

Professionalization of University Administrators and Managers: The Russian Case and the World Perspectives

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Abstract

Administrative initiatives are gaining importance and visibility because of the higher education transformation and challenges it is facing. Both administrative employees and scholars are involved in the competition for jurisdiction in academia. The article is devoted to this tension and the process of university administrative practice professionalization, which has already started in Europe and US, but is only beginning to be developed in Russia. The research was conducted by analyzing world HE administrators' and managers' associations and educational programs, and by interviewing Russian universities managers and administrators. The goal of the research was to figure out the characteristics of academic management as a professional practice, to demonstrate an increase of administrative work status and to follow the steps of the profession's development. The future of the tension between two groups of professionals and the perspectives of university administrators' profession will be discussed.

Keywords: HE transformation, managerialism, professionalization, university administrators.

1. Introduction

Modern universities in the whole world are facing more challenges and have to strive for resources, positions on ranking lists and successful existence. The massification, internationalization, technologies development and increased accountability demand new types of professionals to be hired. These professionals get different names: "non-academic staff", "general staff", "support staff", "academic related staff", "professional staff" and etc. In Russia they are called managers (working on universal aims, responsible for financial and human resources) or administrators (having clerical functions and providing administrative support) without paying attention to the particularity of each term. Both groups are regularly blamed by academics for all top-down orders for changes, though they only play broker's role. The article is focused on the self-identification of professional staff, their interactions with scholars and the way they increase the status of their profession.

2. Materials and methods

The research was implemented by qualitative methods. 40 administrators from one of the most developed and famous Russian universities of different positions were interviewed. Different cases in mass media materials, illustrating the conflict between scholars and non-academic staff were dissected, the history of the world and the Russian academic administrators' and manager's professional association's foundation and evolution was followed.

3. The first steps towards professionalization in Russia

The process of professionalization, which has already gathered momentum in America and European countries, is also beginning in Russia through the creation of professional standards, journals, codes, and specialized postgraduate education programmes. Whitchurch states that academic managers are more and more likely to get special education and become members of professional associations [3]. The discussion on the importance of university managers' professionalization for managerial ideology strengthening was shown in the article "The Changing Dynamics of Higher Education Middle Management" [2]. There became an order of magnitude more certified employees and representatives of professional associations among university administrators and managers. Professionalization of academic management is especially important for legitimizing and justifying a special status of administrators and managers, which grants them the authority over academic staff. Australian Association for Tertiary Education Management offers to grant the same institutional status scholars have to university administrators and managers, because they make a great contribution to universities' goals achievement [1]. However, the role of university administrators is constantly discussed and redefined.



Special attention must be paid to the professional associations for academic administrators and managers. The associations are mainly aimed to maintain ethical standards, develop the professional skills of participants, and interact with Government authorities. By integrating in the community, administrators get involved in a professional network, which provides them with the necessary experience, knowledge and skills, as well as the opportunity get evaluation for their work.

In the autumn of 2006, the Russian Association of University Managers and Administrators was established by the Tver State Medical Academy, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tver and Rostov State Universities. "RAUMA" was created for developing modern principles of university management, disseminating the best practices in the field of university administration and management. «Russia-EU» realized international project «RAUMA» within the framework of «TEMPUS-TACIS» programme. «RAUMA» appeared as an alternative to the "Association of rectors", giving an opportunity to the representatives of middle-level university management to get a platform for interaction. The events of the association were aimed to develop professional skills of administrative staff by organizing special trainings, thematic seminars, and educational programmes. The association resembled European examples of university managers' and administrators' professional unions, but, in fact, it was a top-down programme for a temporary cooperation. "RAUMA" lasted exactly as long as the project and financing: after its termination, the association did not receive further development.

Professional associations, as well as their predecessor like craft guilds and scientific communities, are self-organized and collectively coordinated. The state prefers to avoid costs associated with the control over professional associations. Moreover, it is ready to grant autonomy to associations, which become accountable to the society, as a client, evaluating provided services. Professional associations must create knowledge reinforced by scientific research, translate it and practical skills through the system of education, provide practical application of knowledge. That requires professionals' participation and standards' adoption. While Russia is trying to introduce standards everywhere, the participation of professionals cannot be called active. Moreover, the network of professionals must be formed, but Russian university administrators have not yet managed to create their own one, although they take part in international associations' events quite actively. For instance, there is a lot of information on various programmes on the website of the Kazan Federal University. Those projects were potentially interesting for improving the university management.

The programme, initiated by the NRU HSE, also must be noted - HSE Professional Development Programme for Administrative Staff offers a platform for interaction, skills development and involvement in the most important university processes. The programme appeared in 2015 as an alternative to the "Young Faculty Development Programme". The idea was suggested by the university top management for organizing a special form of work with administrators. It is important to note that the programme does not simply create a collaborative field, but it generates a network of university administrators and works on improvement of employees' qualifications for further effective work at NRU HSE. The university is training its staff to create projects for their further implementation at this university. Participation in this programme can be interesting for employees because of the opportunity to establish communication (horizontal links) with their colleagues and realize their ideas (to feel their significance for the university).

There are the journals, where university administrators and managers can publish articles on university management: "Educational Studies", "Higher Education in Russia", "Quality. Innovation. Education", "Economics of Education", "Innovations in Education", "Law and Education" and etc.

More than 40 educational programmes, train professionals for university management. An online course at the Moscow School of Management Skolkovo was recently introduced to academic managers and administrators, to teach them how to build effective management based on the experience of different universities. Thus, it can be concluded that modern academic administrators are not only beginning to build common network of contacts for interaction, but also receive special education or improve their qualifications and produce knowledge that can be converted into publications.

4. Self-identification of administrators and their roles in a modern university (some results from the interviews' analysis)

4.1 Integration to profession

Despite the fact that staff turnover is not typical to administrative staff, it is important to note that the composition of employees can be changed along with the ideology that university adheres at a specific moment. In 2012 the university, where administrators were interviewed, was radically



reformed and the majority of former employees were reduced, and new administrators were recruited in accordance with the new requirements:

«To reduce all administrative staff. Following the ideological goal of the leader, I was looking for totally different people. Those who could take more managerial functions».

It is also important to note that quite often the main advantage of the hired administrator was not qualification and membership in the academic environment in principle, but the knowledge of specifics of particular university.

The managers of the university adhere to the idea of recruiting holders of academic background¹ for the posts of administrative staff. The majority of new university administrators have either the experience in teaching (including the refresher courses), or they were trying to combine teaching and administration in the past, but because of the high load they abandoned the first in favor of the second role, "more comfortable for family", "more stable work", they are competent in. The reasons of choosing administration instead of teaching:

1) Uncertainty in one's own competence

«I haven't become an expert yet».

2) The impossibility of building an academic career without education (holding a degree), and the possibility of implementing administrative activities without significant damage to personal life (the possibility of combining work and family)

3) Lack of time or opportunity to make serious research, lack of self-confidence

«I'm not sure that I see myself in science. To do what I am interested in, I had to leave, and I was not ready to leave».

4) Practical orientation (interest in solving practical problems)

«You can combine. Than you shouldn't sleep. You can't let anyone down; you should keep a good quality. I'm a practitioner. I do not really like theory».

5) Unfinished administrative tasks

«I needed to raise the system to an acceptable level. I have not raised it yet. There are still many tasks. When everything works like clocks, and you can spit on the ceiling, you can pay less attention to these processes and do research».

4.2 Types of professionals

The research was devoted to the changing role and identification of university administrators. According to the interviews, 4 categories of administrators can be figured out:

1) Successful "blended-professionals"

Individuals who occupy both an administrative and academic position at the university.

«The head of the department called an assistant professor he knew to the deal: I was given teaching hours and a formal position of a senior administrator, manager».

2) "Unsuccessful" academics

Individuals invited through informal channels of communication who failed to "fit" as teachers (or they have lectures and seminars from time to time) and who were offered an administrative position that they accept keeping the hope to be able to find a teaching position in future. They can be included in research projects, but they don't have publications.

«There was no such position as manager here, but they created it for me, because they wanted me to stay, though they could not give me teaching hours».

3) Pure practitioners

Came from the other sphere or from educational management (never thought of teaching)

«I love practical tasks and I don't like theory».

4) International specialists

Professionals engaged in administrative work at a high level: ideological agents of a university or intermediaries in its interaction with foreign counterparts.

The last type of administrators is in most cases involved in an international professional society of university administrators. One of the problems administrators face with as representatives of professionals in academia is the lack of unique community they could be a part of. The program, organized by the NRU HSE is designed to train administrators and create community ties only within this particular university, so it is an example of "professionalization in" and "for" that particular institution, having a very small impact on the global idea of university administrators

¹ The example of requirements for one of vacancies: *«Experience (5 years) in administrative work/research/teaching work at institutions of higher or vocational education».*

“professionalization”. The informants told about being members of global associations, such as AUA, AIEA, EAIE, NAFSA, APAIE and etc., which meant their involvement in a larger professional society. *«We do have a community of administrators. If you are a participant of a conference, you become a member of this community. You get newsletters, you can participate in webinars, your contacts are open».*

4.3 The models of interactions with academic staff

Five models of interaction with scholars were defined:

- 1) Attitude of care "talking/ explaining to little kids"

«Like with little kids is also with respect. With respect, but you explain more. Because these are not the processes with which people work. How would you and the child communicate if he asks for something from you? Surely, differently than with an adult».

It must be added that it is the new category of care. In the past there was «family» care, and now it is an “effective care”:

«The atmosphere prevailed: the company was a family. The functions of caring their teachers slowed down the process».

- 2) With piety (attitude of deep respect for "genius")

«For me it was very nervous, because I came to a woman with two higher educations, with a PhD».

- 3) Taking “them” as “enemies” (“Snobs”, who do not want to follow the rules)

- 4) As with “other” professionals (the group with which administrators work)

«The administrator does not behave like a teacher, the teacher does not behave like an administrator <...>, because the academics does not need to know how all administrative processes are organized at the university <...> Academics do not want to understand. Administrators should understand, but they should understand that academics do not owe anything. Our task is to explain them how the process is arranged».

- 5) As with creative individuals

«It is very displeasing to some teachers that the solution of their problems is postponed for a certain period. "These are all persuasions, you do not want to work, I do not want your stupid system". Teachers are creative people – we have already got used to it».

4.4 Tension between professional and academic staff

Administrators feel that there is a tension between them and academic staff, which can be interpreted in different ways.

- 1) The reason for the conflict is the lack of understanding by the teacher of the broker role of the administrator, who does not create the rule.

«That this is all exclusively our initiative, that we sometimes even interfere with their great work».

- 2) Conflict lies in the reluctance (and sometimes - inability) of academics to adapt to modern reality and new rules.

- 3) The specifics of the work and the perception of time for academic staff and administrators are different.

According to the administrators, they gain credibility in the eyes of academic employees, proving their belonging to a single group or confirming (with their past academic merit or scientific degree) that they do not belong to the category of “strangers”.

«I just added this to the autorun. And in some situations I personally noticed the difference. It means that you are not some kind of administrator, but you are more approximate, you are from the environment” (about PhD).

5. Conclusion

Russian universities are included into the world rankings and they must meet the requirements that is why the new types of professionals are hired. University administrators and managers are no longer representing supporting clerical positions – they get higher education, improve qualification and take part in making vital decisions for HE institutions. However, there is still a lack of unique community of professionals – both in Russia and abroad. Moreover, the problem of communication between administrators and scholars must be solved but creating the space for their communication and making them understand the roles of each other.



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