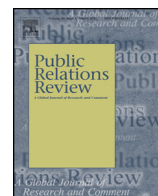




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## Public Relations Review



# Leadership and public relations in two emerging markets: A comparative study of communication management in Latvia and Russia

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates perceptions of public relations leadership in two emerging markets—Latvia and Russia—via an online survey of a diverse pool of public relations practitioners. This effort is guided by [Meng and Berger's \(2013\)](#) model of excellent public relations leadership. Additionally, this study moves a step further by seeking to understand how national sociopolitical contexts shape leadership in public relations. Results show a number of similarities and differences in Latvian and Russian participants' interpretations of professional leadership. Gaining access to the dominant coalition, or decision-making authority in the organization is perceived as an important ability in both countries. Challenges of talent management are more acute in Russia than Latvia.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years public relations research has focused heavily on the study of public relations management. Public relations has traditionally been defined as a management function ([Grunig, 2006](#)) that can fully realize its potential if it is directed by communication managers rather than technicians. Meanwhile, other social science disciplines have moved forward by addressing the importance of leadership and leaders. While the scope of managerial activity is limited to planning, organizing and controlling processes, leadership implies envisioning an alternative future for an organization, encouraging followers to accomplish their potential and empowering employees ([Bass & Bass, 2008](#)).

Only recently has the public relations discipline begun addressing the issue of leadership, and how leadership in public relations can strengthen our profession and contribute to organizational effectiveness. Much of this new research trend in public relations has inquired about leadership and leaders in the United States. There has been little acknowledgement of other contexts such as Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe ([World PR Report, 2013](#)) that currently lead the growth of the public relations industry.

The purpose of this paper is to start bridging this gap in the knowledge of public relations by investigating leadership in Latvia and Russia. These two emerging markets have experienced the rise of public relations over the past two decades and they provide non-traditional sociopolitical contexts for the study of leadership in public relations.

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## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Public relations leadership

A number of public relations scholars have attempted to investigate various aspects of professional leadership. Berger and Reber (2006) believed that it is crucial to discuss leadership in public relations because of its intertwining nature with power, the most important issue in public relations. Further, Bowen (2009) found that leadership is one of the main routes to the dominant coalition or decision-making authority in the organization.

Research found that public relations leaders use more than one leadership style: inclusive (i.e., leaders are collaborative) and transformational (i.e., leaders provide a clear vision and inspire change) (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009) and both transformational and transactional styles (i.e., leaders are change agents and at the same time, they use rewards and punishment as motivational tools) (Jin, 2010). Importantly, acting as an organizational change agent appeared to be one of the most important leadership behaviors (Choi & Choi, 2009). Meng, Berger, Gower, and Heyman (2012) found that practitioners' leadership values and beliefs are most strongly influenced by work experiences and role models on the job.

Individual studies discuss single concepts such as traits, skills, styles, behaviors, contingencies and situations, team work, among others. As an attempt to offer a comprehensive understanding of leadership in Meng and Berger (2013) proposed a model of excellence in public relations leadership. The model acknowledges the complexity of leadership by approaching it as a "dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produce ethical and effective communication. ... [and] fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimize organizations in society" (p. 153).

The model consists of six interrelated leadership dimensions: self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability, and communication knowledge and expertise. The seventh dimension, organizational culture and structure, describes the institutional environment which also shapes public relations leadership. The model has been found to be a reliable public relations scale in a study with almost 4500 communication professionals in 23 countries, the largest study of leadership ever conducted in the profession (Berger & Meng 2014). However, some important differences emerged even within geographically and culturally close country clusters (i.e., perceptions of ethics, talent management, and measurement of effectiveness).

Researchers of leadership in other disciplines have discussed its relation with societal culture. Bass and Bass (2008) argued that leadership traits are universal and culturally specific. This paper seeks to apply this acknowledgment to leadership in public relations. Although the current study is guided by Meng and Berger's (2013) model of excellent public relations leadership, it will also attempt to move a step further by seeking to understand how, not only organizational cultures and structures, but also national sociopolitical contexts shape leadership in public relations. To achieve this goal, this study investigates leadership in two post-Soviet environments: Latvia and Russia. In both countries the start of public relations can be traced to the late 1980s when *perestroika*, an attempt to reform the Communist Party, and the public dissent with the Communist rule led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### 2.2. Public relations in Latvia

Like in other Eastern and Central European countries, Western-style public relations in Latvia started to develop after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pētersone (2006) found that the arrival of Western-style public relations was linked to political and economic transitions in Latvia. In the late 1980s dissident groups began staging anti-Soviet protests that grew into large-scale public demonstrations in response to Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*. These opposition movements aimed to create international awareness about the forceful annexation of independent Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940 and gain international re-instatement of independent Latvia.

After the independence was renewed in 1991, the political use of public relations was replaced by the economic goal of introducing the free market to Latvia. According to Pētersone's (2006) findings, public relations helped the Latvian government facilitate the privatization of former state-owned enterprises and attract foreign investments. Both the government and private sector used public relations to introduce free market institutions and services to the public, and gain the public's acceptance for foreign investments and businesses in Latvia.

Pūre (2014) divided the most recent Latvian public relations history into three periods: beginnings, institutionalization, and professionalization. During the beginnings between 1991 and 1994 public relations was mostly employed by the public and political sectors. Pūre observed that during this period communication was still highly manipulative and propagandistic. There was little regard for public opinion and exchange of information.

The next period was the institutionalization from 1995 to 2000. During this period the private sector stimulated the growth of the public relations industry. The arrival of Western businesses created the need for public relations agencies. The period of institutionalization was also characterized by the establishment of first in-house units at finance institutions and government-owned enterprises.

The third period, professionalization, began in 2001 and is ongoing. Two professional associations, the Association of Public Relations Professionals and the Latvian Public Relations Consultancy Association, were founded in 2001. During the early years of professionalization most businesses and government institutions opened public relations units. The agency sector also continues to expand.

Over the years the understanding about the strategic potential of public relations has advanced in Latvia (Pūre, 2014). This understanding especially deepened between 2008 and 2010 when Latvia was confronted with a dramatic economic recession. However, Pūre (2014) found that many public relations practitioners still lack knowledge about ethical and advanced forms of public relations. They continue to manipulate information and disseminate propaganda.

### 2.3. *Public relations in Russia*

Russia is one of the 37 countries with a globalized public relations practice (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007). Although deemed as one of the toughest markets, Russia nevertheless is considered a favored public relations market for 2015 (Sudhaman, 2014). However, a number of issues impede the industry's growth. For example, the occupation is still seen as a service field (Tsetsura, 2010) and subordinated to the marketing function (Erzikova, 2012). Further, the field of public relations in Russia lacks professional standards and legislation, and suffers from a low level of business transparency (Epley, 2012).

The burgeoning occupation is attractive for young Russians who perceive it as creative and prestigious (Erzikova & Berger, 2011). Indeed, creativity is viewed as one of the most important aspects of public relations in Russia (Erzikova, 2012). This perception indicates the formative stage of the profession—practitioners, especially in provinces, rely on intuition and imagination in the absence of well-defined and measurable approaches (Erzikova, 2012). At the same time, Western (rational) normative ideas have infiltrated public relations in the economic sphere, which is most westernized field in Russia (Erzikova, 2013).

Russian public relations practitioners attempt to take a leadership role in tackling major social issues and building societal harmony (Epley, 2012). This task is not an easy one in any country, and Russia with its Soviet heritage—a deficient and bureaucratic managerial system—seems to be the most challenging place to implement these kinds of reforms (Erzikova, 2014a,b). In addition to these social reforms, the concept of leadership itself is under transformation in Russia.

In sum, there are similarities between public relations in Latvia and Russia. It is a relatively new profession in both countries. This profession is an attractive career choice and has experienced a rapid growth since the early 1990s. However, the development of the profession in both Latvia and Russia is still inhibited by the former Soviet heritage.

Despite these similarities, the sociopolitical contexts in which the public relations profession has emerged in the two countries are different. In Russia Boris Yeltzin's more liberal political and economic policies have been replaced by the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, since its re-gained independence Latvia has taken a Western orientation by joining structures such as the European Union and NATO.

This paper links these sociopolitical environments and leadership in public relations. It aims to add the broader sociopolitical dimension to public relations leadership by investigating leadership issues in Latvia and Russia, two countries with political histories that have been intertwined during the 20th century and then diverged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. To meet this goal, four research questions are proposed:

RQ 1: What issues are important to public relations leaders in Latvia and Russia?

RQ 2: What action strategies do Latvian and Russian public relations leaders use to deal with these issues?

RQ 3: What leadership abilities in public relations are valued in Latvia and Russia?

RQ 4: What actions should be taken to facilitate the development of future leaders in public relations in Russia and Latvia?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. *Research framework*

This research is part of a larger project entitled *Public relations leaders as sensemakers: A global study of leadership in public relations and communication management* that was conducted in 23 countries and surveyed 4484 public relations practitioners in 2011–2012. The data for the global study, as well as this research, was gathered through a 58-item online survey that asked participants to rate each item on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The survey was developed based on Berger and Meng's (2013) model of excellence in public relations leadership that was described earlier in this paper.

The survey was translated into nine languages, including Latvian and Russian. The participants could choose to complete it in their native tongue or in English.

### 3.2. *Participant solicitation and demographics*

In both countries the researchers experienced challenges with participant solicitation because there are no professional databases. To overcome these challenges, snowball sampling with the aim of reaching public relations practitioners with diverse backgrounds and experiences was used.

In Latvia, out of 462 practitioners contacted, 111 fully completed the survey. Approximately 2000 individuals received the call to participate in the study in Russia. The survey was fully completed by 215 individuals. The demographical data reveal that in both countries women dominate the field. The representation of female participants in Latvia reached 85.6% and in Russia 72.5%. A much lower percentage of men, 14.4% in Latvia and 27.5% in Russia, completed the survey. Public

relations is a relatively new phenomenon in both Latvia and Russia, and the majority of participants (55% in Latvia and 58% in Russia) were between 25 and 35, followed by the 36–45 age group (25% in Latvia and 24% in Russia).

The study's participants in both countries were highly educated. In Latvia 95.7% had obtained higher education with more than half (54.1%) holding a master's degree. Almost 65% participants in Russia had higher education; 15.8% had earned a doctoral degree.

For the largest group of participants (23.4% in Latvia and 28.4% in Russia), the primary area of study was public relations. Other fields in Latvia included social sciences (18%), communication and media studies (13.5%), and business and management (12.6%). The educational backgrounds of Russian participants were in humanities (20.9%), journalism (13%), and social sciences (11.2%). Business and management as a field of study was reported by only 2.3% of participants in Russia. The majority of participants (67.6% in Latvia and 66.5% in Russia) had less than 11 years of experience in public relations.

The study also looked at how close the research participants were to the organization's senior management. In Latvia almost half of participants (48%) reported themselves as the top leaders, followed by 32.4% who said they were one reporting level removed from the senior management. It seems that in Russia public relations practitioners have fewer opportunities to directly interact with the senior management. Almost half (48.8%) were two or more levels removed from the senior management.

Finally, in Latvia the largest group of participants (40.5%) represented private companies, i.e., businesses that are not publicly traded. The dominant group in Russia was practitioners working for non-profit, government, education and political organizations (46.5%).

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1. Research question 1: what issues are important to public relations leaders in Latvia and Russia?

*Dealing with the speed and volume of information flow* was rated as the most important issue both in Latvia (32.4%) and Russia (24.8%). The average mean score for this item was higher in Latvia ( $m = 6.24$ ) than in Russia ( $m = 5.98$ ).

In Latvia the second highest rated issue was *being prepared to effectively cope with crises that may arise* ( $m = 6.18$ , 15.3% respondents). This issue was rated as the third most important issue in Russia with 13% of respondents giving this issue an average mean score of 6.02, lower than in Latvia.

*Improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace* were the top third and fourth issues in Latvia and Russia respectively. In Latvia 12.6% of respondents gave this issue a mean score of 5.7, whereas 10.7% of their Russian counterparts assigned this issue a higher mean score of 6.02.

The third most important issue in Russia was also concerned with the cultivation of human resources. In this country *finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals* was ascribed a mean score of 6.08 (17.2%). This issue was perceived as less significant in Latvia where it was rated as the seventh most important issue.

##### 4.2. Research question 2: what action strategies do Latvian and Russian public relations leaders use to deal with these issues?

The top issue both in Latvia and Russia was *dealing with the speed and volume of information flow*. Public relations practitioners in both countries used similar action strategies to address this issue. Developing new skills and/or improving working processes in public relations units was rated as the most important action strategy in Russia ( $m = 5.38$ ) and the second most important strategy in Latvia ( $m = 5.44$ ).

The second action strategy used to deal with the speed and volume of information flow in Russia was using new technologies to collect, analyze and distribute news and information faster ( $m = 5.36$ ). This action strategy was rated as number one in Latvia ( $m = 5.58$ ).

*Being prepared to effectively cope with crises that may arise* was rated as the second most important issue in Latvia and the third most important issue in Russia. To deal with this issue both Latvian ( $m = 5.78$ ) and Russian ( $m = 5.29$ ) respondents developed effective crises communication plans for action. Latvian respondents also implemented effective issues management programs to reduce the risk of crises ( $m = 5.50$ ), whereas their Russian colleagues used issue scanning and monitoring technologies to identify and track potential problems ( $m = 5.21$ ).

In Russia the second most important issue was *finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals*. To address this issue, Russian public relations professionals designed individualized development plans for high potential professionals ( $m = 5.11$ ) and provided greater autonomy on the job to highly talented individuals ( $m = 5.05$ ).

The issue of *improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace* was rated as the third most important issue in Latvia and fourth most important issue in Russia. Latvian respondents dealt with this issue by creating a positive communication climate ( $m = 5.95$ ), honoring employees through reward and recognition programs ( $m = 5.63$ ) and increasing accessibility to and visibility of senior leaders ( $m = 5.63$ ).

##### 4.3. Research question 3: what leadership abilities in public relations are valued in Latvia and Russia?

The leadership abilities that both Latvian and Russian practitioners valued were similar. The most important leadership ability in both countries was the *capability to participate in the organizational strategic-decision making regarding the issue*.

Slightly less than a half of Latvian respondents (47.7%) gave this ability a mean score of 6.18. 49.8% of Russian practitioners scored this issue at 6.20.

The same percentage of Latvian practitioners (47.7%) gave priority to the public relations leader's *ability to build and manage professional work teams to address the most important issue* ( $m=6.18$ ). In Russia this ability was rated as the third most important leadership skill ( $m=6.05$ , 44.2% of respondents).

The second most valued leadership ability in Russia was *possessing communication knowledge to develop appropriate strategies, plans and messages* ( $m=6.16$ , 25.1% of respondents). This ability was rated as number four in Latvia with a mean score of 5.98.

The third ability emphasized by 40.5% Latvian respondents included *providing a compelling vision for how communication can help the organization* ( $m=6.02$ ). This ability did not make the top three list in Russia where it remained number four.

#### 4.4. Research question 4: what actions should be taken to facilitate the development of future leaders in public relations in Russia and Latvia?

There was quite a lot of agreement between Latvian and Russian respondents on how to develop future leaders in public relations. The leading action in both countries was *strengthening the future leaders' change management skills*. Latvian practitioners assigned this action an average mean score of 5.95 whereas Russian respondents gave the rating of 5.82.

The mean score of 5.82 was assigned to *enhancing the future leaders' conflict management skills* both by Latvian and Russian public relations practitioners.

The third leadership development strategy was different in each country. Russian public relations practitioners believed that there was a need to *improve the future leaders' listening skills* ( $m=5.67$ ). *Development of better ways to measure and document public relations contributions to organizations* was selected as leadership development action number three in Latvia ( $m=5.63$ ).

## 5. Discussion

This section compares and contrasts the findings in Latvia and Russia, and interprets similarities and differences. The results of the Global Leadership Study (Berger & Meng, 2014) serve as a frame of reference to better understand the status of public relations leadership in two environments that have been shaped by the Soviet past but for the last two decades have chosen different political and economic paths.

### 5.1. Contextualizing the most important issues

#### 5.1.1. Speed and volume of information

The top issue in both countries was dealing with the speed and volume of information flow. The perceived importance of this issue makes Latvian and Russian public relations practitioners quite like their global colleagues who also rated this issue as number one.

Despite these similarities, it is important to note that a significantly higher percentage of Latvian (32.4%) than Russian (24.8%) practitioners chose the speed and volume of information as the top issue. Although based on the current data it is impossible to provide an evidence-based explanation for this difference, some interpretations might be related to differing communication infrastructures and political regimes in the two countries.

For example, Erzikova (2012) found that communication technologies are not equally accessible across Russia. There is high saturation of communication technologies in major cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, however, these technologies are still rare and expensive in remote regions.

The situation in Latvia might be different. Data compiled by the European Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe (2013) shows that 70% of the population in Latvia regularly uses the Internet (i.e., at least once a week). Fifty-seven percent uses the Internet on a daily basis. These findings are consistent with the average within the European Union.

It is also possible that the flow of information is shaped by different political regimes in Latvia and Russia. Political and media scholars have frequently discussed the link between democracy and the freedom of expression that may be conducive to a greater flow of information within the society. If this is so, it can be expected that in more democratic societies the issue of information flow will be more predominant than in less democratic nations. The Freedom House's Freedom in the World (2014) report has described Latvia as free and democratic, while the report rates Russia as a not free country with declining democratic tendencies.

In the context of the global findings, a common pattern between the Latvian and Russian findings emerged. Managing the digital revolution and rise of social media was rated as the second most important issue globally. However, this issue did not appear in the Latvian and Russian top three issue lists. It was issue number five in Latvia and issue number six in Russia. This finding is quite surprising because the issue of the digital revolution seems to be closely related to the issue of the speed and volume of information flow that was highly regarded both in Latvia and Russia.

If the lack of communication technologies and political constraints can provide a partial explanation for the diminished importance of the digital revolution in Russia, the Latvian findings are much harder to assess. One possibility is that Latvian public relations practitioners still have not understood the strategic communication potential of the digital revolution and

social media. A study by the [Latvian Internet Association \(2010\)](#) revealed that only 11.7% of the 315 companies use social media, whereas another study ([Kazaka, 2010](#)) suggested that out of 420 businesses 44% did not communicate through social media because of the shortage of human resources and a perception of social media as ineffective channel of communication.

### 5.1.2. Coping with crises

Being prepared to effectively cope with crises that may arise was among the top three issues both in Latvia and Russia. In Latvia this issue was the second highest rated, whereas in Russia it was rated the third highest. This issue was rated only number four globally.

Although this study does not provide an empirical rationale for the high rating of this issue in Latvia, one possible explanation is the dramatic economic crisis that Latvia experienced between 2009 and 2012, a period during which the data for this study was collected. The Russian economy, due to its vast energy resources, was less affected by the global economic downturn.

This explanation may also provide insights into the difference between Latvia and global findings which included data from several large and rapidly expanding emerging markets such as Brazil, India and China, as well as relatively strong and recovering Western economies such as Germany and the United States. If the authors' speculations are correct, these findings may point at a link between public relations and various market factors that are very rarely studied by public relations researchers.

### 5.1.3. Human capital

The issue of finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals was rated as the second most important issue in Russia, whereas it was issue number seven in Latvia and globally.

This finding is interesting because the development of public relations in both countries has been quite similar. During the Soviet years the public relations industry and profession in the Western sense did not exist in either country. Formal education and training in communication management was not offered. Public relations was introduced to both countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Does it mean that Latvia has a stronger talent base? Or are Russian public relations professionals more selective in their interpretation of what constitutes a highly qualified communication professional?

In fact, [Erzikova and Berger \(2011\)](#) found that Russian public relations professionals still perceive public relations as an art rather than a strategic function that helps organizations meet their business goals. According to this reasoning, to discover a creative artist is more challenging than to find a public relations strategist. In addition, Russian practitioners regard the state of public relations education in their country as rather poor.

Improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace was the third most important issue in Latvia and it was number four issue in Russia. Neither the issue of finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals, nor the issue of improving employee engagement and commitment in workplace was rated highly by global public relations practitioners. It is possible that Latvian and Russian participants evaluate this issue higher than their global peers because the workplace in these two countries is still undergoing transformations and struggling with implications deriving from the top-down management style inherited from the Soviet years ([Erzikova, 2014a,b](#); [Petersone & Reber, 2014](#)).

## 5.2. Action strategies used to address the most important issues

The action strategies that Latvian and Russian public relations practitioners used to deal with these issues were similar although sometimes the order of these action strategies differed. The same action strategies for dealing with the most important issues were also prioritized by global participants.

To deal with the speed and volume of information flow Latvian and Russian practitioners developed new skills and/or improved working processes in public relations units, as well as used new technologies to collect, analyze and distribute news and information faster.

The action strategy that was used in both Latvia and Russia to cope with crises included the development of effective crisis communication plans. In Latvia public relations practitioners also implemented effective issues management programs to reduce the risk of crises, whereas in Russia public relations professionals used issue scanning and monitoring technologies to identify and track potential problems.

In Russia finding, developing and retaining highly talented communication professionals was the second most important issue. To address this issue, public relations practitioners designed individualized development plans for high potential professionals and provided autonomy on the job to highly talented individuals.

Latvian public relations professionals were concerned with improving employee engagement and commitment in the workplace. The action strategies that were regarded the most highly included creating a positive communication climate, followed by honoring employees through reward and recognition programs, and increasing accessibility to and visibility of senior leaders.

### 5.3. Leadership abilities

Latvian and Russian practitioners valued similar leadership abilities: (1) participate in the organizational strategic-decision making, (2) build and manage professional work teams to address the most important issue, (3) possess communication knowledge to develop appropriate strategies, plans and messages, and (4) provide compelling vision for how communication can help the organization.

The highest rated Latvian and Russian leadership abilities are quite consistent with the global findings. However, there is a difference that is worth mentioning. The third most important global leadership ability is possessing a strong ethical orientation and set of values to guide actions. A much lower value is ascribed to this ability in Latvia and Russia. In Latvia it appears as the fifth most important leadership ability out of ten, whereas in Russia this leadership ability is rated number six.

This finding seems to suggest that Latvian and Russian practitioners are much less concerned about professional ethics than their global peers. Previous studies (Erzikova & Berger, 2011; Petersone, 2006; Püre, 2014) found that manipulative practices are not foreign to some communicators in Russia and Latvia.

### 5.4. Development of future leaders in public relations

There was also a considerable overlap between Latvian and Russian practitioners' opinions of how the development of future leaders should be facilitated. Practitioners in both countries considered that future leaders' change and conflict management skills need to be strengthened. They also agreed that the improvement of future leaders' listening skills is important.

The suggested leadership development strategies seem to be consistent with the above discussed focus on the human capital cultivation that prevailed in both countries. It seems logical that in order to attract and retain, and to facilitate employee engagement and commitment, public relations leaders should become more open to the members of their teams. The outdated, Soviet-style authoritarian leadership style should be replaced by two-way exchanges and more inclusive decision-making.

Furthermore, the development strategies for future leaders that were valued by Latvian and Russian practitioners did not differ from those identified by public relations professionals in other countries. Possibly, the Global Leadership Study suggests that the need for a more open and inclusive leadership is an important issue around the world.

This study revealed only one significant difference between Latvian and Russian participants in the area of future leadership development. The third highest rated leadership development strategy in Latvia was the development of better ways to measure and document public relations contributions to organizations. The need to affirm public relations value was also acknowledged by public relations practitioners globally. They rated this leadership development strategy number four.

However, Russian participants did not see this strategy as important. It was rated only number eight in Russia. This finding is consistent with previous research on public relations in Russia which showed that Russian practitioners viewed public relations as a field of artistic expression (Erzikova & Berger, 2011; Erzikova, 2013). This perception might have contributed to the low ranking of the importance of measurement in public relations.

### 5.5. Interpreting the study's data

The findings of this study revealed an interesting difference in data reporting. Latvian participants consistently rated various survey items higher than their Russian colleagues. This discovery poses interesting questions for researchers of this study and their colleagues who engage in international investigations of a quantitative nature. Does it mean that the Russian participants ascribe a lower value to these issues? Is it possible that they are more critical in their evaluation of various issues? Are there any cultural factors at play?

### 5.6. Suggestions for future research

Although this study provided diverse insights into leadership in public relations in Latvia and Russia, it also generated a plethora of questions for future investigation.

First, public relations researchers (e.g., Verčič, Zerfass, & Wiesenberg, 2015; Kent & Taylor, 2007) have discussed the interdependence between public relations and various environmental factors. However, little research has been conducted to understand the ways that these factors affect public relations in specific countries and regions. For example, how do various national market forces shape public relations? How do political regimes contribute to leadership styles? How does communication infrastructure determine what issues are important to public relations leaders and organizational publics?

Second, the public relations literature often suggests that the digital revolution and social media are the driving force of contemporary public relations. This study illustrates that this issue is not a priority, at least, in the two countries studied. In the case of Latvia, it seems that there is the necessary infrastructure. Nevertheless, the results show that this issue employs less significance on the Latvian public relations practitioners' agendas. Is it possible that social media is not the most effective channel of communication in some environments? Is this form of communication appropriate for the local business and communication cultures?

Third, despite similar recent public relations histories, the issue of attracting, developing and retaining highly qualified communication professionals does not have the same importance in Latvia than it does in Russia. It would be interesting to explore why Russian colleagues ascribe much more significance to this issue than their Latvian peers. Does it mean that Latvia has a stronger talent base or that Russian organizations are more selective? Is there any other explanation for this phenomenon?

Fourth, in comparison to the global data there was more focus on human capital in Latvia and Russia. Why is the profession more concerned about this issue in these two countries? Does it have anything to do with the Soviet past and the need for a new kind of talent, especially in such a U.S.-style field as public relations?

Fifth, Latvian and Russian public relations practitioners gave a lower priority to public relations ethics than practitioners globally. Does it mean that public relations ethics is not a crucial element of the public relations practice in the region? If so, what can be done to enhance the practitioners' ethical awareness?

Sixth, over years the public relations research community has called for comparative studies. This study illustrated consistent differences in data reporting in the two countries. Latvian participants gave higher scores to all items than their Russian colleagues. How can this difference be explained? What impact does it have on the study's findings?

## 6. Conclusion

The public relations practice and scholarship have started placing a greater emphasis on leadership as one of the ways to ensure the organizational effectiveness. By comparing public relations in two emerging markets—Latvia and Russia—this paper contributes to a better understanding of the conceptualization and practice of public relations leadership in post-communist contexts, a little explored area of research. A possible avenue of research in the future could involve comparisons between these two emerging markets and more established economies.

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