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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MISCOMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE WORK GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

As the workforce in the United States has become increasingly culturally diverse, there is an urgent need to understand the processes in culturally diverse work groups. Although quite a few studies have examined conflict and communication breakdown in diverse groups, this study is one of the few that investigate the relationships among verbal miscommunication and task, process, and relationship types of conflict in culturally diverse work groups. Data were collected from 222 individuals currently working in culturally diverse organizations across the U.S. Exploratory factor analysis, multiple regression analysis, and canonical correlation analysis were used to test hypotheses. Present study findings identified significant positive relationships between verbal miscommunication and two types of conflict in culturally diverse work groups. Discussion of implications, recommendations for practitioners, limitations, and suggestions for future research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity in work groups in the United States reflects a cultural mosaic of work environments in organizations around the world. Interaction of multiple cultures brings the need for effective intercultural communication practices (Marga, 2010). Cultural diversity increases the complexity of the work processes and interactions among members of culturally diverse work teams and groups (Aritz & Walker, 2010). Moderately heterogeneous groups experience relational conflict, significant communication problems, and low team identity that negatively impact the effectiveness of team's work (Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997). Further, "increasing team diversity is associated with increasing levels of both process and delegation conflict" (Jäger & Raich, 2011, p. 234). Findings on heterogeneous teams reveal reduced satisfaction with the team work and substandard team performance (Ravlin, Thomas, & Ilsev, 2000; Earley & Mosakoski, 2000; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999).

While group and teamwork have become essential to organizations, the complexity of cultural diversity and intra-group interactions among culturally diverse group members have not been examined thoroughly. Moreover, findings reported a few decades ago may not hold true now due to globalization and a different cultural profile of the workforce. The purpose of this study is to empirically investigate the relationship between verbal miscommunication and intra-group conflict (task, process, and relationship) in culturally diverse work groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research reports on investigations of perception and miscommunication in the construction industry, performance evaluations, and the subjective nature of consumer beliefs

(Aritz & Walker, 2010; English, 2005). These studies reveal that the communication problems are widespread. Miscommunication could possibly result in lower productivity, low employee motivation or the lack of employee motivation, job dissatisfaction, work-related stress, escalated conflict, and loss of customers (Aritz & Walker, 2010; English, 2005).

There are several reasons of miscommunication between supervisors and their subordinates. One reason to note is that supervisors underestimate the complexity of communication and its "crucial importance in getting the job done". (Ramsey, 2009, p. 17). The most common causes of miscommunication include "misunderstanding the nature of communication, misinterpreting the supervisor's role in communication, and undervaluing the importance of communication (Ramsey, 2009, p. 16).

Ongoing literature reports mixed results from empirical studies on the positive and negative impact of conflict to groups and organizations (Jehn, 1995; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012). The history of research on conflict reveals that early organizational conflict theorists thought of conflict as dysfunctional to organizations while contemporary researchers agree that conflict is beneficial under some circumstances (Tjosvold, 1991).

Jehn (1995) analyzed the structure of 105 work groups and management teams to find out whether conflict can be beneficial. Multiple methods were used to examine the effects of conflict on both individual- and group-level variables to provide a more refined model of intra-group conflict. Results show that type of conflict and the structure of the group produce the setting for conflict. Relationship and task conflicts are negatively associated with individuals' satisfaction, liking of other group members, and intent to remain in the group. In groups performing very routine tasks, disagreements about the task are detrimental to group functioning. Further, in groups performing non-routine tasks, disagreements about the tasks do not have a detrimental effect, and in some cases, such disagreements are quite beneficial. Contrary to expectations, norms encouraging open discussion of conflict have not been always advantageous.

METHODOLOGY

The verbal miscommunication was assessed on two levels: Peer, or among group members, and in supervisor-subordinate dyads. The focus was on verbal miscommunication that had occurred in work settings on work-related issues. Work groups in this study include team members and supervisor-subordinate dyads. In a group of two or more people, cultural diversity is any difference in which the individuals vary on the cultural dimension (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995). A survey questionnaire was developed to measure the levels of miscommunication at the peer, or group level and supervisor-subordinate level. Six items measured the presence of miscommunication in a culturally diverse workplace at these levels on a seven-point Likert scale.

The intra-group conflict measure assessed the type of conflict that respondents' experienced in their work groups and with their supervisors. Task conflict was defined an awareness of differences in opinions regarding a work task (Jehn&Mannix, 2001). Process conflict was stated to be an awareness of differences regarding the way for atask to be accomplished (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999) while relationship conflict was an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities that includes emotions (Jehn&Mannix, 2001).

This study used the conflict instrument of Jehn and Mannix's (2001) emanating from the work of Jehn (1995) with process conflict items from Shah and Jehn's (1993). The internal reliability was good as demonstrated by the Cronbach α for the relationship, task, and process types of conflict of .94, .94, and .93, respectively. To examine the amount and type of conflict in the work groups, nine items measured the presence of conflict on a seven-point Likert scale.

Hypotheses

H1: Miscommunication is positively related to task conflict in culturally diverse work groups.

H2: Miscommunication is positively related to process conflict in culturally diverse work groups.

H3: Miscommunication is positively related to relationship conflict in culturally diverse work groups.

Sample and Data Collection

The study sample was comprised of 222 members of culturally diverse work groups employed at diversified companies based in the U.S. The sample was drawn from companies listed on DiversityInc. (2013) and *Black Enterprise Magazine* (2013) lists that represent cultural diversity well. The sample respondents were invited to participate voluntarily. A pilot study was conducted to test and refine the instrument. The study survey was then electronically delivered to 870 participants who were assured of the anonymity of their responses with a consent form. The collected data yielded a sample size of 375 and a response rate of 43.10 percent. The data was further cleaned, which yielded a final usable sample of 222 observations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

The sample was comprised of 167 male respondents (75.2 percent) and 55 female respondents (24.8 percent). The majority of the participants considered English as their primary language of communication (78.8 percent) at work. The data demonstrated that the study sample was well diversified. The majority of the respondents were Whites/Caucasians (46.4 percent) followed by respondents from Asia (25.7 percent) and American Indians / Native Americans (11.3 percent). Hispanics accounted for 6.8 percent and Blacks accounted for 5.0 percent of the sample. The distribution of the ethnicity/race of the participants' supervisors was quite broad: majority of the supervisors were White/Caucasian (35.1 percent), one-fifth were Asians (21.2 percent), followed by almost equal numbers of Black / African American supervisors (9.0 percent) and American Indian / Native American supervisors (9.9 percent),

Results

Several statistic measures were used to test the significance of the canonical correlations. Wilk's lambda ($\lambda = .022$) was one of such statistic that was reported significant for this study at confidence level of .05. Other multivariate tests of statistical significance reported for this study were Pillai's Trace = .023 and Hotelling's Trace = .020, all statistically significant at confidence level of .05.

Two miscommunication variables assessing miscommunication at the peer level and the supervisor level were independent variables while three types of conflict were the dependent variables for this analysis. Therefore, there was the Miscommunication latent factor and the Conflict latent factor with the objective of maximizing the variates for the correlation between

them. Two functions were reported with the value of the first canonical correlation of .25502. The squared root was .06503, which meant that about 7 percent of variance was explained by the first canonical function. The first reported canonical correlation was the highest and the remaining canonical correlation was not significant. The multivariate tests of significance reported statistical significance level of .05 (Table 1).

Table 1
Multivariate Tests of Significance of Canonical Correlation Model

Test Name	Value	Approx. F	Hypoth. DF	Error DF	Sig. of F
Pillai's Trace	.06579	2.47175	6.00	436.00	.023
Hotelling's Trace	.07032	2.53138	6.00	432.00	.020
Wilk's λ	.93426	2.50175	6.00	434.00	.022
Eigenvalues and Canonical Correlations					
Root No.	Eigenvalue	Pct.	Cum. Pct.	Canon Cor.	Sq. Cor
1	.06956	98.92140	98.92140	.25502	.06503
2	.00076	1.07860	100.00000	.02753	.00076

Note: Multivariate Tests of Significance (S = 2, M = 0, N = 107 1/2)

Table 2
Canonical Model Correlation Results

<i>Canonical correlations between dependent and canonical variables</i>	
Variable	Function No. and Value
	1
Miscommunication (Peer)	.97822
Miscommunication (Supervisor)	.70368
<i>Correlations between covariates and canonical variables</i>	
	1
Conflict (Task)	.71450
Conflict (Process)	.67282
Conflict (Relationship)	.29164

The correlation matrix reported high and positive correlations between the independent variables and canonical variables. Correlations between covariates and canonical variables were also positive suggesting that the relationships between the dependent and independent variables in this study were positive as well (Table 2).

The correlation coefficients of the first canonical variate revealed that miscommunication at the peer level (.97822) was positive and more influential in forming the first canonical variate than at the supervisor level (.70368) as reported in (Table 2). Both coefficients were quite close, suggesting that miscommunication levels at both peer and supervisor levels were significant. The correlation coefficients also revealed that Relationship conflict (.71450) and Task conflict (.67282) were positively significant while Process conflict (.29164) was positive but not significant.

Therefore, Hypothesis1, which stated that miscommunication was positively related to task conflict in culturally diverse work groups, was supported by the data. Hypothesis2 predicted that miscommunication was positively related to process conflict and it was supported by the data. Hypothesis3 stated that miscommunication was positively related to relationship conflict in culturally diverse work groups and it was not supported by the data.

CONCLUSION

This study empirically investigated the relationships between verbal miscommunication and three types of conflict in culturally diverse work groups in organizations based in the United States. The verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups was examined at the peer and supervisor levels. Present study makes a meaningful contribution to the extant research on the variables of interest. Further, this study takes empirical research further and reveals that a significant relationship exists between verbal miscommunication and conflict in culturally diverse work groups.

Previous studies have demonstrated mixed results on task and process types of conflict variables. To date, the process conflict has been the least empirically examined. The present study contributes to the limited research that exists on this variable by presenting findings that demonstrate a significant positive relationship between process conflict and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups. Further, present research confirms previously found significant positive relationship between task conflict and verbal miscommunication in culturally diverse work groups.

Contrary to the previous studies, the current research did not find a significant positive relationship between miscommunication and relationship conflict in culturally diverse work groups. Future researchers may want to further examine the association between these variables.

[References available upon the request]

IS UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE A CULTURAL DIMENSION?

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ABSTRACT

The world is shrinking rapidly with the advent of faster communication, transportation and financial flows (Kotler et al., 2014). To understand global business and culture, a considerable number of people rely upon Hofstede's 1980's findings. This paper looks at the validity of those findings in general, his cultural dimensions, and uncertainty avoidance. This paper uses naturalistic observation and proposes that uncertainty avoidance is not a cultural dimension but depends on the organizational level at which the person works and how much knowledge intensive work the position requires.

HOW WILL THE 2014 WESTERN ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA IMPACT ITS RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BRICS ALLIANCE?

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ABSTRACT

What will the ongoing Western economic sanctions being imposed on Russia for its actions in the Ukraine do to its relationships with the other countries of the BRICS alliance? Is the situation splitting the group or strengthening it? Could there actually be a significant downside to the sanctions for the U.S. and the EU in the future? Will the sanctions actually cause Russia to stop its “support” for the Ukrainian separatists? Do economic sanctions actually work? These are the questions this paper will attempt to answer.

INTRODUCTION

Since February, 2014 when the succession movement in the Crimean region of the Ukraine gained worldwide publicity and brought focus on the succeeding Russian annexation of the region as all of the world sat by and watched the TV news reports. Quite quickly the West, mainly the U.S. and the EU, reacted. The reaction was to threaten and then impose ever increasing economic sanctions on Russia as they continued to expand their involvement.

As a founding member of the BRICS alliance speculation began to crop up as to what the reaction and impact would be from the other BRICS members (Brazil, India, China and South Africa). Would it split the alliance? Would they support Russia or the West in this situation?

On March 18 the spokesperson for the Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, claimed in a BBC interview that Russia would just switch to new partners when the economic sanctions being imposed by the European Union and the United States began. He highlighted that the world isn't unipolar and Russia has strong ties with other states as well, though Russia wants to remain in good relations with its Western partners especially with the EU due to the volume of deals and joint projects they were involved in currently.

Those “new partners” are not really new partners at all since Russia has been closely interconnected with them for almost 13 years. This is all about the so called BRICS organization, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS represent 42 percent of the world's population and about a quarter of the world's economy, which means that this bloc of states is an important global actor. [1]

This clearly points out that Russia is counting on its relationships with the BRICS to blunt the sanctions being imposed by the West. Is this a one sided view or is it reciprocal from the other members of the alliance?

While Russia buys significantly from the EU and the U.S. they have undertaken to increase ties to the developing countries, maybe in anticipation of situations just like this.

Trade with China, Brazil and India has begun to steadily increase on many fronts effectively blunting or at least dampening the effects of the growing sanctions.

You could easily conclude in answer to the question of what impact will the sanctions have on the BRICS that they seem to be strengthening the alliance and enriching business activity among the members. Is this the real answer to the question that opened the paper or are there other views that merit consideration?

DISCUSSION

Why did Russia join the BRICS alliance initially? There has always been speculation as to the reasons behind the BRICS formation. Russia in particular, despite its normal blustery posture on the world stage, is certainly not the largest economic power in the alliance. Recent reporting might shed some additional light on this subject after 13 years of quiet strengthening by the organization.

We are provided with some insight by William Pomeranz, Deputy Director of the Kernan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

To the extent that the BRICS have a common core, it unites a group of emerging market countries that had no input in drafting the rules of global commerce. Russia lacks the economic clout to revisit these conventions so it needs the support of its fellow BRICS members to change the rules of the game – or at least create alternative institutions that get around these rules.

Russia has used its influence to push the BRICS in that direction, and help shape the organization. What the BRICS give Russia is a geopolitical cover as well. Putin's foreign policy is based on one overriding principle: National Sovereignty. No country or international organization has the right to interfere in other nation's internal affairs, a viewpoint largely shared by the BRICS countries.

The BRICS approach also coincides nicely with Russia's version of a multipolar world and further holds out the prospect of more increased multilateral trade between the members. So from Russia's perspective, the BRICS remain a highly valuable concept that has already produced some tangible results. [2]

As the perspective from William Pomeranz points out Russia is now getting from the BRICS exactly what they may have sought when they helped organize the effort in 2001. Created by Goldman Sachs analyst Jim O'Neill the BRICS was really a gimmick that turned into a formal group that is now beginning to exert some of its economic and political power potential on the world stage.

At the BRICS Summit VI in Fortaleza, Brazil in July, 2014 the leadership seems to continue to confirm that their support of continued coordination and support of efforts toward reforming the structures of global governance especially in the economic and commercial fields – Financial G20, IMF and the World Bank. All of this leading to the reasons Russia is pleased to be a member at this time as the aims of the BRICS alliance nicely match Russian intentions and once again give them geopolitical cover in this time of need.

In the midst of the increasing sanctions against Russia, the BRICS summit went on as if nothing was a miss in the world. Support for Russia seems to be as strong as ever and focus on the theme of the summit "Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions" kept that clearly on growing member cooperation and trade – which has always been an issue in the alliance.

Does the Fortaleza summit declarations answer the question of whether the sanctions against Russia are splitting or strengthening the alliance? Some hint of the level of the support for Russia may be in the announced plan to hold the BRICS Summit VII in Ufa, Russia in 2015.

Further evidence of the continued support for the nationalization and economic growth is the announcement and signing of an agreement to form their own New Development Bank (NDB) sponsored by the alliance in answer to the previously mentioned financial concerns they publically share.

The Fortaleza declaration announces the signing of the agreement to establish the New Development Bank (NDB) with the express purpose of mobilizing resources necessary for the improvement of infrastructure and the initiation of sustainable development projects in the BRICS and other emerging and developing economies.

Based on sound banking principles the NDB will strengthen the cooperation among our countries and will supplement the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global development thus contributing to our collective commitments for achieving the goal of future strong, sustainable and balanced growth. The first chair of the NDB Board of Governors shall be from Russia. [3]

In addition to the push for essentially a BRICS bank to give countries an alternative to the G20, the G*, the IMF or the World Bank the declaration from the recent summit also makes a clear point that the BRICS are committed to raising their level of economic cooperation to a new level, with no mention of leaving out Russia. In fact specific language from the declaration that seemingly supports Russia, as a BRICS member, in this time of economic/political confrontation over the Ukraine follows:

We are committed to raise our economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level. To achieve this, we emphasize the importance of establishing a road map for intra-BRICS economic cooperation. In this regard we welcome proposals for a “BRICS Economic Cooperation Strategy” and increased economic trade and investment cooperation among all our members. [4]

Among the ten main topics in the Fortaleza declaration clearly Russia, through its President Vladimir Putin, has continued to garner increased support as he promotes the idea of national sovereignty among the membership. Coincidentally this is the policy that President Putin cites in the documents used to annex Crimea and support Russia’s continuing help for the Ukrainian separatists in the eastern portion of that country.

Could there actually be a significant downside to the sanctions for the U.S. and the EU in the future? Will they impact the BRICS and all the other nations of the world?

The first clear impact of this is the statement by Russia that it will not return to the G8. “Such a format does not exist for now” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told a Russian radio station. “Russia will however continue to participate in the Group of 20” which includes most developed and major developing countries of the world said the Kremlin spokesperson. [5]

In typical Russian fashion, while being expelled from the G8, they continue to maintain membership in the G20 so they still continue to have contacts with other nations much as before. While they try to divert attention away from the effects of the sanctions and the expulsion from the G8 by acting as though nothing has really changed classically, an act of Russian public relations misdirection they are historically known for enacting.

The initial sanctions against Russia were focused on individuals, then banks and now finally on corporations. Will this staged response by the West actually have an impact long term? The ongoing evaluation of that economic impact is already being examined.

In a Financial Times article written by Timothy Ash he offers some early analysis. The list of individuals is fairly significant capturing yet more of the Kremlin's elite, those nearest and dearest to President Vladimir Putin. However, reviewing the list of banks and corporations sanctioned, what is striking is the relative absence of any at the "commanding heights" of the Russian economy – there had been an earlier hint from U.S. government officials quoted in the media that some Russian state-owned banks might have been sanctioned, none where.

Among the corporations there appears to be a plethora of construction companies. In recent days the U.S. press has been awash with suggestions that the U.S. administration was eager to expose the illicit wealth of the Kremlin elite, and the inclusion of construction companies and some small banks is likely aimed at further pointing the way for investigative journalists – and a warning to regime members that the U.S. government knows where they have their investments.

The measures unveiled so far do not even begin to address the question of whether sanctions can work to the extent of changing Russian policy toward the Ukraine. [6]

This leads to the next question "Will the economic sanctions cause Russia to stop supporting the Ukrainian separatists?"

It is quite obvious that that the sanctions have up until now produced much back and forth, but not any real results. Both sides continue to bluster like comic strip characters in a cartoon.

Tensions remain high one day and lower the next as Russia moves its troops around like chess pieces and the two sides or really three sides meet endlessly around Europe seeking some kind of a resolution. Is a solution possible? Crimea is gone, and the Eastern Ukraine is still in doubt with neither side giving up anything. Russian support for the separatists continues covertly and overtly. The Ukrainian military with increased Western support continues to push back, but the issue remains very much in doubt day to day. The sanctions themselves have had an impact on Russia, but not enough for Putin to step in and end this.

Russian economic performances continue to weaken with growth slowing from 4.3% in 2011 to 1.3% in 2013 and investment is contracting. Since US and EU banks and investors may well be reluctant or unable to lend to Russia under the current circumstances, the economy may slow further and the Russian private sector may require official support.

The current climate is negative for economic growth. Russia was already experiencing a slowdown with growth falling and investment declining. Fitch has revised downward its growth forecast to less than 1% in 2014 and only 2% in 2015. These projections still rely on a mild upturn in investment, which is now less likely. Indeed, recession is possible, given the impact of higher interest rates, a weaker ruble and geopolitical uncertainty. [7]

Against this background, the Russian authorities will want to minimize any additional negative impact on the economy by the infusion of additional government funds, usually never made in a public pronouncement. Second measures targeted at influential Russians, such as visa bans and asset freezes may be also effective in increasing the pressure on authorities for a negotiated settlement according to reports. Economists seem to agree that Russia has done itself more harm than good with its aggression in the region. The ruble and the stock market have been tumbling and the GDP forecasts, as reported earlier, have been slashed, but President Putin remains entrenched in his position.

With President Putin, supported by his BRICS allies, doing nothing to change the situation where does the action go next? More in fact is currently being written about the impacts

of the counter sanctions on Europe this winter rather than on seeing a potential end to the support of the Ukrainian separatist movement by Russia.

Carstan Brzeski, a senior economist at ING, and his colleague Peter VandinHoute, ING's chief euro-zone economist, have roughly estimated how the sanctions might impact Europe. Absent sanctions it would be reasonable to expect the European economy to grow one per cent this year. The direct impact of the sanctions on that figure, despite the worries of some European leaders, would be relatively miniscule: G.D.P. growth would be lower by about half of a tenth of a percentage point.

Few would argue that sanctions are supposed to be a profit making enterprise: their goals tend to be political, not economic. By imposing sanctions on Russia, European leaders hope to encourage e de-escalation of the situation in Crimea. And yet, it's clear that for sanctions to work, they should harm the sanctionee more than the sanctioner. [8]

Russia despite many feints and promises continues to follow Putin and withdraw troops, promise winter relief and then a day later completely reverse themselves. Troops back to the border, winter gas to Europe in question, random attacks from inside Russia pick up in the Ukraine and prices go up. Once again nothing really changes as the news seems to have at least one story per day about activity in the area, on both sides. Both sides continue to talk compromise and settlement yet almost a full year after this started nothing in terms of a settlement has happened or is on the near horizon.

In the background all the new strategy Russia seems to be employing is to try to grow despite the sanctions by utilizing all of its old alliances, like the BRICS and the Customs Union (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) to blunt the effects of the sanctions. Toward this end Russia has also been courting Vietnam to join the existing Customs Union organization. Normally customs unions consist of neighboring countries which this certainly would not be. Is this yet another actual attempt by Russia to blunt the sanctions or push at the United States as it also tries to have Vietnam become part of its Pivot to Asia initiative?

The world has seen Russia do as they have always done going point counterpoint to the West since February, 2014. At this time one must conclude that while the sanctions have had some limited economic impact on Russia they have not stopped the support of the separatists. Today they are perhaps more covert than they were in the beginning, but they are still the power behind the scenes.

Economically the EU has seen its economy suffer in some ways which are more visible country to country than the Russian travails, which are still easily hidden by the Putin government. Russia is receiving increasing support from the BRICS and others seeking to expand open markets and satisfy their own economic needs and shortfalls. As history has repeatedly shown global politics and political action is business as usual.

All of this brings out clearly the age old question and the last question posed at the beginning of this paper "Do economic sanctions or any sanctions actually work?"

In a long term study published by the Peterson Institute they found that economic sanctions are partially successful about one-third of the time. Of the 174 cases they examined dating from World War One, the most successful cases were when the goal was modest such as the release of a political prisoner, where there was only 50% success. When the aim was more ambitious, such as changing a major policy the success rate drops to about 30%. [9]

Since October 1960 when the U.S. began its sanctions against Cuba, which have never produced a regime change there, but have only done economic damage to the average Cuban people and as a result the U.S is currently in the process of changing that long standing

policy. We have also seen sanctions imposed against Iran, which some authorities say pushed them to the negotiation table, will hopefully result in a much restructured nuclear program – one that the world can live with.

A case can be made that says basically economic sanctions seldom work, they harm populations that were not intended to be harmed and maybe in the 21st. century we must find another way. In the last 50 years we have seen too many unplanned consequences like higher oil prices, energy shortages and now we await the results of the ever increasing economic and political pressure on Russia. Russia, unlike Cuba, Iran, Iraq, South Africa and others sanctioned in the past is a vast country with the resources to fight back with sanctions of its own against some portions of the West. Will the West continue to ratchet up the pressure on Russia or will the Russian push back cause the stalemate in the Ukraine to stay that way? If so it will fall into the historical pattern of only 30% of all sanctions ever really are successful.

Latest news reports continue to support the idea that the sanctions are at best a standoff. Elections are being held in the separatist areas heartily supported by Russia with little more than some verbal actions being taken by the West to protest these “sham” elections. Has Russia actually achieved a stalemate? Certainly a question only answered by a later historical review.

CONCLUSION

The retaliatory economic sanctions imposed with so much fanfare by the U.S. and the EU in February, 2014 has ultimately had little or no effect on settling the Ukrainian crisis. Russia is still being Russia and the western allies still bluster about tougher sanctions to come, but to what end?

The overall topic of this paper concerns Russia’s relationship with the BRICS since the economic sanctions were put in place. The reality is the BRICS alliance and the membership’s relations with Russia have actually become stronger as they have stood solidly with Russia throughout the crisis.

Russian President Putin and his administration at year end 2014 were still posturing and calling for “mutually acceptable solutions” to end the “outstanding issues” with the West... Such pressure not only causes direct economic damage, but also threatens international stability. Attempts to use the language of ultimatum and sanctions in talks with Russia are absolutely inadmissible and have no chance for success,” he said.

“We hope that common sense will prevail. We call for the abandonment of the distorted logic of the restrictions and threats and to arrive at mutually acceptable solution to the outstanding issues” he added.

“The Russian economy, said Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, is losing around \$40 billion in a year because of the sanctions and another \$90-100 Billion because of a 30 percent drop in oils prices.” [10]

Whatever the truth about the sanctions is, even Russia is admitting they are doing some harm. Through all the turmoil, publicity smoke screens and political intrigue the one clear fact is the BRICS stand with and behind Russia against the sanctions. They are all in fact “partners” in the alliance.

Since the BRICS 2014 annual meetings the support for Russia has not wavered, despite push back from the West. Russian sanctions against the West have opened wide the doors to raise imports to Russia from the BRICS. With the import of western food products no longer allowed by President Putin the BRICS have raced to fill the gaps. Brazil and China have upped

exports of chicken, fruit and vegetables while a variety of other nations, not members of the alliance, have also stepped up. Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay and a smattering of other nations are now shipping higher levels of meat, fish, fruits and vegetables to fill the appetites of hungry Russians. Establishing new trade partners may forever change the Russian import/export scenario's that existed before the 2014 sanctions began.

Over the next year the current Western policy of trying to isolate Russia for its support of the separatist elements in the Ukraine will continue to be tested. As previously illustrated Russia has once again become a closer ally of China, and the growing power of the BRICS alliance. International politics once again is in the forefront of the news and Russia above all is being Russia with President Vladimir Putin taking center stage and seemingly failing to wilt under Western economic and political pressure.

The BRICS alliance appears to be able to influence some of the strange recent Russian behavior, because Russia needs them in the absence of former Western trading partners. Pushed by the BRICS and their escalating power in the United Nations and the G20 Russia continues to “negotiate” the issues in the Ukraine and Crimea. This action from Russia, at least in the press and on TV, points out the increasing power of the BRICS and the influence they exert on the world stage as well as their fellow alliance member Russia.

How will it all work out? Will Russia continue to make feints toward a solution? How long can they withstand the economic damage being inflicted by the sanctions and will ultimately the leverage of the BRICS bring about some kind of a solution? The answer is just not that simple. The news media each day carries stories of new activities and actions on both sides in the Ukraine where there appears to be no solution in sight.

One thing is certain the answer to the question posed at the beginning of the paper: “What will the ongoing Western economic sanctions being imposed on Russia for its actions in the Ukraine do to its relationships with the other countries of the BRICS alliance?” is clear. The Western sanctions have not only strengthened Russian participations in the BRICS alliance but also have increased the BRICS influence in world affairs and opened new trade partnerships for Russia which may forever impact the world import/export marketplace.

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