% of the supervisors' responses. The issues reported as inhibitors in this category were (a) lack of a work ethic, (b) lack of career commitment, and (c) lack of mission commitment. Examples of reasons for lack of organizational commitment included: "Commitments to other tasks outside of the organization," "my interest for my professional career which is different from what I do in this organization," and "indifference and lack of interest (sometimes people work only for the salary, they don't care about the education of the students)."

It is worth noting that supervisors and employees differed somewhat as to what factors fostered or inhibited organizational commitment. Among fostering factors, employees tended to emphasize personal motivators (67% of their responses against 58% of supervisors'), whereas supervisors were more inclined to emphasize organizational factors (36% of their responses against 22% of employees' responses), and relational factors (22% of their responses against 11% of employees' responses). In the category of inhibiting factors, the only difference was that supervisors tended to emphasize more personal factors than did employees (17% versus 9%).

Guatemalan employees and supervisors acknowledged that the best strategies to manage organizational commitment were to improve communication and interpersonal relationships, economic incentives,

motivational strategies, and changes in some organization features. For example, employees and supervisors suggested: "More communication among the different levels of the organization", "increase the level of the salaries because it can be done", and "organize workshops to motivate employees' commitment to the organization."

To improve communication and interpersonal relationships were reported as the most important strategies to manage organizational commitment with 39% of the employees' and 20% of supervisors' responses. Examples in this category include: "More communication among the different levels of the organization" and "do more listening and be more aware of people's needs and aspirations." *Economic incentives* were reported as the second important factor to manage organizational commitment with 24% of the employees' responses and 31% of supervisors' responses. *Motivational Strategies*, such as making employees feel that they were a part of the organization, making them aware of the importance of their work for themselves, for the organization, and for others, were in third place with 24% of the employees' responses and 0% of supervisors' responses. Finally, respondents suggested *changes in some organizational features* (4% of employees' and 28% of supervisors). These suggestions included: "Change the work plan to do a more organized job" and "Revise the organizational structure. It needs to be modernized."

Employees' and supervisors' perceptions were significantly different at the .01 level of confidence, as to the need of more motivation in order to encourage organizational commitment. Motivation was viewed by the employees as the most needed strategy to be implemented to improve organizational commitment (24% of their responses against 0% of supervisors' responses). The motivational strategies mentioned by employees were: making employees feel that they were a part of the organization, making them aware of the importance of their work for themselves, for the organization, and for others. Perceptions were also different with regard to the relevance of the other management strategies: improve communication and interpersonal relationships, economic incentives, and changes in some organizational features. *Supervisors put more emphasis than employees did on economic incentives and organizational changes.*

In summary, the content analysis of responses revealed three major findings. First, employees and supervisors were very similar in their conceptualizations of organizational commitment and communication satisfaction. Second, communication satisfaction was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, with the two most important dimensions the quality of the relationships among coworkers and between employees and supervisors. Third, organizational commitment was also conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, with identification with the organization's mission and work ethic as the two most important factors.

Discussion

Communication Satisfaction

A major theoretical implication of this study's findings on the conceptualization of communication satisfaction is that, in terms of communication functions in organizations (Goldhaber, 1993), the human function seems to be the most important for Guatemalan employees and supervisors. The human function of communication includes any communication affecting members' feelings of self-worth and quality of organizational relationships. In fact, the production, the maintenance, and innovation functions of communication (Farece, Monge, & Russell, 1977) were almost ignored in their conceptualization of communication satisfaction. This might reveal a very distinctive cultural characteristic, in contrast with the more production and goal-oriented culture of the United States (Rhinesmith, 1970). The Guatemalan culture can be characterized as being more relationship-oriented than objective and results-oriented, as has been suggested by Rhinesmith (1970), Hofstede (1984), and Ruch (1989). It seems that in the Guatemalan cultures, as in other Latin American cultures, the need for affiliation is stronger than the need for achievement when it comes to what motivates a person to communicate with coworkers and supervisors. Persons motivated by a high need for affiliation tend to perform best under conditions in which they can work with people whom they can enjoy and ask for their warmth and friendliness. This pattern, according to Rhinesmith (1970) would fit persons in many societies, as the Latin Americas, which have a more group-oriented orientation. As expected, the communication factors that Guatemalans perceived to be associated with satisfaction were related to and consistent with three cultural characteristics of the Guatemalan society,

suggested by [Hofstede](#) (1991): collectivism, high power distance, and high uncertainty avoidance. In the present study, supervisors and employees said that communication satisfaction occurs when ideas are interchanged within a climate characterized by trust, respect, support, honesty, constructive feedback, and mutual understanding.

Overall, results demonstrate that for Guatemalan employees and supervisors the two most important areas of communication satisfaction and dissatisfaction are related to the overall communication climate of an organization and to the relationship between employees and superiors (supervisors, managers, and top management people). These findings seem to confirm the results of the research in the U.S. (e.g., [Eisenberg, Monge, & Farace](#), 1984; [Jablin](#), 1979; [Redding](#), 1972) where factors in subordinate-superior communication and communication climate are related to employees' satisfaction with their superior, job, and organizations. If this is the case, it can be concluded that cultural differences between the U.S. and Guatemala seem not to have such a major impact on the factors that foster and inhibit employees' communication satisfaction in organizational settings. The implications of this inference are significant for management purposes since it indicates that some U.S. communication satisfaction management strategies can be extrapolated to Guatemala and other Latin American countries and vice versa. Consequently, these findings, on the one hand, justify the ongoing practices by Latin American's academics and consultants that teach communication theory and communication management strategies developed in the U.S., assuming that the necessary adaptations are being made. Moreover, the findings call for more collaboration between the North and the South on the areas of organizational communication theory and research, teaching, and practice.

It is important to mention that organizational and personal aspects, such as better work schedules, establishing a reward system, and cohesive systems of operations for the whole organization were also mentioned as important to improving communication satisfaction. This finding suggests how much communication satisfaction is also influenced by factors other than communication factors for Guatemalan employees and supervisors. These findings unmistakably indicate that managing communication satisfaction in Guatemalan organizations also requires attention to employee's economic needs, such as good salaries, and employee's work conditions, such as, flexible work schedules.

Organizational Commitment

The findings also indicate that work ethic, the intrinsic responsibility that drives human beings to put their best effort into whatever they are doing, was an important dimension of organizational commitment for Guatemalan employees. The strength with which the work ethic dimension has emerged in the present study may reveal a distinctive cultural characteristic of Guatemalan workers. The type of organizations used for this study may account for this great sense of work ethic. Two of the organizations, a school and a hospital, were Catholic institutions run with a strong emphasis on providing the best service to students and ill children, respectively. As stated previously, the code of ethics that regulates Guatemalans' private and public lives is greatly influenced by Christian morality as preached by the Catholic and other Christian Churches. The work ethic is also highly influenced by Christian teachings, especially in organizations run by Catholics, such as the school and the hospital used in this study. Employees in these organizations were taught that to do a good job is God's will and therefore, being responsible in fulfilling all the duties at work and working hard is the best way to please God and be blessed by Him. As a corollary these employees developed a strong sense of guilt when the job was done poorly (for related findings, see [Teacher's organizational commitment](#) in educational organizations in Turkey; [Development of organizational commitment](#) in Hong Kong aided Secondary School Christian Teachers - A Case Study).

From these results, it is also apparent that a strong sense of mission characterized the Guatemalan employees. The major focus of their commitment was to serve the Guatemalan people by providing them with a good education, health, and food. This strong sense of mission was more evident in the responses of the school and hospital employees than in those of the factory employees, a result that may be explained by the different nature of the organizations. The school and the hospital were Catholic institutions with a management style that distinctly promoted religious motivation. Employees and supervisors in these two organizations were recruited on the basis of their Catholic beliefs and commitment to serve students and ill children following the example of Jesus in the Gospel. Employees were reminded of this mission through talks by top management and daily prayers. Moreover, employees in these organizations were also sent to

one-day spiritual retreats two or three times during the year where the Catholic values of responsibility, hard-work, and Christian commitment were the main focus. Yet a sense of mission was also present among the factory employees, due to a recently implemented management strategy that emphasized serving people through the production of food. To reinforce this goal an organizational creed and song had been created. This strong commitment to serve people is undoubtedly related to the cultural dimension of collectivism that characterize Guatemalans. Another factor that accounted for this strong sense of work ethic or commitment is the urgent need that the Guatemalan employees had for job security. This is understandable in a country where more than 45% are unemployed or underemployed.

Moreover, this study's findings have other important theoretical implications. On the one hand, it challenges the research trend that has treated work ethic as a form of work commitment different from organizational commitment (Morrow, 1983). On the other hand, it also supports Reichers' (1985) multiple commitment perspective, which contends that the conceptualization of organizational commitment must include all of the actual commitments that the employee experiences, with work ethic (commitment to the job) as one of them. The present findings also support Scott, Corman, and Cheney's (1998) structural model of identification in the organization, which links identification to situated activities and communication.

The findings clearly underscore supervisor and employees differences in perceptions of what are the most effective strategies to manage organizational commitment. Employees, unlike supervisors, tend to favor management strategies that address the relevance of the work they do (mission) more than the use of external motivators such as organizational changes or economic incentives. The strong sense of commitment to the mission of the organization and work ethic inspired by Catholic beliefs and values as described above may explain why employees of these organizations put so much emphasis on internal motivators.

Finally, it is also meaningful to highlight the managerial implications of this study. This investigation serves well the purpose of applied research--research conducted to examine and solve practical problems. The findings of this study provide a rich body of knowledge from which national and multinational organizations can benefit when trying to understand what is the meaning of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment, and what strategies to develop to manage communication satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the results of this study clearly extend on our understandings of organizational commitment and satisfaction, the research does have some limitations. This study is based on self-report data, and the results need to be understood with this in mind. The results reflect what the employees and supervisors perceived about communication and commitment, and not necessarily what actually happened. So they may not be an accurate reflection of the actual behavior of the individuals studied. Therefore, the use of techniques such as direct observation and participation could be employed in future research to determine what actually happens in organizations. Still, organization members' perceptions provide insight into how they interpret organizational experiences.

The findings of this study are representative only of the three organizations that participated in the study. It is important to take into consideration that these organizations were unique in their organizational mission, structure, communication systems, and management style. A larger sample of employees and supervisors would have allowed for more accurate results and increased confidence in the results' generalizability. A broader study including a much larger sample utilizing all of the major types of Guatemalan organizations is recommended for subsequent investigations.

Because of the exploratory nature of this pioneer study and due to the lack of empirical research conducted to examine the impact of management practices on commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), no comparisons could be made to report differences and similarities between Guatemalan and U.S. supervisors and employees on their perceptions of the most effective strategies to manage organizational commitment. Further multinational research is needed to demonstrate if the findings of this study hold with others samples of similar organizations in Latin American countries and in other countries and cultures around the world. Clearly, the need for more international communication research is essential.

However, much more research is needed to investigate national and cultural differences and similarities on both constructs. This enterprise is particularly urgent given the multicultural composition of today's organizations and the globalization of trade and economy. It cannot be assumed anymore that the Western perspective on these issues is the norm in terms of how we understand them (theory) and how we apply them (management practice). We need to revisit our theories to see what needs to be changed and added to provide a multicultural-multinational perspective of the issues. We need to ask: What are those components of communication satisfaction and organizational commitment that are common to all cultures and nations and what are those that are unique to each of them? What are the management processes that seem to be effective in all cultures and nations and what are the ones that are unique to each of them? What are the theoretical models that can help understand both the commonality and uniqueness of the multicultural/multinational workforce's perceptions on organizational communication satisfaction and commitment, and management processes? A good example of this kind of research is a study conducted by Eva [Kras](#) (1988) to compare Mexican and US management practices and the impact of culture.

There is also a real need for investigating the Guatemalan culture. The tentative description of the Guatemalan national character provided in this study was a challenging task because of the lack of research to document such a general description. More research is also needed to investigate the nature of organizational dimensions such as management and communication styles, superior/subordinate relationship, problem-solving style, personal feedback, work ethic, and organizational loyalty.

Conclusion

This study, which is descriptive and exploratory in nature, represents the first endeavor to investigate differences and similarities between employees and supervisors in their conceptualizations of organizational commitment and communication satisfaction in Guatemala. This study represents a modest contribution to answer the criticism of the dearth of investigations on organizational behavior and communication in Latin American countries ([Wiseman & Shuter](#), 1994; [Archer & Fitch](#), 1994). Although this research is not intended to examine the relationship between national culture, corporate culture, and communication behavior, its findings can serve such a purpose in the future. However, some cross-cultural comparisons are addressed in the discussion of the findings of this study, specifically between Guatemala and the U.S. Yet, as [Meyer and Allen](#) (1997) pointed out, more cross-cultural research is needed to assess the generalizability of findings concerning the development and consequences of commitment. Finally, it is also meaningful to highlight the managerial implications of this study. The findings of this study provide a rich body of knowledge on communication satisfaction and organizational commitment conceptualization and management from which national and multinational organizations can benefit.

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Notes

¹ Researcher's Background: I moved to Guatemala from Spain when I was 18 years old. For two years I studied to become teacher and after teaching in High School in Nicaragua for six years, I came back to Guatemala to initiate university studies. I was a full time student for two years majoring in Psychology and Theology at the national university and at a private university respectively. Then I went to Spain to continue my studies at the University of Salamanca and after two years, I obtained a Degree in Psychology and another in Theology. Upon completion of my university studies I returned to Guatemala. My first professional assignment was the creation of a Catholic Theology College to train future catholic priests, brothers, nuns, teachers, and community leaders. I was Director and Professor in this College for five years. Then I was appointed first Chair of a newly created department of Communication Sciences at the Catholic University of Guatemala, Universidad Rafael Landívar. I was Department Chair and professor for five years until I came to the US as a Fulbright scholar to do my Masters and Ph. D. in Communication Studies at the University of Kansas. During the fourteen years that I lived in Guatemala, I had the opportunity to interact with people of all social classes Indigenous and Ladinos, poor and rich, and professionals and workers from a great variety of organizations and institutions. This experiential knowledge along with my expertise as a scholar allowed me to get to know Guatemalan culture and Guatemalan organizations.

² Definitions in the category of *communication climate* were phrased as follows: "Communication satisfaction is feeling comfortable talking with somebody else." Definitions emphasizing issues related to *personal feedback* were: Communication satisfaction occurs "when it is possible to communicate positive and negative things and they are accepted in a mature fashion." In the category of *supervisor communication*, some of the definitions were: Communication satisfaction occurs when "there is dialogue and you are respected, listened, and valued."

³ Definitions from the *psychological perspective* were formulated in terms of "feeling part of an organization, identifying with its mission, goals and philosophy." Conceptualizations from the *work ethic perspective* were phrased in terms of "willingness to give the best of oneself to do a good job or to be responsible in the performance of the job". Definitions in the category of the *exchange perspective* were expressed in terms of "a bilateral contract of rights and obligations that have developed between employees and the organization in order to achieve both parties' objectives, or the willingness to do a good job in exchange for one's salaries."

