

## Russia Versus the World: Are Public Relations Leadership Priorities More Similar than Different?

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### ABSTRACT

As a part of a global study, 215 Russian public relations practitioners completed an online survey about their perceptions of professional leadership and communication management. The Russian sample's demographics differed significantly from the overall sample's make-up (N=4,484; 22 countries). Despite the differences, there was a significant overlap between Russian participants' and their global peers' beliefs. This result might signal the universality of some specific leadership aspects and/or a globalization effect in Russian public relations.

**Keywords:** communication management, leadership, public relations, Russia.

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The public relations field is in the midst of shifting from a management concept to a leadership paradigm. Although the two approaches—management and leadership—should not be taken as a dichotomy, the newly emerged concept better suits the task of moving public relations practitioners to the forefront of the decision-making process. Public relations leadership is not merely a *potential* but *capital* that advances organizations. Excellent leadership means being involved in strategic decision-making, providing ethical counsel, possessing a high level of communication knowledge and expertise, and practicing two-way symmetrical communication (Erzikova & Berger, 2012).

A number of scholars outlined differences between management and leadership. While managers plan, organize, and control, leaders envision an attractive future for an organization, enable followers to improve their performance, and empower employees to make decisions (Bass & Bass, 2008). According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), "Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (p. 221). Rethinking public relations leadership, Thayer (1986) said that the true

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leader differs from a manager “in terms of how he or she *thinks about what needs to be done*” (p. 10).

Some differences in management and leadership appear universal. Indeed, the leadership phenomenon includes both universal (*etic*) and culturally specific (*emic*) aspects (Bass & Bass, 2008). Scholars (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) have identified 22 universal positive attributes of leadership (e.g., honest, trustworthy, informed, dynamic, just, dependable). When viewed within a national context, the similarities and differences inform our understanding of public relations leadership worldwide.

Every nation faces challenges and barriers to change, but Russia seems to occupy the top spot in terms of unique obstacles to achieving the transition from a managerial to a leadership paradigm. Post-Soviet Russia inherited a deficient and bureaucratic managerial system. Yet, it also included a strong transactional leadership component. The system made the trains run on time, but it has not spurred the Russian economy into 21<sup>st</sup> century where entrepreneurial values and practices are more highly prized. In the West, particularly in the U.S., some organizations grow out of managerial approaches by appealing to leadership models. Russia still struggles with management reforms (McCarthy, Puffer, May, Ledgerwood, & Stewart, 2008).

This research examines Russian public relations practitioners’ perceptions of a variety of aspects of professional leadership and communication management. The survey is part of a world-wide study conducted by an international group of researchers with support from IBM Corporation, Heyman Associates, and The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations at the University of Alabama.

The survey instrument was based on a conceptual model of excellent public relations leadership developed and previously tested by Meng, Berger, Gower, and Heyman (2012). They noted that in their study, the concept of *excellence* in public relations leadership derives from a Weberian “ideal type” rather than from Grunig’s public relations excellence theory (Meng et al., 2012). The model includes six interrelated dimensions: self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability, and communication knowledge and expertise (Berger, 2012). A seventh dimension in the model, organizational culture and structure, influences the environment for and practice of leadership.

The main finding of this study is a significant overlap between Russian and their global colleagues’ views about and attitudes toward professional PR leadership. This result might signal, among others, universality of some specific leadership aspects (Bass, 1997) and Meng et al.’s (2012) model of excellent public relations leadership; a globalization effect in Russian public relations (Erzikova, 2013; 2012); and/or Russian practitioners’ adaption of Western approaches without questioning their fit to the country’s environment (Moskovskaya, 2011).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *A brief overview of public relations leadership scholarship*

The study of leaders has been a significant part of the study of history (Bass & Bass, 2008). One of the most researched topics in business, education, psychology and other areas of social and applied sciences, leadership has only recently become a focus in public relations scholarship. A number of studies (e.g., Grunig, 1992; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Berger, Reber, & Heyman, 2007; Berger & Reber, 2006; Bowen, 2009; Choi & Choi, 2009; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009; Jin, 2010; Meng et al., 2012) have employed different samples and methods to explore various aspects of PR leadership in the United States. The common conclusion has been that PR leadership is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, and the importance of developing leadership skills is vital for gaining influence within organizations and thus effectively advancing organizational goals.

The concepts of power and leadership are closely related. Grunig (1992) argued that “excellent leaders give power but minimize ‘power of politics’” (p. 233). Berger and Reber (2006) conceptualized power as the most important issue in public relations: Power and influence mean “the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of others” (p. 5). Further, Bowen (2009) argued that leadership is one of the main routes to the dominant coalition, or decision-making authority in the organization.

Since public relations practitioners perceived themselves as operating in a turbulent environment, they valued transformational leadership more than transactional style (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). However, the respondents also acknowledged the importance of situational leadership, or the necessity to change leadership style depending on circumstances and environment. Further, Werder and Holtzhausen’s (2009) research supported Aldoory and Toth’s (2004) assumption that leadership in public relations is mainly situational.

Werder and Holtzhausen (2009) sought to identify the most frequently observed leadership style in public relations practice. An inclusive style (e.g., leaders are collaborative) prevailed, followed by transformational leadership style (e.g., leaders provide a clear vision and inspire change). It appeared that public relations leaders used both styles, which are different but not mutually exclusive. Jin (2010) also found that U.S. public relations leaders demonstrated both transformational and transactional behaviors, and the unit size might have been a factor in determining the style. In large organizations public relations leaders leaned toward transactional style, which is associated with more control and less emotional attachment. However, empathetic transformational leaders were more effective in organizational settings because of their ability to instill confidence and gain employees’ trust (Jin, 2010).

Leadership has been defined in terms of activities and behaviors (Bass & Bass, 2008). By examining the concept of public relations leadership through a behavioral approach, Choi and Choi (2009) concluded that such behaviors as providing a clear vision and

acting as a change agent are most essential in demonstrating the importance of public relations' contribution to organizational success.

### *The Russian Context*

Research on Russian leadership has stressed the persuasiveness of the Soviet era style characterized by top-down control, punishment for mistakes, and low transparency (Fey, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2008; Dixon, Meyer, & Day, 2007; Elenkov, 2002; de Vries, 2001; Fey, Adaeva & Vitkovskaia, 2001). The Russian case, a classical example of transactional leadership style, hinders organizational change in the country with a fundamentally noncompetitive economy (McCarthy et al., 2008). To study “the mystery of modern-day Russian leadership” (Fey, 2008) and its effects on public relations practice, one must understand the Russian values and behavioral patterns (de Vries, 2001).

The Russian approach to leadership is determined by Slavic history and Orthodox religion; geography and climate; and unique social capital (McCarthy et al., 2008; Grachev & Bobina, 2006; de Vries, 2001). Using the clinical paradigm, de Vries (2001) outlined the following specifics of the Russian national character: Regressive nostalgia; a sadomasochistic identification with authority; enormous endurance; emotional expressiveness; collective orientation; readiness for extraordinary sacrifices; preoccupation with egalitarianism; conservatism; learned helplessness; and phlegmatic fatalism. In addition, Czar Ivan the Terrible, who was prone to extreme mood swings, exemplifies an archetype of Russian leadership (de Vries, 2001).

Since Russians are preoccupied with the past, they tend to place issues into a historical context. Their past defines the present and the future. Change is perceived as a threat to traditions (de Vries, 2001). In modern societies such as the U.S., the leader is expected to be a change agent. In traditional societies such as Russia, the leader is selected to conserve societal truths (Thayer, 1986). Moreover, Russians are more contemplative than task-oriented; reactive than proactive; and relationship-centered. Russians value friendship more than business partnership (de Vries, 2001).

Historically, Russians have respected power over law. As a consequence of feeling insecure about the world, they believe in a strong leader (de Vries, 2001). The elevated status of leaders implies that they give orders and prescribe rules that shape followers' behaviors (McCarthy et al., 2008). Mini-dictators, or small bureaucrats, commonly run organizations and hinder the development of trust— a prerequisite for effective leadership (de Vries, 2001).

In transitional economies such as Russia, organizations typically suffer from so-called administrative heritage, or the inability to adapt to market needs (McCarthy et al., 2008; Dixon et al., 2007). In such organizations, public relations leaders play a special role in breaking old habits and routines and fostering organizations' capabilities to perform well in a market economy.

*Public Relations Leadership in Russian Context*

Although the Russian field is relatively new (Tsetsura, 2011), Russia is one of the 37 countries with a globalized public relations practice (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2007). According to the International Communications Consultancy Organization's Report (2012), the Russian public relations industry has experienced growth in 2010 and 2011, 17% and 23% respectively. However, the field still suffers from a lack of industry standards and regulations (Eapley, 2012). Moreover, the occupation is still seen as a service field (Tsetsura, 2010) and subdued to the marketing function (Erzikova, 2012).

While the leadership concept and its components appear to transcend national boundaries, the situational context nevertheless impacts leadership practices in different regions and countries (Bass, 1997). For example, research showed that compared to their U.S. peers, Russian public relations students believed leaders should impose their opinions on employees rather than take into consideration followers' opinions (Erzikova & Berger, 2011). This finding was consistent with an overall description of an Eastern-European leader as a people-oriented individual with, nevertheless, a weak desire to involve others in decision-making (Northouse, 2007).

Another study revealed that Russian public relations students appeared less ethically grounded and less supportive of the transformational leadership style than their U.S. counterparts (Erzikova & Berger, 2008). Overall, the authoritarian culture has been manifested in leadership studies in Russia (Bass & Bass, 2008).

Young public relations professionals, supposedly free from old mental models, might be seen as potential change agents. However, the quality of public relations education in Russia is rather dubious (Erzikova & Berger, 2006). Public relations and management formal programs share common problems: A lack of integration of theory and practice; the fragmentation of knowledge; borrowing Western theories without adapting them to Russian realities; dogmatism, and low expectations of learning (knowledge) among students (Moskovskaya, 2011). Such educational programs do not cultivate the ability to change old mental management models or initiate leadership in the professional field. Meanwhile, research has shown an age effect in leadership development: The earlier leadership training starts, the better the results (Zenger, 2012).

Overall, the Russian environment seems rather challenging for effective public relations. However, while acknowledging the difficulties Russia presents, one should recognize national advantages as well. For example, Russians are better educated, more innovative and more industrious than people in many other countries (Fey, 2008). De Vries (2001) argued that a creative and innovative core of the Russian character is a constructive anarchist quality that might help foster innovations. For Russians, social recognition may be more important than money (Fey, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2008). Ultimately, public relations practitioners' successful performance in leadership depends on their ability to unlock cultural codes (Hyatt & Simons, 1999), or capitalize on certain national specifics while mitigating challenges.

Based on the discussion above, the following research question is proposed:

**RQ:** How are the Russian participants' perceptions about professional leadership different from the views of the global leadership study's overall respondents?

## METHOD

### *Global Online Survey*

Public relations practitioners ( $N=4,484$ ; 52% were women) from 23 countries participated in a 58-question online survey launched in November 2011 and closed in July 2012. The instrument used a 7-point Likert-type scale. Ratings were interpreted as follows: Ratings of 5.0 or higher meant the issue was important; ratings approaching 6.0 or higher meant the issue was very important.

The survey was distributed in nine languages, including Russian (See Appendix I for a list of countries and languages). The questionnaire was translated in each language and then back translated and checked for accuracy. Respondents from the Russian Federation had a choice to complete the survey in English or Russian.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) Issues in the Field; (2) The Development of Future Leaders; (3) Perceptions about Leadership; and (4) Demographics. Section 1 included 10 important *issues* in public relations practice; *strategies and tactics* to deal with the issues, and Meng et al.'s (2012) *seven dimensions* of leadership. The *issues* subsection asked participants to rank the 10 issues, which were drawn from close readings of recent professional and trade publications. Twelve academics and PR professionals commented on whether the list was a good representation of the major professional challenges. The subsection was revised based on their suggestions. The *strategies and tactics* subsection was developed in a similar way, culling practices from professional and trade publications because little research has been conducted in this area. The *seven dimensions* of leadership had been previously tested (Meng et al., 2012).

To ensure content validity, sections 1 and 3 of the questionnaire were pretested with 57 active professionals in the field. Several changes were made in the wording of individual statements in response to the pretest comments. Section 2 items were drawn from academic and professional literature and from previous work done by Meng et al. (2012).

### *Russian Sample and Participants' Demographics*

Due to the lack of a professional (email) database in Russia, a snowball sampling was employed, meaning the study results cannot be generalized. Participants were initially recruited through the principal country investigator's personal contacts; PR professional organizations and firms; and social media websites. An email invitation asked practitioners to share the survey link with other PR professionals. Approximately 2,000 potential respondents were contacted.

Overall, 215 Russian public relations practitioners completed the survey; 73% of them were females and 27% were males. The majority of respondents (58%) were less than 36 years old; the second largest category (24%) was comprised of individuals who were 36-45 years old; 13% of the participants were 46-55 years old; and 5% of the participants were older than 55.

About half of respondents reported having a Master's degree (33%) or a Doctoral degree (16%); 16% received a Bachelor's degree and 6% had a high school diploma. Almost two-thirds of the participants received their degree in one of four areas of study: Public relations/communication management (28%); humanities (21%); journalism (13%); and social science (11%).

The majority of participants (67%) had less than 11 years of experience in public relations; 22% worked in public relations for 11-20 years; and 11% said they had more than 20 years of experience as public relations specialists.

As for levels between participants' positions and the highest ranked communication leader in their organizations, 23% said they were top leaders; 28% reported that there was one reporting level between them and communication leaders; and almost half (49%) indicated two and more levels.

Half of the participants (n=107) worked for organizations with fewer than five public relations professionals; 30% were employed by organizations with 5-15 public relations specialists; 6% worked in a communication unit with 16-25 professionals; and 14% respondents said their organizations employed more than 25 communication specialists.

Almost half of the participants (47%) reported working for nonprofit, government, political or educational organizations; 22% were employed by private organizations; and 13% worked for public organizations.

Compared to the overall study sample, the Russian sample was female dominated (73% vs. 52%), younger (82% of respondents were under 45 vs. 59% in the overall sample), and less experienced (33% with more than 11 years of experience vs. 65%). Interestingly, 16% of Russians had PhDs, versus 8.5% in the other 22 countries. Yet, Russia had half the number of bachelor's degrees when compared to average of the global sample (16% vs. 30%). The Russian sample included fewer top leaders (23% vs. 40%) and more respondents majored in public relations in universities (28% vs. 16%). Compared to the overall study sample, Russians worked at lower levels in their organizations (49% vs. 30%).

## RESULTS

***Russian practitioners' beliefs about the most significant issues that affect communication leaders and the practice of PR.***

Overall, statistical means showed that Russian participants rated highly the importance of issues the public relations industry faces today (Table 1). Interestingly, Russian participants did not differ from global colleagues in ranking the speed and volume of information as the top issue. Like others, they highly rated the ability to handle crisis communication. Yet, Russians disagreed with others on the issue of talent management, making it #2 priority, while other respondents ranked the issue as #7.

Table 1  
*Participants' Rating of Important Issues in the Field (N=215;  $\alpha=.78$ )*

Statement			M	SD	Frequency	Ranking	
	Russia	All countries					
1. Dealing with the speed and volume of information flow			5.98	1.26	53	1	1
2. Finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals	6.08		1.22	37		2	7
3. Being prepared to deal effectively with crises that may arise			6.02	1.15	28	3	4
4. Improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace	6.07		1.16	23		4	6
5. Meeting communication needs in diverse cultures and globalizing markets	5.28		1.45	22		5	9
6. Managing the digital revolution and rise of social media	5.43		1.32	18		6	2
7. Improving the image of the public relations/communication management profession	5.27		1.59	10		7	10
8. Meeting increasing demands for corporate social responsibility			5.27	1.43	9	8-9	8
9. Improving the measurement of communication effectiveness to demonstrate value			5.40	1.33	9	8-9	3
10. Dealing with growing demands for transparency of communications and operations			5.23	1.57	6	10	5

Note. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

The largest group – 53 Russian participants (25%) – indicated that dealing with the speed and volume of information flow was the most important issue ( $M=5.98$ ;  $SD=1.26$ ) (Table 2). The two top strategies to deal with this issue—developing new skills/improving work processes and using new technologies to analyze/distribute information—coincided with other study participants' prioritization. Moreover, it appeared that as in other parts of the world, organizations in Russia increase the work load for existing employees rather than hiring additional help.

Table 2



*Means and Standard Deviations for Dealing With The Speed And Volume Of Information Flow (n=53;  $\alpha=.54$ )*

Statement	M	SD	The overall study mean
1. Developing new skills and/or improving work processes in your unit	5.38	1.66	5.31
2. Using new technologies to collect, analyze and distribute news and information faster	5.36	1.72	5.30
3. Assigning additional work and responsibilities to existing employees in the unit	5.08	1.50	4.96
4. Increasing the use of external consultants or agencies	3.68	1.73	3.67
5. Hiring additional permanent or part-time employees	3.34	1.94	3.28

*Note.* On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

The second most important problem, as 37 respondents (17%) indicated, was finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals ( $M=6.08$ ;  $SD=1.16$ ) (Table 3). Creating individualized plans and providing greater autonomy made the top of strategies to address the issue (as in the overall study). Yet, statistical means showed that compared to the other study respondents, Russian participants appeared to favor the two approaches less. The difference was especially evident on the issue of job autonomy (5.05 vs. 5.70), possibly indicating the dominance of transactional leadership style in organizations.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Finding, Developing And Retaining Highly Talented Communication Professionals (n=37;  $\alpha=.75$ )*

Statement	M	SD	The overall study mean
1. Designing individualized development plans for high potential professionals	5.11	2.03	5.20
2. Providing greater autonomy on the job to highly talented individuals	5.05	1.65	5.70
3. Supporting the education of future professionals at universities	5.03	2.15	4.26
4. Providing superior financial incentives and benefits to top talent	4.57	1.91	4.48
5. Using search firms to help locate and evaluate talent	4.22	2.08	3.67

*Note.* On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

Being prepared to deal effectively with crises that may arise ( $M=6.02$ ;  $SD=1.15$ ) was the third most important issue in today's public relations, according to 28 participants (13%) (Table 4). Like others, Russian participants rated high a good crisis communication plan. However, they did not place a great importance on educating and training stakeholders and employees regarding crisis communication.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Being Prepared To Deal Effectively With Crises That May Arise (n=28;  $\alpha=.89$ )*

Statement	M	SD	<i>The overall study mean</i>	
1. Developing effective crisis communication plans for action	5.29	2.00	5.66	
2. Using issue scanning and monitoring technologies to identify and track potential problems	5.21	1.73	5.05	
3. Implementing effective issues management programs to reduce the risk of crises	4.54	2.06	5.11	
4. Providing employees with training for crisis management procedures	4.36	2.20	4.83	
5. Educating stakeholders about emergency communications and related response systems	4.00	1.83	4.92	

*Note.* On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

### ***Practitioners' beliefs about actions and strategies that they consider effective to cope with the selected issues.***

After respondents indicated the most important issue in public relations, they were asked to rate seven leadership personal abilities or qualities that help them or their communication leaders to deal with the specific issue (Table 5). The scale was internally reliable, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of .74.

Study participants recognized the following abilities as the most important: (1) "Participating in your organization's strategic decision-making regarding the issue" ( $M=6.20$ ;  $SD=.98$ ); (2) "Possessing communication knowledge to develop appropriate strategies, plans and messages" ( $M=6.16$ ;  $SD=1.11$ ) and (3) "Having the ability to build and manage professional work teams to address the issue" ( $M=6.05$ ;  $SD=1.12$ ). The top two most important issues to deal with issues on the job differed only in order from the overall sample's result, possibly indicating the universal value of being a member of the decision-making team and possessing appropriate knowledge to advance the organization (Table 5). The third most important aspect as rated by global study respondents—professional ethics—did not make into the Russian top three issues.

Table 5

*Respondents' Rating Leadership Capabilities To Deal Successfully With The Important Issue They Selected\**

Statement	M	SD	Ranking	
			Russia	All countries
1. Participating in your organization's strategic decision-making regarding the issue	6.20	.98	1	2
2. Possessing communication knowledge to develop				

appropriate strategies, plans and messages	6.16	1.11	2	1
3. Having the ability to build and manage professional work teams to address the issue	6.05	1.12	3	4
4. Providing a compelling vision for how communication can help the organization	5.85	1.24	4	5
5. Having the ability to develop coalitions in and outside the organization to deal with the issue	5.57	1.39	5	6
6. Possessing a strong ethical orientation and set of values to guide actions	5.49	1.45	6	3
7. Working in an organization that supports 2-way communication and shared power	5.20	1.54	7	7

\*The important issues are listed in Table 1.

Note. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

### ***Participants' beliefs about the most important strategies and actions that should be undertaken to stimulate the development of future leaders.***

While assessing strategies and actions that should be undertaken to stimulate the development of future leaders, participants indicated three most important issues: "Strengthen change management skills and capabilities" ( $M=6.07$ ;  $SD=1.21$ ); "Enhance conflict management skills" ( $M=5.82$ ;  $SD=1.28$ ); and "Improve the listening skills of professionals" ( $M=5.67$ ;  $SD=1.26$ ) (Table 6). The Russian top three choices differed in order from overall participants' priorities, but were nevertheless the same issues.

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Development of Future Leaders Scale Items*

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Ranking</i>		
<i>Russia All countries</i>					
1. Strengthen change management skills and capabilities	6.07	1.21	1	1	
2. Enhance conflict management skills	5.82	1.28	2	3	
3. Improve the listening skills of professionals	5.67	1.26	3	2	
4. Enhance professional skills in coping with work-related stress	5.40	1.51	4	7	
5. Strengthen the business/economic component of communication education programs	5.33	1.36	5	5	
6. Develop training to enhance the emotional intelligence of PR professionals	5.27	1.52	6	8	
7. Increase cultural understanding and sensitivity	5.27	1.39	7	6	
8. Develop better measures to document the value and contributions of public relations	5.07	1.49	8	4	
9. Urge professional associations to work together to develop leaders	4.93	1.62	9	10	
10. Develop a core global education curriculum	4.87	1.71	10	11	
11. Require professional accreditation or licensing	4.38	1.83	11	12	
12. Impose tough penalties on ethical violators	4.15	1.81	12	9	

Note. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

Principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation (Table 7) revealed four main factors, with the strongest component (eigenvalue = 2.26) loading on four items, and it corresponded to 18.8% of the variance in the original data. The second eigenvalue was equal to 2.14 and was associated with 17.8% of the variance. The third eigenvalue (1.93) was associated with 16.1% of the variance in the original data. The fourth factor (eigenvalue = 1.02) accounted for 15.7% of the variability. Together, the four factors explained 68.4% of the variance in the sample.

Factor 1, “humanity aspirations” ( $\alpha=.78$ ), reflected participants’ perceptions of the importance of humanity (e.g., moral education) in the development of future leaders. Factor 2, “business agenda” ( $\alpha=.68$ ), outlined concrete steps the occupation needs to take to prepare business-minded practitioners. Factor 3, “professional skills” ( $\alpha=.68$ ), represented participants’ perceptions of the importance of change management capabilities and stress-coping skills.

Factor 4, “occupational regulations” ( $\alpha=.69$ ), revealed a link between ethics violation, accreditation/licensing and a universal PR curriculum.

Table 7  
Means and Factor Analysis for the Development of Future Leaders Scale Items (N=215)

Statement	M	SD	Factor loadings				
			1	2	3	4	
1. Increase cultural understanding and sensitivity			1.39	<b>.879</b>	.030	-.034	.148
2. Improve the listening skills of professionals	5.67	1.26	<b>.857</b>	.197	.087	-.040	
3. Develop training to enhance the emotional intelligence of PR professionals	5.27	1.52	<b>.625</b>	.273	.445	.107	
4. Urge professional associations to work together to develop leaders		4.93	1.62	<b>.442</b>	.441	.214	.316
5. Develop better measures to document the value and contributions of public relations		5.07	1.49	.006	<b>.777</b>	-.021	.228
6. Strengthen the business/economic component of communication education programs		5.33	1.36	.299	<b>.697</b>	.141	.120
7. Enhance conflict management skills	5.82	1.28	.209	<b>.681</b>	.386	.002	
8. Strengthen change management skills and capabilities	6.07	1.21	.061	.048	<b>.855</b>	.007	
9. Enhance professional skills in coping with work-related stress		5.40	1.51	.094	.181	<b>.787</b>	.162
10. Impose tough penalties on ethical violators	4.15	1.81	.095	.140	.008	<b>.837</b>	
11. Develop a core global education curriculum	4.87	1.71	.099	.017	.389	<b>.724</b>	
12. Require professional accreditation or licensing		4.38	1.83	.023	.468	-.090	<b>.658</b>
Eigenvalue				2.26	2.14	1.93	1.02
% of variance explained			18.8	17.8	16.1	15.7	

Statement	M	SD	Factor loadings			
			1	2	3	4
Increase cultural understanding and sensitivity	5.27	1.39	.879	.030	-.034	.148
Improve the listening skills of professionals	5.67	1.26	.857	.197	.087	-.040
Develop training to enhance the emotional intelligence of PR professionals	5.27	1.52	.625	.273	.445	.107
Urge professional associations to work together to develop leaders	4.93	1.62	.442	.441	.214	.316
Develop better measures to document the value and contributions of public relations						
Strengthen the business/economic component of communication education programs						
Enhance conflict management skills						
Strengthen change management skills and capabilities						
Enhance conflict management skills						
Strengthen change management skills and capabilities						
Enhance conflict management skills						
Impose tough penalties on ethical violators						
Develop a core global education curriculum						
Require professional accreditation or licensing						
Eigenvalue			2.26	2.14	1.93	1.02
% of variance explained			18.8	17.8	16.1	15.7

Note. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Factor 1: 5 items,  $\alpha = .78$ . Factor 2: 3 items,  $\alpha = .68$ , Factor 3: 2 items,  $\alpha = .68$ . Factor 4: 3 items,  $\alpha = .69$ .

### ***Practitioners' individual perceptions about leaders and leadership***

It appeared that study participants were the most supportive of the statement, "Men and women can be equally capable leaders in public relations." Although females ( $M=6.24$ ;  $SD=1.42$ ) scored higher on this statement than males did ( $M=6.14$ ;  $SD=1.51$ ), a T-test did not indicate a reliable difference between the two groups ( $t(213) = .45$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Table 8).

While Russian respondents gave the same rating to the first two statements as their global colleagues did, they appeared to be more enthusiastic about the future of public relations in Russia than others. Russians also ranked as the lowest the same two statements as other respondents did, demonstrating rather weak beliefs in the superiority of public relations leadership and skills over other professional leadership. In addition, Russian participants did not differ from other respondents in a low rating of their top communication leaders (Table 8), as reflected in the Summated Leadership Index score (see Appendix II).

The index score for this survey consists of the individual scores for three questions: "The CEO or top executive in my organization doesn't understand the value of PR;" "My organization encourages and practices two-way communication;" and "The highest ranking PR professional in my organization is an excellent leader." According to

excellence theory in public relations, these three variables contribute to excellent practice and a *culture for communication* (Berger, 2012).

The Russian summated mean score was  $M=13.56$  and  $SD=4.59$ . Cronbach's alpha on the three items was .68. The Russian result showed organizational conditions for leadership were perceived as rather poor, compared, for example, to India ( $M=16.44$ ;  $SD=4.26$ ), a country with the highest score in the worldwide study. The highest possible mean score for *Summated Leadership Index* would be 21.00 (See Appendix II for a list of countries and regions' indexes).

**Table 8**  
**Means and Standard Deviations for Leadership Perceptions Scale Items**

Statement	M	SD	Ranking	
			Russia	All countries
Men and women can be equally capable leaders in public relations	6.21	1.45	1	1
I don't want to be a leader in communication management*	5.61	1.88	2	2
I am optimistic about the future of the public relations profession in my country	5.30	1.74	3	5-6
I learn more about excellent leadership from role models and/or mentors on the job than from university education or management development programs	5.13	1.81	4	7
The CEO or top executive in my organization doesn't understand the value of public relations*	4.94	1.90	5	5-6
My organization encourages and practices two-way communication among members	4.48	1.88	6	8
I consider myself to be a leader in communication management	4.41	1.77	7	3
Females have better interpersonal communication skills than males*	4.23	1.90	8	10
The highest ranking communication professional in my organization is an excellent leader	4.14	2.09	9	9
I prefer to work for a male leader on the job*	4.12	2.23	10	4
Leadership in communication management is different from leadership in other fields	4.02	2.06	11	11
Leadership skills are more important than communication skills in leading a public relations unit or department	3.19	1.67	12	12

Note. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree and 7 indicating Strongly Agree.

\*Reverse coded items.

## DISCUSSION

This study, a part of a global research project, looked at possible differences and similarities between Russian and foreign practitioners' perceptions of key issues in public relations leadership. The global study tested the possible universality of a model of excellent public relations that integrates individual skills, traits, behaviors, and cultural and structural factors (Berger, 2012). The model was found to be a reliable public relations scale in 23 studied countries (Berger, 2012). Still, some differences in leadership perceptions were indicated even within country clusters (e.g., Eastern European, Latin American) (Berger, 2012).

Compared to their foreign colleagues, Russian participants expressed a greater concern about talent management and a lesser concern about ethics, measurement of effectiveness, and transparency. These results appeared to be consistent with previous studies on Russian public relations (Erzikova, 2012; 2013). In addition, Russian respondents manifested a weaker desire to work for a male leader than their global peers did. This result might have reflected a common perception of public relations as a feminized occupation in Russia (Tsetsura, 2011).

A number of contradictions that deserve further investigation were detected in the study. First, although respondents deemed organizational conditions for leadership in Russian organizations as rather poor, they were nevertheless more enthusiastic about the future of public relations than their global peers. A future study is needed to examine whether Russian practitioners associate the future of public relations with its overall development (e.g., a growing number of PR agencies and university PR programs) and do not bring into the equation their own organizations.

Second, although social media is on the rise in Russia (Barash, 2012) and public relations consultancies actively offer digital communication services to clients (International Communications Consultancy Organization's Report, 2011), the issue of managing the digital revolution and rise of social media did not make it to the top of the Russian list as it did in the overall study. One of the reasons might be the fact that only half of the adult population in Russia has access to the Internet (Voronina, 2013), and the Internet penetration remains as low as 24% in Russia's provinces (Vartanova & Azhgikhina, 2011).

Third, while acknowledging the great importance of having an effective communication plan to deal with crises, Russian participants nevertheless had mixed emotions about the necessity of preparing stakeholders and employees to face an emergency. It seemed that they conceived crisis response solely as the responsibility of public relations specialists. More research is warranted to examine if Russian respondents, like their U.S. colleagues, saw crisis response as a means to prove their worth and gain access to the dominant coalition (Bowen, 2009).

Fourth, while Russian respondents ranked such a leadership dimension as strong ethical orientations lower than other global participants did (Table 5), they underscored the importance of ethics-related aspects in the leader development (Table 7). It appeared that Russian participants reserved their own right to get the job done at any cost while believing that the future generation of PR practitioners should comply with ethical standards. This inconsistency might be a reflection of paternalistic traditions (Bass & Bass, 2008) and the fact that in Slavic cultures, ethical standards for personal and official relationships differ (Puffer, 1994).

Overall, Russian national economic, socio-political and cultural characteristics are distinctively different from other participating countries. In addition, the Russian sample's demographics differed significantly from the overall sample's make-up. Despite the differences, there was a significant overlap between Russian participants'

and their global peers' beliefs on most important public relations issues and strategies to deal with them, leadership development and leadership perceptions. The overlap was the most intriguing result in this study.

However, since the Russian sample was a convenience sample, the results cannot be generalized.

The world-wide study's investigators were able to use professional databases to collect generalizable results in only two out of 23 participating countries—Germany (n=1,405) and the U.S. (n=827). Other countries (n=2,252) relied on nonprobability samplings. Given the fact that the majority of country investigators reside in the West, it might be implied that their contacts in native countries were largely Westerners or Western-minded practitioners (in case of other than Western geographies).

Anti-Americanism was encountered in the process of data collection in Russia: A few potential respondents refused to participate in a survey originated in the U.S. Thus, a substantial overlap between Russian and overall results might have reflected a self-selection bias.

As a counterargument, it might be assumed that the study tapped into universally relevant dimensions of public relations leadership spurred by a globalized economy. The era of globalization unifies professional approaches and even the norms of ethical behavior (Bass & Bass, 2008). Not diminishing the importance of national economic, political, social and cultural factors that affect public relations in a country (Sriramesh & Duhe, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 2007), one should acknowledge the power of such coalescing factors as the spread of a digital revolution; the rise of social media; and an increased presence of Western organizations in Russia (Erzikova, 2012). Importantly, at least one-third of the Russian population communicates with foreigners (Shlapentokh, 2012).

Further, there was a good degree of consistency *within* the Russian sample as well. Particularly, the majority of participants (57%) agreed on three out of ten important issues public relations faces today: The speed and volume of information flow; dealing with crises, and talent management. The first two aspects were among the overall study respondents' priorities.

Russian participants' ranking of the leadership development approaches to future leaders' training and education revealed that they prioritize *soft skills* (Berger, 2012): Strengthening change management skills and capabilities; enhancing conflict management skills; and improving the listening skills of professionals. Russian respondents also highly valued moral education and business training, emphasizing the importance of both leadership traits and skills in the process of leader development (Northouse, 2007).

This survey has directly advanced the understanding of practitioner perceptions of the current leadership situation and called for the next step of investigation. This would



entail exploring factors that affect leadership behaviors in international settings and offering ways to improve public relations leaders' skills and strategic capabilities.

The global study did not control for a specific region/area that participants in 23 countries represented. This limitation should be addressed in a future study in Russia by employing a geopolitical approach (Tsetsura, 2009) and considering a substantial divide between the center (megalopolises) and peripheral areas (economically disadvantaged regions) (Erzikova, 2012).

Given the importance of gender in public relations (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Tsetsura, 2011), a future study should take a thorough look at gender-based differences in leadership perceptions. A qualitative approach can help explore how males and females conceptualize and practice leadership in various organizations.

In addition, the Russian survey results indicating a relatively low summated leadership score calls for a more thorough examination of CEOs' and public relations leaders' roles and behaviors in organizations. Participants had a better opinion about their CEOs than about communication leaders. This result might suggest that public relations specialists had higher performance expectations about their immediate supervisors than top management. Overall, like many other survey participant countries, Russia has a long way to go to improve leadership.

## CONCLUSION

Although leadership is a universal concept, it is not culture free. In other words, universality of the leadership paradigm is affected by national specifics and (or) strongly held beliefs that might be even counterproductive (Bass & Bass, 2008). In the Russian Federation, the inherited bureaucratic traditions hinder the attempt to modernize the economy and re-establish Russia as a world leader. The Russian results of the worldwide study indicate that like their colleagues around the globe, Russian practitioners acknowledge the power of public relations as a contributor to organizational effectiveness and their roles as change agents.

The similar views signal a firm ground for joint efforts to advance the concept of leadership as an interactive two-way process between a leader and followers (Bass & Bass, 2008) worldwide. In addition, public relations leadership seems to be an answer to the main challenge of an increasingly globalized world— working across cultures and dealing with multicultural teams (de Vries, 2001). The present research suggests public relations practitioners worldwide could be quite successful in this endeavor.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I

#### Survey countries/regions:

Brazil, Canada, Chile, Chinese-speaking countries (China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan), Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia), Egypt, German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland), India, Lebanon, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, S. Korea, Spain, United Arab Emirates, UK, US.

**Languages:**

Arabic, Chinese (simplified and traditional), English, Estonian, German, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

**Appendix II**  
**Summated Leadership Index**

<b>Country/Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
India	140	16.44	4.26
Mexico	213	15.31	4.55
Chinese-speaking countries	143	14.87	4.29
United States	828	14.76	4.47
German-speaking countries	1773	14.62	4.07
Latvia/Estonia	142	14.60	3.96
United Kingdom	139	14.42	4.89
Spain	210	14.39	4.89
Chile	156	14.00	4.51
Russia	215	13.56	4.59
South Korea	205	13.37	2.14
Brazil	302	13.09	4.61

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