Perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness in Colombia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study was to identify what Colombians perceive as effective and least effective/ineffective managerial behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – This study was conducted following a qualitative methodology based on the philosophical assumptions of pragmatism and the "pragmatic approach" (Morgan, 2007). The critical incident technique was used to generate data from a purposive sample of 27 managers and non-managerial employees located in Medellin and Bogota, Colombia.

Findings – The results of this study suggest that effective managers in Colombia are those who are supportive, caring, considerate, participative, understanding, communicative and flexible, and are also good problem solvers.

Research limitations/implications – This study focused on the perceptions of Colombian managers and non-managerial employees only. Therefore, the description of effective and least effective/ineffective managers in Colombia could be highly value-laden from the national cultural perspective. Hence, it is recommended that further research should be carried out to explore the perceptions of international managers who have frequently interacted or worked with Colombian managers.

Originality/value – The results of this study have practical implications for Colombian managers and international managers who manage the Colombian workforce. For Colombian managers, this study provides insight into what is considered effective or least effective/ineffective managerial and leadership behavior. The findings provide useful information on foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) that have operations in Colombia. MNCs can use the results of this study to create effective management development models for their expatriates in Colombia.

Keywords Managerial and effectiveness, Managerial behavior, Supervisory leadership in Colombia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In today's globalized economy, not only material and monetary resources are being traded but also personnel are being transplanted to live and work in foreign lands. Both Latin American and Caribbean countries have opened their doors to global investors, and also have become small but global players investing abroad. This study focuses on one of Latin America's top countries to invest in, namely, Colombia (UNCTAD, 2013),

and explores one of the key variables associated with the successful internationalizing of companies, namely, the behavioral manifestation of managerial and leadership effectiveness.

Latin America as a region was expected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to grow its output by 3.5 per cent in 2013, showing a favorable scenario based on high commodity prices (IMFa, 2013). In addition, it was predicted by the IMF that Colombia, the third most populated country in Latin America behind Brazil and Mexico, would have an even better outcome with a 4.1 per cent gross domestic product growth for 2013 and 4.5 per cent for 2014 (IMFb, 2013). Several economic indicators show Colombia's recent progress in the global marketplace. For example, Colombia has recently entered and ratified several free trade agreements with countries and blocks such as the USA, the European Free Trade Association, Mexico, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the country has also signed bilateral investment treaties with Peru, Spain and Switzerland in recent times. Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow in Colombia grew drastically from USD1.5 billion in 1999 to USD 13 billion in 2011. In 2012, this number reached USD16 billion, the highest level in the country's history. Colombia was ranked 18 in the FDI host economies rankings of 2012 (third in the region after Brazil and Chile), improving its place from being 21 in 2011. The country was also ranked 13 in economies with the highest (n = 16 per cent) inward FDI rate of return in 2011 (UNCTAD, 2013).

The increase in FDI in Colombia has brought expatriate managers to major Colombian cities, and they face the challenge of having to effectively supervise and direct Colombian employees. To be successful as a manager or leader in international assignments, expats need to understand the cultural environment of the host country (Mondy, 2010). Unfortunately that is not always the case (Wang, 2011). A lack of understanding of the local workplace culture and how to manage/lead effectively a local workforce can result in management failure, and the creation of great losses for the company. This can also lead to a significant, damaging hit to the manager's career path.

The vast majority of research on management and leadership has been conducted in the USA, Canada and various Western European countries. Furthermore, it is widely assumed that the various theoretical models and taxonomies derived from that research are universally applicable. However, this assumption has been challenged by various scholars who argue that the relevance and transferability of findings of US management research to non-US cultures can be problematic due to the significant cultural and organizational differences affecting the managerial and leadership environment of the USA in relation to other countries (Chhokar et al., 2013; Peterson and Hunt, 1997). As Tsui (2007) has argued, if the limits of existing Western management theories are to be discovered, and if new theories explaining local management and leadership phenomena in the merging economies of Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America are to be discovered (if any), then this calls for indigenous management research; and preferably, this should be carried out by or in collaboration with native or local scholars. Tsui's view is echoed by Hernandez-Romero (2010) who argues that, as Latin America becomes a more important player in the global marketplace, indigenous research within the region is needed.

Our study is a response to the need to better understand how to effectively manage the Colombian workforce, especially given the increasing levels of FDI to the region, and thus the number of expatriates managing the Colombian workforce. Our study is based

on indigenous replication studies of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness carried out by Wang (2011) in China; Hamlin *et al.* (2010) in Egypt; Ruiz *et al* (2013) in Mexico, and by Hamlin and Patel (2012) in Romania. By indigenous research we mean any single country study that is context-specific as a result of either incorporating aspects of the national context in the theory and methods, or by taking the national context as granted, which, as Tsui (2007) claims, is the case for research conducted in the USA These above-cited single country emic (*context-specific*) studies replicated the research by Hamlin and Cooper (2007), Hamlin and Bassi (2008) and Hamlin and Serventi (2008) in the UK. The main aim of our study has been to identify what Colombians perceive as the specific managerial behaviors which differentiate effective managers from least effective/ineffective managers. As was the case in all of the past emic replication studies cited above, our use of the term "managerial and leadership effectiveness" refers to the behavioral effectiveness of managers in performing their everyday tasks of managing and leading people, and the word "leadership" refers to the "supervisory leadership", as defined by House and Aditya (1997), which is performed by most managers at all levels within organizations.

Literature review
Past research on Colombian management and leadership
Research that has specifically addressed the issue of effective managerial behavioral practices in Colombia has not been found. However, there are cross-cultural studies, which suggest that certain managerial practices could be more effective than others when managing a Colombian workforce.

Research that does provide insight about what could make managers effective in Colombia is the global study conducted by Hofstede (1980). This research explored culture across countries based on four cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Later, a fifth (long-term orientation) and a relatively new sixth dimension of culture (indulgence versus restraint) were included (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint dimensions have not yet been measured in Colombia.

With regard to power distance, which refers to the extent that people are willing to accept authority without questioning it, Hofstede's high index on power distance describes Colombia as a country where there is a high dependence from the supervised on their supervisor. This finding on power distance suggests that Colombians are willing to accept authoritarian managers and unequal power distribution. Indeed, a high power index distance suggests that subordinates feel more comfortable with authoritarian managers who make the decisions rather than with democratic managers who involve subordinates in the decision-making process (Luthans and Doh, 2012).

With regard to the cultural dimension of individualism/collectivism, which refers to the tendency of individuals to look after themselves and immediate family only, Hofstede's study found that Colombians are highly collectivistic (Luthans and Doh, 2012). This finding indicates that relationships and connections are very important in Colombia. A high collectivist index suggests that managers may prefer to rely on relationships rather than performance, and that they may favor those employees with whom they have developed close relationships.

Hofstede's study also found Colombians being high on uncertainty avoidance, which refers to the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations. Colombia's

high index on this dimension indicates that the Colombian society displays the preference for rules, regulations and the need to avoid failure (Hofstede, 1980). This finding suggests that Colombians may be risk averse, and in the context of the workplace, employees prefer managers who give clear directions and instructions rather than those managers who tend to be ambiguous. Finally, in terms of masculinity/ femininity, this refers to the extent to which people value success, money and physical assets, Colombians scored moderate to high on this dimension, which suggests that they value material things, recognition, financial compensation and professional advancement.

Other research relevant to our study due to the insight it provides into effective strategic leadership in Colombia is House *et al.*'s (2004) GLOBE study. The purpose of their study was to identify behaviors that could promote or prevent outstanding leadership manifested by general (top) managers of private sector companies. The findings suggest that effective organizational leaders in Colombia are those who are charismatic, team-oriented, participative and human-oriented. Charismatic leadership refers to those leaders who inspire subordinates and create a passion among subordinates to perform. Participative leaders are those who seek input from subordinates in the decision-making process. Team-oriented leaders are those who inspire collaboration among team members. Human-oriented leaders are those who are concerned about the well-being of their subordinates (House *et al.*, 2004). The findings of the GLOBE study also indicate that attributes such as being self-protective (face saver and conflict inducer), and autonomous (individualistic and self-centered) inhibit effective strategic leadership in Colombia. Clearly, the type of "strategic leadership" manifested by organizational leaders/top managers determines, or at least influences, the type of managerial culture of the organization, and this has a direct bearing on the type of effective and least effective/ineffective "supervisory leadership" behaviors exhibited by the managers of that organization.

In addition to the cross-national studies previously cited, two other studies were found that provide insight into what could make mangers effective or least effective/ ineffective in Colombia. Calderon *et al.* (2010), after surveying 273 organizations, concluded that the human resources practices in Colombia are gaining maturity, and are being perceived as organizational capabilities that are essential for the competitiveness of the company. Furthermore, their findings show that the human resource is perceived as a company asset, and that job satisfaction is necessary to improve productivity. In this regard, Idrovo (2006) conducted a study of the Colombian views of balance between work and family, finding that companies are more and more aware that work and that family balance is not only essential to employees' well-being but also have an impact on performance and productivity.

In summary, research that specifically addresses managerial and leadership effectiveness in Colombia was not found. Nevertheless, there are some cross-national and indigenous studies that provide insight into factors that should be considered to be an effective manager in Colombia. However, the findings of these few studies are inconclusive and at times they seem to be contradictory. For example, while Hofstede's study (1980) suggests that Colombians may prefer authoritarian managers and to be told what to do, the GLOBE study suggests that Colombians prefer participative leaders and seek to be involved in the decision-making process. Consequently, further research is necessary to determine those attributes of managerial behavior that make managers

effective or ineffective in Colombia. This is particularly important due to the increasing levels of FDI that Colombia is experiencing, and consequently the rising numbers of international managers working in the country.

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the implicit leadership theory (ILT), which is based on the idea that employees having their own assumptions about what constitutes as effective and ineffective leadership (Eden and Leviatan, 1975). Employees use these assumptions about leadership to understand experiences they live (Shaw, 1990), and leaders' behaviors are judged by their followers based on how well they fit with the respective implicit theories that their followers hold about effective/ineffective leadership (Cantor and Mischel, 1979). The better the fit between the perceived behavior manifested by leaders/managers and the internal behavioral leadership prototypes (implicit theories) held by their followers/subordinates (the perceivers), the more likely they will be judged as *effective* or *ineffective*. In addition to the ILTs that followers hold about managers and leaders, it is claimed that the effectiveness of the specific managerial/leadership behaviors is influenced by the organizational culture (Gerstner and Day, 1994) and the national culture of the employees (Helgstrand and Stuhlmacher, 1999). Thus, individuals from different cultures and different organizations may perceive managerial and leadership effectiveness in different ways (Chong and Thomas, 1997). Differences about the perceptions of effective leadership between leaders and followers could have a negative impact on the performance of the organization (Engle and Lord, 1997).

Research aims and questions

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to identify what Colombians perceive as *effective* and *least effective/ineffective* managerial behavior. Following Hamlin (1988), who followed Latham and Wexley (1981), the definitions of *effective* and *ineffective* managerial performance adopted for this study were as follows: effective managerial performance is "behavior which you wish all managers would adopt if and when faced with a similar circumstance". Ineffective managerial performance is:

> […] behavior which, if it occurred repeatedly, or was seen once in certain circumstances, might cause you to begin to question or doubt the ability of that particular manager in that instance (Ruiz *et al.*, 2013, p. 135).

The research questions that guided this study are the following:

RQ1. What managerial behaviors are perceived as being effective by Colombian managers and non-managerial employees?

RQ2. What managerial behaviors are perceived as being least effective or ineffective by Colombian managers and non-managerial employees?

Research methodology

Our empirical study was informed by the "managerial behavior approach" to management research (Noordegraaf and Stewart, 2000), which consists of reviewing managerial work and behavior, as it takes place within the context of an organization "with the aim of developing categories, concepts and theories on the basis of empirical evidence" (Noordegraaf and Stewart, 2000, p. 429). Our philosophical stance was based on the assumptions of pragmatism and the "pragmatic approach" (Morgan, 2007), and

we adopted the critical incident technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954) to collect concrete examples (critical incidents) of effective and least effective/ineffective managerial behavior. This technique was used by Author 3 for his original study of managerial and leadership effectiveness (Hamlin, 1988) and for all of the above-cited replication studies that he has conducted with various co-researchers. As indicated by Borman and Brush (1993), CIT is considered one of the best techniques for generating data to identify effective/ineffective managerial behavior. In addition, as argued by Chell (1998), CIT allows researchers to make comparisons across cases for the purpose of demonstrating the transferability of their findings.

Sample and data collection
The sample of research participants included managers and non-managerial employees from 22 private and 5 public companies located in Medellin and Bogota, Colombia. They were chosen on the basis of purposive and convenience sampling techniques by the two of us who are natives of Colombia, and who collected the CIT data. Although a sample size of 40 or more participants had been planned, only 27 were able to be recruited because of imposed contextual constraints prevailing at the time of the study. This number of CIT informants is the same as the number secured by Hamlin *et al.* (2011) for their equivalent replication study in Mexico. Of our 27 CIT informants, 9 were female and 18 were male.

Following previous studies, the plan was to interview employees from all levels of the organization (non-managerial employees, first-level managers, middle-level managers and senior managers). Of the total 27 participants, 13 were non-managerial employees and 14 were managers, of whom 10 were at the middle-level and 4 at the senior-level of management.

To be consistent with Hamlin's (1988) original study and the subsequent replication studies that explored perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness, we followed the same research protocol for conducting our CIT interviews. Prior to each interview, participants were instructed of the purpose of the research and what was hoped to be achieved. Furthermore, they were informed of the meaning of different key terminology such as "critical", "incident", "critical incident (CI)" and "effective", and "ineffective" managerial performance. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, during which the participant was asked to describe five incidents of specific effective managerial behavior, and five incidents of specific ineffective managerial behavior exhibited by other managers that they had personally observed within the past 6-12 months. Participants who were themselves managers were not allowed to offer CIs relating to their own managerial practice.

The CIs could relate either to behavior exhibited by managers above, at the same level or below them in the organizational hierarchy. For each CI, the researcher posed and strictly adhered to three standard questions, as follows:

Q1. What was the background situation, circumstance or context that led up to the critical incident you have in mind?

Q2. What and in what way *exactly* did the subject (the manager you observed) do/say or not do/say that was either effective or ineffective?

Q3. What was the specific result or outcome of the critical incident that you have described, and, on reflection, why do you perceive/judge this to be an example of "effective" or "ineffective" managerial behavior/managerial performance?

The interviews generated 250 usable CIs. The incidents were transcribed in data collection tables created for this purpose. In case of doubts, the researcher made clarifications with the participants during the interview. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and to reduce the loss of meaning in translating the gathered CIT data into English, the back-and-forth method was used as part of the translation process. This was conducted by Author 1, who is a native of Colombia, together with another Colombian who is also bilingual and an educated professional. Their translations were scrutinized by Author 2, who is Mexican and fluent in both Spanish and English, and where any doubts about meaning were detected, these were resolved through discussion and explication.

A total of 267 CIs were obtained from the 27 respondents, of which 134 were concrete examples of positive (*effective*) managerial behavior and 133 of negative (*least effective/ineffective*) managerial behavior.

Data analysis
Analysis of the 267 CIs obtained from the 27 respondents was done in accordance with the two stage procedure used by Hamlin (2002) for their various replication studies. In the first stage, the CIs were subjected to a variant of inductive content analysis involving open coding (Flick, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to identify the unit of meaning of each CI, and when necessary to disentangle any CI that contained more than one unit of meaning. This resulted in 137 positive and 133 negative-coded CIs being identified, of which 9 of the positive and 14 of the negative CIs were found to be unusable for reasons of insufficient behavioral specificity or clarity of meaning.

The second stage of the inductive data analysis was second-level content analysis involving axial coding to identify behavioral categories (Flick, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Of the 128 positive and 119 negative CIs subjected to this second-stage analysis, 118 and 117 were found to be convergent in meaning with one or more of the other positive and negative CIs, respectively. This resulted in the emergence of 26 categories related to effective and 27 categories related to least effective/ineffective managerial behavior. The number of CIs contained within each behavioral category ranged from 2 to 10 (mean = 4.43). Each category was then interpreted, and a behavioral statement (BS) created to capture in essence the meaning held in common to all of its constituent CIs. The BSs were then used as descriptive labels for the identified behavioral categories.

Results
The 26 positive (effective) and 27 negative (least effective/ineffective) behavioral categories as described by the derived BSs resulting from our study are presented:
Positive (*effective*) BSs:

- *P1:* Manager organizes well the roles, responsibilities and deployment of, and collaboration between employees.

- *P2:* Manager clearly explains to employees what needs to be done, and/or gives guidance on how it needs to be done.

- *P3:* When confronted by imposed or emergent changes in objectives the manager adapts to the changed situation in a positive/proactive manner.

- *P4:* Manager addresses directly conflict or other problematic interpersonal issues that arise between individual employees and/or between teams or departments.
- *P5:* Manager addresses problems with employees whose behavior or performance is below standard, and takes action to discipline or even fire them if necessary.
- *P6:* Manager reacts fast to problems experienced by customers and arranges for them to be fixed.
- *P7:* Manager maintains good control of the agenda and/or proceedings of meetings.
- *P8:* Manager takes action to improve/optimize the efficient use of employee time and other resources.
- *P9:* Manager indirectly and/or directly helps/supports employees deal with problem issues arising with their customers or clients.
- *P10:* Manager rewards deserving employees (e.g. for working extra hard; achieving company revenue goals).
- *P11:* Manager gives public recognition to the successes/good performance of his/her employees.
- *P12:* When manager sees a subordinate or colleague in a pressurized/potentially stressful work situation, he/she lends a hand and gives personal help/support.
- *P13:* Manager fights for and secures resources for his his/her employees, and/or acts as an advocate with higher management on their behalf.
- *P14:* Manager gives space and flexibility that allows employees to use their initiative, develop ideas and make their own decisions.
- *P15:* Manager actively delegates to and empowers his/her employees to make their own decisions.
- *P16:* Manager shows care and concern for the health and well-being of his/her employees.
- *P17:* Manager shows empathy for and understanding of employees confronted by worrying situations at work, and takes action to relieve the worry or stress.
- *P18:* Manager actively supports employees' endeavors to develop and/or advance their careers and/or settle into a new job (e.g. giving promotional opportunities and helping with transfer/relocation within organization).
- *P19:* Manager encourages and supports employees to develop and broaden their skills, and/or actively arranges training for them and/or trains them personally.
- *P20:* Manager encourages and supports employees to attend work-related (trade/industrial) learning events such s fairs, conventions and conferences.
- *P21:* Manager is open to the ideas/suggestions of employees and listens to them.
- *P22:* Manager accepts and implements suggestions from employees.
- *P23:* Manager instigates social interaction with employees outside of work.
- *P24:* Manager seeks and utilizes the views of employs in his decisions, and/or involves them in discussions and problem-solving activities.

- *P25:* Manager runs regular meetings with employees to impart and/or exchange information and/or facilitate team planning and coordination.
- *P26:* Manager is honest in his communication with employees and keeps them informed on matters that affect them.

Negative (least effective/ineffective) BSs:

- *N1:* Manager shows lack of respect and civility to employees.
- *N2:* Manager shows lack of sensitivity to/care for the health and well-being of his employees.
- *N3:* Manager acts in an autocratic manner (e.g. does not empower his employees; deprives them of decision-making power/autonomy; does not allow teamwork).
- *N4:* Manager micro-manages with employees always needing to ask for supervisor approval.
- *N5:* Manager does not seek the views of employees and/or ignores any suggestions/recommendations made by them.
- *N6:* Manager treats employees unfairly by showing favoritism and/or being influenced by political connections.
- *N7:* Manager exhibits inconsistent and/or unreliable behavior.
- *N8:* Manager treats employees unequally (e.g. assigning tasks; making concessions; applying rules and dealing with mistakes).
- *N9:* Manager does not take responsibility for his/her own actions and passes the buck and blames others.
- *N10:* Manager acts in a secretive and/or arbitrary manner.
- *N11:* Manager talks to employees, usually in front of others, in a way that demeans, humiliates and undermines their self-confidence.
- *N12:* Manager gets emotionally upset and loses control.
- *N13:* Manager exhibits bad judgment, makes bad decisions and/or gives bad advice to employees.
- *N14:* Manager fails to fully plan and/or prepare for meetings.
- *N15:* Manager plans badly and/or takes action without checking the completeness or correctness of the facts.
- *N16:* Manager fails to give to employees clear, precise and/or timely orders/instructions/directions on what is required of them.
- *N17:* Manager exercises weak/poor control of the convening and running of meetings (e.g. punctuality of attendees; keeping to the agenda and keeping to time).
- *N18:* Manager tolerates employees who under-perform.
- *N19:* Manager procrastinates in addressing issues.
- *N20:* Manager ignores employee concerns or complaints and/or notification of potential problems, and takes no action to address or resolve the issues.
- *N21:* Manager avoids dealing with issues that are potentially contentious.

- *N22:* Manager abdicates from performing critical tasks and/or roles.
- *N23:* Manager exhibits a lack of key knowledge, skills, competence and/or experience that subordinates expect their manager to possess.
- *N24:* Manager fails to give guidance or other forms of support to employees prior to them performing assigned task, and/or fails to respond when they make a request for guidance.
- *N25:* Manager delays and/or withholds from employees information about organizational rules, regulations or changes that will directly affect them.
- *N26:* Manager deprives employees of support they require to perform better in their current jobs and/or resolve a (e.g. remote worker support; opportunity to improve in the job or undertake education or training).
- *N27:* Manager displays a negative attitude or closed mind to new ideas or suggestion from his employees, and/or to working collaboratively with other departments.

To illustrate the relationship between the BSs and their constituent CIs, two examples as follows:

(1) *Positive (effective) BS*: P15. Manager actively delegates to and empowers his/her employees to make their own decisions (the seven CIs):
- Commercial manager delegates the project to the person with more experience on the subject.
- The manager allows a democratic selection process by teammates, based on merits, is displayed.
- Management delegates with control and empowerment.
- The manager assigns projects according to the roles of every employee, empowering them of the execution, and making them completely responsible for the results of the project; they even have to present the results in front of the board of directors or the proper audience was the project is completed. The manager gave them complete credit for a job well done.
- The Director realized that he could not manage to handle the load of communications effectively and on time, so he delegated the work.
- The sales manager included his subordinate in all big projects from the area and gave him responsibilities no other analyst in the company had. For example, the analyst alone was assigned the project of changing all sales commissions, saving the company millions of dollars.
- Manager empowers employees, asks for results but also offers and provides support to the team.

(2) *Negative (least effective/ineffective) BS*: N11. Manager talks to employees, usually in front of others, in a way that demeans, humiliates and undermines their self-confidence (5 CIs):
- In front of everybody and in a loud manner, the manager asks that one of her employees stops talking.

- One of the employees of the marketing team was in charge of the process of coordinating the efforts made in the media plan and the publication of the advertising in the main newspapers and magazines, the process lacked follow-up and one of the advertisements was not published in the proper page. The boss started screaming at the employee in front of everyone, and publicly summoned her.
- In a meeting with all the customer service staff, the manager played a tape in which the interviewee was recorded, she was used as an example of bad customer service and the manager pointed out in public all the mistakes she made.
- When seeing a bad job, a manager said to employee's "let's hope when this falls down we won't be here".
- For many months the project manager met the sales forecasts with no especial recognition; however, the first month he did not do it, he got a call from the general manager and was told that he was good for nothing.

Additionally, an example of a typical CIT "data strip" showing the background context to a particular concrete example (CI) of observed managerial behavior, and also the resulting consequences/outcomes that caused the interviewee to perceive and judge the CI as effective, is shown in (Table I).

Based on our findings it seems that managers in Colombian organizations are perceived to be effective by their respective peers, superiors and subordinates when, for example, they:

- are considerate of employees' points of view;
- are fair decision-makers;
- provide a professional and positive work environment;
- promote and recognize hard work;
- are flexible and open to new ideas;
- are good listeners and support employees;
- encourage employees' development;
- adapt to new situations;
- show empowerment, discipline and organization;

Background	Critical incident	Consequence	
After four years of managing an account, an account manager is tired and wants a change	The employee's manager instead of taking a negative attitude and telling the employee to look for another job, and helped him to get a transferred to another account at the same firm	Very positive that companies give opportunities of horizontal moves, helping people get changes without leaving the company. Thanks to situations like that, employees feel comfortable about sharing their thoughts	**Table I.** Example of a critical incident showing the background and the consequence

- guide proactively;
- are effective problem solvers; and
- are considerate of employees' personal needs.

On the other hand, Colombian managers are perceived to be least effective or ineffective when, for example, they:

- exhibit rude behavior;
- do not support employees;
- lack clear communication, delegation and problem-solving skills;
- lack organization and planning skills;
- do not provide directions;
- do not work on their own responsibilities;
- display unfair treatment and incompetent behavior;
- make poor decisions;
- exhibit authoritarian, arbitrary and non-inclusive behavior; and
- are inconsiderate of the personal needs of employees.

Discussion

The findings of this empirical study challenge the predominant discourse on how managers should manage and lead employees within Latin American countries. For instance, Hofstede's power distance results for Colombia suggest there is a high dependence on management making decisions. Additionally, the GLOBE study clustering of Colombia in the Latin American region, and Ogliastri's (2007) conclusion of social inequality and concentration of an elite group support various deductions that the national culture of Colombia is characterized by employees readily accepting autocratic direction from people in power. Based on the CIT data collected for this study, effective managers provide proactive guidance while delegating, listening, recognizing and supporting employees. Our findings suggest that to be effective in Colombia, managers should be participative rather that authoritarian, which contradicts the widely held belief and perception about Colombians favoring authoritarian managers. In particular, multinational corporations (MNCs) must be aware of the preferred leadership style of Colombians when training managers for assignments in this Latin American country. Literature about international management (Luthans and Doh, 2012) consistently suggests authoritarian leadership as the leadership style that better aligns with the Colombian culture. However, our findings challenge this generalized idea, which is mostly based on studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s.

Other recent studies on perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness held in other countries, including China, Mexico, Egypt, Germany, Romania and the UK (Hamlin and Bassi, 2008; Hamlin and Cooper, 2007; Hamlin and Serventi, 2008, Ruiz et al., 2013) came to similar conclusions with regard to the preference of participative over authoritarian leadership. This suggests that there are management/leadership practices and managerial behaviors that are commonly perceived to be effective and least effective/ineffective across cultures. We suggest our findings, which are more consistent with "universal/context general" as opposed to "contingency/context-

specific" and "culture-specific" schools of thought, might be the result of the world's economic and technological integration. For example, free trade agreements have caused not only an increase in trade of goods and services but also increased flows of expatriates who could transfer home management practices to host countries. In addition, it is reasonable to infer that technological advances in communication have made employees aware of managerial practices that may be more desirable than the ones experienced, thus impacting the perception of managerial and leadership effectiveness across the world.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that effective managers in Colombia are those who are supportive, caring, considerate, participative, understanding, communicative and flexible, and are also good problem solvers.

Implications for practice

Our results have practical implications for Colombian managers, expatriate managers and other international managers who manage the Colombian workforce. For Colombian managers, this study provides insight into what is considered effective or ineffective managerial and leadership behavior. It is imperative that managers in Colombia become mindful of the importance of being effective managers. Ireland and Hitt (2005) indicated that leadership practices are an essential means for organizations to improve their competitiveness. Effective leadership practices help organizations to be better prepared to take advantage of the opportunities and face the challenges associated with globalization. "No matter what the organization's activity, or country, the better the decisions of its managers and leaders, the more likely that the organization will thrive" (Rausch, 1999, p. 1). Therefore, it is necessary that Colombian managers make use of effective management and leadership practices. By becoming aware of the attributes associated with effective and least effective/ineffective managerial behavior, managers can work to enhance those attributes that lead to perceived managerial and effectiveness and avoid the pitfalls that could lead to behavioral ineffectiveness. Being a Colombian manager in Colombia does not automatically make the manager effective. Colombian managers need to be well-informed about those attributes of managerial behavior that, in the perception of the Colombian workforce, lead to effective management and supervisory leadership.

The findings of this study provide useful information on foreign MNCs that have operations in Colombia. For example, they could be used to create management and leadership development (MLD) models for their expatriates. By becoming aware of what is considered effective and least effective/ineffective managerial behavior in Colombia, human resource development professionals working for the MNCs would be better placed to prepare their expatriate managers for international assignments in that country. We suggest that evidence-based knowledge on what makes managers effective in Colombia will help international managers to interact with the Colombian workforce in a more effective manner.

The findings of our study call for special attention to the role that participative supervisory leadership plays in Colombia. MLD programs designed to prepare expatriates to successfully manage the Colombian workforce should consider the findings of our study about the preference of Colombians for participative supervisory leadership. MLD programs based on the findings of studies conducted decades ago may no longer be applicable.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

We acknowledge that this study has four limitations. The first relates to the size of the sample of research participants ($n = 27$). Although it was within the typical range of 20-40 for qualitative studies (Cresswell *et al.*, 2003), we believe the data saturation point had not been reached because, by the end of the coding process, the progressive decline in the number of "new" CIs surfacing from the CIT data had not completely ceased. Consequently, it is possible that there are other discrete positive or negative behavioral categories of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness that have yet to be identified within Colombian private sector organizations. The second limitation relates to the locality of the 27 participants, all of whom worked for organizations situated in just two cities, namely, Medellin and Bogota. Thus, these findings cannot be generalized to the entire country. It is recommended that further replication studies are conducted in other major cities and towns in other parts of Colombia.

The third limitation relates to the methodology. While qualitative data have provided rich insights into what makes managers effective and least effective/ineffective in one part of Colombia, they do not give the breath that allows generalization to the larger population of managers throughout the country. One way that this limitation might be overcome would be to create a "behavioral item questionnaire" (BIQ) derived from a judicious selection of BSs generated by our study and by any subsequent replication studies. With a Likert scale attached to each item in the questionnaire, the BIQ could then be administered to a large population of respondents in a representative sample of organizations throughout Colombia. Subjecting the results to factor analysis could then lead to the identification of generic behavioral criteria of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness, and in due course to a Colombian taxonomy that has nationwide relevance and utility. In addition, we suggest other equivalent studies should be conducted using a different method for gathering empirical data (e.g. the repertory grid technique) to assess whether or not the sole use of CIT has affected the uniform results across nations suggested by our study.

Finally, this study focused on the perceptions of Colombian managers and non-managerial employees only. Therefore, the description of effective and least effective/ineffective managers in Colombia could be highly value-laden from the national cultural perspective. Hence, it is recommended that further research should be carried out to explore the perceptions of international managers who have frequently interacted or worked with Colombian managers.

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