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Article

Cultivating patriotism: A pioneering note on a Russian dimension of corporate ethics management

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Communication

Cultivating Patriotism—A Pioneering Note on a Russian Dimension of Corporate Ethics Management

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Abstract: Corporate codes of conduct address various issues, some of which can be country-specific. A tentative analysis of the content of 42 codes of the leading Russian private companies implies that about a quarter of them consider patriotism, which generally matches the significant attention paid to this issue in Russian society. Of 10 companies with the biggest annual revenue, four (40%) consider patriotism in their codes. The main topics are pride in a company's relevance to state development, initiatives, and interests, as well as care for the veterans of the World War II. The present study implies that patriotism can be an important dimension of corporate ethics management in some countries.

Keywords: code of conduct; ethics communication; leading companies; Russia; state focus

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1. Introduction

Corporate ethics constitutes a major research topic, which is related to studies of business communications, corporate governance, and human resource management (Christina and Fort 2020; Joyner and Payne 2002; Rhodes and Pullen 2018; Schwartz 2001; Weaver et al. 1999). A code of conduct is the basic instrument of corporate ethics management because it summarizes desirable norms of behavior and establishes mechanisms of implementation of these norms. Although the content of these codes varies between companies, they commonly pay attention to such issues as equality, justice, responsibility (social and environmental), communication, problem reporting, business disclosure, team building, safety, corruption, and partner trust. Naturally, these issues are often linked to the company's interests and aims, i.e., business priorities. Nonetheless, some norms of corporate ethics can be dictated by higher purposes (e.g., social or political). This is especially the case for corporations representing countries with strong state intervention in the business sphere or where entrepreneurship is influenced by some cultural or historical inspirations and ambitions.

Patriotism is a highly complex social, political, and economical phenomenon (Clift and Woll 2012; Schatz et al. 1999; Turner 2002). Provisionally, it can be related to feeling proud of being a citizen of any given country and feeling a readiness to act accordingly (indeed, this is a simplified definition that cannot pretend to be universal). Finding patriotism-related notions in corporate codes of conduct is rather unexpected to researchers as these notions indicate an organizational shift from a business focus to a state focus. However, this shift is possible in countries that traditionally emphasize national identity and evident cultural peculiarities. Amos (2018) documented how specific social situations in particular countries (for instance, developing countries) influence the patterns and the discourses of corporate social responsibility. Earlier, Ryan (2005) demonstrated how country-scale attempts to develop affect both corporate governance and business

ethics. In other words, finding country-specific patterns in corporate codes of conduct is possible and deserves further investigation.

The objective of the present contribution is to shed light on how patriotic behavior is cultivated by leading Russian companies via establishing the specific norms in their codes of conduct. The results of this pioneering, empirical study are reported to set up a further discussion going beyond the Russian business sphere.

2. Brief Literature Review

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the previous literature, and it comprises several elements. First, the essence of corporate codes of conduct is addressed. Second, it is shown that country-specific ethical norms need consideration in such codes. Third, the cultural frame of doing business in a given country (Russia in this case) is stressed. Fourth, patriotism is considered as a part of this frame. Fifth, the relevance of patriotism to corporate social responsibility is shown. The available literature tends to emphasize general questions (this is why it is not necessary to repeat such extensive knowledge, which can be found in many "deep" literature reviews), and the issue of patriotism in corporate ethics management seems to be truly novel (as a result, the related literature to be reviewed is lacking). Taking together these elements of the theoretical framework, it is possible to propose a general hypothesis and two related research questions for this study.

The knowledge of corporate codes of conduct is conceptualized, particularly, in the seminal works by Béthoux et al. (2007), Erwin (2011), Raiborn and Payne (1990), and White and Montgomery (1980). These researchers revealed the diversity of their content and emphasized its relevance to various business and social needs. White and Montgomery (1980) offered one of the first conceptualizations and empirical studies of corporate codes of conduct. They established their general importance in modern business and also stressed the significant diversity of the topics covered by these documents. Moreover, these specialists realized that different companies tend to pay attention to different topics. In other words, content richness triggers heterogeneity of ethics on the national scale. Raiborn and Payne (1990) explained that codes of conduct link legality and morality, and their main characteristics are clarity, comprehensiveness, and enforceability. These specialists also noted that these strategic documents are tied to corporate culture and understanding of the diversity of situations where they may be applied. Béthoux et al. (2007) explained that corporate social responsibility is an important element of codes of conduct, and that employees need to implement such codes to protect companies' assets. These specialists also demonstrated that codes of conduct not only establish and communicate ethics but also serve to sustain corporate identity. Erwin (2011) distinguished between the ethical norms prescribed by codes of conduct and real-world corporate behavior (ethical performance). He found that the quality of these codes is of utmost importance for ethical performance in each given case. This means that their content, with its focus, emphases, and composition, determines behavior, and, thus, these codes are real instruments of corporate policy and communication channels. In the light of the literature evidence, codes of conduct are very important to shape the behavior of managerial staff, employees, and company in general. For instance, they often prescribe trust and respect, attention to local communities and environment, as well as warn against bribes and gender discrimination. These are universal requirements, which are meaningful throughout the world.

Less attention has been paid by the previous researchers to country-specific ethical norms. For instance, Elankumaran (2006) established the national peculiarities of corporate codes of conduct in India, and Amaeshi and Amao (2009) did the same for Nigeria. The former study realized that codes of conduct may be related to so-called "distinctive national character". This idea can be regarded as a premise for linking patriotism and corporate ethics management. The latter study explains that the home-country understanding of capitalism by multinational companies changes when they operate in a different country, and this change is reflected in corporate codes of conduct. Again, this is evidence of very fundamental links of the corporate ethical norms to the cultural frame. Both studies closely

examined country-specific peculiarities, although the scarcity of similar studies indicates a remarkable knowledge gap that is yet to be filled.

Doing business is Russia is highly specific, and some notable peculiarities were reported by Fey and Shekshnia (2011). It was also found that the Russian cultural frame is important to the national business behavior, and it affects the economic performance of organizations (Grachev and Izyumov 2003; Guseva 2013; Kulapov et al. 2019; Nguyen et al. 2019; Yerznkyan et al. 2017). Such a frame can influence the meaning of some universal norms and values, and it can also pose new, country-specific norms and values. Dufy (2015) noted the factor of patriotism and put this into the political frame. Indeed, Russian patriotism has many aspects (Danakari 2019; Sanina 2016; Volkov et al. 2018), and it boasts deep historical roots (Merkulov et al. 2020). According to these authors, the pride in the own country, its people, history, traditions, and identity is among the imperatives of the Russian society, and it has strengthened evidently in recent years. Patriotism influences organizational culture and managerial practices (Vadi and Vereshagin 2006), and it guides some business processes (Sladkiewicz 2017). It is not a simple part of the cultural frame of doing business in a given country but a force of business development.

Corporate social responsibility is something more than a simple concept in modern research; rather, it is a pillar of this research, as well as an analytical frame. Hundreds of works have been devoted to corporate social responsibility, from which two most cited (according to "Scopus" on 19 June 2021) are the seminal articles by Orlitzky et al. (2003) and Porter and Kramer (2006), which not only provide a theoretical framework but also argue for benefits of social responsibility to companies and their competitive advantages and performance. Nonetheless, many related issues (these are almost philosophical sometimes) remain debatable, as one can find in two very fresh examples (Fraser et al. 2021; Sheehy and Farneti 2021). The meaning of patriotism (Clift and Woll 2012; Schatz et al. 1999; Turner 2002; see also remarks given in the introductory part of this work) allows one to connect this phenomenon to corporate social responsibility. In fact, patriotism appeals to social norms. It requires being active and responsible citizens (Lubimov 2013; Volkov et al. 2018). Such responsibility is required from both companies and their employees. Patriotism can be also regarded as a mechanism by which the state guides corporate ethics in the correct way. Nonetheless, the discourses of patriotism and responsibility do not necessarily agree in all (Pekkanen and Penttilä 2021).

Previous research (see review above) has allowed one to hypothesize patriotism 'penetration' into Russian corporate ethics. Answering two research questions may help to test this hypothesis. First, how many Russian companies prescribe patriotic behavior in their codes of conduct? Second, which particular aspects of patriotism are considered by these companies? Attention should be paid to the biggest companies for two reasons. First, information about these companies is easy to obtain (their codes of conduct are often available on their well-developed web-pages). Second, these companies are leaders of the national business system, and, thus, they serve as examples to smaller companies. Additionally, private companies are of the greatest importance for answering noted questions to exclude the possible factor of state requirements in the state-owned companies.

3. Methodology

The codes of conduct of the leading Russian companies are a material of the present study. A hundred private Russian companies with the biggest annual revenue are taken from the 'fresh' national ranking (Forbes 2020). Official web-page of each company is checked to find its code of conduct. Presumably, the majority of these companies have such codes, but only 42 of them offer direct online access to them, and only these codes are analyzed.

The content of each code of conduct is checked carefully to find all notions related to patriotism. These notions should be clearly separated from those dealing with the other aspects of corporate social responsibility. For the purposes of the present study, it is presumed that patriotism is addressed in those cases when codes draw workers' attention to coun-

try/nation history/culture, national pride/interests, and state ambitions. Considerations of local communities, charity donations, etc., are important issues, but these do not seem to be elements of patriotic behavior sensu stricto, and, thus, these are not analyzed. In any case, patriotism can be judged one of many aspects of corporate social responsibility. Codes of conduct bearing patriotism-related notions (patriotic codes) are of central importance for this study. Their design (number of pages, amount of illustrations, and presence of behavior templates) and their focus (main elements of the content) are characterized in order to provide with a general vision of these codes. Essentially, the present study is based on qualitative content analysis (quantitative approaches of content analysis are not used because these need adaptation to the Russian language, and abundance of synonyms does not make word counting efficient). All codes of conduct are treated anonymously, i.e., the names of the companies are not disclosed in this paper to avoid any occasional violation of the companies' reputation.

The collected information is employed for several quantitative, semi-quantitative, and qualitative procedures aimed at the analysis of the patriotism "penetration" into the codes of conduct. First, the number and the share of the patriotic codes are established. Second, the dependence of the number of such codes on the company rank (the positions in the ranking by Forbes (2020)) is established. For this purpose, all companies are grouped into four clusters representing the ranks of 1–10, 11–20, 21–50, and 51–100. The number of the patriotic codes in each cluster is established. Third, the persistence of patriotism-related notions in the codes is established with a provisional system of scores. The lowest score (1) is given to those codes where patriotism-related notions are very few, and they are expressed in a few words. The higher score (2) is given to those codes where these notions are either brief but more abundant, or more detailed but few. The highest score (3) is given to those codes where these notions are relatively abundant and extensive. Then, the average score is calculated. Fourth, the consideration of corporate social responsibility in the patriotic codes is characterized. Fifth, all patriotism-related notions are classified intuitively via assigning to topics with different thematic affinity. Then, the frequency of these topics in the analyzed codes is measured.

4. Results

From 42 analyzed codes of conduct, 11 codes bear patriotism-related notions. These codes differ chiefly in design, whereas their focus is coherent (Table 1). This means these are "classical" codes of conduct paying attention to common ethical issues. It is also possible to add that the analyzed codes are well-developed and more or less similar (this finding differs from what was reported by White and Montgomery (1980) for the US economy). That is why consideration of patriotism does not result from any "haphazard" reflection of the corporate ethics.

The share of the patriotic codes is 26%, a bit more than a quarter of the leading Russian companies cultivate patriotism via prescriptions of the related norms. Interestingly, patriotic codes are more common among the ten highest-ranked companies (40% of the latter boast patriotic prescriptions). They are less common among the smaller companies. Patriotism is addressed by chiefly the same number of companies with the rank below 10 (Table 2).

The persistence of the patriotism-related notions in the analyzed codes of conduct differs. The average score is 1.6, which can be interpreted as moderate persistence. The highest scores marking significant persistence are found in two cases. Patriotism does not seem to be common element of the codes of conduct on the international scale, and, thus, even such a moderate persistence as reported indicates the importance of patriotism to Russian business. Eighty-two percent of the analyzed patriotic codes deal with corporate social responsibility more or less extensively (Table 1), which is explained in the terms of care and social protection of workers, contribution to local communities, and environmental dedication. Like in the case of the multinational companies (Béthoux et al. 2007), attention is concentrated sometimes on the workers, although the other aspects of corporate social

responsibility are also covered rather adequately. Interestingly, patriotism-related notions are both mixed with these explanations and given separately. Apparently, patriotism means something more (and even something different) to the considered Russian companies than corporate social responsibility.

Table 1. General characteristics of the analyzed patriotic codes.

Company	Design			Focus (Content Elements)					
	Number of Pages	Amount of Illustrations	Behavior Templates	Corporate Social Responsibility	Staff Interests	Company Interests and Security	Relations	Reporting	Misconduct
A	29	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
B	12	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
C	62	Numerous	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
D	24	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
E	14	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
F	19	Moderate	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
G	12	Rare	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
H	28	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
I	25	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
J	45	Numerous	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
K	16	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: the companies' names are not disclosed, and the companies are labeled provisionally as A–K.

Table 2. Frequency of patriotism consideration in the analyzed codes of conduct.

Corporation Rank	Number of Codes of Conduct	Number of Patriotic Codes	Patriotism Persistence, %%
1–10	10	4	40
11–20	18	2	11
21–50	14	3	21
51–100	10	2	20
Total	42	11	26

The found patriotism-related notions differ essentially, and they are rather diverse: a total of 11 topics are distinguished (Table 3). Most commonly, the codes state that a given company contributes to the country's development; in doing so, the company is proud of being Russian, and it appeals to its workers to share this pride. State initiatives and state interests are also mentioned in several codes, which means that following these initiatives and interests is a company's priority, and it is advisable to the staff. Of central importance is the consideration of World War II veterans and the care for them in four codes. These notions reflect quintessence of Russian patriotism (the pride in the role the country played in the victory in this war). One code states directly that a given company is focused on patriotism. Additionally, one company stressed that it is proud of its representatives who are active in state policy, although it warned (like many other companies) that this political activity is their individual choice. More generally, the above-mentioned and other patriotism-related topics constitute three major themes (Table 3). These seem to be three main pillars of the current patriotism-related corporate ethics in Russia.

Table 3. Topics of patriotism-related notions in the analyzed codes of conduct.

Topic	Number of Codes	Thematic Affinity
D1. Contribution to the country development (and pride in this)	5	Country growth (D)
D2. State initiatives	3	
D3. Ecological pride	1	
D4. Ecological legislation improvement	1	
P1. State interests	3	Country policy (P)
P2. Sanctions	1	
P3. Pride in a company's representatives in policy	1	
H1. Being patriots	1	Country history (H)
H2. Company's relevance to state history	1	
H3. Veterans of the World War II	4	
H4. Country's cultural heritage preservation	1	

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the present study imply that the leading Russian companies cultivate patriotism via ethical prescriptions. The share of the patriotic codes is significant, especially taking into account that patriotism is not among the common ethical requirements in international practice and that its consideration is fully voluntary. These findings prove the idea that the importance and diversity of the Russian patriotism (Dufy 2015; Danakari 2019; Sanina 2016; Sladkiewicz 2017; Vadi and Vereshagin 2006; Volkov et al. 2018) incentivize many companies to mention it in their codes of conduct. This creates a new and important dimension of corporate ethics management, which is closely tied to the cultural frame of business (Fey and Shekshnia 2011; Grachev and Izyumov 2003; Guseva 2013; Kulapov et al. 2019; Nguyen et al. 2019; Yerznkyan et al. 2017). It is also established that the attention to the patriotic behavior increases in the biggest companies. Apparently, taking the leading position stimulates corporate patriotic thinking, with related notions in the official, strategic communications.

The present study contributes to the literature as follows. First, it implies that patriotism is an important issue of corporate ethics management. Second, it demonstrates that corporate codes of conduct may be country-specific to a significant degree. The findings of the present study also have practical implications. Working in the leading Russian companies or cooperating with them requires attention to patriotic norms, which should be taken into account by the foreigners interested in doing business or working in Russia. Particularly, this is important to industries with a significant degree of internationalization—for instance, tourism (Pshenichnykh et al. 2020). As for Russian managers, they should note the diversity of ethical prescriptions related to patriotism in order to broaden the treatment of patriotism in their own companies.

The undertaken analysis permits making a general conclusion that patriotism is a true dimension of corporate ethics management in Russia. About a quarter of the leading Russian private companies include patriotism-related notions in their codes of conduct, and these notions are diverse. Answering the two research questions allows one to prove the hypothesis about the 'penetration' of patriotism into Russian corporate ethics. The theoretical implication of this study is linked to an emphasis on the country-specific dimensions of corporate ethics management. Russian companies provide a bold example of patriotism-related ethical behavior, which are rooted in the history, the traditions, and the modern cultural frame of the country. Apparently, this dimension both extends and strengthens corporate social responsibility. Consideration of patriotism in the corporate codes of conduct makes the focus of the latter broader, which corresponds well to the Hamel (2009)'s idea of higher social tasks as an advantage of modern business. It is very probable that the patriotic behavior in Russian companies contributes to their performance, sustainability, and general strength in the market (testing this idea highlights a direction for further investigations). The practical implication of this study is that Russian patriotism

should be regarded as a serious dimension of national corporate ethics and social responsibility, and it should be taken into account in international business collaboration projects and in the extension of the Russian economic presence into other markets (Dzhandzhugazova et al. 2018; Nikulin 2020; Sosnovskikh 2021). Moreover, as the patriotism dimension seems to be advantageous to business, Russian companies can be used as good examples of patriotic behavior to be followed in other countries.

The main limitations of this study are linked to its sole focus on Russia and the relatively restricted number of samples. Two other limitations are linked to the theoretical framework and analysis of the collected codes of conduct. In the former case, the already published literature is too scarce (almost absent), and, thus, the offered theoretical framework is provisional, the full-scale literature review is impossible, and the results cannot be compared to the outcomes of other research. In the latter case, the examined documents are written in the Russian language, and only qualitative analysis based on contextual interpretations is possible. However, all these limitations do not raise barriers for this study due to its pioneering and rather tentative character. Moreover, it is expected that accumulation of the knowledge of various patriotism-related patterns of corporate strategies from different countries (Brazil, China, India, Russia, the USA, etc.) will permit one to erase these limitations in the future. An important question for further research is how patriotism-related prescriptions are implemented and followed by all categories of companies' staff. Additionally, the appearance of new forms and institutions of business in Russia (Androsova and Sogacheva 2021; Ezangina and Evstratov 2019; Kolesnikov et al. 2020; Scherbina and Grechko 2021) also requires attention in regard to patterns of patriotism.

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