The Rise and Fading Away of Charisma. Leadership Transition and Managerial Ethics in the Post-Soviet Media Holdings

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Abstract

This paper examines post-communist managerial ethics during the emergence and transition of charismatic leadership in two privately owned media holdings in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. These media holdings were bootstrapped in the 1990s and 2000s by people without management experience and connections. This paper argues that Weberian charismatic leadership was a necessary leadership style to start a private business for people without links to elite networks. However, once firms establish themselves on the market, charisma fades and yields itself to a legal-rational leadership style. In particular, the paper compares and contrasts the managerial ethics issues arising from the loyalty-based leader–follower relations in the charismatic leadership phase and the legal-rational phase of a firm’s development and maturation. While the legal-rational phase brings positive changes to workload management and employees’ rights for vacation and p/maternity leave, task delegation remains an unsolved issue. Ambiguous career advancement criteria of the legal-rational phase replace rapid career progression of junior and middle managers during the charismatic phase. By examining the dynamics of managerial ethics transformation, this study adds to the literature on post-communist leadership, management and governance. Recommendations are provided for privately owned firms on how to advance managerial ethics to attract and retain qualified talent.

Keywords Post-communist · Managerial ethics · Charismatic leadership · Weber · Legal-rational leadership · Russia · Kyrgyzstan · Media holding · Emerging markets

Introduction

How has managerial ethics changed in the post-Soviet space 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? How different and how similar are leadership styles and work ethics in different parts of the former USSR? These are the questions of investigation of this paper, which looks at two sample cases of the first generation of self-made post-communist businesspeople from Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Russia was the largest Soviet economy, while Kyrgyzstan’s economy was one of the smallest in the former Soviet Union. Perestroika and glasnost paved the way for a whole new generation of self-made post-communist businesspeople. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, the

entire post-Soviet space was full of commercial and risk-taking initiatives. The first generation of post-communist businesspeople enjoyed a carte-blanche or freedom to act as they wish. Needless to say, that only a few of those companies managed to survive on the market until now and eventually become self-sustaining businesses. It is what is known so far. But the interest of this paper is that in the course of bootstrapping and growing a business, the self-made post-communist managers developed and nurtured their understanding of managerial ethics. Their knowledge and values of managerial ethics laid the basis for the emerging institution of post-communist management. By performing a comparative case study of two phases of leadership in two media holdings, this paper aims at understanding the connection between leadership, authority and managerial ethics, and how it has been changing throughout two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post-communist setting is characterised by large-scale transformations, the ongoing political, economic and social turbulence, and the weakness of formal institutions. It is a suitable setting to observe changes in

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leadership and managerial ethics in the companies that are run by post-communist businesspeople. This investigation emphasises charismatic leadership and charismatic authority in Weberian understanding of it. The study explores the transition of charisma to a legal-rational authority (Weber, 1922/1947) on the example of post-communist leaders of media holdings. The challenge is to find out whether there is a change of managerial ethical issues once leadership style changes, and how is this change manifested in the workload management, task delegation, career progression of junior and middle managers, and employees' rights for vacation and paternity and maternity leave. With this goal in mind, this paper observes two examples of leadership transition of self-made post-communist businesspeople, one from Russia and one from Kyrgyzstan, both of whom have created and been running a media company after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this light, the paper considers the following research questions:

1. Does managerial ethics in a company change when a leadership style transitions from charismatic to a legal-rational one within post-communist media holdings in Russia and Kyrgyzstan?
2. In the case of post-communist privately owned businesses, how does leadership transition impact managerial ethics, namely the issues of workload management, task delegation, career progression, and employees' rights for vacation and p/maternity leave?

These questions will be addressed through a comparative case study based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with company owners, senior, middle and junior management, and former employees. The case study aims at covering the period of company development from its origin—in the early 1990s in case of the Russian firm and early 2000s in case of the Kyrgyz firm—until 2016. A journey of two firms from a basement to a media holding, it's an investigation into different phases of leadership across time, the transition of leadership and the issues of managerial ethics associated with it. It's the first study of managerial ethics in media firms in Russia and Kyrgyzstan that are owned and run by the first generation of post-soviet businesspeople.

Theoretical Framework

Theory-wise, this paper is focused on the concepts of charisma and authority in relation to managerial ethics in the post-communist context of media firms. The two subsections, one on charisma, and another one on managerial ethics, aim at presenting the previous research which laid the basis for this paper.

Charisma and Leadership

Although charismatic authority as a concept of leadership is a well-known sociological concept, the manifestation and the impact of charisma in a business setting is still not well understood. This paper defines charisma as a personal charm or a 'gift of grace' which helps one to influence, inspire and lead others. The German sociologist Weber (1922/1947) defined charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which s/he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (p. 358). This paper defines charismatic leadership as a leadership type whenever an owner, a founder or a large department head (the charismatic leader) inspires the employees to follow his/her vision (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Kotter, 1990; Küng, 2008). Unlike visionary or transformational leadership, charismatic leadership allows creating strong emotional ties between a leader and followers in such a way that they develop a mutual attachment (Weber, 1922/1947; Küng, 2008). Weber (1922/1947) distinguished between traditional, charismatic and legal-rational authority.

Heredity-based traditional authority is of limited relevance for the post-soviet small business context. Due to the change of ownership structures and the rise of new entrepreneurship initiatives, inherited family businesses were not typical during the first 20 years after the fall of the Soviet Union. However, research on elite networks (Ivlevs et al., 2020) argued that some post-soviet entrepreneurs benefited from previous communist party links. One may, for example, view the current post-soviet oligarchic structures as an example of Weberian traditional authority. Yet, this paper focuses on small businesses started by people without prior communist party connections, who lived outside of centres of power (e.g. Moscow), and were in their 20 s or early 30 s when the Soviet Union fell. Charismatic authority emanates from a specific leader who inspires others. This leader is perceived to possess the extraordinary individual characteristics of a divine or supernatural origin (Weber, 1922/1947). On the other hand, legal-rational authority is based on the rule of law, rather than on any specific leader (Weber, 1922/1947). The principles of law empower those who hold this authority type and allow them to influence their subordinates. This paper speaks of charismatic authority and legal-rational authority as two distinct leadership styles—a charismatic one and a legal-rational one.

A crisis is necessary for the occurrence of charismatic leadership in organisations (De Cremer & Van Dijke, 2010; Shamir & Howell, 1999). Followers are eager to support the charismatic leader because they develop

mutual attachment and dependency to each other as a result of their close interaction (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1988) including the one in media firms (Küng, 2008). Anyhow, it is inevitable that charisma over time becomes routinised (Weber, 1922/1947) and fades away. Conger and Kanungo (1987) found evidence that the routinisation of charisma turns charismatic leaders into administrators (caretakers) or managers (nudging followers), and as soon as it happens, their charisma wanes. Following this logic, charismatic leaders lose their charisma, the more immersed they become into the structures which emerge with routinisation. Some prefer to work with or for a charismatic leader regardless of charisma's fading, is because they are comfortable as task-doers as much as the others are comfortable as task-creators. Inter-family relations in one's early childhood influence the way a personality is formed (Freud, 1901/1975). Later, alongside other factors, that impacts one's career choices and behaviour. Zaleznik (2004) adds that appointed managers (or those in senior and middle management) seek stability and control and instinctively try to quickly resolve problems, sometimes before they fully understand what a problem is. Therefore, a combination of internal predispositions and external aspects shapes both leaders and followers.

Previous studies discussed the connection between charismatic leadership and managerial ethics. Findings by Howell and Avolio (1992) suggest that creating loyal supporters and eliminating dissenters is one of the characteristics of charismatic leadership. Although some charismatic leaders develop their followers intellectually, over long periods overdependence on a charismatic leader can mean losing more significant opportunities for followers. For instance, those who could have started their own business using the skills they had gained, instead prefer

to stay at the company, without changing. With this, we move on to discussing business ethics and, in particular, ethical dimensions of management decision-making.

Business Ethics, Managerial Ethics and HRM Practices

Business ethics can be discussed from various perspectives, including one of the employee, the company and society as a whole. The ownership and the legitimacy of managerial authority (McMahon, 1989), organisational values as perceived by employees (Jin et al., 2007), and employees' professional value systems (von Weltzien Hoivik, 2002) shape the development of managerial ethics. This paper focuses on managerial ethics, which relates to the leader–follower relationship and ethical decision-making of executives. In the literature, this field overlaps with workplace ethics or the ethics of human resource management (HRM). It covers ethical issues arising around an employer–employee relationship from the employees' perspective (Sennett, 1998), such as the rights and duties owed between employer and employee. The HRM practices include career development and opportunities for advancement, training opportunities, job influence and challenge, involvement and communication, performance management and appraisal, and work-life balance. However, merely putting HRM practises in place is not enough; HRM practices contribute to firm performance when the approach to people management taken by managers is ethical (Purcell & Kinnie, 2008). Therefore, this paper relies on the term “managerial ethics” and focuses on leaders' ethical decisions and their impact on followers. Guillén and González's (2001) conceptual model of ethical dimensions views managerial ethics through the lens of leadership. Table 1 is an adaptation of Guillén and González's (2001) work (p. 183), from the perspective of HRM practices.

Table 1 HRM practices and managerial ethics' dimensions in an organization. *Source* Adapted from Guillén and González (2001)

Managerial HRM practises in an organisation	Managerial HRM practices in an organisation	The primary source of influence (ethical dimension)
Task assignment	Direct control and supervision Compulsory rules Resource allocation	Formal power and leadership
Direct control and supervision		
Compulsory rules		
Resource allocation		
Process and routine standardisation	Goal definition Information-decision systems	Effectiveness of decision-making and execution
Goal definition		
Information-decision systems		
Remuneration systems and procedures	Assessment systems Training Recognition and reward systems Code of conduct Common mission statement	The attractiveness of a firm to current and potential employees
Assessment systems		
Training		
Recognition and reward systems		
Code of conduct		
Common mission statement		

Regardless of the region of the world, business people tend to overestimate how ethical they are (Baumhart, 1961), and post-communist managers are not an exception. The essential aspects of business ethics can be identified, placing them in a relevant economic and social perspective. With this, we move on to discussing managerial ethics, focusing on the examples from post-communist countries.

Managerial Ethics in the Post-communist Businesses

Previous research identified that workplace flourishing, career progression and compensation within an organisation depend as much on emotional intelligence of the parties (Hui-Hua & Schutte, 2015) as on the informal ties between them, which is referred to as cronyism (Oxelheim & Clarkson, 2014). Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, doing business in post-communist countries remains largely persona-based and dependent on informal practices. Poór et al. (2020) point at the inconsistency between HR policies and HR practices in the newly emerged post-socialist market economies. The informal HR practices are persistent and influential even in MNC subsidiaries operating in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia because local HR departments often experience autonomy in decision-making and implementation (Poór et al., 2020). These informal practices, may, for instance, affect the hiring process, workload management arrangements, and workers' rights for a vacation that may lead to favouritism. These parameters vary—in case of weak legal and institutional frameworks in the post-communist space they are country- and industry-specific. Edwards and Lawrence (2000) compared managers in Hungary, Poland, Russia, Czech Republic and Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, former Yugoslavia and concluded that “Russian managers’ experience of the collapse of the communist system in the early 1990s has been particularly acute” (p. 43). The formal process of de-communisation in Russia began later than in Central Europe. The Central Asian states—to which Kyrgyzstan belongs to—became independent as a result of the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1991. It arguably took them longer to adapt their institutions to the market economy. In Central Asia, responsible leadership, personal integrity, human and worker rights are the emerging major ethical issues as well as relatively unexplored concepts both by management and employees (Rossouw, 2011). Furthermore, industry-specific aspect in the post-soviet space is under-researched, and therefore, there are various combinations of leadership styles and managerial ethics.

Research findings emphasise the immense role of individual arrangements when it comes to managerial ethics in the post-communist space. And, therefore, the role of company leadership in this setting remains strong. To illustrate that point, Shekshnia and Kets de Vries (2008) wrote about

the lack of planning and opportunistic approach to the management of the first-generation of Russian businesspeople. “[...] a person in such uncertain conditions [when rules of the game change without notice] has to be very flexible. Most of them do not dream of building the best company or one that will last forever. They focus on making the most of the opportunities they see around them” (Shekshnia & Kets de Vries, 2008, p. 292). Besides, during the 1990s and early 2000s, many founders and owners of businesses in Russia served as CEOs themselves. Their role included inspiring and energising the staffers regularly. However, the market economy cannot run without the ethos of bureaucratic office (Weber, 1922/1947, as cited in Du Gay, 2009). The research on post-communist business ethics confirms that. During the mid-2000s, the roles of owner and manager in Russia became increasingly separated, and the relationship between leaders and followers is now built on more rational grounds (Serdukov, 2012; Shirokova et al., 2015). For example, it is more common that share and option schemes are used to motivate the personnel (Shekshnia & Kets de Vries, 2008).

The research findings on post-communist business ethics suggest that companies in the Former Soviet Union represent the mixture of leadership norms, for instance, an autocratic one and a participatory one (Rees & Miazhevich, 2009). Educated post-communist people prefer secured full-time employment over fixed-term contracts (Rees & Miazhevich, 2009; Smirnykh & Wörgötter, 2019), and they are content with being active followers and adhering to permissive leadership styles (Sotiroska Ivanoska et al., 2019). Perceptions of various business practices such as falsifying time/quantity/quality reports, the acceptance of gifts and favours in exchange of preferential treatment and other differ among Russian male and female managers (Deshpande et al., 2000). Younger CEOs in Russia “show equal or less need for change in management style” (Shirokova et al., 2015, p. 90) than older CEOs; therefore, age is not a change-maker. These studies confirm previous findings by Donaldson (1996) who found that in multi-national corporations, the understanding of managerial ethics, for example, the tolerance for a bribe, is culture-specific. Therefore, these arguments suggest that there are multiple dimensions to consider when analysing the development of managerial ethics in post-communist firms. Therefore, a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to fill in this gap.

Research Design

Among all approaches to studying managerial ethics and organisational leadership, this study is using a qualitative comparative case study based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Arguably, it is the most suitable choice for this

research of new practices of managerial ethics in countries where media has never been a business. Russia and Kyrgyzstan, two post-soviet states, are an example of countries where media has never been a business until 1991. Interviews allow capturing first-hand experiences and reflections about an ongoing process (Gummeson, 2000, p. 35; Kvale, 2007) such as leadership transition. At the same time, the case study framework helps to situate this process in its context and explain the reasons behind its peculiarities.

Setting

In this paper, leadership transition and managerial ethics are observed within a specific type of business entity—a privately-owned media firm. The post-Soviet media landscape consists of state-owned media companies (e.g., Rossiya TV-Channel); media assets of diversified media groups (e.g. STS channel, a part of STS Media); foreign-owned media (e.g., Cosmopolitan-Russia magazine, a subsidiary of the Nordic media group Sanoma), and privately owned media firms. To reduce economic risks and increase political influence or resistance to external political influence (Jaksic et al., 2014; Rowland & Higgs, 2008), many media firms in the past 20 years have grouped into holdings, and thus, changed its leaders. Selling a successful media business to a corporate media group is standard practice. Therefore, it is crucial to concentrate on a privately owned firm, which was not sold, to capture the development of a founder's leadership and a firm's managerial ethics. Only a dozen media holdings in Russia and three ones in Kyrgyzstan are still owned by the same person or group who bootstrapped them in the 1990s or 2000s (Tokbaeva, 2018, 2019).

Based on the analysis of market transformations, the following research criteria were used to select the companies for a case study:

- (a) a company is a media holding (as defined above);
- (b) a company is privately owned by local businesspeople;
- (c) a company was founded after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991; therefore, it is a post-Soviet firm;
- (d) a company has already broken even and is in a good financial state.

Following a multiple-case study procedure proposed by Yin (2014, p. 60), two companies were selected: one for Kyrgyzstan, and the one for Russia. The country-comparative approach allows identifying similarities and differences in managerial ethics between a stronger economy (Russia) and a weaker one (Kyrgyzstan), the 'centre' of the former Soviet Union and its 'periphery'. The two-case study design was chosen to consider a greater variety of external and internal influences. The business environments in the Central,

Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia do share post-communist traits, but only to a limited degree. Also, their media markets are distinct (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2010; Gross & Jakubowicz, 2013; Sparks & Reading, 1994; Vartanova, 2013). Market conditions and political situation placed the Russian media in a position where they receive vastly more foreign investment and state subsidies than the Kyrgyz ones (Dovbysh, 2019; Tokbaeva, 2019). On the other hand, the Kyrgyz media have enjoyed relatively more press freedom than their Russian counterparts—the countries are ranked 82nd and 149th, respectively (World Press Freedom Rating, 2020). Therefore, leadership patterns of media holding founders were examined and compared on the backdrop of similar yet distinct media environments of regional Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

Data Sources

The interview target number was estimated at 40 interviews, 20 per country, using Hinkin and Holtom's (2009) response rates and sample representations model in organisational studies. A broad scope of in-depth semi-structured or "intensive" (Charmaz, 2014) interviews with company owners, senior, middle and junior management and former members of staff was achieved. The questionnaire was constructed with an emphasis on the relationship between a leader and his/her followers during two stages of a company's life-cycle—the origin and maturation (Bryman, 1992; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Kets de Vries, 1988; Küng, 2000; Lund, 2008). The questionnaire included questions about the changes in practices of managerial ethics and its impact on employees' job performance and job satisfaction. Questionnaires were adjusted for company owners, senior managers, middle managers, junior and former employees, depending on the degree of one's involvement in decision-making and years of company service. Following Kotter (1982), questions about early childhood, adulthood and family-related questions were asked, when appropriate. Overall, the questions were constructed to capture micro-issues, such as motivations among leaders and followers (Adair, 2009) and macro-issues, such as the functioning of an organisation in a business environment. Names of interview participants and companies were made anonymous, and pseudonyms are used in this paper, to protect their privacy (Table 2).

Fieldwork took place in 2014–2015 in two stages: the first stage was in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and the second stage in Ekaterinburg, Russia. Additional interviews were gathered by Skype or email during 2016; and then during 2019. 43 interviews were collected; 22 on Kyrgyzstan and 21 on Russia. The primary data from in-depth semi-structured interviews were supported through fieldwork

Table 2 Overview of data collection

Period of data collection	December 2014–August 2019
Data sources	In-depth semi-structured interviews, business publications, news agencies, corporate materials, observations at companies and industry conferences
Total number of interviews collected	Forty-three interviews with 41 informants # informants with one interview conducted: 39 # informants with two interviews conducted: 2
Type of informants	Company founders and owners, top executives, branch heads, middle management, junior management, former employees, industry analysts, press association members
Countries in which information was collected	Kyrgyzstan, Russia

observations and document analysis, which allowed to minimise potential bias (Cassell, 2009).

Data Analysis

Textual analysis of interview data was performed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Goulding, 2009), which is suitable for dealing with subjective data from interviews. Following Hsieh and Shannon's framework (2005), this research argued that the directed approach of textual analysis can effectively interpret data on leadership and managerial ethics in transitioning contexts. The analytic codes that resulted from the textual analysis of interviews laid the basis for comparing and contrasting the cases of Russian and Kyrgyz media holding. The empirical results and the analysis of findings will be presented in the next subsections of the paper.

Empirical Results

The sufficient evidence was collected for analysis of leadership and managerial ethics during both phases—company origin and company maturation. Empirical data from the Russian and the Kyrgyz one is laid out together, in a chronological way. The discussion goes around the development of leadership within media companies and its transition from a charismatic one to a hybrid one. It also shows that, despite improving, managerial ethics issues in these companies remained unsolved.

The Emergence of a Charismatic Leader

We begin the narrative with the Kyrgyz case. Murat Alibek is the founder of Altyn Kul, a Kyrgyz media holding. This media holding currently includes the highest circulation paper *The Altyn* and one of the most visited websites in the Kyrgyz language in the world. He was born in Kyrgyzstan

in a soviet working-class family. He was a teenager when the Soviet Union collapsed. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Alibek got a degree in software engineering. He started his private business in his late 20 s to support his family, a wife and a child. In 2001 he borrowed money and ventured to publish his first title. He served as a journalist, editor and layout editor all in one. Alibek distributed papers himself also. His attempts to sell the paper at the bazaar (Central Asian marketplace) were not a success. He went bankrupt. Few months after in summer of 2001 he published another title—a crossword puzzle paper. He created crosswords himself using computer software and dictionaries. He took out a mortgage for a house, having borrowed from his wife's family. By autumn of 2001, the circulation of the crossword puzzle paper rose twofold, and he could hire the first five people and rent an office in the basement with no windows. Alibek came up with an idea of a newspaper that would sell out across the whole country. The first issue of *The Altyn* was published in spring 2002.

The new paper was not profitable. I had to support it by means of earnings from crossword puzzle paper. All the time I'd simply make the whole team work for *The Altyn* for free. And I couldn't explain them logically why they'd have to do it. (From an interview with the owner)

The new paper included crosswords and news about local and international celebrities. But it received a cold welcome from the readers.

There were moods [among the team] that new paper rather had to be shut down. But I remember telling them that there will be the times when we will all make a living thanks to that paper [*The Altyn*]. And I expected that in two-to-three years we could build it up very well – it could become one of the top five newspapers in the country in terms of circulation. (From an interview with the owner)

In 2008, the new paper finally broke even. Its circulation and advertising revenue have been steadily growing since then. Alibek demonstrated charismatic features in the early stages of the company growth by inspiring people and leading them (Bryman, 1992; Weber, 1922/1947), despite not being able to offer them stability.

If I could not satisfy my staff financially, I would embrace them with hope and confidence instead, as I believed myself that success was eventually going to happen. (From an interview with the owner)

Alibek showed a business talent in identifying the market niche and creating a product that has eventually become the nation's favourite paper in the Kyrgyz language. However, for the first seven years, from 2001 to 2008, the venture's continuous existence relied on unpaid labour. Both skilled staff or the staff Alibek trained himself worked without permanent or even fixed-term contracts, and the honorarium was paid occasionally according to oral conventions between Alibek and each employee. Moreover, this case is genuinely charismatic since the leader depended on his followers as much as they relied on him to guide them. Needless to say, that employees themselves yielded the right to make the most critical business decisions in the company to Alibek, which, again, corresponds to the Weberian understanding of charismatic authority.

There were times when I had doubts. I inspired my very first employees with confidence, I have then seen this confidence in their eyes, and it inspired me back. (From an interview with the owner)

We now move on to the Russian case. Mikhail Andreev is a founder of Zhuravl-Media, a Russian media holding. Zhuravl-Media is one of the largest publishing houses in regional Russia. Its specialism is business press and business-to-client (B2C) services. Andreev was born in the Russian Ural region in an educated soviet family. He graduated from the Mechanical Engineering Faculty of Ural State Technical University in 1983. When the Soviet Union collapsed, he was working at the analogue computer plant as a programmer. In 1992, he left the plant and joined a cooperative together with a group of friends, who were programmers like him. Alexei Kharitonov thinks that his programming education helped him to set up his first business, a booklet publishing company. Although he didn't know anything about business, he was no stranger to setting precise tasks and solving complex problems.

I worked at a plant, and I had a great team there. Whenever, for different reasons, some of the people I used to work with left [the plant] to create their cooperatives, they started inviting me in. I later joined them. We had

a very young, dynamic programming team. (From an interview with the owner)

He later left that cooperative to start his own business together with his friend. Thus, the company was founded in 1992.

It was all about entrepreneurship. It was in the air. And then after some time, I caught myself thinking that I had a new criterion of success. Success is no longer measured by the pages of code one's written or the number of orders delivered, but the amount of returns on investment. That's when I realised I started thinking like a businessman. (From an interview with the owner)

Andreev's business success so far may be explained through his ability to surround himself with loyal people and translate his vision through them to the rest of the staff. His business venture was a success, and the company could reinvest its surplus into its development. Around 2004 and 2006 the company could afford to try out several products to see which one of them would work. The company employees recalled that it was an exciting period when they had a say in the company's business and saw their ideas put into practice. By 2007, Zhuravl Media included a portfolio of B2B, B2C services, a business newspaper, a glossy magazine and several user-generated content websites. It was in 2007 that Zhuravl Media reached its maturation stage and realised that it could scale up its successful business model. During the 2000s, the company expanded, and sold its media franchise to partners across Russia and, later, Kazakhstan.

The Fading Away of Charisma and the Rise of a Legal-Rational Leader

We begin with the Kyrgyz case. Altyn Kul employees describe Alibek as a determined, intelligent and optimistic person. In recent years, according to interviews with company employees and media experts, Alibek has become more rigorous and pragmatic. Yet, he gets informed about the situation and controls his subordinates through "having discussions with them". He cultivated loyalty among many employees that have been working for the company for more than ten years.

It's all about choosing whom to hire. We used to have competent specialists, who were probably most interested in salary. I understand that, but I did not have money in those days. As all companies do, I would choose the employee, whom I can satisfy financially. (From an interview with the owner)

Recently hired staff workers do not share the feeling of long-term employees that Alibek is the "father of the company".

Instead, they believe they work for a reliable business with a stable salary and staff benefits. These are 20–22-year-old recent graduates of journalism faculties as well as current students who are working part-time at the media holding. Nevertheless, they are still affected by the organisation culture sustained by middle management and senior management. The latter consists of the people who were among the first five whom Alibek had hired back in 2001.

When the business started to get better and better, the long-term employees believed even more in our chances for the future. In turn, their mood affected recently hired employees. (From an interview with the owner)

Speaking of human resource management practises at Altyn Kul, Alibek said he trusted his gut feeling when choosing “the right” people, and his decisions have been uncontested.

I was very strict towards certain deeds. If someone influenced the work negatively, I always tried to get rid of that person. I wanted to create a solid basis [of people and ideas], which would not infect others. (From an interview with the owner)

In an interview, Alibek also said that he associates the company with himself.

The ones who did not believe in the company, who influenced negatively, I would always say goodbye to them, no matter how skilled they were. They just did not suit me and the company policy. This is the way, such a team was formed, and it stays the same until now. (From an interview with the owner)

Since 2012, Alibek has held several positions in the Kyrgyz government. According to article 22 of the Kyrgyz law on government service, a civil servant is not allowed to be an entrepreneur and a company head (St. 22 Zakon KR 2016). Although Alibek appointed other people in charge of operations of the media holding, he remained the founding member, shareholder and advisor of the media holding. Until now, he stays in close contact with the staff by regularly appearing in the office. Once one’s service in the government ceases, one can restore one’s position as a company head in charter and memorandum.

The issues of task delegation and career progression of newly hired junior and middle managers remain unsolved in the legal-rational stage. What has improved in the legal-rational stage of leadership is the issue of employees’ rights for maternity and paternity leave. Although the Labour Codex of Kyrgyzstan ensures it, not all companies observe it. Therefore, companies like Altyn Kul who secure staffers’ employment after pregnancy as their competitive advantage over competitors.

By the time I had my baby, I was promoted to an editor position. Then I asked to be a journalist instead of an editor [to reduce workload]. When my child got older, I returned to the editorial position. It is a common practice [at our company]. (From an interview with one of the editors-in-chief)

Moving on to the Russian case, Zhuravl Media employees describe Mikhail Andreev as the person who values listening over talking. Most commonly, he listens to the staff’s suggestions and concerns and takes business decisions, based on what he has heard. If the 2000s were the period of growth and market expansion for Zhuravl Media, the 2010s struck the company with several crises, one after another. For Andreev, the most recent problems were the competition from global services like Chinese e-commerce platform Alibaba and a drop in local business activity and advertisement revenues caused by foreign sanctions. Alibaba is doing well on the Russian market. Andreev cancelled several departments entirely and had to cut staff. However, most of Zhuravl Media’s heads of branches have stayed with the company for ten years and more. Some employees worked at the company for more than 15 years, and some for more than 20 years. They have accumulated knowledge of the market and the company’s competitive advantages. They are the members of the senior management team who sustain Andreev’s vision and share it with the middle and junior management. Those senior managers who didn’t share Andreev’s vision, left the company, regardless of the time they had served at the media holding, feeling a lack of career progression opportunities and lack of being valued.

I do not have an inspiration coming to the meetings anymore. When my department was vital, I was one of the main decision-makers in a company. We used to have lively discussions about everything together (with the company head), and I found him so intelligent. Then, when we lost several advertising contracts, I became just an operations man. (From an interview with the department head)

Andreev belongs to the first generation of media managers to understand the importance of the market data on any business in the Russian regions. He is pragmatic and understands that now the business times are not so favourable for Zhuravl Media as they used to be during the 2000s when advertising revenues were higher. Although these qualities seem essential for general managers described by Kotter (1982), these qualities are not widespread in the post-Soviet space. It is the feature of the legal-rational style of leadership that it relies more on data rather than people and their feelings.

Now [as of 2015] we are in the period of patching up holes. The publishing industry is impetuously breaking; the paper is dying right before our very eyes.

New technologies like Instagram appear almost every month. Change of means of communication leads to a shift in marketing. (From an interview with the owner)

Moreover, the company took special arrangements navigating the turbulent economic and political times. Being part of a larger state holding could leverage the outcomes of political uncertainty (Jaksic et al., 2014). Also, state contracts for the media could help (Dovbysh, 2019), but the leadership decided to sustain its editorial independence.

Our boss gathered us at a staff meeting and told us he does not have any connections in the government that would get him out of trouble if it happens. Therefore, he asked us not to touch on sensitive topics such as Ukraine and the church. We didn't cover them at all anyway. (From an interview with the editor-in-chief)

Speaking on this topic, the owner himself mentioned that the company tries to avoid getting involved in politics.

Thank God, we've got people who serve as a buffer between us and the authorities. Apart from that, we and the state authorities exist in a parallel universe. (From an interview with the owner)

Despite losses, the main divisions of the company, such as its B2B and B2C platforms, function smoothly. There is no cash-flow issue, and the company is financially healthy. It emerged from interviews with company representatives who were asked to evaluate which departments were doing well and which weren't. The only department that is under pressure is the glossy magazine unit, and the atmosphere among the staff confirmed that. In all of the departments, the holding's employees clearly understand the company's vision, and there is compliance with that vision. The magazine employees are aware that their department may soon undergo cuts. However, even if reductions happen,

employees will be offered compensations. Settlements did not exist in the charismatic phase of Zhuravl Media development. Currently, the most ambitious department of the company is the IT department, which employs 60 people, and it is growing. Most likely, the IT managers will get a promotion shortly, since the entire media holding is shifting its focus to becoming fully digital. The leadership of Zhuravl Media grips control over major decisions, as standard for a charismatic phase, and at the same time negotiates with its employees, as typical for a legal-rational stage. The Russian case is a mixture or a hybrid of leadership styles, where the company owner feels more comfortable being in full control.

Findings

This paper explored the connection between leadership shift and the changes in managerial ethics in post-communist organisations on the example of two media firms in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. The findings are based on the adaption of Guillén and González's (2001) conceptual model of managerial ethics in relation to HRM and Walter's and Bruch's (2009) model for assessing the impact of charismatic leadership on organisations. Figure 1 presents two variations of former charismatic leaders by showing that there are several outcomes to a leader's behaviour when one's charisma fades. Guillén and González's (2001) profound model is extensive and covers managerial practices such as, for instance, resource allocation, that can not be evaluated through qualitative research. Therefore, it was decided to build the current model of this research (Table 3) based on the following four managerial practices in HRM: a) workload management; b) task delegation; c) career progression of junior and middle managers; and d) employees' rights for vacation and paternity and maternity leave.

Fig. 1 What does a charismatic leader transform to, once charisma fades? Evidence from the Kyrgyz and Russian cases

At the kickstart stage, businesses benefit from a charismatic leader (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). It is particularly so in emerging transitional markets, where cultural attitudes favour risk-taking and high power distance between members of an organisation. Yet, when the companies break even and mature, regardless of context, charisma fades (Weber, 1922/1947) and transforms into a legal-rational leadership or, most likely, into a hybrid. Currently, the leadership style of both the Russian and the Kyrgyz media owners is a hybrid form of a charismatic and a legal-rational leadership style. The process of transformation does not happen at once and depends on a leader's personality. Once the company matured, the Kyrgyz company head turned into a public persona and took a post in the Kyrgyz government. In contrast, the Russian media company head prefers to be a low key leader (See Fig. 1 for details).

Leadership style plays a considerable role in shaping managerial ethics, given the novelty of managerial ethics concept for post-communist business owners and employees (Bohatá, 1997; Rossouw, 2011). This research has found that when a leadership style shifts from charismatic to a legal-rational one in a post-communist firm, managerial ethics changes also. Table 3 summarises the findings of this study based on the extensive interview-based research with company owners, department heads, middle and junior management as well as former employees and industry experts in Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

The shift in leadership style brings more consideration towards workload management and employees' rights for vacation and p/maternity leave. However, the leadership transition in both media holdings did not bring changes in managerial ethics. Ill-performed task delegation among employees demonstrates it. Furthermore, the implementation of career progression of junior and middle managers in the post-communist firms, on the contrary, slowed down. During a charismatic phase, a charismatic leader rapidly promoted his/her loyal followers, even to senior positions. Yet, once the leadership style changed, the career progression opportunities narrowed down, and the practises for career

progression became unclear, especially to junior employees and mid-career managers.

In summary, this study found that the shift from a charismatic leadership style to a legal-rational authority does not imply that all managerial ethics issues are solved. Therefore, neither charismatic nor legal-rational leadership styles are not entirely ethical; at least it is so in the post-communist context. On the other hand, the legal-rational authority may even intensify some issues that weren't acute before. For instance, Zhuravl Media lost several loyal middle managers and one top manager after the shift to a legal-rational style. They explained their choice to leave the company by lack of opportunities to progress, for instance, from a middle managerial level to a senior managerial level, or from a senior managerial level to a co-owner level, during a legal-rational leadership phase. The conflicts may be described as personal choices of involved parties. However, increased bureaucratisation, lack of room for career progression, and lack of owner's understanding of the ideas that come from the staff were identified as the reasons why those previously loyal managers left. At the same time, one needs to acknowledge that the legal-rational authority has brought positive changes to human resource management, especially for junior-level employees. For instance, employees' rights for vacation and p/maternity leave and workload management have been taken into consideration and been exercised. That can be explained through the need for the companies to compete with other employees for the talent pool and keep the qualified employees trained within the company. Therefore, from the long-range planning perspective, the measure to offer benefits and compensations for staff workers is an effective way of optimising business costs and sustain qualified talent. The findings indicated that skilled talent might seek employment elsewhere, for instance, in a metropolis, such as Moscow and, thus, contributing to "brain drain". Successful Russian firms manage to retain their talent, yet such moods exist and were expressed in interviews. It is less so in Kyrgyzstan where none of the interviewees voiced a possibility of relocation. To keep the talent, private firms in

Table 3 Managerial ethics in the two phases of leadership in two the post-communist media holdings in Russia and Kyrgyzstan

Ethical dimension	Managerial practices in HRM	Charismatic leadership phase		Legal-rational leadership phase	
		Altyn Kul (Kyrgyzstan) 1994–2007	Zhuravl Media (Russia) 2001–2008	Altyn Kul (Kyrgyzstan) 2008–2016	Zhuravl Media (Russia) 2007–2016
Formal power and leadership Effectiveness of decision-making and execution	Workload management	Absent	Absent	Present	Present
	Task delegation	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
The attractiveness of a firm to employees	Career progression of junior and middle managers	Present	Present	Absent	Absent
	Employees' rights for vacation and paternity and maternity leave	Absent	Absent	Present	Present

post-Soviet states need to address the confusion around task delegation and the ambiguity around career progression of junior and middle managers.

Conclusion

The appearance of new ventures founded by self-made businesspeople after the fall of the Soviet Union and their consequent maturation is what makes a post-Soviet setting particularly interesting one from the managerial ethics perspective. Due to the unique mix of lack of institutional development and widespread reliance on informal networks in business, Weberian three types of authority—a traditional authority, a charismatic authority, and a legal-rational authority—in this setting exist in multiple combinations or hybrid forms. The more post-communist countries detach themselves from communist practises and find their way of developing small, medium and large-scale businesses, the more hybrid variations of leadership styles come to place. Hybrids can be found across all business and national canvases, hence a country-comparative approach is a suitable framework for leadership studies. It is a comparative case study of leadership and managerial ethics transition in two local media holdings in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Both were founded after the fall of the Soviet Union by people with no connections to the previous communist elite networks and no prior experience in doing business. The Kyrgyz media holding Altyn Kul broke even after seven years on the market, while it took the Russian media holding Zhuravl Media 12 years to do the same. The break-even point is a milestone which marks leadership transition from a charismatic style to a legal-rational style. This study has found that in post-communist firms, managerial ethics changes when a charismatic leadership phase shifts to a hybrid charismatic/legal-rational phase. Workload management and employees' rights for vacation and paternity and maternity leave have been positively affected in both Russian and Kyrgyz firms. However, the leadership transition in both media holdings

did not bring changes in task delegation, and it affected the career progression of junior and middle managers negatively.

Implications for Academia

This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature of post-communist leadership, management and governance. This research confirmed previous studies on charismatic bonding between leaders and followers as a requisite for a business to overcome the crisis by De Cremer and Van Dijke (2010) and Shamir and Howell (1999). Tied up to economic turmoil and uncertainty, whether it is caused by post-communist market transformations, the 2008 financial crisis, or the need to digitise the value chain for high performance, persona-based leadership style remains acute in the post-Soviet space. It is there for cultural reasons. Start-up and survival stages of business development require a passion-driven, risk-taking charismatic leadership style. However, with the growth of market concentration, as illustrated on the example of media markets in Russia and Kyrgyzstan in this paper, there is a tendency of a “start-up” hero finds him/herself turn into a legal-rational bureaucrat. Some leaders explain it by the need to concentrate on other (e.g. political goals), while still maintaining advisor and owner role in the business (the Kyrgyz case). In contrast, others prefer to remain low key while navigating the tightening socio-political environment (the Russian case). There is a need for detailed case-studies in critical leadership in the post-Soviet business setting.

Implications for International and Local Business

This research has shown that a leader's charisma in its pure form has faded, and will only exist in post-Soviet firms a hybrid form as soon as a firm breaks even, and business optimisation is prioritised over survival. However, companies require different types of leaders at various stages of their development (See Table 4).

Table 4 Weberian leadership styles and hybrids in various organisational settings in the post-Soviet space

Charismatic leadership	These are pure entrepreneurship initiatives in the early 1990s and 2000s bootstrapped by first-generation entrepreneurs without prior elite network connections. According to this research, this leadership style has now faded as some firms ceased to exist, and others transformed
Traditional leadership	These are the early 1990s and 2000s' small businesses bootstrapped by people with sufficient communist elite network links who turned entrepreneurs (Ivlevs et al., 2020)
Legal-rational leadership	These are the managers of the former state enterprises turned into private companies (Kiser, 1989; Soulsby & Clark, 1996)
Charismatic/legal-rational hybrid	Current department heads in foreign-owned firms, MNCs, and owners and leaders of temporary and gig economy projects such as start-ups
Charismatic/traditional hybrid	These are owners and partners in all-sized family businesses
Traditional/legal-rational hybrid	These are the C-level and middle management in state-controlled corporations

Charismatic/legal-rational leaders will rise to prominence as department heads in foreign-owned firms, MNCs, and owners and leaders of temporary and gig economy projects such as start-ups. Traditional/charismatic leaders will occupy influential positions in family businesses that now become more common in the post-Soviet space, especially in Central Asia, where family ties are traditionally strong. In Russia and Eastern Europe, traditional/legal-rational leaders can be found in larger organisational structures such as oligarchies and state-controlled holdings.

Nowadays many market niches are occupied by the players who had survived on the market throughout the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. At least, as the research has shown, this is the case for the media markets of Russia and Kyrgyzstan. It means that in the next 5–10 years, one will be able to observe and study more successions in post-communist firms. For example, the ownership may be transferred to family members, or non-family members can be appointed as CEOs. Therefore, Kotter's work on professional management will be acute for the post-communist business context in and after the 2020s.

Implications for Policymakers and Governing Bodies

Regardless of that, our results reveal that the issues of managerial ethics such as task delegation and career progression of junior and middle managers remain unsolved. The media holdings observed in this study are, in many ways, the forward-thinking pioneers. Yet, these firms have not figured out its approach towards managerial ethics and not considered ethics as a driver of business success. This study confirms the findings of Bohatá (1997) and Rossouw (2011) that the business world in Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, has not taken a systemic approach towards managerial ethics. Training interventions by policymakers and governing bodies such as national business associations and chambers of commerce is required. This study is limited to the comparative analysis of two cases of media firms in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, other combinations of leadership styles, how leadership affects managerial ethics, and which solutions firms offer to its employees in various national and industry contexts, should be explored further.

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Conflict of Interest Dinara Tokbaeva declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

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