

Russia and Leadership

Russia is the world's largest country, approximately 1.8 times the size of the United States, with an area of 17,098,242 square kilometers (CIA, 2009). It is, however, only the 9th largest country by population, with a mere 140,041,247 people. While Russia does contain several minority ethnic groups, 79.8% of the population is Russian, and Russian is the only heavily spoken language. While Russia has large populations of non-practicing believers, only about 25 to 35 percent of the population is religious, the majority of them being Russian Orthodox, with Muslim as a close second.

Russia is a federation, whose central capital is in Moscow (CIA, 2009). Federations have power divided formally between the central authority and a wide variety of republics, provinces, and territories. Russia was formerly the central part of the communist state known as the Soviet Union until 1991, and the after effects of that regime have a strong influence on Russian customs today (CultureGrams, 2009). The vast majority of Russia's exports are oil, gas, timber, and metals.

Russia has had a long history of totalitarian governments, from the czars to the communist party (CultureGrams, 2009). While many Russians have embraced the freedom and opportunity in their new government, the prior suppression of personal opinions and responsibility lingers, and even more Russians are looking for the economic stability that the country no longer has. Despite communist interests, power and wealth are still often used to measure social status. In general, Russians seem to be frustrated with the situation in their country, but often continue to work whether they are getting paid or not. Russians are extremely

hard workers, and that ambition and drive to produce is a common trait among businessmen (Puffer, 1994).

Despite their concerns with their country's economic standing, Russians are very proud of their country and its accomplishments (CultureGrams, 2009). While it is often overshadowed by the effects of the Soviet Union, Russians wish the country to be known for its contributions to literature, art, science, technology, and medicine.

Russians tend to remain formal with new acquaintances, which is why many people consider them 'cold' (CultureGrams, 2009). However, Russians greatly prize friends, with whom they are very warm and open. They tend to keep friends as a support network, often going to extreme lengths to help friends. They like to have guests, sitting and talking for an extended period of time is common. Hosts often offer refreshments, but guests are able to politely decline. It is expected for a guest to take their shoes off at the door.

When preparing a meal for guests, it is a common practice for Russians to place more food than they can eat on the table, and occasionally leave food on their plate as well (CultureGrams, 2009). This is used as a sign of abundance, whether or not this is true. Guests should leave a very small amount of food on their plate to indicate they have eaten well. While leaving a lot of food on your plate may indicate you did not like the food, leaving no food on the plate shows that your hosts did not provide enough for you. Vodka is a commonly served drink, both with meals and with conversation. When friends open a bottle of vodka, it is customary to drink until the bottle is completely empty.

Clothing is very important in Russia; it is a sign of status and culture (CultureGrams, 2009). European fashions are popular, and knock-off clothing claiming to be brand name labels at a cheaper price are common. Thicker than most other pants, jeans are very common in Russia,

and men often wear a fur hat called a *shapka* or a *ushanka*. Women tend to wear high heels, short skirts, and a lot of makeup.

Russians meet with a firm handshake and say *Zdravstvuyte* (Hello), *Dobry dien* (Good day), *Dobroye utro* (Good morning), or *Dobry vecher* (Good evening) (CultureGrams, 2009). A more casual hello, *Privet*, may also be used. If friends ask *Kak dela?* (How are you?), they may expect to receive a detailed answer, but it is inappropriate for a stranger to ask.

According to Geert's Hofstede's website, Russia has a Power Distance Index of 93, an Individualism score of 39, a Masculinity of 36, and an Uncertainty Avoidance Index of 95. No Long Term Orientation is available, and the website notes that the values for Russia are estimated. Russians have come to accept the massive differences in power between different groups of people, which are responsible for their high Power Distance Index. As a former communist country, a fairly low Individualism score is to be expected. Russians are looking for stability, and they often choose to work even after they are no longer paid, their high Uncertainty Avoidance Index reflects their search for a future.

Another study that categorized and classified Russia's views on leadership was the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) survey (Grachev & Bobina, 2006). It is based on a culturally-endorsed implicit leadership theory (CLT) which studies the beliefs about effective leaders shared by members of a group. This system of values is based on the work of Hofstede as well as others.

The CLT profile uses six dimensions of leadership, mapped on a diagram showing the maximum and minimum mean values for all 62 countries surveyed in the study (Grachev & Bobina, 2006). It is determined by collating 21 specific leadership attributes and behaviors that are universally viewed as contributors to or inhibitors from organizational leadership. Two of

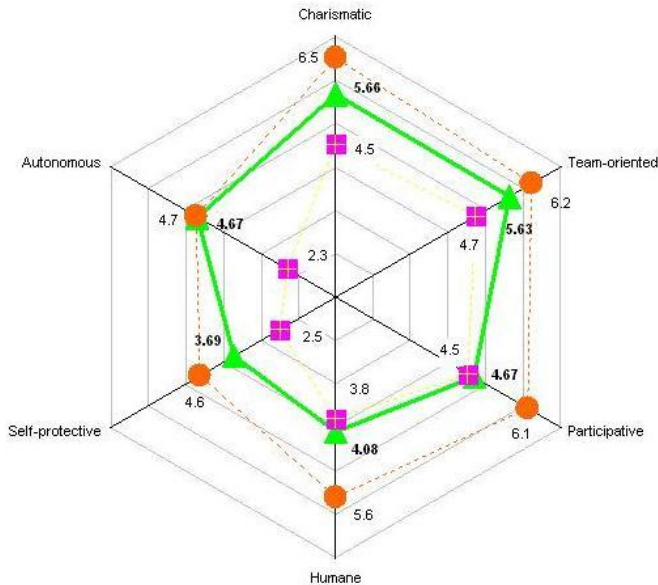


Figure 1. Russian CLT Profile (Grachev & Bobina, 2006)

the global dimensions were determined to be universally beneficial to effective leadership, Charismatic/value-based and Team-oriented. Two were labeled as culture-sensitive contributors, Humane and Participative; two were labeled as culture-sensitive impediments, Autonomous and Self-protective. The squares represent the low ends, and the circles represent the high ends.

This allows a quick view of what Russians consider an effective leader in comparison to other countries. The figure shows a shift from Charisma and Team-oriented leadership that was common during the communist era, to a more value-based and individualist viewpoint as the country changes (Grachev & Bobina, 2006). The Humane orientation came out exceedingly low, in contrast to more survivalist behaviors seen in a transitional economy. The tendency for Russian organization to remain vertical and the effectiveness of authoritarian decisions lead to an extremely low Participative score, which is the tendency to involve others in making and implementing decisions. Autonomous leadership is ranked very high in Russia; many business leaders take pride in their uniqueness and autonomy. Self-Protective ranked very high, which is the tendency not only to make decisions to protect oneself, but to save face.

It is difficult to look at the leadership traits of recent leaders in the country, because the country has changed so radically over the last two decades. However, men who work hard to achieve their goals are respected and will earn the respect of the people. A good leader should

be able to provide stability and make decisive actions. Optimism is not common in Russia, so promises of change are much less likely to garner support than they are in the United States.

An American business leader should approach a new relationship with a Russian businessman with confidence and strength, but respect for the accomplishments of the latter. A social relationship will further a business relationship significantly, but it will take a long time to develop.

Russia is a country in a transitional period, moving from the authoritarian ways of old to newer more democratic methods. Its people are proud and hardworking, often frustrated with their situation, yet persevering in their survival and the preservation of their cultural ways.

References

- Central Intelligence Agency. (2009). *The World Factbook – Russia*. Retrieved December 4, 2009, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>
- Grachev, M., & Bobina, M. (2006). Russian Organizational Leadership: Lessons from the Globe Study. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1(2), 67-79.
- Hofstede, Geert. (2009). Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions [online]. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php
- Puffer, S. (1994). Understanding the bear: A portrait of Russian business leaders. *Academy of Management Executive*, 8(1), 41-54. Retrieved from Business Source Elite database.
- Russia. (2009). *CultureGrams 2010 World Edition*. Provo, UT: ProQuest.