Understanding acculturation in cross-border partnerships: an analysis in the Russian automotive industry

Montenero Vincent

CEFRES, Czech Republic

vincent.montenero@gmail.com

Very Philippe

Edhec Business School, France

Philippe.very@edhec.edu

Abstract

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Former research has identified the influence of acculturation on the outcome of international partnerships. The research seeks for enriching our understanding of this influence, through the analysis of acculturative reactions – stress or attraction - all along the partnership process and from each partner perspective. For that purpose, we focused on partnerships in the Russian automotive industry that combine local firms with carmakers from developed countries. Our findings highlight the fact that acculturative stress or attraction can occur throughout the partnership process, from negotiation to implementation. Factors creating stress or attraction are partly similar for both partners, and partly specific to one partner. The whole picture of acculturation goes far beyond the classical search for an initial congruence between partners and underlines the impact of acculturative reactions on the management – and the performance - of these alliances.

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Keywords: international partnerships, acculturation theory, acculturative stress, acculturative attraction, Russia, car industry

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INTRODUCTION

Each time an industrial corporation establishes itself on a new market, it brings with it its own vision of the World as well as its conception of normal and proper ways of doing things, of relating to other people, and the behaviors that embody those conceptions. The encounter with the other will most often result in the confrontation, or even the opposition with another conception of the World. This may strongly impact the necessary transfer of information, i.e. organizational learning, and the success of the project (Ang and Inkpen 2008; Inkpen 2008; Yitmen 2013).

Whilst culture (at organizational level and national level) definitely matters in international business, research findings remain inconclusive about the linkage between cultural differences and performance in the case of cross-border partnerships (Teerikangas & Very, 2006). For tis reason some authors have proposed another perspective on culture, looking at acculturation, a concept originally elaborated to characterize social movements of populations, and particularly migration groups joining another culture. Acculturation is a process of culture change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Applying this concept in the field of mergers and acquisitions, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) theoretically argue that congruence between preferred modes of acculturation by each partner should facilitate the implementation of mergers. Initial findings using this perspective tended to show that acculturation contributes to explain economic performance in the case of cross-border acquisitions (Very et al., 1996). Unfortunately, the approach through acculturation has been rarely adopted by researchers despite its possible explanatory power. This research uses the acculturation perspective to explore factors of acculturative stress and attraction that characterize international partnerships and contribute to understand their performance. We first examine how acculturation has been utilized and show that research in management has adopted a rather restrictive perspective on acculturation: in the field of acquisitions, implementation success is theoretically associated with the congruence between the partners' perceptions of acculturation prior to implementation. As social movements theorists have found when studying populations of migrants, acculturative

reactions occur all along the change process and influences the integration in the host country. Translated in the context of international business, these findings incite to assume that acculturation is likely to influence the performance of a partnership all along the process, from negotiation between firms to implementation. Our research project aims at studying this assumption.

For this purpose, we analyzed partnerships between Western and Russian companies in the car industry. We conducted in-depth interviews with 29 managers from both sides of these deals. The car-industry is a relevant industry to study acculturation, because foreign strategic moves generally seek for deploying standardized technologies, work organizations and practices initially developed in the Western world. Western car makers tend to impose their strongly intertwined global system to all players (Bourdin, Le Thiec, and Elissalde 2009; Ijose 2010). Accordingly, the globalized automotive industry presents an interesting case of a movement towards a "Westernized rule of law" (Dunfee and Warren 2001:191). Russia is also a relevant context because its long experience of the car industry during the Soviet Union period has generated its own Russian work organization and practices, far different from those of Western companies.

Our findings show that the acculturation perspective is appropriate to understand the dynamics at work in the interaction between actors belonging to two different industrial traditions. Stress and attraction can occur all along the negotiation and the implementation of a partnership. Our analysis gives a complex picture of acculturation, with similarities between Russians and Western managers in their perceptions of factors of acculturative stress and attraction, but also with specificities and oppositions. These findings underline the need to understand cultural influences from both sides of partnerships, along the whole course of implementation, in order to enhance chances of economic success. Acculturation in partnership is much more than a simple initial congruence between partners' preferences.

STATE OF THE ART ABOUT ACCULTURATION

Numerous studies have analyzed the linkage between culture and the performance of mergers, acquisitions and alliances. Most authors have based their research on the assumption that the extent of cultural differences (at the organizational level and/or at the national level) is inversely associated with the performance of these strategic moves. But the findings remain very confusing. For instance, reviews of research about this assumption in the context of acquisitions provide inconclusive results, as some studies find a positive relationship, whereas others a negative one, and still others no relationship (Teerikangas & Very, 2006; 2012).

Some researchers however have used a different perspective on the linkage between culture and performance, relying on the concept of acculturation coming from the theory of social movements (Berry, 1980) and then applied to the context of acquisitions (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988). The theory of social movements examines how migrant minorities adapt themselves to the new culture of their host country. Acculturation refers to this multidimensional process of adapting to the host majority culture (Berry, 1980). It is a process of culture change that results from continuous, first- hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Within the acculturation process, a member of one cultural group can change his or her behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes to become more in-line with the norms of another culture. Berry (1980) developed a classification for ethnic minority individuals to describe acculturation types. He proposed four categories: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration occurs when a person has an interest in both maintaining his or her culture of origin while simultaneously successfully interacting with the mainstream culture. Assimilation occurs when the individual does not maintain his/her culture of origin, but adopts the behavior attached with the host culture. At the opposite, an individual in the separation category avoids interaction with the new culture while keeping his/her culture of origin. Finally, an individual in the marginalization category has no more interest in his/ her culture of origin, nor in the culture of the host country.

Originally proposed as a group-level phenomenon, acculturation is also recognized as an individual-level experience sometimes called "psychological acculturation" (Graves, 1967). This concept refers to changes in an individual whose cultural group is collectively experiencing acculturation.

Acculturation is described as a process made both of stress and of attraction when the individual is exposed to a new culture. Stress occurs when the individual perceives a gap between how things are in the new culture and how the individual thinks that things ought to be. Attraction (or positive perception) emerges when how things are in the new culture are aligned with how things ought to be or preferable to how things were in the initial culture. Individuals experience acculturation to varying degrees. Stressors may result from this varying experience of acculturation: for some people, acculturative changes may all be perceived as stressors, while for others, they may be benign or even seen as opportunities (acculturative attraction). These varying levels of acculturative stress may become manifest as a result of acculturation experience and stressors/attractors. The consequence is a possible variation in adaptation to the new culture (Berry, 1983).

Berry's framework was then utilized by management researchers Nahavandi & Malekzadeh (1988) who have proposed that post-acquisition culture involves a dynamic tension between forces of cultural differentiation (the side of the acquired firm) and forces of organizational integration (the side of the acquirer). The acquired firm and the acquirer have each their own preference about the mode of acculturation (integration, assimilation, separation, deculturation (i.e. marginalization)) that should be chosen for acquisition integration. The basic contention of their model is that implementation success is associated with a strong congruence between each one's preference. Otherwise, acculturative stress will emerge and hinder implementation progress.

This theoretical model acknowledges that huge cultural differences between two merging organizations does not necessarily imply that the selling firm will systematically resist post-merger consolidation attempts. The acquired firm's employees may be attracted to the buying firm's values, and may willingly assimilate the culture of the acquirer (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988).

The authors consider that their model is a dynamic one. The acculturation mode, the implementation process and the outcome of the merger are likely to affect the cultures and practices of both organizations. Each partner's preference for an acculturation mode can change over time, for instance when an acquired firm initially wanting to preserve its culture found through contacts some attraction attached to the acquirer's culture and practices. Unfortunately, the authors formulated propositions on congruence associated with their theory but neglected this dynamic perspective.

Empirical studies of acculturation in international partnerships remain scarce. Looking at cross-border acquisitions, Larsson and Lubatkin (2001) found that positive acculturation (attraction) occurs when the acquirer efficiently manages social integration. This process also helps to explain the stress perceived by acquired employees when asked to conform to the acquirer's values and practices, and reasons why tend tend to resist such cultural pressures.

Very et al. (1996) investigated the notions of acculturative stress and attraction in the context of cross-border acquisitions. They found a linkage between the level of acculturative stress and the performance of acquisitions. More precisely, they found that both tensions and attractions emerge within the process of acquisition integration and that these phenomena differ in nature according to the nationality of the firms. For instance, French are stressed when their collective culture is questioned, or British managers are stressed when the reward systems of the acquirer are not perceived as objective. At the same time, the managers of British firms were attracted by the level of assertiveness and achievement associated with French acquirers. These authors

studied firms from 3 countries: Great Britain, USA and France. They collected perceptions only from the acquired firms. They suggested that further studies should extend to other countries, to other types of alliances, and to both companies' perceptions. Surprisingly, no works to our knowledge have embarked in these directions.

A subsequent study about acculturation extended acculturation research to cases of expatriation. The authors investigated the acculturative stress felt by host country managers working in multinational companies (Lee & al., 2019). The authors identified psychological difficulties inherent to those managers working at foreign firms and their negative impact on work engagement in the Korean host context. Like in many recent studies, these researchers focused on stress and neglected attraction, even if former findings had showed the mixed feelings of individuals confronted to a new culture. Nonetheless, their research shows that the acculturation perspective can be applied to any kind of foreign presence (through greenfield investments, acquisitions, or any type of alliance).

Foreign direct investments, as initially explained by Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988), do not necessarily require the creation of a homogeneous culture. When acquiring a company for pursuing unrelated diversification, much autonomy is generally given to the acquired firm who can keep its own culture (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991; Very, 2004). Lin (2014) examined this linkage between strategy and acculturation in the case of acquisitions. He found that acculturation is required for the success of the related acquisitions, but not for vertical integration or unrelated diversification. Accordingly, partnerships aiming at consolidating positions within an industry constitute a preferential context for studying acculturation.

Acculturation appears rarely studied in the field of international partnerships even if the initial findings were showing its contribution to the success of strategic moves abroad. This is why we launched an investigation to increase our understanding of acculturation in international partnerships. Former developments have highlighted several gaps or weaknesses associated with former studies in our knowledge of the linkages. First, the main idea expressed in the first theoretical paper can be discussed: the congruence between preferred modes of acculturation. Congruence can hardly be looked for in cases where the expanding firm has a clear strategy. For value to be created, implementation of the plan should be made whatever the preferences of the local target (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991). So, if by chance the local partner preferred mode of acculturation is aligned to the foreign partner's one, implementation will be facilitated. If initial preferences diverge, implementation is likely to face more resistance from local employees. This means that congruence should be envisioned as an initial fact characterizing

the international move, and not as an agreement between both parties sought for by the foreign firm.

Second, there are chances that the emergence of acculturative stress or attraction could occur all along the implementation of a partnership. As said earlier, the degree of congruence has been conceived as an initial factor that will influence implementation: one partner's preference for acculturation mode is "*triggered by the contact between the two companies*" (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988: 87). If there is incongruence at this starting point, acculturative stress should emerge. But stress can be perceived all along the implementation process. Stress can increase or decrease with the multiplication of contacts and the changes designed and brought. Former studies in the case of acquisitions have shown that firms learn to know each other during the course of integration (Very & Schweiger, 2001). Discovering, as time goes by, the partner's practices and values could generate stress and attraction. Therefore, resistance or alignment associated with stress and attraction is likely to evolve with the advancement of the implementation process.

Third, former studies have explored acculturation from only one side of a partnership. This statement looks very strange when the original theory was based on congruence between partners' preferences. It means that the initial theory has not been solidly tested. We don't really know if things happen in the same way on both sides. For instance we do not know if acculturative stress - or attraction - simultaneously increases or decreases at both partners. Understanding what happens on both sides could help understand resistances and tensions that could hinder implementation.

Last, while researchers recognize that acculturative stress and acculturative attraction can emerge, former studies (with the exception of Very et al, 1996) have focused their attention on stress. As attraction should facilitate implementation, it should be included in investigations about acculturation in partnerships.

Our research aims at fulfilling these gaps, and at getting a better understanding about the role of acculturation in partnership performance.

We designed our research framework for responding to some other suggestions from researchers. Most cited studies were conducted in developed countries. We explored partnerships in Russia, an emerging economy. Following recommendations made in earlier works, and in line with Lee & al. (2019), we included diverse types of partnerships (acquisitions, joint ventures) that were negotiated and/or implemented. Our framework is described in the following paragraphs, starting with explanations about our choice of partnerships in the automotive industry in Russia.

RUSSIA AND THE CAR INDUSTRY

CULTURE IN THE CAR INDUSTRY

Our approach of culture endorses the definition given by Schein (1985) which focuses on values and attitudes, i.e. "how things ought to be". When examining companies establishing themselves abroad, scholars have mostly observed national culture. Besides, the last twenty years have seen a growing interest for research on organizational cultures. Next to this, studies on cultures specific to a professional group or industry are scarce, limiting sometime themselves to the opposition between private and public companies (Cullen 2004). In the cases that we have analyzed, however, we find numerous similarities between the ways automotive companies are organized or how they conduct business. These companies share a sectoral culture, a kind of sub-culturewhich superimposes itself to the national or organizational cultures.

The globalization of the automotive sectors started thirty years ago with the opening of new markets and the need to restructure activities. This move which was initiated by American groups, coincided with the growing use of practices created by Japanese manufacturers (Ijose, 2010). The approach gradually imposed itself to all players, establishing the volume produced as an essential touchstone of the system.

The globalization of the automotive system has been described by many scholars (for example, Boyer & Freyssenet, 2000; Colovic & Mayrhofer, 2008). The major objective of regional integration strategies was to exploit in the best way possible the geography, i.e. reducing costs by increasing the volumes of parts produced, taking advantage of lower wages when possible, tendering right across the Globe and promoting a strong standardization which leaves little space for adaptations (Schmid 2011). This first aspect of the system is imposing the harmonization of processes, the unification of costs and the full traceability of parts. These "car assemblers" (Humphrey 2000) need to rely on global suppliers (Sturgeon et al. 2009) who must demonstrate a solid competence and an ability to ensure a quality production on several production sites (Schmitt and Van Biesebroeck 2013). In such a context, transparency becomes a norm.

Placed in the center of the system, OEMs monitor the levels of internationalization or externalization of the industry, as well as the extent of the "spatial integration or disintegration" that seems needed (PIPAME, 2010). Mostly, they impose a specific approach of time aimed at reducing risks and increasing efficiency. Partnerships are constructed for long periods of time (7 years or over), which allow to involve suppliers in the development of innovative solutions and ensure availability of parts throughout the life of the model (Gules, Burges, and Lynch

1999). Because of this, contracts usually stipulate that the supplier must find an alternative if they need to stop production. Besides this condition, car manufacturers need a high flexibility in the way developments are conducted, mainly at the beginning, when it is very difficult to assess the time and money necessary. It is assumed that cost overruns are part of the investment for a long-term global contract. This feature requires a high flexibility from suppliers at both administrative and organizational levels.

Lastly, this sectoral culture is characterized by a strong interest for technological issue, necessary to ensure the viability of companies and the safety of drivers and passengers. Giving a central focus to technology creates an obsession for quality and tends to place all players above the usual concerns of other industries.

These cultural traits are described in Table 1.

Table 1: culture in the automotive industry

Main features of the globalized system	Major organizational consequences	Resulting behaviors (Values)
Use of economic geography (industrial globalization)	- Strong centralization - Standardization of production and parts (same processes and same prices everywhere) - Global suppliers	- Repeatability and trackability - Transparency - More importance given to processes than to personal relations
Specific time (reduction of risks and inherent costs)	- Global long-term contracts - Strong partnership - Flexibility and work by project - Parallel project organization	- Less importance of hierarchy - Agility
Importance of quality and technology	- Control systems - Externalized controls (at suppliers' level)	- Quality (reproducibility) - Feeling of superiority - Strong interest for the technology

RUSSIA'S CULTURE

Russia was marked in the early 90's by the brutal passage from a centrally planned economy to capitalism. The Soviet System has been described as highly bureaucratic and centralized, emphasizing top-down management. At the center of the organization, we found the various ministers relayed at local level by the enterprises' directors who concentrated a lot of power in their hands, issuing orders and bearing responsibility for the firms' results (Ivancevitch, DeFrank, and Gregory 1992). This centralized and autocratic system generated the emergence of several attitudes, such as the fear to talk openly or the preference given to information

received from unformal channels to those of any official media (Alas and Vadi 2004). The socialist system was the cumulation of a century-long history of forces which discouraged participative decision-making and risk-taking (Ivancevitch and al. 1992).

Since the transition from a central planned economy to a market economy, the numerous reforms implemented by the Russian government have failed to bring Russian capitalism into the modern age (Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova 2003). Several scholars are even speaking of the failure of the country modernization (Inozemtsev 2016). The institution deficiency has led to the surge of corruption and poor contract enforcement (Blanchard and Kremer 1997). Many Russian economic agents' behaviors, often considered senseless, are often rational reactions in front of the uncertainty

The long Soviet history had another consequence in the fact that it cut off the country from a large part of the world. As the nerve center of the Socialist World, Russia created and developed its own approach of business practices, using many inputs from the West that it highly transformed before processing. Remains of this period can be found in the persistence of the notion of the 'near abroad' (Shashenkov 1994), as well as in the idea that Russia would be following a 'unique path' different from what exists in Europe (Dubin 2002). Highly cultivated by the current Russian political authorities through the notion of a new Eurasianism (Smith 1999), this situation strengthens in the mind of many Russians the idea of the country's natural difference.

Regardless of any consideration on the Soviet period or weak institutions, scholars have described several features considered characteristic of the Russian business culture. A first key feature can be found in the importance of relations, an element which can take many forms. Russians attach the utmost importance to creating and maintaining networks (Butler and Purchase 2004). In a practical way, they thus tend to be more relativistic than their American counterparts, that is they reject universal rules when making ethical judgements (Robertson, Gilley, and Street 2003). Generally, Russians value much more networking (Salmi and Heikkilä 2015) and informal relations (Ledeneva 2006) to processes. Finally, the concept of blat (the use of personal networks) is still very important, even if it has evolved since Soviet times from a process to get access to certain resources to a way to "compensate for the failure of formal organizations" (Ledeneva 2009).

A second feature is to be found in the perception of time. To fight against the uncertainty of the Russian business environment, local entrepreneurs tend to concentrate on short time, adopting a "limited time horizon" (Grachev 2009:6; Veiga, Yanousas, and Bucholtz 1995:22). On a practical level, this often discourages Russians from elaborating complex plans, driving them

instead to adapting to the context. As Michailova (2000:102) wrote, "they tend to adapt to the environment rather than transforming it".

A third feature is linked to a vision of interpersonal relations based on power. This applies to relations between managers and subordinates, based on strong top-down connections (Aycan et al. 2000:196–206) in exchange of protection. It affects the way information is managed, since managers tend to avoid showing that they may have been influenced by their subordinates (Michailova and Husted 2003:65–67). At the level of customer/suppliers' relations, we find power games as well as a lack of transparency (Braguinsky and Mityakov 2015).

In synthesis, the characteristics that we identified describe working practices within the Russian economy. The impregnate the local car manufacturers and the traditional suppliers to the automotive industry (Avtovaz / Lada), as well as companies from other industries willing to invest in this sector. Consequently, studying partnership with foreign corporations, within the automotive sector, offers an interesting opportunity for investigating a specific cultural context anchored in a long local history.

METHODOLOGY

Our empirical study aims at exploring acculturation in partnerships from both sides of the partnership. We have selected partnerships in the Russian car industry for two reasons: first, the automotive industry has set up a strongly intertwined global system imposed to all players (Bourdin, Le Thiec, and Elissalde 2009; Ijose, 2010); dominated by Western companies. The globalized automotive industry presents an interesting case of a movement towards a "Westernized rule of law", propagating its standardized practices abroad (Dunfee and Warren 2001:191). In emerging countries, car manufacturers aim at deploying their practices in the partner factories, kindling a need for acculturation. Second, former research has studied acculturation in Western countries, but rarely in emerging countries. Russia, as described earlier, has a long history in the car industry, with companies that developed their work practices at the time of the Soviet Union. Consequently, partnerships in the Russian car industry constitute a relevant context for studying acculturation between Western companies and firms from emerging economies.

Russia is the World's widest country, having borders with Europe on its Wester side and with Asia on its Southern-Eastern side. Historical cultural differences might exist throughout the country, due to past commercial exchanges and wars with neighbors. It is worth noting that the car industry is concentrated in the Western part of Russia, that can be assumed to be relatively

homogeneous in terms of culture. More precisely, the companies of our Russian respondents come mainly from the 3 regions where most of the automotive industry is concentrated, i.e. the Moscow region, the Kaluga region 200 km to the South-West and the Togliatti region 1000 km to the East. In this context, it is difficult for us to identify regional differences. In contrast, we identified in our interviews differences in reactions depending on the degree of exposure to automotive culture and above all to the willingness to accept new constraints, either by conviction or by interest. We can cite, as an example, the potential Proseat partners, who eventually decided not to invest in the automotive industry, or the Avtovaz employees who defended the organizational culture of the acquired company.

It is also interesting to see that the Russians who have chosen to work for a Western company comment on the attitude of other Russians, those who work in former state enterprises or who come from other industrial sectors. More than regional differences, the analysis revealed oppositions linked to organizational or sectoral cultures.

To our knowledge, no studies have applied the acculturation framework considering simultaneously what happens at each partner, therefore our research is exploratory in nature. This explains why we used a qualitative inductive approach, based on a series of ex-post case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2006, 2014) to analyze acculturative stress and attraction. According to Pettigrew (1990), taking advantage of extreme situations (here, the difficulty of establishing partnerships) helps make the different features of the process "transparently observable".

We first elaborated a list of Western-Russian partnerships in the automotive industry over the period 2008-2017 using press news, including those that succeeded as well as those that failed at negotiation phase or later. We incorporated carmakers and their suppliers in our list. We then contacted the identified companies to ask for the permission to conduct interviews with managers involved in these deals. As shown in the description of cases in the next chapter, we could not conduct our research to the same extent each time, as several companies stopped looking for local partnerships after unlucky experiences, and one in particular decided from the beginning to work only with subsidiaries of Western companies.

In the companies that accepted, we globally conducted 34 interviews with 13 Russian managers or executives and with 16 Westerners (managers or executives from France, Austria, Germany, Australia). Some people were inteviewd two or even three times during successive years. The use of the relatively unprecise word "Westerner" follows a convention initiated by Soulsby & Clark (2007, p. 1437) to pinpoint entities or individuals with a longer experience of advanced

market economies (i.e. not exposed to a socialist economy). The interviewees, their companies and their partnership are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Partnerships and interviewees

CASE	CASE #	FUNCTION	NATIONALITY	COMPANY	ACTIVITY	TYPE OF PART-NERSHIP	DATE
PROSEAT	PW 1	CEO	Belgian	PROSEAT	Polyurethane subcontractor	Alliance	2013
	PW 2	Finance Vice-President	British				2013
	PW 3	Marketing Vice-President	Belgian				2013 2014
	PW 4	Controller	Belgian				2013
	PW 5	Development Manager	French				2013 2014 2015
	PW 6	Quality Director	Belgian				2014
	PW 7	Process Manager	Australian				2015
	PR1	CEO Russian Subsidiary	Russian				2013 2015
	PR2	HR Manager	Russian				2013
	PR3	Technical Manager	Russian				2013
	PR4	Shareholder	Russian	DEKOR	Polyurethane producer		2015
	PR5	Owner	Russian	FOAMLINE	Polyurethane producer		2013
	PR6	Lawyer	Russian	FOAMLINE			2013
	PW 8	CEO Russian	Austrian	SOTEX	Polyurethane subcontractor		2017
BASF Coatings	BR 1	Sales Manager Russia	Russian	BASF Coatings	Paint global supplier	Partnership and alliance	2017
	BW 1	CEO Russian Subsidiary	German	BASF Coatings			2013
PSA	PW 1	Plant Manager Russia	French	PSA	OEM Car Manufacturer	Partnership	2017
	PW 2	HR Manager Russia	French				2012
RENAULT	RW 1	Purchasing Manager Chemistry	Russian	RENAULT	OEM Car Manufacturer	Partnership	2017
	RR 1	Purchasing Manager Tires	Tires				2017
	RR 2	Product Manager Tires	Russian				2015
AVTOVAZ	AW 1	Strategic Cooperation Director	French	RENAULT-NISSAN	OEM Car Manufacturer	Acquisition	2015 2017
	AR 1	Juridical Manager	Russian	RENAULT / AVTOVAZ			2015

	AR 2	Project Manager	Russian	RENAULT / AVTOVAZ	OEM Car Manufacturer		2015
	AR 3	Cost Manager	Russian				2015
	AR 4	CEO French subsidiary	Russian				2012
FAURECIA	FW 1	CEO Russian subsidiary	French	FAURECIA	Global supplier (seats)	Alliance (attempt)	2015
VOLKSWAGEN	VW 1	Purchasing Director	German	VOLSKWAGEN	OEM Car Manufacturer	Alliance (attempt)	2015
	VW 2	Purchasing Manager (chemicals)	German				2016

We conducted the interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire with open questions about the partnership process and its inherent challenges. The choice of a non-directive interview was made for several reasons:

- Former tools employed in the management field for measuring acculturation have been developed, either in the context of acquisitions, or for studying group dynamics at work. As we encompass diverse types of partnerships in our study, the measurement tool developed for investigating the context of acquisitions does not apply: this tool has been elaborated to examine acculturative stress and attraction when implementing the socio-structural integration of the two companies that merge (Very et al., 1996). Looking at how psycho-sociologists measure stress and/or attraction in the workplace, we found that many used open questions (see for instance Amason et al., 1999).

- Open questions allow the interviewee to get a grip on the interview (Magioglou, 2008). This kind of interview aims at obtaining a detailed description of the topic under study. The respondents give their perceptions and analyses of the topic. They have much more freedom than they would in the case of closed questions. Consequently, the approach facilitates the emergence, during the discussion, of what they consider most important.

We asked interviewees to describe their experience of partnerships between Russian and Western companies, to identify what has been easily done and what they found attractive in the partnership, to explain the difficulties they faced and the misunderstandings between parties that emerged throughout the process. In certain cases, we met the actors a second and even a third time to make them react to the first information collected. Interviews lasted between one hour and a half and two hours. Interviews with Russian managers were done in English or Russian according to the situation, translated if necessary and typed. Other interviews were made in English or French and were typed.

In this paper, we focused on the answers to two questions:

- What were the major difficulties that you faced in the partnership?
- What did you find attractive in the partnership?

Answers could concern the creation of the partnership and/or its subsequent management. The interviewer invited the respondent to speak about these two phases when appropriate.

As highlighted in Table 1, we were not able to collect systematically Russian perceptions and Westerners perceptions for all the cases. This is why our analysis focused on identifying topics common to each population (either Russian managers, or Western managers). Researchers in the field of social movements theory have identified the relevance of acculturation theory at individual as well as group level. In our case, we used individual interviews for identifying some common ground in a population (either the Russians or the Westerners). Only topics that were cited by a majority of interviewees were kept. Interviews were analyzed separately by two researchers who looked for identifying factors of acculturative stress and acculturative attraction in each discourse. The researchers then shared their thoughts and converged quickly, in one round, on resulting factors.

FINDINGS

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF CASES

Our unit of analysis is the individual manager participating in a partnership (at any stage). We describe hereunder the partnerships about which we collected information.

PROSEAT

When setting up their business in Russia upon request of their customers, Proseat wanted to launch a joint venture with the leading Russian producer of polyurethane foam. The discussions did not lead to an agreement. They set up instead a sub-contracting agreement with a smaller Russian polyurethane producer. The partnership allowed them to manufacture products complying with the car manufacturer's requirement. A clash about transfer prices caused the Russian partner to abandon the project, obliging Proseat to set up an alternative solution involving their major Russian competitor.

BASF Coatings

The German Group BASF had been one of the first company to establish itself in Russia. For some of their Coatings activity, they worked with Russian partners who distributed their products. During their long presence, the Group had several opportunities of setting up agreement with Russian partners, however these only worked in one case.

PSA

The car maker chose a "greenfield approach", building a plant close to the Volkswagen site. At the time of the interview, the company had already an experience of 6 to 7 years of the market. They were trying to develop partnerships with Russian suppliers in order to reduce the taxes on foreign content and the costs. This move belonged to a general action of russification, the only expatriate left being the Plant Manager.

RENAULT

Renault came in Russia in the nineties, and created in 1998 a production plant in Moscow, under the form of a joint venture with the City of Moscow. Renault eventually acquired the whole capital. At the time of the interviews, Renault was entering into a russification phase, trying very hard to create partnerships with Russian suppliers, mainly those who had been working for many years with Avtovaz.

AVTOVAZ

Avtovaz was the larger car manufacturer in Russia. After the collapse of the communist system, the company's sales decreased dramatically. At the end of year 2007, Renault launched the acquisition of Avtovaz. In February 2008, the French company acquired 25% of the share plus one share to have a blocking minority. The first phase of the integration, organized only at the levels of Top managers, was failure. A second phase was launched at a lower level, creating numerous international project groups. The interviewees belonged to these groups.

FAURECIA

When launching its business in Russia, the company considered a partnership with a Russian sub-contractor which had been for many years an official supplier to Avtovaz in Togliatti. The negotiations were rather short (around 6 months). They did not lead to an agreement and Faurecia decided to build their own plant.

VOLKSWAGEN

Volkswagen set up a production plant in Russia in 2008. From the beginning, in compliance with their "greenfield strategy", they decided to work mainly with Russian transplants of their global suppliers and to train young Russians to their company processes.

MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Our findings will be presented in three parts: first, the identification of factors of acculturative stress for Russian managers on one side, and for Western managers; second, the identification of factors of acculturative attraction for the same two populations; third, a multi-case analysis of similarities and differences between the factors of stress and attraction pertaining to each population.

Factors of acculturative stress for Russian managers

Most Russian managers perceive the same four factors of stress associated with the partnership: projection in the future, mistrust of decisions coming from the West, introducing organizational flexibility; and, maybe with a lower impact the mistrust of Westernized Russians

Projection in the future means a difficulty to work with mid-term (around 5 years) strategies of Western companies. Russians are used to work with very short-term decisions of very long-term plans (as at the Soviet Union time). When Westerners announce a plan and explain that it gives a direction, but can evolve over time, Russian managers feel uncomfortable.

> *Nobody is sure about tomorrow. We need to survive today. And this is why nobody is prepared like Foamline to invest in a long-term project. People like to have money today. And this is the main characteristic of Russian companies. It is like this. (CEO Proseat Russia)*

The mistrust of decisions coming from the West signifies a lack of confidence in decisions that are taken at the Western company headquarters for implementation in Russia. Russian managers systematically think that these decisions have been taken without integrating the specificities of their country. They think that the Western company does not consider Russians seriously. They tend to react strongly against these decisions.

> *The French seem to be looking down at the Russian organization. They do not show it openly, because the French who come now have a good listening ability, but we have the feeling that Russia is not taken seriously or frightens foreigners. (Project Cost Manager at Avtovaz)*

Western companies generally want to introduce flexibility, often through project management, inside the very hierarchical organization of their Russian counterpart. This will to change the organization creates stress because many managers in the Russian organization do not want to have their position impacted by the change. For instance, many top and middle managers are used to impose their decisions to lower hierarchical levels, and they don't share information because it is one of their sources of power. Accordingly, introducing changes creates a lot of uncertainty in existing hierarchies.

> *I did not try to change this. It is clear that when you speak to your boss, there is certain distance. And this belongs to a certain mentality. When you speak to your boss, he is not someone who should train you, ho should support you, who should guide you. He is just someone who is above you. He is not in charge of you, but he is there to punish you. He is some-one who occupies a higher position… So I can just shut up. (Renault Project Manager, purchasing dpt)*

The "pure" Russian managers interviewed face difficulties with those Russians that adopt the Western way of doing business. Their conception of the partnership remains the adoption of a new organizational model but respecting Russian specificities. They consider Westernized Russian managers as betrayers, and it creates a social divide inside the Russian company. Some managers say that it is essentially a conflict of generation with younger managers more open to Westernization.

> *...then, since she [CEO Proseat Russia] has always been working for Western companies, I think she may have had difficulty to understand the specificity of the Russian market. (Lawyer, Foamline)*

Factors of acculturative stress for Western managers

A majority of Western managers cite four factors of stress: projection in the future, the "not possible" syndrome (introducing organizational flexibility), information and communication and ethical behavior.

The projection in the future means the difficulty of Russian managers to function according to a mid-term plan. It requires a lot of effort to incite them to work according to such plan because Russians do not believe in this way of functioning. Thus, the implementation of the strategic plan creates a lot of anxiety for Western managers.

> *...typically, what differentiates strongly Russians from Europeans, Westerners, ... it is the fact that they have a very short-term vision. These people are capable to elaborate 20-year plan to launch a spatial mission, but in business, they look 1é months ahead maximum. All what they can get in these 12 months, they will take it, and they don't care for the next months (CEO BASF Vostok)*

> *We say : it is the plan. And between French managers, we agree that, if the plan does not work 100%, it is not important. But for Russians, it is difficult to understand (Renault Product Group, Sales Manager)*

Another source of stress comes from the fact that the spontaneous reaction to any decision made by Westerners is: "it is not possible". This reaction is often associated with the administrative Russian culture. For any change, contracts need to be elaborated and signed and it takes sometimes a lot of time. For social changes, employees refer to the Russian law that, according to them, forbids the proposed new social order. Also, introducing flexibility in the organization looks very challenging. The "not possible" syndrome creates anxiety because it means that changing the organization will need more delay than expected by Western managers.

No, it is not possible, it is complex. The first thing I hear is "this time it will be complex". But I insist. Then people say "it is the law". I look for the local laws, I ask someone to interpret them for me, and I see that ii is not so tricky. (PSA Russia CEO and Plant Manager)

The French manager is lost. He feels he has a wall to climb. One he has climbed it, he finds another wall behind. For instance, a new buying contract requires at least 23 signatures at Avtovaz, with at least one person that will be against this contract… In some cases, I have heard about 90 signatures. You are lost in the flow of required signatures, in the papers and people are discouraged when they don't understand the whole process. Each time you ask something, it is not possible. (Renault Cooperation Director Eurasia)

Another problem is that in Russia, there is no delegation of authority as the one we have at Renault-Nissan. The CEO does not give its confidence under a certain level of responsibility (Renault Product Group Sales Manager)

A third source of stress comes from the lack of information flows inside Russian companies. Western managers are not informed of issues that could create trouble in operations. Thus, they are unable to anticipate problems.

I said to a supplier yesterday : you realize, you had an issue with a supplier , you have known it for 3 months, but you did not inform us. Even your sales department did not know. And you called us yesterday to say that you cannot send us the components, you are crazy! (Renault Product Group Sales Manager)

A big topic of course…it's still information flow in the organization that is much more less than in, let's say, when I look in the headquarter in Germany… What do I disclose? What do I exchange with the other? It is still a little bit different. Information is still seen as a kind of asset, so once you open it to other, it is not anymore the asset that you have, if you know it for yourself. Therefore this is somehow a kind of topic where certain people are then very reluctant and keep the things for themselves. (CEO BASF Vostok)

The fourth category of factors that generates stress for Westerners is associated with non-ethical behavior. Non ethical behavior starts with absenteeism which constitutes a huge issue, but also with corruption or counterfeiting practices.

My first job is to make people come at work. I changed the bonus system… I cut the bonus if people don't come. Because it is not fair that those who don't come penalize the other ones. But the bonus does not entirely solve the problem… People don't care about how they

influence performance and how they overload those at work with the tasks that absents do not do. (Renault Product Group Sales Manager)

Authorizations are a lengthy process and again, you need a lot of patience. You need a lot of time to get the thing starting. I have to say we as a company did not run into that one, therefore what you always hear is also topics of corruption here. In BASF, you can imagine we are a big company, we have extremely strict compliance rules. (CEO BASF Vostok)

Factors of acculturative attraction for Russian managers

Russian managers perceive two main factors of attraction: eagerness to learn new techniques and processes, ease of following very strict processes

Russian managers welcome Western partners that bring new techniques and methods for enhancing the competitiveness of the Russian car industry. It is worth noting that ideally they would like to integrate these new techniques without changing their behaviors: for them, Russians know better how to behave in the Russian context. Thus, attraction does not concern management, it is specifically linked to newness in operations.

> *We were very accurate and precise how to do. This is true... The people from Proseat were impressed how we absorbed everything. (Shareholder, Dekor)*

Another factor of attraction is associated with the fact that Westerners aim at introducing very strict processes in the car factories. For instance, strict processes dedicated to quality control are appreciated by local managers, and quality enhancement looks easy to reach than initially expected by Westerners.

> *[When you look at] Renault plant here. People said "it will not work, it is there is a lot of suspicion, you have people from Central Asia..." It will be bad quality. It is a complete « cliche image », and wrong. Because people who work in production, they work on Renault standards, and they are very strict.in terms of production, with disciplinary codes, and everything. (Renault Product Purchase Manager)*

Factors of acculturative attraction for Western managers

Western managers identify two main factors of acculturative attraction when partnering in Russia: the young generation and the respect of hierarchy.

The young generation looks eager to learn new management methods like project management. Westerners often rely on young people coming out of University and give them responsibilities.

These young people do not care about Russians attached to the old Russian system with a strong hierarchy and no sharing of responsibilities.

I have very good young managers around 30 years old, who must interact with Russians in their fifties: it does not work easily in many cases. (CEO Faurecia Russia)

This is what we have done. In 80% of cases, I have employed young students with technical background who could speak foreign languages. And I always worked in this way. In my teams, I had people who spoke English or German. Not everyone could speak both languages. And little by little, they were all in touch with our Russian suppliers. When I left, I had 60 people, of which only 6 Germans. And the rest were Russians who had learn to work together. (Volkswagen Purchasing Director)

Another factor of attraction cited by a majority of Western managers emerges during the implementation of the partnership. Relationships with the Russian top-managers are generally very conflictual in a first phase, but Westerners learn how to deal with them. Westerners need to impose their decisions and hold steady the chosen direction, then Russians will follow because they respect their Western boss who sticks to what he has decided.

… we got into each other, and then you are respected. There is an emotional side of relationships where you need to show that I am a strong man, and you are also a strong man. It is somewhat basic: we argue, I show that I keep my direction, he shows the same, and then we can discuss in a quieter atmosphere. You need to have this fight very early to show that you are strong and powerful. (Renault Product Group Purchasing Manager)

… you need to be consistent in your decisions with the Russians, because they have this culture of power. When they see that you don't deviate from the course taken, they will follow you. (Renault Cooperation Director Eurasia)

Acculturative reactions from both sides

Stress and attraction occurs at both partners, during the negotiation phase and/or during the implementation of the partnership. We hereunder give a more detailed picture of these occurrences.

Stress and attraction perceived by each partner

As our quotes show, Russians and Westerners feel some stress associated with what happens in the partnership. Whatever the type of case, all the interviewees have cited at least one factor of stress and one factor of attraction. For those who participated in signed partnerships, they identified the emergence of stress or attraction at diverse moments of the process. Sometimes, stress emerges on Russian side following decisions that were taken by Westerners. Other times,

Russian reactions to Westerners' decisions created stress for Western managers. Acculturative stress and attraction can arise throughout the negotiation and implementation process.

Comparison of factors of stress and attraction

The following table compiles the factors of acculturative stress and the factors of acculturative attraction for both populations. The comparison of factors identified by each population shows similarities and specificities.

Table 3: factors of stress and attraction for each population

	RUSSIAN MANAGERS	WESTERN MANAGERS
FACTORS OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS	- projection in the future, - mistrust of decisions coming from the West, - introducing organizational flexibility, - mistrust of Westernized Russians	- projection in the future, - the "not possible" syndrome (introducing organizational flexibility), - information and communication, - ethical behavior
FACTORS OF ACCULTURATIVE ATTRACTION	- eagerness to learn new techniques and processes, - ease of following very strict processes	- the young generation, - the respect of hierarchy

Projection in the future generates stress for both parties: Russians don't understand the usefulness of mid-term plans and Westerners struggle for imposing them. Introducing organizational flexibility creates stress on both sides: the questioning of the traditional strong hierarchy engenders anxiety for Russian managers, while Westerners need to deal with the "not possible" syndrome.

Other factors of acculturative stress pertain to each population: Russians are stressed by decisions coming from Western headquarters without any consideration for the local context. Anxiety emerges for Westerners discovering the lack of information and communication flows in the Russian organization, as well as non-ethical behaviors - from their point of view-.

Factors of acculturative attraction look specific to each population. While Russians are attracted by the access to hard knowledge (techniques, strict processes), Westerners find advantages associated with power relations in Russia.

Interestingly, one factor of stress for Russians is perceived attractive by Westerners. This factor is associated with a social divide associated with a generational conflict: Young managers are eager to behave and manage in a Westernized way, while traditional older Russians stay attached to the Russian way of behaving and managing. It is worth noticing that most Russians

that we interviewed were rather old. If we had interviewed younger managers, they would have classified this factor as attractive instead of stressful.

DISCUSSION

We used the acculturation framework for deciphering the influence of culture on the management of cross-border partnerships in the context of the Russian automotive industry. Our findings extend prior research by drawing a more precise picture of acculturation in partnerships. They first show that acculturative stress and attraction arise at both parties. Former studies have generally analyzed acculturation looking at one partner. Research conducted on acquisition investigated acculturation on the acquired firm side (Very et al., 1996). Reactions to acculturation occur on both sides. Therefore, our research underlines the importance of simultaneously analyzing what happens on each side of a cross-border partnership. The dynamics of acculturation, which have been found to influence performance (Very et al., 1996, for acquisitions) cannot be fully understood by investigating only the perceptions of one partner. As acculturative stress has been associated with lower commitment (Buono et al., 1985; Sales and Mirvis, 1984), identifying the emergence of stress at both partners should contribute, if this stress is managed, to the future performance of the partnership.

Many studies dealing with reactions to acculturation focused on the arousal of stress. Our findings highlight that factors of attraction are perceived by each partner. If people are attracted by techniques, processes, behaviors or management practices, this attractiveness can represent an opportunity to make people work together. Building an integration plan on such foundation is likely to facilitate the implementation of the partnership, and therefore to generate future economic performance.

Our findings also show that acculturative stress and attraction emerge all along the process. For instance, attraction of Russians for Western technology generally appears very early, at negotiation time. Attraction felt by Westerners for young and motivated managers emerges during negotiation for some respondents, or in the course of integration for other ones. Stress stemming from the "not possible" syndrome can rise throughout the whole negotiation and implementation process. Decisions undertaken by Western managers in the course of implementation give sometimes birth to stress felt by Russians. Accordingly, the influence of acculturation on implementation cannot be reduced to the initial congruence between preferred modes of integration (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988). The theoretical model proposed by these authors needs to be completed in order to reflect the influence of acculturation on implementation.

The comparison between our two populations shows a mix of similarity, specificity and opposition between factors of stress and attraction cited by each one. Figure 1 synthetizes our results. Some factors are common, others are specific to each group, and one is perceived stressful for one party and attractive by the second one.

Figure 1: linkages between factors of acculturation for each population
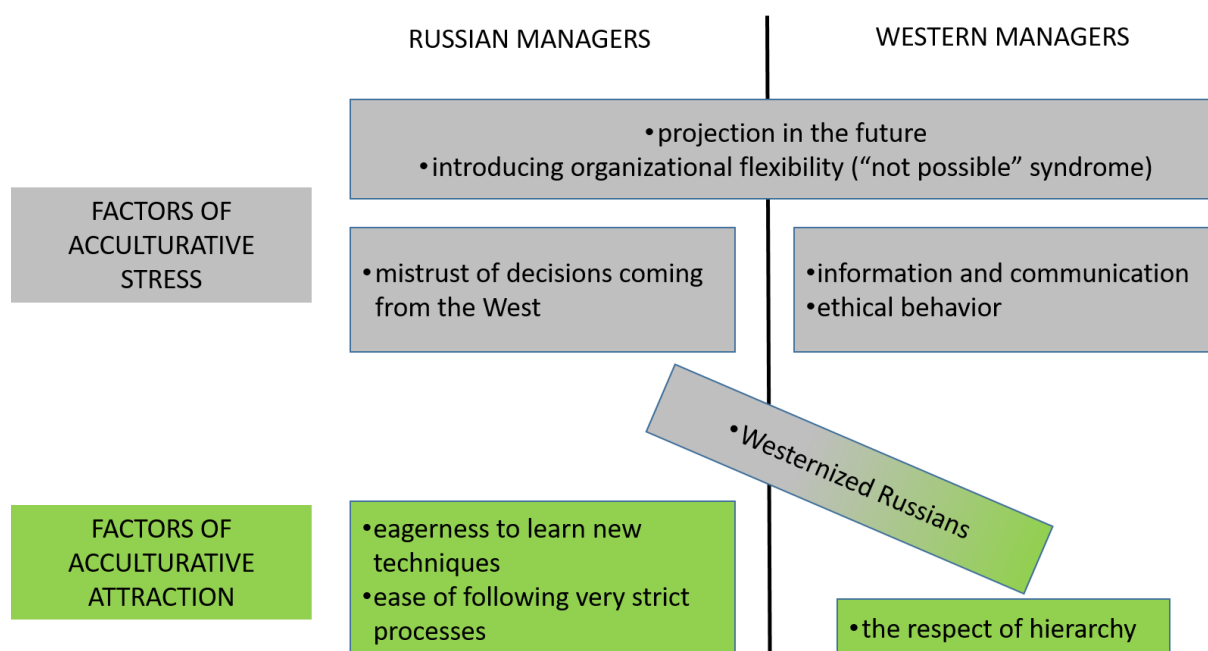
In synthesis, our findings lead us far beyond the sole existence of an initial congruence. The implementation of a partnership should be facilitated by the continuous attention of top-managers to the emergence of stress and attraction on each side of the partnership. If the arousal of stress or attraction is detected early, managers can act accordingly. Attraction can contain ingredients useful for implanting changes. Stress is likely to generate resistance to change, so actions that contribute to reduce the level of stress should be taken. In addition to the initial congruence between preferred modes of acculturation, the attention given to acculturative reactions all along the implementation process and the subsequent set of managerial actions undertaken are likely to influence the economic outcome of the partnership.

We chose to focus on the Russian context characterized by a strong culture, largely forged during the Soviet Union period in the car industry. Our findings underline the social divide based on generations in Russia, where younger managers adopt Western methods of management and organization, while older managers are stressed by this Western managerial influence. This is illustrated in our study by the fact that young Russian managers are seen as

traitors by older ones, but are identified by Western managers as an attractive opportunity to introduce change.

In other words, the acculturation framework offers an interesting way to identify societal evolutions and their consequences on business with foreign countries.

In term of managerial implications, our research shows the interest for managers of foreign partnership to keep attention at these factors of stress and attraction that emerge on both sides of the deal. This attention should be brought all along the implementation phase. Factors of acculturative stress should be taken seriously as they are likely to affect the implementation of the partnership strategy and, as a consequence, influence negatively performance. It is not enough to identify the emergence of stress in his/her own company: attention should be also given to sources of anxiety in the partnering organization, because these sources could differ from the ones perceived on home side. Actions that could contribute to decrease the level of stress at both companies should be considered. At the same time, what is found attractive on one side constitutes a basis to exploit in order to bring change in the expected strategic direction. Identifying factors of attraction is likely to facilitate the introduction of changes.

It is important to change the attitude of Westerners towards the national culture or the organizational culture of the companies with which they come into contact. What makes sense for Russians can be misunderstood by Westerners. Western managers should be careful before deciding to modify or close operations they consider useless or even absurd: before deciding, it is important to evaluate if decisions will be perceived as a rejection or a disparagement of the Russian way of management. Several interlocutors from Avtovaz praised the French managers' ability to listen to Russians. However, they felt deep down inside themselves a denigration of their culture, which they expressed using terms bringing out the suffering caused by this situation. Better understanding the underlying reasons for certain operations or behaviors should help to find the right arguments to enhance change.

Furthermore, as shown by the Proseat case, the Russian partners have well integrated the technical aspects, to the point of surprising Westerners by the quality of the final product. When we analyze what happened, we notice the great attention paid to the training and the explanations concerning technical processes. Besides this however, little attention seems to have been paid to explaining certain relational habits or certain ways of considering cooperation between companies in the sector. We therefore recommend spending time explaining the way of being and answering questions from Russian interlocutors. Again, it is easier here to find the right arguments if we better understand the underlying reasons for Russian operations, rejections or blockages.

Our study presents some limitations. We did not collect systematically answers from both sides for each partnership, so our findings are based on an aggregation of perceptions by Russians or by Westerners. Further studies could find ways to collect perceptions on both sides of the same deals in order to confirm our findings. Another limitation is associated with the small size of our sample. While we found a general convergence inside each group, further studies could usefully try to corroborate our findings using bigger samples and quantitative methods.

We explored acculturation in the context of foreign partnerships in the Russian car industry. As most firms of this local industry are deeply impregnated by the Soviet Union period in their organization and management practices, it is possible that our results are not transferable to other industries and other emerging countries. Our choice of this context was motivated by the search of an environment characterized by standardized practices (the car industry) and very contrasted cultures and administrative heritages (Russia and the West). Further research should test if findings remain relevant in other contexts.

CONCLUSION

Our research aimed at deciphering the acculturation that occurs in the course of cross-border partnerships between firms from Russia and firms from Western countries. Our findings emphasize the relevance of the acculturation framework for analyzing factors that may slow down or accelerate the implementation of these partnerships. Both acculturative stress and attraction emerge at each partner, sometimes based on the same factors, sometimes on factors specific to one party. Also, a factor of stress for one partner can constitute a factor of attraction for the other one. The acculturation picture offers a complex view of cultural dynamics in partnerships, but at the same time informs about factors influencing performance. Attention given to the emergence of acculturative reactions is likely to contribute to the success of the partnership. In addition, the acculturation framework allows to understand changes occurring inside the Russian society, with successive generations behaving differently at work and more or less opened to the adoption of new managerial practices.

This is why the acculturation approach, which has been largely neglected by researchers in management, constitutes a relevant way to analyze what is at stakes in cross-border alliances and acquisitions. Further exploration using this approach looks fruitful for improving our knowledge of cultural dynamics at work in strategic partnerships.

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