

Business Ethics in the United States and Russia

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Ethics is a critical area affecting business between Russia and the U.S. In preparing students to work in a global economy awareness of culture differences in ethics is important. This study surveys Russian and U.S. students on their perception of ethical behavior in various business settings and scenarios to identify differences and similarities. The study found that unlike earlier studies, current Russian and U.S. students are more similar than dissimilar in their perceptions of and behaviors in ethical situations. Implications for business and the classroom are discussed.

Differences in ethical values can affect business on a wide range of issues such as employment practices, workplace behavior, financial transactions, the honoring of agreements, and the relationship between business and government (Hendry, 1999). Identifying and explaining such differences is an important part of education in preparing students to work in a global economy. One culture with whom ethical differences has been an issue is Russia. As Russia has transitioned from communism to a more market-based economy in the 1990's and 2000's ethical challenges have been perceived as one of the biggest barriers to doing business with Russia (1994 U.S. Department of State notice in Puffer & McCarthy, 1995).

Early research conducted during this transition period identified many differences in the perception of ethical practices between Russia and the U.S. During this period the Russian economy has continued to change and grow. Medvedev made a major part of the focus of his administration as president tackling corruption; passing an anti-corruption law in 2009. In 2011 the Russian church issued a code of moral principles and rules for business (McDonald, 2011). Russia's interaction with other countries and those country's laws on corruption, notably the UK Bribery Act and the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, have also caused many Russian companies to change practices and policies improving the business environment (Goltsblat, 2012). However, despite these regulatory changes the perception of Russia as corrupt and unethical in business still exists. For example, although Russia's ranking by Transparency International improved, Russia is still ranked 133 out of 176 countries. (Ellyatt, 2013) Additionally, many stories of Russia corruption were in the news during the Winter Olympics 2014 in Sochi (Berman, 2014)

These recent changes may not be directly reflected in the current business culture. However, since culture and ethics are closely related for Russia (Puffer & McCarthy, 2011) and cultural change is slow, it is important to look at the attitudes of the next generation of Russians (those raised since 1994 during the newer changes) to determine if change is occurring. This study surveys U.S. and Russian students as to their perceptions of ethical behavior in various business settings to identify current similarities and

differences on perception of ethical behavior. This analysis is important for teachers who are preparing students to operate not only in the current business environment, but also in the future business climate. The paper reviews ethical theory, previous studies on ethical differences between the U.S. and Russia and traditional historical/cultural values underlying differences in ethical perceptions.

Ethical Theory Perspective

Shaw (1999) defines ethics as the principles of human conduct at either an individual or group level. Weiss (1994) claims that business ethics refers to "What is right and wrong? Good or bad?" in business transactions. While there are many ethical theories, according to Beekun, Stedham, Yamamura, and Barghouti (2003) all ethical theories are either teleological or deontological. Teleological theories maintain that it is not the actions themselves that are ethical or unethical, but the outcomes or consequences that matter (i.e. profit/loss). This theory is also known as the 'utilitarian' or 'consequentialist' perspective. It evaluates the ethical choice being made based on what will benefit the greatest number of people. This perspective espouses making decisions according to the situation rather than a set of rules. It is a 'relativist' position that evaluates the current situation and uses this as the basis for making an ethical judgment (Robertson, Gilley, & Street, 2003). Deontological theories claim that the quality of man's actions determines the highest norm of morality. These theories embody overall concern for others' welfare when evaluating alternatives. Of concern is individual freedom, genuineness and the belief that what is good for one person is good for all men. These non-consequential judgments are based on considerations of an explicit or implicit set of rules or principles that guide behavior. The judgments are based on 'universal' or 'idealistic' moral principles that do not necessarily anticipate the results of decisions. For example, judgments may be based on what is 'fair' for all. This universal perspective approach sees 'people' as ends rather than means.

Previous Studies of Russian and US Perceptions of Ethical Behavior

While there is much discussion of ethical differences between Russia and U.S. there is little research available about actual attitudes. Puffer and McCarthy (1995) identified several differences in Russia and U.S. ethical attitudes. Among their findings was that Russians and Americans both agree that keeping one's word, maintaining trust, and keeping rewards commensurate with performance are ethical behaviors and that black market, price gouging and refusing to pay debts are unethical behaviors. Differences were that Russians felt personal favoritism (blat), manipulating data and ignoring senseless laws and regulations were ethical while Americans did not. Similarly Americans felt that maximizing profits, using layoffs for profit, and whistleblowing were ethical behaviors while Russians did not.

In 2003 Hisrich, Bucar, and Oztark surveyed business people from Russia, Slovenia, Turkey and the U.S. for their perceptions as to whether certain business practices were ethical or not. Of the four countries, Russians were the least sensitive to ethical issues in business practice. Differences in ethical perceptions were seen in practices such as using company services for personal use, giving and accepting gifts for preferential treatment, authorizing subordinates to violate company policy and failing to report a co-worker's violation of company policy or law with U.S. business people feeling these were more unethical than Russians. Only one similarity was seen, calling in sick to take a day off which both perceived as more unethical than ethical.

Jaffe and Tsimerman (2005) conducted a study of Russian students' attitudes toward ethics and business. They focused on ethical issues such as bribe taking, being honest and the importance of self-interest vs. the interest of the organizational practices. They found that Russian students' attitudes toward ethical behavior in 2005 had not changed from those of earlier studies. Although this study does confirm Russian students attitudes there is no comparison with U.S. students.

Issues Underlying Differences in Ethical Perceptions

Several explanations are given for differences in ethical behavior between the U.S. and Russia. The first difference relates to government and religious values. Over the last century the U.S. has developed specific sets of values/behaviors that have been codified by laws (government) as well as codes of ethics

for professions and businesses. Additionally, according to Puffer and McCarthy (1995) the U.S. Protestant beliefs in a strong work ethic and that the accumulation of wealth is considered virtuous has influenced the standards for ethical behavior. Both of these factors favor a more deontological (universal) approach. On the other hand Russia has been characterized by oppressive regimes that have created conflicting standards of ethical behavior. In fact the move from the Soviet times to a market economy has created much uncertainty and ambiguity and significantly impacted standards of ethical behavior (Profi20, 2010). Furthermore, until recently the Russian Orthodox Church has not valued work as a religious virtue. "People who engaged in business were suspected of having selfish and, implicitly, unethical motives" (Puffer & McCarthy, 1995, p.32). The lack of set standards favors a more teleological (utilitarian) approach.

The second difference is the cultural differences in beliefs about power. The U.S. is characterized as being low on Hofstede's power distance category, meaning status and personal relationships are less important and people are perceived as equal (Hofstede, 2001; Profi20, 2010). One's fate is determined more by their abilities than their social status. This attitude implies less concentration of authority and more decentralized decision structure (Beekum, et. al., 2003). U.S. managers often rely on personal experience and subordinates in making decisions. The US orientation places a high value on being fair and encourages healthy competition (Puffer & McCarthy, 1995). Russia is ranked high on the power distance scale. "Regardless of who was in control of the country, the population was subjected to the values and behaviors of the leaders." (p. 32) Russian values are shaped by a continuous lack of individual freedom. The Russian culture places more emphasis on authority figures and is more likely to tolerate an uneven distribution of power in the organizational chain of command or a utilitarian (teleological) perspective (Bergelson, 2011; Puffer & McCarthy, 2011) than the U. S.

Third is the belief in individualism. The U.S. is characterized as being high on individualism, focusing on self-reliance, responsibility for self and immediate family (Hofstede, 2001). These characteristics are supported by a free marketplace and democratic government. Individualism also implies that societal norms such as values/standards apply to all (universal perspective). According to Bollinger (1994) Russia falls into the group of countries that have a tendency to be collectivistic. Business is often done in relation to this dimension. The collective mentality has employees expect their work firm to take care of them as a family does. In contrast to the U.S. system, Russia suppressed personal initiative and achievement at many levels. Though Communism tried to instill a work ethic to serve their totalitarian goals, what resulted was a reward system that recognized collective rather than individual achievements. There was little incentive to work hard or take personal responsibility for actions.

Additionally, the collectivistic orientation stresses personal relationships. Managing a business is dependent on loyalty and a sense of duty and responsibility with decisions often made on the basis of personal relationships (blat) and networks (Puffer & McCarthy, 2011). Bergelson (2011) claims Russians expect and often require from others loyalty, respect and sincerity when making moral evaluations. She writes, "Russians have an inclination toward judgmental attitudes, with a tendency for ethical evaluation." (p. 191) Russians would believe that not all values/standards apply to all people (utilitarian perspective).

The bystander effect, related to the individualism/collectivism differences between the U.S and Russia, contends that people are less likely to help someone in an emergency when there are other people around. The presence of others diffuses responsibility because people assume someone else will help (Fredicks, Ramsey & Hornett, 2010). The bystander effect (awareness of others action or inaction) has been extended to the commission of unethical acts in the workplace. One workplace example of behavior is the failure to report problems caused by other workers. A worker may not report a problem caused by a co-worker because it could be perceived as not their responsibility (not my job). In this case the worker sees himself as a bystander. Previous studies support that Russians did not perceive failure to report violations of company policy by others as unethical.

Ethical Issues in Current Study

These cultural factors have provided explanations for varying perceptions of ethical behavior between Russia and U.S. However, given the changes that have occurred both regulatory and culturally in the last ten years the following research question about ethical perception is advanced,

R1: Have differences in perceptions of ethical and unethical business behaviors changed for Russian and U.S. students since 2005?

Two additional research questions are advanced related to the cultural influences of power distance (the Russian cultures traditionally high respect for power and authority) and collectivism (the importance of the group to Russians) and their influence on perception of ethical decisions.

R2: Will organizational position and authority (power) effect ethical decision making differently for Russian and U.S. students?

R3: Will the involvement of others (bystander effect) effect ethical decision-making differently for Russian and U.S. students?

Method

Thirty-six students from two private universities in the U.S. and twenty students from two Russian universities, a private and public university, were given a survey of seventeen business behaviors and five scenarios. The survey asked students to indicate on a 7 point scale (1 very unethical to 7 very ethical) their perception of each behavior. Fourteen of the behaviors were items that were previously identified as significantly different between Russians and Americans either in Puffer, McCarthy (1995) or Hisrich, Bucar, and Oztark (2003) studies. These studies were selected because they involved direct U.S./Russia comparisons. The scenarios tested the two cultural factors of power and the bystander effect. Scenarios 1-3 tested power by determining if one's actions toward possible unethical behaviors changed given the authority position (power) of the violator (subordinate, co-worker, or supervisor). Scenario behavior changed given the involvement of other people. Tukey HSD test was done on the survey to show significant differences in groups. One way ANOVA and t- tests were done with the scenarios to identify significant differences in responses.

Results

Changes in Perception of Ethical Behavior

RQ 1- Have differences in perceptions of ethical and unethical business behaviors changed for Russians and U.S. participants since 2005? Fourteen of the seventeen items were ones in which there had been significant differences. For the first twelve statements Russians previously felt the behaviors were more ethical. For statements thirteen and fourteen U.S. had previously perceived the behavior as more ethical. On all fourteen items there were no longer significant differences.

Of the last three items in which Russian and U.S. students were previously similar; calling in sick to take time off work, refusing to pay debts, and failing to keep one's word there was only one significant difference, calling in sick to take time off. Russians students perceived this as more unethical. (Table one) These findings suggest that there has been a change in perceptions of ethical behavior and U.S. and Russian perceive ethical issues in business practices more similarly than before on these behaviors.

TABLE 1

Ethical Practices (Means)	United States	Russia
1.Using company services for personal use	2.64	3.05
2.Removing company supplies for personal use	2.11	2.21
3.Giving gifts/favors for preferential treatment	2.44	2.47
4.Accepting gifts/favors for preferential treatment	2.31	2.79
5.Blaming errors on an innocent coworker	1.44	1.32
6.Falsifying reports to superiors	1.36	1.74
7.Failing to comply with government regulations that appear senseless	2.22	2.95
8.Overstating expense accounts by more than 10%	1.83	2.11
9.Overstating expense account by less than 10%	2.28	2.26
10.Not reporting your subordinates for violating company policy	2.53	3.00
11.Failing to report a co-workers violation of company policy	2.81	2.95
12.Authorizing your subordinates to violate company policy	2.14	2.05
13.Maximizing your profits	4.61	4.00
14.Laying off employees to maximize your profit	2.85	2.53
15.Calling in sick in order to take time off	2.58	3.47*
16.Failing to keep one's word	2.00	1.68
17.Refusing to pay your debts	1.67	1.42

Power in Ethical Decisions

R 2 addressed whether the effect of organizational position and authority (power) was different for Russian and US students in making ethical decisions. (Table 2) A one way ANOVA shows no significant difference between the responses of Russian and U.S. students in regards to how they would handle unethical misbehavior (taking supplies home) given different authority/power levels. Taking the whole sample into consideration, paired sample t-tests, showed that there were differences between responses in scenarios 1, 2, and 3, but not statistically significant.

TABLE 2

Scenario 1: Supervisee (Percentages)	United States	Russia
You work in an office. You notice that one of the people you supervise is taking company supplies home frequently and using company services (printing, etc.) for their personal use. What would you do?		
Nothing, pretend you didn't know what was happening	2.8	30
Talk with the employee	77.8	65

Talk with another supervisor about this issue	13.9	0
Talk with a friend in higher management	5.6	0
Start taking materials home when needed	0	0
Other	0	5
Scenario 2: Co-Worker (Percentages) You work in an office with several other account executives. You notice that one of your coworkers (another account executive) is taking company supplies home frequently and using services (printing, etc.) for their personal use. What would you do?	United States	Russia
Nothing, no one has noticed	2.8	10
Talk with the supervisor in charge of all the account executives	36.1	10
Talk with your supervisor	5.6	0
Talk to your co-worker about this issue	44.4	60
Talk with another co-worker about this issue	11.1	10
Start taking home supplies	0	5
Other	0	5
Scenario 3: Supervisor (Percentages) You work in an office and see your supervisor taking home company supplies and using company services (print, etc.) for their personal use. What would you do?	United States	Russia
Nothing, pretend you didn't know what was happening	13.9	30
Talk with a friend in higher management	13.9	5
Talk to your supervisor about this issue	33.3	25
Talk to a co-worker about the issue	19.4	20
Talk to ethical reporting program at the company	11.1	5
Start taking supplies home when needed	2.8	10
Other	5.6	5

In scenario 1 when the person taking company supplies home was someone you were supervising, the preferred choice of both Russians and U.S. students was to talk directly with the employee. However, 28% more Russians students would do nothing and 19.5% more U.S. students would either talk with another supervisor or a friend in higher management about this issue.

Scenario 2 examined when the person taking company supplies home was a co-worker at one's own level. The number one response for both Russians and U.S. students was to talk directly with the co-worker but a higher percentage of U.S. students (42.7%) chose to report this misbehavior by talking with the supervisor in charge of all accounts or their supervisor than Russians (10%).

In scenario 3, the person taking company supplies home was your supervisor. U.S. students' first response was to talk to the supervisor about the issue followed by talking with a co-worker, then doing nothing, telling a friend, reporting to an ethical report office, and taking supplies home as well. For the Russian students the number one response was to ignore the issue, then talk to the supervisor, talk to a coworker, start taking supplies home, report to ethical reporting program or talk with a friend in higher management. The major differences were that Russians were more apt to ignore the behavior or start taking home supplies if it was their supervisor, while U.S. students were more apt than Russians to talk with a friend in higher management, talk to the supervisor or report these activities to an ethical reporting program.

Bystander Effect

RQ3 is the effect of involvement of other (bystander effect) in making an ethical decision different for Russian and U.S. students? A one – way ANOVA showed no significant differences in response from the Russians and the US students to scenarios 4 and 5. (Table 3)

TABLE 3

	Scenario 4	Scenario 5
U.S.	2.58	2.53
Russia	2.90	2.40

These findings indicate that both groups responded similarly to each scenario. To test for difference between responses in scenarios 4 and 5, paired sample t-tests were conducted. These tests show the response for scenario 4 did not differ significantly from the response given in scenario 5. (Table 4) This response would indicate that the bystander effect did not influence the behaviors of the participants. Looking at the percentages between scenario 4 and 5 there are some differences.

TABLE 4

Scenario 4: Bystander Step 1 (Percentages) You are working for a major corporation in your home town. The pay is good and the benefits are what you classify as exceptional. As part of your benefits, your retirement provides for stock options. In fact, the basis of your retirement is company stock options. The company seems to be doing well and their stock price is rising. You feel on top of the world, your stock price is increasing and you are getting an increasing share of a rising stock. Your job is flexible and is providing significant opportunities for you. You are sitting at your desk when you get a phone call from your boss, asking for your assistance. The government agency in charge of business regulations is conducting a spot check on your company and its trading behaviors. The phones on the trading floors are supposed to be staffed. It is well known throughout the company that these phones are not staffed because there is no trading activity. Your boss encourages you to drop everything and go to the trading floor in order "to put on a good show" for the government agency.	United States	Russia
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What do you do?		
Nothing, ignore the request and continue with your work	2.8	5
Talk to your boss about the request	55.6	50
Proceed to the trading floor as directed	30.6	20
Tell one of your friends at work and you both agree to stay behind	2.8	5
Tell one of your friends at work and convince your friend to go with you to the trading floor	8.3	15
Other	0	5
Scenario 5: Bystander Step 2 (Percentages)		
Assume that you proceed to the trading floor with no questions asked because your boss requested it. As you go up to the trading floor, you notice several other employees making their way as well. As you enter the trading floor, you are given instructions to find a desk and pick up a phone and pretend to call people from a list. You watch more and more company employees enter the floor and realize that there are over fifty (50) employees relocated to the trading floor. As you find a desk and start placing calls members of the government regulation agency are given a tour of the floor. Once they have gone, further instructions are given to return to your normal duties. What do you do?	United States	Russia
Go back to your normal duties as instructed	13.9	30
Speak to your boss and ask for clarification about the issue	36.1	20
Speak to your boss and tell him/her you are uncomfortable doing this	36.1	30
Speak to the company's Chief Ethics Officer	11.1	20
Other	2.8	0

In Scenario 4, the initial request by the supervisor to engage in questionable behavior, the number one response by both U.S. and Russians students was to talk to the boss about the request. The other responses in order of preference for both Russians and U.S. were: proceeding to the floor (going along with the action), telling a work friend a convincing them to go along, or telling a friend and staying behind with

them, or doing nothing. However, 10% more U.S. students would proceed to the floor, while 10% more Russians would talk to a friend and get the friend to either stay with them or go to the floor with them.

Scenario 5 assumes you have proceeded to the floor without asking questions and participated in the unethical behavior along with several other members of your company. This scenario examines what one does after realizing this. The number one response for Russians students was to either go back to work as instructed or talk with their boss and tell them they were uncomfortable with this situation. The number one response for U.S. students was either to talk to the boss and ask for clarification or tell the boss they were uncomfortable with the situation. More U.S. students chose to talk directly to the boss (72%) than Russians (50%). While more Russians chose to return to work (30%) than U. S. students (14%).

Discussion

Overall the results indicate that the cultural perspective and orientation from traditional factors identified earlier in the paper (history, religion, individual/collectivism and power) that have explained the differences between Russians and U.S. in determining what is ethical and unethical are no longer as strong for the next generation on the behaviors tested. Russian and U.S. students in this study were more similar in perception of unethical/ethical behaviors (surveys) and in their own behaviors in unethical situations (scenarios). There was only one difference in the surveys (calling in sick) and this was a difference in which formerly U.S. and Russia were similar.

Given the power distance, it was expected that Russians would ignore the situation more when the position of the violator was higher. While the scenarios showed some of this cultural perspective in that more Russians than U.S. students were likely to ignore the situation (do nothing) or begin to take supplies home when the violator was their supervisor, it was not significant. In fact in all of the scenarios more Russians than U.S. students ignored the issue which might reflects more of the earlier attitudes about not reporting violations of company policy than power differences.

This same conclusion was true in looking at the bystander effect and the cultural perspective of individualism/collectivism. In scenarios 4 and 5 when faced with participating in or having participated in an unethical situation (the trading floor) although more Russians spent time getting support from a friend or ignoring the situation while U.S. students were more apt to directly talk to the boss, the finding was not significant.

The bystander effect findings were consistent with previous studies of U.S. students for scenario 4, but not with scenario 5. Previous studies using these scenarios had found that U.S. students would first speak to their boss and ask clarification, followed by going back to work. In this study they spoke to their boss for clarification followed by telling their boss they were uncomfortable. This finding suggests that U.S. behaviors may also be changing and is consistent with current research that shows a sharp increase in millennials reporting of unethical behavior (Mintz, 2014).

The findings on both power and bystander would support the claim that Russia may be becoming more low power, individualistic, and moving away from a utilitarian philosophical approach. These conclusions do not indicate that one culture has become more or less ethical in their behaviors. What they show is that if one culture commits what the other culture thinks is an unethical act on these behaviors, the offending culture is likely also perceives their action as unethical. Actions are less apt due to cultural misunderstandings. Hopefully, the awareness of these similarities will reduce the cultural ethical challenges that have affected business in earlier decades (Puffer & McCarthy, 1995).

This study is limited to the behaviors tested. Given earlier research (Jaffe, 2005) and the generation findings on U.S. millennials by the Ethics Resource Center 2013, additional studies should be done looking specifically at other ethical attitudes such as the belief that one needs to compromise ethics for the good of the company, the use of bribes, or the need to adapt to the ethical standards of other countries. These studies would broaden the analysis of the next generation's ethical perspective.

This study surveyed U. S. and Russian students at the beginning of their careers in order to look at what might be expected in the next generation of business interactions. Because this is a sample of students, the implications of these similarities might not be seen for years until these students become more involved in their careers. The results may have been different if the study had surveyed people who

are currently working. Some of these differences may be due to overall generational changes as well as cultural changes. Different age groups may reflect difference values as the studies on variations between generation-x and millennials' have shown. (Ethics Resource Center, 2013) A suggestion for future research would be a longitudinal study of this age group to see if there are changes in these perceptions or differences between groups as they advance in their careers. A longitudinal study would help identify what additional factors, if any, could affect one's perception of ethical/unethical behaviors.

Classroom Implications

In preparing students to work in an intercultural business environment, this study provided important insights for the classroom discussion about both cultural and generational values in the workplace. The survey also provides a valuable teaching tool. Instructors can give the survey and scenarios to their classes and have students choose their own responses. The scenario's varying options provide an interactive opportunity for the class not only to discuss the findings of the study, but also the reasons and ramifications of their own actions. Furthermore, the study provides information on how perceptions of ethical behavior continue to evolve and change. It is important for both instructors and students to keep assessing perceptions and updating beliefs and practices in order to understand the intent of others and work more effectively together.

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