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Academic Professionalism in the Era of Change

Role Subidentities and Transformation of Time Budgets

This article is based on a case study conducted within the National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE) that examined the identity fragmentation of academic professionals in the context of current educational and academic reforms in Russia. Seven hundred and five professors were surveyed for the study, which focused

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on budgeting work time. The authors single out and describe eight groups of teachers using various structures for budgeting their working time: (1) teachers; (2) teachers engaged in research; (3) teachers engaged in administrative work; (4) researchers; (5) administrators; (6) teachers/researchers/administrators; (7) teachers/researchers; and (8) teachers/administrators. These groups were classified by comparing professional goals, evaluations of working conditions, the university's strategic goals, and attitudes toward publication policy.

As Russia undergoes profound reforms in the areas of research and higher education, professional and official positions and activities in these spheres are being reconsidered. Following in the footsteps of Russia's Ministry of Education and Science, administrations of many Russian universities are making significant changes to labor contracts with academic professionals, including hiring and certification procedures, range of expected results, and terms of employment. All of this is aimed at solving several tasks: "ensuring Russia's inclusion in the global network of knowledge and technology; meeting the needs of key, strategically important branches of industry for human resources in terms of numbers and quality, as well as research and development; maintaining a basic socioeconomic structure in a given region; and satisfying the growing demand for a general higher education that provides for socialization and access to the career start" [3, pp. 8–69].

The resolution of these tasks is under the supervision of university leaders in the area of employment. We have observed a managerialization of the system for assessing the effectiveness of a university's work based on formal criteria of publication activity (citation index) [8] and the handling of various types of normative workloads (for example, attracting external grants, or even simply submitting grant applications). Additionally, the current official and non-official hierarchies in the university system are being reconsidered. For example, department heads have frequently lost administrative power and influence due to the reorganization of university's organizational structure [1].

It raises the question of the role status and professional positions of academic professionals in today's Russia. We can presume that, first of all, there is a change in the role configuration of university

professors, since there has been a transformation in the content and nature of their work, and, second, the former Soviet and post-Soviet professional academic culture is fading. This culture was primarily directed at transmitting knowledge and gaining classroom hours, and only then at active research and publication activities. Moreover, the problem arises that most state universities have kept the classroom workload¹ for lectures and seminars at least at the level of Soviet norms, while requirements for administrative workload and publication activity have increased significantly, which could result in a misaligned professional identity [e.g., 4; 10]. The balance of time budgets for academic professionals has changed significantly due to a transformation in the requirements set for them by leadership as well as by the introduction of new standards and norms (connected, for example, with the preparation of teaching materials), which is reflected in both the overall workload and in the distribution of time over various activities: teaching, administrative workload, publication activity.

Recent Russian studies have established that the system of hiring and organizing the labor of university staff is stagnant. For example, according to Ya. Kozmina's study, several years ago teaching was a priority for most (61 percent) university staff members surveyed, while research was a priority for the minority. Kozmina notes, moreover, that this situation is not just the result of professors' choices, but also a normative condition of employment at a university, where general wages are set aside for teaching positions. Meanwhile, other studies have noted the beginning of transformational processes in the structure of academic positions. Thus we can conclude that the reformative influence of the Ministry of Education and university administrations will lead academic professionals to reconsider their preferences in terms of the nature of their employment. For example, in their article E. Sivak and M. Yudkevich compare the results of two surveys of Russian teachers (1992 and 2012) and reveal that, given the growth in administrative control over university workers' activities and the stress factors of labor over the past two decades, "the focus of their professional activities has gradually begun to shift in the direction of research" as part of the

high-priority task of “strengthening Russia’s position in the global community” [7]. It is important to note that a different structure of employment and priorities in professors’ professional activities could have consequences in the form of a differentiation of normative and value notions about the academic profession. For example, Kozmina finds that differences in time budgets are the basis for the fragmentation of the “teaching” and “research” identities of university staff members [2].

Thus, we can state that academic role identities are undergoing a process of fragmentation and that new subidentities are appearing that are oriented toward extrainstitutional needs resulting from cultural transformations of academic space and technological changes in the educational services sphere.

European countries underwent their own path of profound managerial, structural, and cultural changes in higher education two decades before Russia. These changes frequently had a morbid effect on the professional self-identification of university professors and gave rise to a mood of alarmism and forecasts about the end of the academic profession under the influence of market and managerial reforms [e.g., 9; 5, pp. 262–82; 6, pp. 190–93, 388–89]. Marketization, increased administrative regulation, and the internationalization of academic systems had a profound effect on professional identity, which was already fragmented. In other words, a cohesive, universalist model of professionalism is being eroded by growing internal differentiation, and also due to integration with extra-academic systems like government structures, international expert institutes, and business. The role of teaching is declining in the face of the increasing significance of research [13].

Changes in the nature of the academic profession can be traced by looking at our analysis of how professors representing various subgroups budget their time. Even though this kind of approach is fairly typical for studying social changes at micro- and macro-levels [11;14], it has rarely been used in Russian or foreign studies of the academic profession. However, it is time that is a key resource professors have at their disposal, and the nature of their professional activities and their perception of these activities

determine their various strategies for using time. In this article we will look at the processes of the identity fragmentation of academic professionals through the prism of the ways they organize their time, and we will show that, depending on the structure of their time budgets, academic workers form their own attitude toward various aspects of their employment including satisfaction with their salaries, incentives to increase publication activity, etc.

Here we look at the process of professional identity fragmentation in the example of professors at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. The NRU HSE is at the forefront of changes to ensure Russia's high ranking in international university ratings and to speed movement toward academic excellence. Thus, the case of the NRU HSE is interesting because it is one of the first examples of internal reorganization aimed at developing international competitiveness. Similar transformations may soon take place at other Russian research universities.

Empirical basis

The empirical basis of this analysis consists of data from the Monitoring of Professor Life—an annual survey of professors at the NRU HSE Moscow campus, which was conducted by the Center for Internal Monitoring at the NRU HSE. The survey's goal is to study the main characteristics of professor's professional activities, assess their satisfaction with various aspects of their work, and analyze the relationship to the university's development strategy. The survey stage of the study was conducted in November and December 2014. Information was collected in an online survey, with a link sent to each professor's email address. Participants in the study were university employees earning most of their salaries as professors at the NRU HSE (respondents included employees who combine teaching with other types of professional activities). Seven hundred and five professors responded to the survey. This is almost 40 percent of the total number of professors at the NRU HSE Moscow campus earning most of their salaries as professors.

Of these, 626 people (approximately 36 percent) completed the entire form. The majority of respondents failing to complete the entire form responded to the main questions and their answers were included in the analysis.

The sample included teachers holding various positions at the NRU HSE: 44 percent of respondents were teachers, 11 percent were senior teachers, 20 percent were associate professors, and 25 percent were professors, which matches the distribution of these positions throughout the entire university. Ninety percent of people surveyed were staff teachers (their work records are held by the NRU HSE). Depending on their age, respondents represented the following cohorts from humanities, social sciences, and technical departments: 30 and under (17 percent), 31–40 (27 percent), 41–50 (20 percent), 51–60 (21 percent), and 60 and over (15 percent). This sample is representative of age ranges in all the departments. Categories for length of employment were broken down as follows: less than three years (28 percent), three to five years (33 percent), and over five years (39 percent).

Teachers' work time budgets

One of the questions on the survey was about how teachers divided their work time among various types of professional activities at the NRU HSE in 2014. Teachers were given the chance to estimate what percentage of their work time they spent on specific activities: teaching and academic advising, research and development, administrative activities, expert activities, participation in the editorial boards of journals, etc. These estimates were self-reported by respondents and helped assess the scale to which teaching was combined with other types of professional activities. This assessment is more precise than an assessment based on data about official combinations (officially assigned administrative and/or academic positions), since it accounts for the fact that professors may be involved in research or administrative work even if they do not hold the corresponding positions. Our data show that in 2014 over 90 percent of teachers at the NRU HSE were engaged in research, over half (55 percent),

in administrative work, and approximately one-third (35 percent), in other types of professional activities.

Additionally, responses to the question of the distribution of work time gave us an idea of the structure of professors' time budgets by reflecting each activity's share in the overall structure of their duties (see [Table 1](#)). The survey results showed that on average professors spent almost 60 percent of their work time teaching. Almost one-quarter of their work time was spent on research, while a little over 10 percent of their time went to administrative work. However, there were also respondents who devoted more time to research and administrative work: one-fourth of teachers surveyed spent over 40 percent of their work time on research, while one-fifth of respondents spent this amount of time on administrative work. At the same time, only one-fourth of staff members spent over 70 percent of their time teaching.

If we exclude the zero value (data on people who were not engaged in any of the listed activities in 2014), the values for all types of activities besides teaching are even higher (see [Table 2](#)). So, in 2014 people who conducted some research spent an average of approximately 30 percent of their time on this work, while people engaged in administrative activities spent about one-fifth of their work time on these activities. Other types of professional activities took up an average of 11 percent of work time.

Table 1

Time Budget of Teachers at the NRU HSE for Various Types of Professional Activities in 2014, % (N = 647)

Type of activity	Mean	Median	25 th percentile	75 th percentile
Teaching, academic advising	57	60	40	70
Research	27	30	13	40
Administrative work	12	5	0	20
Other types of professional activities	4	0	0	5

Question: Taking 100 percent of the time you spent on professional activities in 2014, what percentage of the time did you devote to each type of activity listed below approximately? Please take into account only the activities you were engaged in at the NRU HSE.

Table 2

Time Budget of Teachers at the NRU HSE for Various Types of Professional Activities in 2014, %, without Zero Values

Type of activity	Mean	Median	25 th percentile	75 th percentile
Teaching, research supervision (<i>N</i> = 647)	57	60	40	70
Research (<i>N</i> = 603)	30	30	20	40
Administrative work (<i>N</i> = 360)	21	20	10	30
Other types of professional activities (<i>N</i> = 224)	11	5	10	10

Question: Taking 100 percent of the time you spent on professional activities in 2014, approximately what percentage of the time did you devote to each type of activity listed below? Please take into account only the activities you were engaged in at the NRU HSE.

Teacher categories based on work time budget structure

This data can show how various categories of teachers are represented among academic professionals based on the structure of their time budgets. Through our analysis, we were able to identify eight different groups of categories working at NRU HSE's Moscow campus (Table 3). We called the first group "teachers." This group included employees who spent all or almost all of their work time in 2014 on teaching and academic advising. The second group was designated as "teachers engaged in research." Included in this group were people who were engaged in teaching and research work, but spent most of their time teaching. The third group, which we called "teachers engaged in administrative work," included people engaged in teaching and administrative work, although most of their time was spent on teaching. The fourth group—"researchers"—describes people who spent more time on research than on other types of activities. The fifth group ("administrators") was made up of people who spent more time on administrative work than on other types of activities. The sixth group ("teachers/researchers, administrators") included employees who spent about the same amount of time on all three main types of professional activities.

Table 3

Classification of Teachers at the NRU HSE based on Work Time Budget Structure ($N = 647$)

Group name	Criteria	%
Teachers	Share of teaching in time budget exceeds 80%	19
Teachers engaged in research	Teaching takes up less than 80 percent of work time, but a larger portion of time than research work (value of greater than 0) or than the total amount of time spent on research or administrative work (if research takes up more time than administrative work)	34
Teachers engaged in administrative work	Teaching takes up less than 80 percent of work time, but a larger portion of time than administrative work (value of greater than 0) or than the total amount of time spent on administrative or research work (if administrative work takes up more time than research)	8
Researchers	Research takes up no less work time than the total share of teaching and administrative work	9
Administrators	Administrative work takes up no less work time than the total share of research and administrative work	4
Teachers/ researchers/ administrators	Each type of activity (teaching, research, administrative work) takes up no less than 30% of work time	6
Teachers/ researchers	The values of the share of work time spent on teaching and research are separated by no more than 10 points, and each activity exceeds the time spent on administrative work	16
Teachers/ administrators	The values of the share of work time spent on teaching and administrative work are separated by no more than 10 points, and each activity exceeds the time spent on research	3

Members of the seventh group (“teachers/researchers”) and the eighth group (“teachers/administrators”) dedicated approximately the same amount of time to teaching and research or to teaching and administrative work, respectively. The exact criteria for inclusion in a group are given in [Table 3](#).

How the various teacher categories differ: From professional unity to professional differentiation

These eight categories of groups represent teachers from the NRU HSE who have differing combinations of various workloads. At the same time, however, differences in the “portfolio” of professional tasks does not in and of itself say anything about the blurring of role unity in the teaching profession. In order to understand how different these categories are from one another, we compared them using a series of parameters that helped determine the special characteristics of their professional identity.

Priorities in the profession

One of the basic aspects we can use to track differentiation in the professional community of teachers is the type of activity they themselves determine to be their priority. Table 4 shows how all these categories can be divided into three groups. The first group includes all the categories where the greatest amount of time is

Table 4

Priority Professional Activity by Category, %

Staff category	Research	Teaching	Administrative	Don't know
Teachers	11	82	0	7
Teachers engaged in research	21	71	0	8
Teachers engaged in administrative work	9	85	0	6
Researchers	85	10	0	5
Administrators	26	37	22	15
Teachers/researchers/administrators	40	35	3	22
Teachers/researchers	42	44	0	14
Teachers/administrators	21	68	0	11

Question: Which types of your professional activities at the NRU HSE do you consider to be your priority areas of work?

Note: $\chi^2 = 256.092$; $df = 21$; $sig < 0.001$.

spent on teaching and the categories where teaching is combined with a significant amount of administrative work. The second group consists of one category—researchers. The third includes people who combine all three types of activities in more or less equal proportions and spend equal amounts of time on teaching and research. This group is the most heterogeneous—the share of respondents placing a priority on research/teaching are approximately the same here.

Thus, we can conclude that workload priority mainly depends on the balance between time spent on research and time spent on teaching, while administrative work is not considered to be one of the most important tasks.

The category “teacher” differs from the other groups because it contains the least number of respondents who intend to publish their work in a foreign journal. The high percentage (over 80 percent) of people who actually do intend to publish abroad can be found in four groups: teachers who combine all three types of workloads, teachers who spend most of their time on administrative work, and the two research-oriented categories.

Publication in a foreign academic journal is important for promotion policies and assessing publication activity at this university. The type of contract and amount of compensation may depend on number of publications. Thus, the observed difference for teachers who spend their time solely on teaching is of particular interest. Teachers in this category are really underdogs in comparison to their colleagues with a different set of workloads. And this, in turn, may become the foundation for the formation of a specific professional identity that is at odds with the institutional environment of a globally oriented research university. This is also implicitly confirmed by the point that the category of “teacher” contains the largest share of staff members indicating that one of their professional goals is to move to another organization (Tables 5 and 6).

Assessment of work conditions

Interestingly, salary satisfaction is not identical in all the groups. Staff members who devote a significant portion of their work time

Table 5

Percentage of Teachers Planning to Publish Their Article in a Foreign Journal, by Category, %

Staff category	%
Teachers	48
Administrators	76
Teachers engaged in research	81
Teachers engaged in administrative work	72
Teachers/researchers/administrators	83
Researchers	81
Teachers/researchers	76
Teachers/administrators	82

Question: What are your main professional goals for the next 2–3 years?

Note: $\chi^2 = 48.780$; $df = 7$; $sig < 0.000$.

Table 6

Percentage of Teachers Whose Professional Goal Is to Move from the NRU HSE to Another Organization, by Category, %

Staff category	%
Teachers	8
Administrators	4
Teachers engaged in research	4
Teachers engaged in administrative work	2
Teachers/researchers/administrators	3
Researchers	4
Teachers/researchers	1
Teachers/administrators	6

Question: What are your main professional goals for the next 2–3 years?

Note: $\chi^2 = 9.854$; $df = 7$; $sig < 0.01$.

Table 7

Salary Satisfaction by Category of Teacher, %

Staff category	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Don't know
Teachers	24	39	24	8	5
Administrators	4	8	69	19	0
Teachers engaged in research	15	36	34	15	1
Teachers engaged in administrative work	2	38	36	22	2
Teachers/researchers/administrators	0	26	57	17	0
Researchers	5	26	44	19	5
Teachers/researchers	7	27	41	22	3
Teachers/administrators	0	24	35	41	0

Question: Please rate how satisfied you are with the size of your salary at the NRU HSE.

Note: $\chi^2 = 84.858$; $df = 28$; $sig < 0.001$.

to administrative functions in various configurations (“administrators,” “teachers/researchers/administrators,” “teachers/administrators”) have the highest level of satisfaction, while staff members engaged only in teaching or research are less satisfied. One explanation for this trend is that many members in this group are senior or mid-level administrators who receive additional compensation for this load. Overall, we can say that administrative and research work increase the level of salary satisfaction, while teaching lowers the level of satisfaction (see [Table 7](#)).

Teachers who spend most of their time on research and are not engaged in administrative work make up the group that is most satisfied with the distribution of their workloads. Members of the “administrators” group were the least satisfied in this respect ([Table 8](#)).

Relationship toward the incentive policy for publication activity

The NRU HSE makes dynamic use of new forms to stimulate research activity and increase the effectiveness of academic professionals. Positive incentives involve providing various pay

Table 8

**Percentage of Staff Members Agreeing with the Statement
“The Workload Is Distributed Fairly Among the Work Collective,”
by Category, %**

Staff category	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Don't know
Teachers	17	9	26	36	12
Administrators	16	40	32	8	4
Teachers engaged in research	8	14	36	31	11
Teachers engaged in administrative work	10	22	33	25	10
Teachers/researchers/administrators	11	20	40	26	3
Researchers	2	9	39	37	14
Teachers/researchers	5	19	28	38	10
Teachers/administrators	6	19	38	31	6

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement about your work collective?

Note: $\chi^2 = 47.009$; $df = 28$; $sig < 0.01$.

increases for academic activities and opportunities for academic mobility. There are also negative incentives that envisage transferring a teacher to a temporary contractor agreement, where the teacher is taken off staff and denied the right to receive academic pay increases and trip grants. This form is applied in cases where a teacher demonstrates insufficient effectiveness in publication and research activities.

As part of the survey, university staff members were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: “Some teachers who do not meet the criteria for publication activity should be transferred to contractor agreements.” Our analysis shows that the strongest advocates of this type of negative stimulus were representatives of the categories where employees spend a significant amount of their time on administrative activities, while the least avid supporters were represented by categories whose members spend most of their time teaching. However, a significant percentage of teachers engaged in research work

Table 9

Percentage of Staff Members Agreeing with the Statement “Some Teachers Who Do Not Meet the Criteria for Publication Activity Should Be Transferred to Contractor Agreements,” %

Staff Category	Disagree	Agree	Don't know
Teachers	73	11	15
Administrators	28	64	8
Teachers engaged in research	73	17	10
Teachers engaged in administrative work	76	18	6
Teachers/researchers/administrators	60	23	17
Researchers	41	44	16
Teachers/researchers	50	28	23
Teachers/administrators	51	50	0

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement about your work collective?

Note: $\chi^2 = 103.377$; $df = 14$; $sig < 0.001$.

Table 10

Percentage of Employees Agreeing with the Statement “The Workloads of Teachers Who Do Not Meet the Criteria for Publication Activity should be Increased by 25 Percent,” %

Staff category	Disagree	Agree	Don't know
Teachers	70	16	14
Administrators	44	48	8
Teachers engaged in research	68	27	5
Teachers engaged in administrative work	65	26	8
Teachers/researchers/administrators	49	43	9
Researchers	32	55	14
Teachers/researchers	50	37	14
Teachers/administrators	63	38	0

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement about your work collective?

Note: $\chi^2 = 78.112$; $df = 14$; $sig < 0.001$.

support this negative stimulus as a way to increase academic effectiveness (Table 9).

A similar distribution of points of view was observed when respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “The workloads of teachers who do not meet the criteria for publication activity should be increased by 25 percent.” Members of the categories “administrators” and “researchers” supported this statement, while the remaining categories were not inclined to do so (Table 10).

Understanding of strategic goals

These categories also differ in the extent to which their members understand the university’s strategic development goals. Categories including respondents with some kind of administrative workload had a comparatively higher share of employees who clearly understood the strategic directions of the university’s development. This percentage was also comparatively high among respondents engaged only in teaching (see Table 11).

Table 11

Understanding of the NRU HSE’s Strategic Development Goals by Category, %

Staff category	Unclear	Somewhat clear	Clear	Don't know
Teachers	21	42	27	9
Administrators	16	32	52	0
Teachers engaged in research	10	46	39	5
Teachers engaged in administrative work	6	39	53	2
Teachers/researchers/administrators	14	34	51	0
Researchers	12	40	40	7
Teachers/researchers	5	38	47	10
Teachers/administrators	13	25	56	6

Question: Are the university’s strategic development goals currently clear to you?

Note: $\chi^2 = 38.998$; $df = 21$; $sig < 0.01$.

Conclusion

This article shows how reclassifying the time budgets of academic professionals results in the formation of new subidentities that are closely related to changing aspects of employer requirements and, to a lesser extent, with ideal/typical notions about university or academic culture as a particular form of professional culture. During the process of educational reform, new subidentities have appeared that are connected with the new division of labor and a shift in balance among various types of workloads: “teachers–administrators,” “teachers–publishers,” “teachers–teachers.” At the same time, the subidentity “teacher–teacher” has taken a back seat, since the new requirements place a focus on publication and research activities, as well as administrative work within the university. These subidentities essentially amount to generalized models of professionalism within the academic profession, and in various situations a subidentity somehow becomes more or less sought after. Additionally, these subidentities reflect not just various ways of inflating workloads at universities, but also express various ideologies: the precedence of production and dissemination of knowledge through publication, the value of transmitting knowledge through teaching and the mission of mentoring and even upbringing, and an orientation on effective administration as a guarantee of the success of a university and higher education overall. It can be assumed that the bearers of these sub-identities represent different generations and positions in the university hierarchy. It all speaks to the need to reject notions about the academic profession in Russian universities as a cohesive community joined by similar values, work solidarity, and a common understanding of the mission of academic professionals. Any further conceptualization of a teacher’s life must account for the high level of differentiation in their professional activities. That said, important grounds for this differentiation are various patterns for using work time.

Note

1. Here is it important to note the appearance of “institutional scissors”—the retention of Soviet norms for classroom workload is accompanied by the

introduction of new requirements for publication activity and a reduction in the actual number of classroom hours as a result of a review of how academic plans are structured with a focus on independent work and elective courses with fewer participants.

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