



The Innovative HR Practices of Regional Administrations: Is it a New Round of Civil Service Reform in Russia?

Alexey G. Barabashev¹, Tatiana V. Zaytseva²

Abstract

The paper examines the innovative HR practices of regional administrations in Russia and the inter-regional cooperation between HR departments of regional governmental bodies; in practice the dissemination is complicated by their relations with the federal bodies (national level) responsible for civil-service regulation.

The authors use the case of Russia to describe the positive experience of blended inter-regional (horizontal) and federal-local (vertical) cooperation between HR departments of the civil service (federal, regional, municipal) that started as a “best practices” initiative, guided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Russia (MLSP of Russia) in 2015. Several cases of such cooperation are described as examples of positive influence on the civil service with pushing changes, and as a tool to foster civil-service reform.

Our findings lead us to the conclusion that the knowledge and motivation accumulated by the innovative HR practices in regional governmental bodies enables them to overcome political, administrative, financial and legal barriers in public-service reform. From a theoretical perspective, the research shows that the theories of public-administration service reform (institutional and instrumental) should take into account the regional HR practices and inter-regional cooperation that promote those practices. Specific features and benefits of regional innovations help to compensate for the lack of formal political support of reforms, or to conquer bureaucratic resistance to change. As it happened in Russia, the regional initiatives facilitated multiple leadership behaviors that have the capacity to increase the willingness to experiment, expand commitment to innovations, and boost motivation for professional development.

1 National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Russia.

2 Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia.

Future research on the influence of new regional HR practices on civil-service reform can be concentrated on the exploration of regional communities of practice (CoP) that are involved in the process of elaborating and disseminating new HR practices. It will provide a better understanding of the limits and possibilities of the regions to support civil-service reform on a national level.

Key words:

civil-service reform; HR inter-regional cooperation; regional civil service; HR practices.

1. Introduction. The problem of finding the appropriate tools for fostering civil-service reforms

The problem of fostering administrative reforms is relevant for both EU countries and their neighbors. Countries with an absence of political and/or administrative will for reforming, quite frequently just imitate the support of reforms, doing almost nothing to introduce real changes. Other types of countries that are trying to implement real reforms with the support of political leadership face the resistance of administrative elites and other valuable actors (big corporations, corrupt state contractors, law-enforcement bodies' top authorities that are afraid of changing the balance of power against them, etc.) that may also block reforms. So, in the absence of political and administrative support, administrative reforms go through repeating cycles which end without a tangible effect.

Civil-service reform is the most difficult to manage within the whole spectrum of administrative reforms as it is the core and most influential part of governmental changes. The problem of how to shape civil-service reform in countries with a lack of political or administrative will to provide strong support for civil-service reform, not only on the part of citizens, but also regional governmental bodies (regional and municipal administrations), can be converted into some "technical" issues. Among them, we would like to focus on the problem of how to create the support for public-service reform from the bottom up starting at the "middle administrative level" in regions. One of the solutions, which was prompted by the Russian practice, was to support HR innovations by involving HR offices of regional administrations via establishing strong horizontal and vertical communication and cooperation, *launching innovative HR regional activities, and extending them to national civil-service reform* through the national competition of the best HR practices. Since both the competition itself and the positive results obtained from its implementation are completely unique, the description of this case will be useful not only for reform administrators, but also for the entire scientific community that deals with the development of the civil service.

For Russia, one could find all the symptoms of the problems in reforming: civil-service reform in Russia is cyclical and incomplete in its results (Barabashev

and Prokofiev 2019). The Russian political elite has pretended to start reforms twice during the last decades. Later, in every cycle, the reform was curtailed off. All attempts to carry out reforms “from above” came up against a lack of desire and cohesive resistance of all stakeholders.

Involvement of Russian regions into civil service reform historically (1991–2014), was minimal. HR offices of Russian regional administrations were “too strict” to act out of line and appear to be insubordinate, to do something innovative outside of existing federal regulations. In most cases they just copied the federal laws and rules. The reasons for that type of rigid behavior are quite obvious.

- (i) The first concern of every regional bureaucrat is to evaluate the possible reaction of federal authorities on regional innovations. Will the federal authority support it, or not? It can be potentially dangerous to start acting innovatively for a single regional HR office without understanding how the federal authority will evaluate the changes. In such conditions it is preferable not to act at all or to act cooperatively (inter-regional cooperation). The reduction of individualized responsibility through collective (coordinated) actions is vital for success. But how can we facilitate such inter-regional cooperation?
- (ii) High risks of innovations. Management innovations in governmental regional bodies are followed not only by positive, but by negative effects, too. The negative effects might include: deformation of the traditions of bureaucratic behavior (in Russia they are rather different in such regions, such as Caucasian national republics, Far East regions, Moscow and Saint Petersburg as multinational conglomerate entities, regions of Central European part of Russia, etc.); negative reshaping of HR decision-making, and the transfer of human and financial resources. At the same time, positive effects of HR innovations are not evident.

The regions of Russia are potentially interested in inter-regional training programs, exchange of innovative HR practices, sharing intellectual capacities for the improvement of regional normative acts, and the transfer of knowledge and HR management know-how, but they need the mechanism of inter-regional coordination.

The paper concentrates on research on the relatively new style (since 2015) of regional administrations HR offices’ behavior, in elaborating and disseminating innovative HR practices and their cooperation as the tool to foster civil-service reform. We will analyze some examples of innovative practices of HR offices in Russia and will show how it influences civil-service reforming on a national level.

The purpose of this paper is to describe organizational and administrative tools with a good potential to break down these barriers. We will focus on a phenomenon that began as the participation of HR offices of state and municipal organizations in the all-Russia competition of HR practices in civil and municipal service (since

2015) and that put pressure on reform from the bottom up. We will explore present regional processes of HR practice elaboration with the purpose of finding the early elements of innovation, the capacity of regional administrations' HR offices to cooperate with regional HR offices of other regions (horizontal cooperation) and with the federal bodies responsible for civil-service management (vertical cooperation). We will refer to the survey data from the ongoing experiment on the promotion of innovations in HR departments of regional and municipal bodies of Russia, the so-called annual *national competition on best HR practices*, operated by the Russian Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, MLSP (Ministry of Labor 2019), to the data from the expert group of MLSP, which is responsible for the evaluation of HR practices, and to the sources that were already published about this competition (Zajceva and Nezhina 2019).

The findings can be used for: (i) future development of the network forms of professional interaction among regional HR offices; (ii) the limitation of the role of the federal center by converting the federal bodies (Russian case) responsible for civil-service management into platforms for experience exchange; (iii) the establishment of conditions for partial replacement of strict legislative norms with guidelines and recommendations that will not block but support innovative management decisions.

2. Overview of civil-service reform in Russia as the neighbor of the EU

2.1 PA reforms analysis

Public administration reforms (PA Reforms) are examined in numerous studies. The theoretic approaches for PA reforms mostly concentrate on the comparative studies of PA reforms or on its institutional dimension. The description of comparative and institutional theoretic approaches for PA reforms in Europe can be found in Kuhlmann and Wollmann (2019). From a PA/governance-paradigm perspective, the classical understanding of recent PA reforms in Europe is described in Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) as the mixture of Neo-Weberianism with NPM instruments of public-service provision, public-evaluation procedures, responsiveness to citizens, etc.

The COCOPS (Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future) Top Executive Survey, which was implemented from 2010 to 2014, and then systematized in Hammerschmidt et al. (2016), has customized European PA reforms according to such dimensions as countries' orientation on some paradigms of governance and in-depth cases that reflect the specifics of the countries' governance systems themselves.

For the region of Central and Eastern EU countries and their neighbors, the PA reforms are staying in the focus of scholars. A lot of books are concentrated on the subject, including Kopric and Kovac (2017), Vintar et al. (2013), Bouckaert et al. (2008). The Special Issue of the *NISPAcee Journal* (published in 2018 as the part of regular Issue) is devoted mostly to PA reforms in the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe region (Kopric 2018; Nakrosis 2018; Nemec 2018; Pesti and Randma-Liiv 2018; Špaček 2018). The Working Group of NISPAcee, which has existed since 2009 (currently – WG-3), concentrates its activity exclusively on the area of PA reforms in the region. Looking at the evolution of research approaches, one can see that they show the increasing complication of explored factors, cases, actors, instruments and theories of reforms: contextual factors – institutional and social contextual factors – variations of contextual factors; country-oriented cases – groups of cases – impact of EU standards on cases; stakeholders – actors; leadership – outsourcing – management and its instruments – innovations – general, mostly Weberian theory of PA reforms – NPM theory of PA reforms – beyond NPM theory of PA reforms – adjustments to local context – best practices – benefits for practitioners – evidence and lessons to be learned. We believe that the inter-regional factor of PA reforms should also be taken into consideration, and we will show (using Russian case) how it can enrich the research of PA reforms analysis.

2.2 Civil-service reform as a part of PA reforms

The civil-service reform as part of PA reforms seems to be the significant and troublesome part of the interest of researchers. That is, we believe, because of the heritage of the countries of the former Soviet bloc: the system of administration of these countries has been based on ideological principles of decision-making and on the lack of professional meritocracy principles of selection as well as the promotion of bureaucracy (Nemec et al. 2017, 45). To shift from such a system to Weberian, or, more recently, NPM and/or NPG principles of civil service is one of the most difficult tasks for all post-soviet countries.

The case of Russia is the most complicated one for analyzing among post-soviet countries due to the lack of in-depth knowledge of recent internal processes in the Russian bureaucratic apparatus. The official statistical data are not enough for reconstructing a clear picture of ongoing processes of transformation. Quite often, attempts to collect more extended and detailed data fails due to the restrictions surrounding administrative space in such a sensitive area, such as classified information about the personnel within government bodies. That is why the analysis of contemporary Russian bureaucracy and its reform is produced mostly from a political angle, and the constructions sometimes are hidden and replace the real internal process descriptions (activity of the HR offices of governmental bodies) with some politico-administrative institutional explanations. We believe that the spectrum of civil-service innovations and the actions for their implementation should be ex-

plored “from an internal position”, based on an in-depth analysis of HR practice cases in governmental bodies themselves.

The sources examining Russian civil-service reform, its history and trends from the perspective of public-administration science, is divided into English and Russian language literature, which just occasionally overlap and are often contradictory. Among the research in English we would like to mention sources such as Barabashev and Straussman 2007; Rowney et al. 2009; Obolonsky and Barabashev 2014; Pryadilnikov 2016; Gans-Morse et al. 2017; Gans-Morse et al. 2019; Nezhina and Zaytseva 2018; Barabashev and Klimenko 2017; Kalgin et al. 2018; Nezhina and Barabashev 2019; Dobrolyubova et al. 2018; etc.). At the same time, the basic books and research articles containing a complex analysis of Russian bureaucracy in a historical perspective (Gosudarstvennaya sluzhba 2009; Obolonsky 2011), about the history of two cycles of civil-service reforms based on the materials of expert groups that were participating in reforms preparation (Reforma gosudarstvennoj sluzhby Rossii 2003; Reforma gosudarstvennoj sluzhby Rossijskoj Federatsii 2006), are published in Russian, with no translation into English (as information for English-speaking readers, some authors of well-known works in Russian language include V. Yuzakov, G. Borschevsky, G. Kupriashin, N. Klisch, etc.).

The closest for our subject are the works devoted to the reasons for the lack of success and of the cyclical character of Russian civil-service reform. The unfinished nature of Russian civil-service reforms, as it is shown, is due to institutional factors (Gel'man and Starodubtsev 2014; Kupriashin 2015), the political and administrative elites' resistance (Obolonsky 2017; Sungurov 2018), limited capacities of the expert community (Barabashev and Prokofiev 2019), the configuration of the management system of reform (Borschevsky 2018; Borschevsky 2017; Panova and Oparina 2015), and weak motivational aspects of reforming (Atnashev 2017; Ivanova and Podolskiy 2017; Kalgin and Kalgina 2018). Despite the differences in explanations, all mentioned researchers agree that the absence of success in civil-service reform in Russia, and the curtaining off of reform after an inspiring beginning to every cycle, is caused by the lack of political and administrative will at the top level of the Russian government.

3. Research questions, hypotheses, tasks and research methodology

Our research is initiated by the question, how do the HR offices of regional and municipal administrations in Russia promote and stimulate civil-service reform? The research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of horizontal and vertical mechanisms of communication and collaboration between HR regional and municipal governmental organizations, and those from federal authorities in support and dissemination of regional in-

novative HR practices, actually exist (from 2015)? How does it stimulate the initiative coming from regional and municipal level?

To outline our research, we will try to explore how the national regulator has recently organized the support of civil-service reform in a bottom-up mode. We call this form of support the “soft support behavior”. The essential feature of the “soft support” of civil-service reform is to initiate the active exchange of HR ideas and innovations created by regions themselves, to help regions, instead of strictly managing the regional HR processes by federal authorities.

2. What kind of innovative HR practices that are in demand for civil-service reform are developed in regional and municipal HR offices? What do such innovative HR practices look like (examples)? Which HR practices appear in the first place and why?

We will show some cases of innovative regional HR practices that are beyond the existing Russian civil-service legislation and have great potential for increasing the quality of the civil service in Russia. We will explain how and why some HR innovative practices that were created and nourished in one region, were later supported and enriched by other regions.

The main methods of this research were case studies and document analysis. For the first part (case studies) we identified and analyzed 27 cases from regional practices and 6 cases from the practice of federal governmental bodies that became winners during years of competition. The basis for the analysis of the documents were the materials of the competition committee, as well as reports of MLSP on monitoring the results of the implementation of best practices in the activities of state bodies at all levels.

4. Research

The recent (since 2015) model of the HR activity of regional state and municipal bodies in Russia might be represented as a two-level collaboration mechanism. The essence of this model is as following: (1) horizontal cooperation between regional and municipal HR offices is mediated by vertically shaped procedures of interaction with federal bodies (*kadres departments* inside the federal ministries); (2) the result of this interaction is the appearance of a cumulative effect: horizontally shaped exchange of best practices is converted into an elaboration of some *synthetic inter-regional practices with a higher level of innovation*. The process of elaborating and disseminating innovative HR practices passes through five steps: (i) generation of new HR ideas/initiatives and their experimental implementation at the regional level and application of this practice for the national competition; (ii) presentation of results and joint discussion with colleagues from other regions during the final face-to-face session of the national competition; (iii) selecting and awarding best practices by the expert jury (expert group); (iv) posting a ready-to-use descriptions

of “best” practices on the MLSP of Russia website; (v) mass implementation of innovations by state institutions at the federal, regional, and municipal levels. *As a result, there is a gradual change in the sphere of public-service personnel management, which entails a change in the entire system of civil service.*

The methods of our research are based on and in-depth analysis of the national all-Russia competition of HR practices in civil service among the HR departments (or branches) of the regional municipal, federal bodies, other state organizations, as such state corporations, that are managed by the Department of state policy in the area of civil service and anti-corruption of the MLSP of Russia. We have used the material of the expert group that is organized to manage the competition, the data base of applications of the HR departments (over 200 applications each year, at the start of the competition in 2015), and the discussion materials and presentations of the participants of competition during the annual conferences of the HR departments that are organized by MLSP of Russia. As it is an event on the national scale, this competition is reflected and resolved in a lot of decisions that are currently made, including the Protocol of the Joint meeting of Administration of the President of Russia, and Apparatus of Government of Russia in January 2019, and the Order of the Government of Russia in support of the national competition of HR practices in civil service (Order of the Government 2020).

4.1 The structure of the national competition on best HR practices in civil service

The structure of the all-Russia national competition is divided into organizational structure and the structure of the competition itself (division of the subjects of competition).

To describe the *organizational structure of competition*, we would like to note that it is an absolutely new phenomenon for the Russian administrative landscape: it brought together academics, HR consultancy experts, and practitioners with the organizational support of MLSP of Russia. The expert jury has existed from the very beginning of national competition since 2015 and has been renewed every year. The expert jury is divided into sub-sections that evaluate applications according to nominations announced beforehand. Joint meetings of the expert jury for the applications’ evaluation are organized (roughly) weekly prior to the announcement of the winners and have the goal to discuss and to combine the experts’ personal evaluations. The conference for the exchange of new HR practices is organized as a one–two-day national face-to-face event, gathering over 200 participants/practitioners of the HR managerial level from government and municipal bodies representing all regions of Russia (heads, deputy heads, senior specialists of HR offices). The conference consists of a series of round tables, plenary session with presentations of selected best HR practices by the winners, and poster sessions. Annually, around 5–6 practices receive 1st-level diplomas and 10–15, 2nd-level diplomas. Establishing

communication among the local bearers of HR practices is no less significant a goal of this event than the selection of the best.

For the purpose of disseminating innovative practices and of breaking “the fear of innovations” for HR offices of regional administrations to do something out of the scope of existing federal regulations, the management and leading HR specialists of regional, municipal, and specialized federal bodies should meet and discuss the new ideas and mechanisms of HR work. So, in 2016, MLSP of Russia decided to launch an additional project on interagency training and creating communities of practice. Public and governmental organizations that were announced as winners in the competition were chosen as the platforms for study visits from other regions (31 platforms in regions of Russia, or on the basis of organizations of the public sector and of some more innovative federal bodies). Those organizations that wanted to implement a particular practice agreed with the platform organizations on the experiences exchange, sending their representatives to internships. As a result, during the next two years (2017–2018), more than 300 organizations participated in this interagency and interregional experience exchange, in addition to the annual national conference.

The goals and subjects of competition are reflected in its structure. As soon as the Department of State Policy in the area of civil service and anti-corruption of the MLSP of Russia launched the national competition, it immediately became one of the most popular events in Russian civil- and municipal-service communities. Governmental and municipal organizations from all over Russia were trying to show their best to convince the jury that their practices are the most excellent ones and that their HR-specialists are the most professional.

However, the main objective of the contest was not just rivalry or competition. The main idea of organizers was to bring together HR professionals from governmental and municipal organizations initiating the process of knowledge-sharing. The national competition was designed to solve several goals:

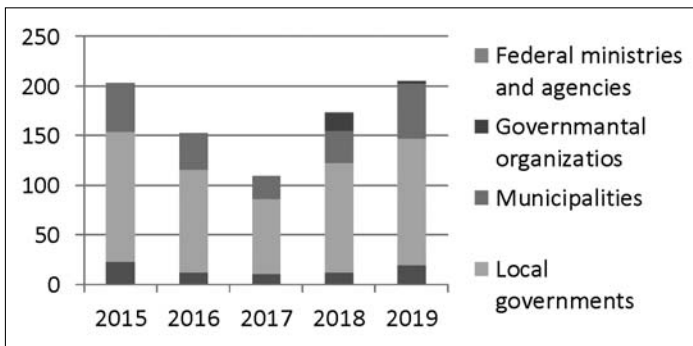
- To start inter-regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing;
- To create motivation for change;
- To raise the efficiency and effectiveness of HRM practice in government and public organizations;
- To create a pool of innovative practices (success stories) that could be further used by HR practitioners in the public sector on federal, local, and municipal levels;
- To create a professional community (network) of HRM specialists in the public sector all over Russia;
- To raise the prestige of the human-resource-management profession among civil servants, to attract motivated students to educational programs on HRM in civil service.

A separate task was to create additional stimuli for the professional development of specialists in human-resource management. It is known that in addition to training in narrow professional areas, the most effective tools for professional development are benchmarking, knowledge-sharing, and cross-training.

During its five-year history, the contest showed evident progress in terms of the quality of applications and the value of communication between participants. It is interesting to note that in the second and third years of the contest the number of applications decreased to almost half of the original amount. At the same time, the number of accepted applications increased by the same proportion (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Number of applications during the five years of the national competition on best HR practices in civil service



This figure reflects a very interesting trend: after the first round of the competition, applicants have become much more orderly in preparing applications. The rigor of the jury, the high level of previous applications, which win the nominations, have set high quality requirements for the next generation of participants. There has also been a trend to resubmit applications from the same organization after significant improvements in the following year.

Characteristics of participants also changed. We can see that the number of federal ministries and agencies participating in the contest decreased, and the number of public and governmental organizations from regional and municipal level is slowly, but noticeably increasing from year to year. Geography and status of applicants changed as well. During the first year, the majority of applicants were representing big cities. After two years, the contest was joined by representatives of small towns and municipalities from the most remote regions of Russia.

The competition was organized with nominations in the following categories:

1. Integrated human resource management;
2. Search, recruitment, and selection of personnel;
3. Qualification requirements;
4. Professional adaptation and orientation;
5. Personnel assessment;
6. Personnel motivation;
7. Professional development;
8. Civil-service culture & ethics;
9. Anti-corruption activities;
10. Talent management;
11. Use of information technologies in HRM processes.

As can be seen from this list, the nominations cover all key areas of human-resource management in government organizations. They also reflect the specifics of the civil service.

Table 1
Number of applications in nominations by year

Nominations/number of applications	2016	2017	2018	2019
Integrated human-resource management	8	10	11	7
Search, recruitment and selection of personnel	18	13	14	12
Development of qualification requirements	1	5	8	2
Professional adaptation and orientation	12	7	22	30
Personnel assessment	13	12	21	6
Professional development	16	13	11	1
Personnel motivation	10	15	13	14
Civil-service culture	5	5	6	7
Anti-corruption activities	17	10	12	11
Talent management	11	13	7	9
Use of information technologies in HRM processes	16	6	12	9

Table 1 shows that the most popular nomination every year is the nomination on professional adaptation and orientation. This can be explained, on the one hand, by the prevalence of this practice in all governmental organizations. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to use. It is also very interesting to note that search,

recruitment and selections as well as personnel assessment are also among the most popular practices.

As noted above, one of the main goals of the contest was to create a pool of innovative practices that could be further used by HR practitioners in the public sector on the federal, regional, and local (municipal) levels. All projects that won in their categories were then posted in detail on the website of the MLSP of Russia in a “ready to use” form. Subsequent monitoring revealed that even detailed descriptions of the practices were not enough to stimulate their implementation in other organizations without strong collaboration of HR offices and adaptation of the practices to specific conditions of the bodies – “recipients”.

4.2 Cases of innovative HR practices and of their dissemination

For HR practices in the public sector, the term “innovations” has a special meaning: it refers to the practices that close the gaps in national civil-service legislation, they do not contradict the legislation, but at the same time are not mentioned in it.³

The process of introducing the innovative HR practices into governmental and municipal bodies has two phases: the pioneering work of some HR office in the elaboration and initial usage of HR practice, and in the next stage the inter-regional cooperation of HR offices (dissemination of the innovative practice) in the form of adaptation or of joint projects of a pioneering HR office and its followers from and concordances with other regions/bodies.

Let us describe some of the examples that illuminate the essence of innovative practices that goes through both phases. The selected cases presented different innovative regional HR practices, including: mentorship practices; HR management complex computerization practices; practices of motivation evaluation; e-training for servants; and summer career schools for students who would like to apply for vacations in governmental and municipal bodies. All these HR technologies are not mentioned in the legislation about civil and municipal service although they are not prohibited by legislation. It helps better to understand the difference between the new approach to civil-service reform based on inter-regional cooperation of “grass-roots” activities (“bottom-up”) and the “standard” approach based on the principle of centralized management of public-service reform (“top-down”).

The *mentorship practice for young civil servants* who were just nominated to their positions was simultaneously initiated by several regions of Russia and initial-

3 Some innovative HR practices are already known and applied in business HR, but due to the specifics of the public sector (such as the difficulties for applying it in a huge governmental system, or the case where some HR suitable for business procedures does not fit the legislation about civil service, or the usage of HR practice being quite expensive in case of its massive application, etc.), they were not used in governmental bodies even though they can potentially be re-shaped and explored. Mostly, HR offices of governmental and municipal bodies are quite skeptical, if not to use the word “afraid”, to introduce innovative HR practices or to borrow and test it because of the high risks to break the rules and traditions of HR governmental routine work.

ly applied to the all-Russia national competition in 2015 as the spectrum of different local procedures of mentors' quality of work evaluation, meetings of mentors, trainings for mentors provided in various ways, including the training by corporate universities, and regional legislative acts (varying from region to region) in support of these initiatives. The following years, as those initiatives started to increase among many regions of Russia, local procedures of one region started to be absorbed by mentorship practices of other regions. As the next step (in 2019), four regions of Russia (Yaroslavl oblast, Kostroma oblast, Lipetsk oblast, Voronezh oblast) jointly produced the practice of mentorship for newly hired employees, including inter-regional exchange of mentors (visits of best mentors to the regions/collaborators), the joint inter-regional trainings for them, inter-regional competitions among mentors and their "pupils", and procedures of evaluation of the effectiveness of mentorship standardized for all four regions. The inter-regional practice of mentorship shows the popularity of the idea of mentorship for Russian regions and the significance of this innovative technology for providing better quality of adaptation for young civil servants regarding the conditions of their work in governmental bodies.

The project of *computerization of regional HR offices' work* also started from local initiatives of HR offices of different regional administrations in 2015. Among these initiatives were the introduction of an automatic informational system of HR for regional management, the elaboration of procedures of filling out the forms about income and property by civil servants online, and the preparation of regional electronic register of civil servants, etc. In 2019, these practices were developed, especially in leading regions such as Saint Petersburg, Leningradskaya oblast, and Tatarstan. These complex practices enrich each other and are discussed, using the inter-regional platform for study visits. The trademark of this complex practice (as it is presented by Leningradskaya oblast) is: total computerization of HR processes based on establishing a one-shop window for all HR procedures and their concentration in a joint HR department, and transferring the responsibilities for personnel decision-making from top managers to mid-level personnel of the HR office. All information for the Governor and for the Head of the Regional Government as well as for the Heads of the Departments is available in an online regime via a specialized program on the intranet. Testing of the candidates for vacant positions, checking professional competencies, regular attestations, personal data, plans for professional development are part of the e-system. Personal e-cabinets for civil servants of the region were created and have an inter-active component (communication with the HR department). The system has capacities to be extended and improved as proposed by the Republic of Tatarstan, by using the software for the smart phones of civil servants with personal access codes. The collaborative practices of computerization of HR were continued in the e-evaluation of regional civil servants on the basis of their KPI, as it was done in Saint Petersburg practice in 2017. They have been developed recently by the Republic of Udmurtia, Novosibirskaya oblast, Rostovskaya oblast, Altaj Region, Tulsckaya oblast, Chelyabinskaya oblast, Komi Repub-

lic, Khabarovskiy Kraj, the city Nalchik of Kabardino-Balkarskaya Republic, and supported by some federal bodies, such as the Russian Ministry of Finance. This practice goes beyond the federal technology, as the federal statistical portal of civil service is less elaborated and can be used just for the purpose of data collection, but not for managerial purposes.

The *evaluation of the motivation of civil servants* is outside the scope of the federal Russian legislation, but the regions along with some federal bodies (as examples we would like to mention the Russian Federal Agency of Inspections in Healthcare Area, the Rosfinmonitoring Agency and the Russian Ministry of Finance) are highly involved in elaborating the appropriate HR practices. The common vision of these practices supported right now (by the City of Surgut, Vologodskaya oblast, Novgorodskaya oblast, Lipetskaya oblast, Krasnoyarskaya oblast, Irkutskaya oblast, Bryanskaya oblast) consists of motivational testing/evaluation by using a combination of questionnaires, behavioral cases, and scales of motivational risks, etc. The results of the evaluations are used for promotion decisions, nominations of civil servants to participate in training programs, elaboration of the measures to prevent professional burn-out, and of the mapping of professional risks (such as inappropriate usage of material stimuli). The federal legislation is not developed in the area of introducing the motivational instruments and evaluations, their usage in promotion, nominations for the training programs on a personal basis, and remuneration, etc. The methodic brochure prepared at the beginning of 2019 by the Russian MLSP was inspired by the regional initiatives, but it cannot compensate the lack of federal legislation.

The *transition of training programs for civil servants into an e-format* (e-training) became popular among Russian regional administrations years before the COVID-19 pandemic, and right now it is flourishing rapidly. The reason for this transition is that the instruments of continuing education for civil servants announced by federal legislation are outdated, the organization of the management of this process is based on gathering the applications from bodies mechanically, and combining of groups of civil servants from different bodies “by chance”.

The first e-training programs, blended with off-line teaching, were elaborated by the Moscow government in its corporate university of Governance of the Government of Moscow in 2016. Later, it was supported and improved by the Republic of Bashkortostan in 2019 by the introduction of the system for managing individual educational/training trajectories for civil and municipal servants by using the capacities of the internet regional portal consisting of constantly replenished e-training programs and courses. The system includes the preliminary computer testing of the levels of professional competencies needed for a servant due to the execution of their functions and for individual professional development as well as the automatic nomination of the required training courses based on the result of tests. Passing the training according to the individual trajectory in the electronic interactive regime is

going through a personal e-cabinet (including distant evaluation of the progress in competencies). The issuing of the certificate with the final results of training/scores for courses proceeds automatically. The potential to include new courses and training programs upon requests from civil servants, to extend the portal for all regions of Russia is in high demand by regions – such practices are improved recently and accommodated to local requirements by Chelyabinskaya oblast, Permskiy kraj, Novosibirskaya oblast, Penzenskaya oblast, Altajski kraj, Kaluzhskaya oblast, and by federal bodies responsible for the management of civil service in Russia. Also worth mentioning is the strong alternate practice of e-training (on the basis of smart-phone software) that was proposed in 2019 by Republic of Tatarstan.

The need to involve students who graduated in bachelor- and master-degree programs into the programs for HR selection for the civil service leads to the creation of *special technologies for students' preparation to competitive selection*. It is very significant for students who graduated in the areas of public administration, jurisprudence, political sciences, sociology, economics because they are in demand in other sectors of the labor market with better salaries. As an example of the HR practices for new personnel attraction, we would like to note the example of the summer carrier school for graduated students organized by the Government of Moscow (2018, 2019). It consists of a combination of video interviews and creative tasks for the selection of candidates to participate (last year, the original list of applicants was reduced from 5000 to 50 persons), arranging the team-building exercises for the selected participants, the extensive classes and master classes, excursions to the Government and talks with members of the Government of Moscow, networking, different professional competitions and trainings, and discussions with concerned citizens, etc. This HR practice is developed also in Yamalo-Nenetskiy Avtonomnyy Okrug, Sakha-Yakutia Republic, Ulyanovskaya oblast, Vologda city, city Verkhhnaya Pyshma, Fund of Social insurance (Petersburg regional office), Khanty-Mansi Autonomy okrug, city Perm, city Salekhard, Orlovskaya oblast, Novgorodskaya oblast, Zabaikalsky kraj, and Tulsckaya oblast. An additional reason why it is so popular in Russian regions is rooted in the lack of federal regulations of agreements of cooperation between educational organizations and administrations/governmental and municipal bodies, and of the system of professional competencies in universities educational programs shaped independently, without any advice emanating from governmental bodies.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The research shows that the new regional practices are influencing PA reforms on the national level through the mechanisms of inter-regional (horizontal) and regional-federal (vertical) cooperation. The results of our research can be outlined according to macro and micro features of the above-described civil-service reform-

ing. The micro features that characterize the capacity of stimulating the civil service reform are:

- The ability of federal stakeholders (Administration of the President of Russia, Apparat of Government of Russia, MLSP of Russia) to bring civil-service reforms to completion at the federal, regional and municipal levels is very limited;
- The focus on regional and municipal levels, their cooperation with each other and with the federal level authorities is a trademark of civil service reform in Russia nowadays. In this new scheme, the federal ministries and Agencies (their HR offices) are participating in the reform as part of the broad national movement by not staying above the process and starting to behave as “local participants”, rather than stakeholders.

Micro features that outlined the capacity of HR regional offices of governmental and municipal bodies to stimulate civil service reform consist of:

- The manifestation of a network of local interregional platforms for the exchange and dissemination of best practices as a specific mechanism for reforming the civil service;
- The emergence of joint local initiatives for direct inter-regional HR practice co-production;
- The involvement of an increasing number of regional participants in civil-service reform processes and the introduction of a different style of local assessments to select best practices.

Our findings generally demonstrate the necessity to take into account the regional dimension of PA reform that can avoid the opposition of two approaches: local independent regional reforms expressing the autonomy of regions vs complete hierarchical subordination of the regions to unified civil-service reform initiated by the federal center. Horizontal inter-regional cooperation is mediated in this scheme by vertically shaped mechanisms (the all-Russia national competition). Also, a horizontally shaped exchange of best practices is converted into an elaboration of some synthetic HR practices collectively that can be and should be used as the sprouts for new summarizing/centrally adopted legislation.

For future research, it is vital to explore the role of regional communities of practice (CoP) consisting jointly of regional practitioners, leading analysts and academics, with the participation of federal bodies responsible for civil-service management, in preparing and disseminating local HR initiatives. The schemes of this co-productive work should be described and analyzed both in case studies and using the statistics of participation. To recognize it as some NPG construction for civil-service-reform promotion may be the working hypothesis to describe this phenomenon in Russia.

In other words, we propose a strategy for research of CoP-shaped civil-service reform, in contrast to existing research approaches toward civil-service reform that are based on an analysis of formal institutes, political and administrative will, and limits to push the reform by legislation—drifting as such. New kinds of research questions arose, such as: Is it possible to realize the HR CoP “benchmark” reform of civil service in cultural and social conditions other than those in Russia? How can HR regional CoP be analyzed by different methods arising from case studies, such as using statistical methods or indicative measuring of effectiveness?

References

- Atnashev, T. [Атнашев, Т. М.]. 2017. “Самоотверженные чиновники? Факторы высокой мотивации госслужащих.” *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 3, 149–166.
- Barabashev, A. and A. Klimenko. 2017. “Russian Governance Changes and Performance.” *Chinese Political Science Review* 2(1), 22–40.
- Barabashev, A. and V. Prokofiev. 2019. “Why Reforms of Public Service of Russia are Cyclic: An Institutional Explanation from a Liberal Perspective.” In R. Cucciollo (ed.). *Dimensions and Challenges of Russian Liberalism*. Cham: Springer, 165–188.
- Barabashev, A. and J. Straussman. 2007. “Public Service Reform in Russia: 1991–2006.” *Public Administration Review* 67(3), 373–382.
- Borshevsky, G. [Борщевский Г. А.] 2017. “Оценка тенденций развития государственной службы: Вопросы методологии.” *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 1, 103–128.
- Borshevsky, G. [Борщевский, Г. А.]. 2018. “Реформирование государственной службы в России: промежуточные итоги и перспективы.” *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 2, 65–88.
- Bouckaert, G., J. Nemes, V. Nakrosis, G. Hajnal and K. Tonnisson (eds). 2008. *Public Management Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: NISPAcee Press.
- Copric, I. 2018. “One Candle, Two Candles ... Is There the Third One? Croatian Public Administration Service Reform before and after the EU Accession.” *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 11(1), 41–61.
- Dobrolyubova, E. I., E. N. Klochkova and V. N. Yuzhakov. 2018. *The Number and Remuneration of Federal Civil Servants in the Conditions of Implementation of Program-target and Project Methods* [in Russian]. Moscow: Delo.

- Gans-Morse J., A. Kalgin, A. Klimenko, D. Vorobyev and A. A. Yakovlev. 2019. "Public Service Motivation as a Predictor of Altruism, Dishonesty, and Corruption." Northwestern Institute for Policy Research. Series WP-19-16.
- Gans-Morse, J., A. Kalgin, A. Klimenko and A. Yakovlev. 2017. "Motivations for Public Service in Corrupt States: Evidence from Post-Soviet Russia." Basic research program working papers series: public and social policy. WP BRP 13/PSP/2017.
- Gel'man, V. Ya. and A. V. Starodubtsev. 2014. "Possibilities and Limitations of Authoritarian Modernization: Russian Reforms of 2000s" [in Russian]. *Politiya* 4, 6-30.
- Gosudarstvennaya sluzhba [Государственная служба]. 2009. *Комплексный подход*. Под ред. А. В. Оболонского. Moscow: Дело Publ. House.
- Hammerschmid, G., S. Van de Walle, Rh. Andrews and Ph. Bezes (eds). 2016. *Public Administration Service Reforms in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing LTD.
- Ivanova, N. and D. Podolskiy. 2017. "Гарантии государственных гражданских служащих как элемент современной кадровой политики." *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 1, 173-190.
- Kalgin, A. [Калгин, А. С.] and O. Kalgina [О. В. Калгина]. 2018. "Карьерный выбор между государственным и частным сектором среди студентов: Роль черт личности." *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 4, 145-171.
- Kalgin, A., D. Parfenova, D. Podolskiy and J. Campbell. 2018. "Performance Management and Job-Goal Alignment: A Conditional Process Model of Turnover Intention in the Public Sector." *International Journal of Public Sector Management*. 31(1): 65-80.
- Kopric, I and P. Kovac (eds). 2017. *European Administrative Space: Spreading Standards, Building Capacities*. Bratislava: NISPACEE Press.
- Kuhlmann, S. and H. Wollmann. 2019. *Introduction to Comparative Public Administration: Administrative Systems and Reforms in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing LTD.
- Kupryashin, G. L. 2015. "Institutional Pitfalls and Public Administration Crises." *E-Journal on Public Administration* 51. Available at http://e-journal.spa.msu.ru/uploads/vestnik/2015/vipusk__51._avgust_2015_g._/problemi_upravlenija_teorija_i_praktika/kupryashin.pdf (last accessed 18 October 2020).
- Ministry of Labor. 2019. *Report on PA Programs*. Available at <https://mintrud.gov.ru/ministry/programms/gossluzhba> (last accessed 18 October 2020).

- Nakrosis, V. 2018. "The Agendas of Public Administration Service Reforms in Lithuania: Windows of Opportunity in the Period 2004–2017." *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 11(1), 91–114.
- Nemec, J. 2018. "Public Administration Service Reforms in Slovakia: Limited Outcomes (Why?)." *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 11(1), 115–134.
- Nemec, J., A. Kuzekova, K. Sadykova and A. Kuzekov. 2017. "Human Capital of Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan." *Public Administration Issues* 3, 29–50.
- Nezhina, T. G. and A. G. Barabashev. 2019. "Serving the Country or Serving Thyself: The Quest for Prosocial Motives of Russian MPA Students." *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 39(1), 106–134.
- Nezhina, T. G. and T. V. Zaytseva. 2018. "A Public Servant: To Be or Not to Be. The Determinants of Employment Decisions Among the Russian MPA Students." *International Journal of Public Administration* 41(1), 72–82.
- Obolonsky, A. V. [Оболонский, А. В.]. 2011. *Кризис административно-бюрократического государства. Реформы государственной службы: международный опыт и российские реалии*. Москва: Фонд "Либеральная миссия".
- Obolonsky, A. V. 2017. "The Crisis of the Bureaucratic State and the Failed Attempts to Overcome it in the Russian Public Service." *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration Journal* 4, 569–591.
- Obolonsky A. V. and A. G. Barabashev. 2014. "How to Clean Out the Augean Stable of Our Bureaucracy: Two Views." *Russian Politics and Law* 52(2), 77–94.
- The Order of the Government of the Russian Federation. 2020. Правительство Российской Федерации. Постановление от 26 июня 2020 года № 935 "О Всероссийском конкурсе Лучшие кадровые практики и инициативы в системе государственного и муниципального управления." Available at: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/74218108/> (last accessed 18 October 2020).
- Panova, E. and N. Oparina. 2015. "Modern Instruments of Human Resources Management in Russian Civil Service" [in Russian]. *Public Administration: Electronic Journal* 48, 103–122.
- Pesti, C. and T. Randma-Liiv. 2018. "Towards a Managerial Public Service Bargain: The Estonian Civil Service Reform." *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 11(1), 135–154.

- Pollitt, C. and G. Bouckaert. 2011. *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis: New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pryadilnikov, M. 2016. "Public Policy Training and Development of MPA/MPP Programs in the Russian Federation." *Policy and Society* 35, 371–383.
- Reforma gosudarstvennoj sluzhby Rossii [Реформа государственной службы России]. 2003. *История попыток реформирования с 1992 по 2000 год*. Под ред. Т. В. Зайцевой. Москва: Издательство "Весь Мир".
- Reforma gosudarstvennoj sluzhby Rossijskoj Federatsii [Реформа государственной службы Российской Федерации]. 2006. (2000–2003 годы). Под ред. А. Г. Барабашева. Москва: Издательский дом ГУ-ВШЭ.
- Rowney, D. K. and E. Husky (eds). 2009. *Russian Bureaucracy and State: Officialdom from Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Špaček, D. 2018. "Public Administration Service Reform in Czechia after 2000: Ambitious Strategies and Modest Results?" *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* 11(1), 155–182.
- Sungurov, A. Yu. 2018. "Russian Reforms, Its Research and Discussion". In A. Sungurov (ed.). *Russian Reforms: View from 2017*. Moscow: Norma, 6–19.
- Vintar, M, A. Rosenbaum, G. Jenei and W. Drechsler (eds). 2013. *The Past, Present and Future of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: NISPAcee Press.
- Zajceva, T. [Зайцева, Т. В.] and T. Nezhina [Т. Г. Нежина]. 2019. "Привлечение молодежи на государственную и муниципальную службу: опыт регионов России." *Вопросы государственного и муниципального управления* 1, 160–189.