

THE IMPACT OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study aims to determine the directions of professionalization of university management to achieve sustainable development of higher education institutions.

Methods: The paper examines the leading theoretical standpoints concerning professional university management and presents the concept of the university as an organized system. An expert survey is utilized to identify the main directions of specialization of university management.

Results: Most respondents (56.4%) believe that changes introduced by Federal Law facilitate more efficient university management, while 40% voice the opposite opinion. The study shows that the respondents very strongly (29.1%) and rather strongly (38.2%) agree that universities need to fulfill similar tasks.

Conclusions: The authors conclude that the professionalization of university management is taking place in many countries, is a part of the transformation of the higher education sector, and encompasses the implementation of the concept of strategic university management, the enhancement and improvement of university administration, and the professional development of managers in higher education.



Keywords: professionalization, university management, university marketing, talent management, resource management.

INTRODUCTION

The effective functioning of society depends on whether it creates the desired attitudes and skills of individuals and equips them with operational and creative knowledge and values. Consequently, one of the most important challenges facing Russia is education, particularly higher education. It is seen as a causal factor in Russia's sustainable development and its socio-economic, cultural, and educational transformation.

Changes in the Russian higher education system need to be implemented immediately since social expectations from it consistently increase along with economic development. Therefore, a significant increase in financing of education and higher education from the state budget in the coming years can be not only expected but demanded. This improvement will be facilitated by a qualitatively new form of economy shifting from the key role of GDP and the indicator of economic efficiency to the rising role of social development indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), Human Poverty Index (HPI), and other related humanistic indicators (Gishkaeva et al., 2019).

The adoption of the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" (State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 2012) strengthens the connections of academic education with business, the economy, and the labor market, decentralizes the establishment of fields of study and specializations at universities, brings more clarity in the operation of the higher education system, enables the introduction of innovative directions of training that are more adapted to the university's capacities, students' expectations, and the needs of the economy, and creates an organizational space for various managerial decisions. The foundation of organizational changes is the strengthening of competition and diversification of the university's mission.

It can be argued that greater freedom in the use of various organizational solutions and increased competition contribute to the professionalization of management. Many strategic, structural, and managerial decisions are tested at universities and adjusted to their needs (Medeshova et al., 2022).



The Russian higher education system is factually just beginning its long journey of professionalization of university management. This backlog is caused primarily by the fact that state universities focus predominantly on non-commercial activities. Members of the university community do not oppose the incorporation of fundamental principles of management into university governance processes, yet they see a problem in the submission of universities to market requirements. Viewing universities as a social services sector, they consider education and science to be a greater priority. Thus, university management staff are faced with the task of finding solutions to incorporate the values of management into the idea of a higher education institution oriented toward a knowledge society to guarantee its graduates high-quality vocational training and valuable content for their professional work.

Together with the expansion of the range of decisions made by university management bodies, there is a rise in the potential of interest in instruments that will optimize university management to achieve the sustainable development of higher education institutions. Access to adequate managerial solutions will enable university management to introduce new management technologies to improve the efficiency of management of individual functional areas within university management. This refers to management systems for human resources, finance, educational marketing, etc.

Thus, the relevance of our research and the stated problem lies in the opportunity for universities' sustainable development based on the professionalization of university management.

The novelty of the study is provided by a description of opportunities for the professionalization of university management as a mechanism for the sustainable development of universities. The practice of university management shows that university management bodies struggle to make well-reasoned decisions given the lack of an appropriate methodological toolkit.

The goal of the study is to determine directions for the professionalization of university management to achieve the sustainable development of higher education institutions.

In this paper, we seek to answer the following research questions: (1) Do the changes introduced by the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" facilitate more efficient university management? (2) Should universities fulfill similar missions in the context of professionalization of university management? (3) What are the main directions of professionalization of university management?



LITERATURE REVIEW

To sort out the issue of the expansion of organizational concepts, methods, and techniques in universities, we should begin by defining the term "professionalization of management". In a broad sense, professionalization refers to the organization and subsequent evolution of social institutions, principles, and laws connected with the creation of the professional structure of society, as well as to the growing number of demands imposed on the worker (Makedon et al., 2019). Relevant literature presents several terms associated with the concept of professionalization, but few link it with the sphere of university management.

Two levels of analysis of professionalization dominate the nomenclature of management. The first concerns the organization that professionalizes itself by efficiently distributing its resources and thereby gradually becomes more efficient in achieving its goals (Fedotova, 2015). The second viewpoint targets the person in an organization who can act professionally and become a professional (Denisova et al., 2023).

A prerequisite for the professionalization of human resources is the enhancement of competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes that ensure long-term and efficient work in the organization (Aipova et al., 2023). Thus, the professionalization of management can take on the meaning of the organization and its managers acquiring and using competencies that allow its efficient management.

Professionalization implies organizational stability and continuity, reinforces management improvement processes (Howorth et al., 2016), is reflected at different levels of the organizational system, and is therefore applicable to strategies, organizational structures, and cultures (Ablazhei, 2020). Responsibility, reliability, and striving to reach the set goals are not only human characteristics but cultural norms that can be part of organizational identity (Wagner et al., 2023).

In the sphere of organizational management, we can observe the development of methods and techniques that strengthen the professionalization of management, which in the functionalist-systemic paradigm is considered a stage in the organization's aspiration to progress (Dekker et al., 2015). A.P. Isaev (2015) argues that the process of professionalization is complex and lengthy, but a long-term trend reinforcing this process can be observed in the field of human resource management. Many organizations have created and implemented human capital development plans at the



strategic level and realized them in the form of quality systems, procedures, and operational plans and schedules (Barilenko et al., 2022; Boitier & Rivière, 2016). Numerous scholars stress that professionalization is a process that takes into consideration not only organizational systems and resources but also the complex interactions of the enterprise with the dynamic environment (Khudiakov & Semushina, 2016; Panasenko et al., 2023).

Professionalization of university management is taking place in many countries and is an integral part of the transformation of the higher education sector (Bagratuni et al., 2023; Khudiakov & Semushina, 2016). The manifestations of university management professionalization around the globe include the development of the concept of university management and the reinforcement and improvement of management specialties in the sphere of higher education (Kallio & Kallio, 2014; Litvinova et al., 2023). The concepts of new public management have extended management methods borrowed from business to the public sector, including the educational sector (Vlasova & Molokova, 2016). The concept of new public management is intended to point to best practices in university management (Rodenkova et al., 2023). However, in some ways, it contradicts the logic of traditional academic thinking (Kliachko, 2016).

The changes experienced by university management are found in universities' administrative structures, the legal norms of their operation, and the missions and strategies, as well as the values of universities, as seen through the lens of a changing academic ethos (Tomilin et al., 2022). Changes in university management are derivative of the transformations that have taken place in the university environment, and more particularly in society, where the hierarchy of values and norms, standards, customs, and widely understood life priorities have been transformed (Bleiklie et al., 2011; Cherkesova et al., 2023).

We should highlight that the professionalization of state university management adheres to the stakeholder model (Capano & Regini, 2014), while private universities tend to follow the shareholder model, which should, however, recognize the non-profit nature of the academic and educational mission (Whitchurch, 2018). Literature on this topic emphasizes the need to view the professionalization of university management as a kind of dialogue and compromise between the interested parties (O'Connor et al., 2019).



The changes brought about by the professionalization of university management have manifested themselves in new practices in relation to the different professional groups working in universities, i.e., researchers, teachers, and university administrators (Bradley, 2016). Traditional management evolves through the professional groups of academic managers, including, for example, rectors and vice-rectors, chief information technology officers, and chairpersons and members of university councils (Kivistö et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the professionalization of university management involves control over how the university's chosen mission is realized (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). In the past few decades, universities' missions have been changing depending on the type of organization. These changes are formed as a result of or under the influence of various hybrid university concepts, spanning from the Humboldtian model to an entrepreneurial university (Noordegraaf, 2015). Canonically, universities are assumed to pursue three missions: research, education, and cooperation with the environment (the so-called "third mission") (Pitt et al., 2010). Public universities focus mainly on non-commercial activities, whereas private universities, especially private for-profit ones, pursue commercial goals (Deering & Sa, 2014).

The gradual increase in the professionalization of management (Bekeshev, 2019), noticeable in the Russian higher education sector, is driven by several factors, including increasing requirements for reporting, the development of methods for quantitative assessment of universities, differentiation of universities, and growing competition.

Universities, seen as organizational systems, consist of integrating subsystems, including strategy, structure, and organizational culture, and rely on knowledge, capital, and human resources. Over the last decades, there has been a rise in the role of strategic management, which increasingly uses integrated control systems to analyze research, teaching, and entrepreneurial activities and to draw comparisons within and between universities (Rozanova, 2020). A strategic choice concerns the spheres of research and pedagogical activity, education, finance, and marketing. A. Kulbaeva et al. (2023) suggest that strategic activity should serve the professionalization of management processes. The need for professionalization of university operations can be further evidenced by the fact that university management and administration are increasingly using new tools to control processes and projects that serve the decision-making process (Hladchenko, 2015). However, research



findings indicate that the Russian higher education sector demonstrates very limited appreciation and knowledge of the concepts and methods of strategic management in universities (Artashkina, 2018).

Researchers are convinced that strategic management should aim for proper planning and implementation of decisions concerning the distribution of organizational resources to (1) achieve the organization's strategic goals, (2) realize the strategic plan, and (3) improve the adaptability of the enterprise's operations to external conditions (Tomilin, 2022). As suggested by N.V. Medvedeva (2015), the management of universities, especially public universities, should support the attainment of objectives that are determined by the type of organization and its key stakeholders. In the case of private universities, strategic goals are set mainly by constituent members. In contrast, in public universities, this goal setting is vested upon the executives, staff, and student representatives organized in collegial bodies, together with policymakers (Glebova et al., 2023; Sułkowski et al., 2020). Analyzing the autonomy of universities, it is worth noting that independence in the decision-making process is largely defined by the type of university, its charter, and its power structure.

A university's competitive advantage consists in the identification of the area in which it is particularly strong, and which differentiates it from other operating entities in the higher education sector. This also covers the unique composition of organizational resources and competencies that strengthen the institution's competitive position relative to other organizations in the industry. Strategic planning should be guided by capitalizing on the competitive advantage of the university in question (Mntonintshi & Mtembu, 2018). Organizational strategies will apply to the university, whereas functional strategies deal with different aspects of the university. Hence, they may relate to financial, human resources, marketing, and other functions. A prominent part is also played by such additional strategies and policies as scientific, educational, and entrepreneurial ones (Gregory, 2008).

The speed and quality of changes in strategic university management give evidence that the university management process has been and is developing in close connection with business practices (Gayduk et al., 2023; Parakhina et al., 2017).

An important role in university management belongs to its organizational structure. Analyzing literature that addresses this issue, we conclude that academic culture was not subjected to scientific reflection in the heyday of Humboldtian universities. Research into organizational culture began at a time of increasingly



profound changes in the models of traditional universities. One of the axes of this change and simultaneously a manifestation of university professionalization is the evolution from a culture of trust to one based on verification, audit, and control (Efimov & Lapteva, 2012).

Researchers also point out the privatization of a part of higher education through outsourcing of some services in public higher education institutions (Marlina et al., 2018) and the transformation of higher education institutions' management systems from the traditional, academic collegial and administrative system to a managerial governance system of a corporate nature, based on business decisions (Tight, 2014).

METHODS

Research approach

Relying on the above-described approaches to the specifics of the professionalization of university management, the qualitative-quantitative approach to research was adopted as the most appropriate to study complex phenomena given the uncertainty of initial information.

The most useful research strategy to establish the directions of university management professionalization was deemed to be a qualitative study. The data provided by qualitative methods is more informative and extensive compared to quantitative, as it provides greater detalization. This will support the collection of data and feedback from the pool of experts regarding the functional areas of university management.

Empirical context

In accordance with the research goal, scientific sources were selected through the Russian citation database RINTS and the international databases Web of Science and Scopus by keywords "university management", "professionalization", "talent management", and "resource management" in both Russian and English with the date of publication limited to no more than 15 years ago.

Data collection

Data collection was carried out from July 10 to September 10, 2023 in the form of a review of literature on the research problem, sampling of the pool of experts, subsequent survey of experts via email, and the processing and analysis of its results.



The survey was conducted among people performing managerial and administrative functions in various positions at universities (rectors, vice-rectors, heads of academic departments, and heads of administrative departments).

Invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to 62 experts. The sampling criterion for the expert pool was at least 8 years of experience working in university management. A total of 55 people agreed to participate in the survey, of which 66% were men and 34% were women. Most of the respondents were aged between 30 and 60 years. Most of the experts had an academic degree. The prevailing work experience in higher education among the respondents (39%) ranged from 11 to 20 years.

The experts who agreed to participate in the study were emailed questions that caught our interest after the literature review. Two of the questions asked for a response on a Likert scale and the third required a free-form response:

Question 1. Do the changes introduced by the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" facilitate more efficient university management?

Question 2. Should universities fulfill similar missions in the context of professionalization of university management?

Question 3. Specify the main directions of professionalization of university management.

All survey participants were informed of the goals of the survey and the intent of its organizers to publish the results in a summarized form.

After the answers were received, the experts were sent a second email asking them to rate the directions of university management professionalization identified in the previous stage (Question 3) by importance on an ordinal scale by assigning points. Based on the scores given by experts, the rank and weight of each parameter were determined.

Data analysis

To ensure greater objectivity of the analysis of survey data, the concordance of experts' opinions was tested with Kendall's concordance coefficient (W): $W = 12S/n^2(m^3-m)$, where S – the sum of squared deviations of all the experts' rankings of all the directions of university management professionalization from the average; n – the number of experts; m – the number of assessed directions of professionalization of university management.

The information obtained through the expert survey was further processed to determine the weights of the obtained parameters, a rank transformation matrix was



constructed, and then the arithmetic mean of individual weights was calculated for each of the parameters. The resulting weights signify the importance of the given direction of university management professionalization according to the experts.

Data analysis also utilized the triangulation method for the sake of validity and reliability of empirical findings. Triangulation was performed by triangulating the researchers. Next, each topic was discussed, and the information agreed upon by all the participants in the study was recorded. The triangulation process thus enhanced the validity of the expert survey data and improved the quality of the information obtained. All the results obtained from the research were documented in a research report.

RESULTS

The results of field research (the expert survey) provide answers to Questions 1 and 2 and data on the key directions of professionalization of university management (Tables 1-3)

Table 1. Question 1: The changes introduced by the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" facilitate more efficient university management

| | N | Percentage |
|-------------------|----|------------|
| Strongly agree | 10 | 18.2 |
| Agree | 21 | 38.2 |
| Disagree | 18 | 32.7 |
| Strongly disagree | 4 | 7.3 |
| No opinion | 2 | 3.6 |
| Total | 55 | 100 |

Analyzing responses to Question 1 (Table 1), we observe a certain differentiation in the attitudes of university staff to the changes introduced by the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" and their influence on the efficiency of university management. Most respondents, 56.4%, believe that the changes brought about by the Federal Law contribute to greater efficiency of university management, while 40% of the respondents hold the opposite view.



Table 2. Question 2: Universities should fulfill similar missions

| | N | Percentage |
|-------------------|----|------------|
| Strongly agree | 16 | 29.1 |
| Agree | 21 | 38.2 |
| Disagree | 12 | 21.8 |
| Strongly disagree | 5 | 9.1 |
| No opinion | 1 | 1.8 |
| Total | 55 | 100 |

The obtained results further demonstrate that the respondents strongly agree (29.1%) and agree (38.2%) with the statement that universities should fulfill similar missions. This means that the understanding of the diversification of universities' strategies and missions among managers and administrative staff is less than ideal. The overwhelming majority of our respondents see the missions of universities as similar.

Table 3. The main directions of professionalization of university management

| No. | Directions for professionalization of university management | Rank | Weight |
|-----|--|------|--------|
| 1 | Transformation of academic culture into a culture of control, introduction of an accounting and accountability system, which will allow controlling university management processes (financial, education quality assurance) | 1 | 0.36 |
| 2 | Introduction of the concept of talent management | 2 | 0.24 |
| 3 | Efficient use of the university's resources and economization of the higher education sector, which implies a pursuit of austerity in universities and causes a decrease in the share of state finance in the work of state universities | 3 | 0.19 |
| 4 | Introduction of the concept of university marketing, changing the focus of higher education from the academic to the professional by adapting academic programs to the demands of the labor market | 4 | 0.13 |
| 5 | Identification of the university's competitive advantages, incorporation of competition mechanisms into the education system, and the work of the university | 5 | 0.08 |

Note: compiled based on the expert survey; the concordance coefficient $W = 0.74$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong consistency of expert opinions

DISCUSSION

The results of the expert survey indicate that the professionalization of university management leads to a transformation of academic culture into a culture of control, which, as argued by researchers, entails a shift from trust in employees to the mechanisms of motivation and monitoring (Glebova et al., 2023; Mntonintshi & Mtembu, 2018). This approach is intended to promote higher efficiency of the new university management system, yet simultaneously causes a loss of the specific



academic ethos grounded in self-monitoring (Efimov & Lapteva, 2012; Gayduk et al., 2023).

The professionalization of university management is accompanied by many problems related to the formalization and bureaucratization of activities that are in essence creative and difficult to standardize. The formalized approach to teaching and research meets opposition from a part of the scientific community (Ablazhei, 2020). Notably, the greatest problems arise in the process of change and the pursuit of professionalization in university management. This may stem, first and foremost, from differences between the culture of trust, which is based on the authority of the professoriate, and control cultures, wherein managers and centralized rules are made the source of power.

An important tool for the professionalization of university management in the sphere of human resources, as suggested by respondents, is the concept of talent management. In literature, this is referred to as integrated talent management. To achieve effectiveness, an organization has to manage talents in the right way: by identifying, strengthening, and raising the performance of talented and competent employees (Gishkaeva et al., 2019).

Human capital management at universities, talent management included, has certain peculiarities that distinguish it from human resource management in enterprises. Most importantly, business organizations and universities differ in their goals, at least in the case of state universities. Enterprises operate in the economic logic of profit, market share, and competition, which translates into employees being perceived as subjects that produce economic goods. Universities driven by the mission of producing social goods, i.e., science and education, function by balancing the logic of higher values with economic thinking. Literature covering this issue points to the urgent need to intensify the talent management process in higher education (Capano & Regini, 2014).

A. Bradley (2016) highlights three leading trends of change in the paradigm of talent management to create competitive advantage. First, Bradley argues that reward programs and employee performance studies in higher education do not directly affect the effectiveness of activities related to talent management processes in higher education institutions. The second trend is the lack of attention to leadership development and planning for changes in the composition of university staff to prepare personnel who will eventually be ready to assume leadership positions in the



university. The third and final trend concerns insufficient monitoring of talent development and attraction processes at universities.

Analyzing literary sources on the matter (Boitier & Rivière, 2013), we can identify three key trends in competition for talent in universities:

- competition for scientists (researchers) who will strengthen universities' research programs,
- competition for academicians – universities strive to attract the best academicians to improve the quality of education and increase the attractiveness of the academic programs offered,
- competition for talented students – attracting the most talented students and providing them with avenues for academic development and subsequent career advancement at universities.

Professionalization of university management in the sphere of finance, also noted by respondents among the directions of university management professionalization, should result in the most efficient use of the university's resources. This direction is increasingly manifested in the introduction of new IT solutions and financial programs in universities, reinforcing the process of control (Deering & Sa, 2014).

Another functional area, which for a long time did not play a significant role in management in higher education, is the area of university marketing in the broad sense (Tomilin, 2022). The professionalization of management in this domain should be aimed at developing training and job (employment) offers consistent with the labor market, as well as building the image and reputation of the university. Universities are increasingly professionalizing their marketing departments, strengthening their position in the organizational structure. In addition, the tools of relationship marketing are gaining in popularity among universities in their marketing activities (Whitchurch, 2018). There is a noticeable desire to build a network of reciprocal relationships between the university and its stakeholders. The university plays a special role in this process by building positive links with students and alumni. This effort is supported by social media, which has become one of the pillars of marketing communication.

New trends in university management have introduced systems and mechanisms for evaluating individual groups of university staff, as well as incentive measures and monitoring tools, in finance, research, and teaching. Presently, research and teaching staff are increasingly pressured to produce more scientific achievements,



which are then parameterized and considered as the basis for extending the employment contract or promotion and awards. The introduced education quality assurance systems require formal attestation of the university teaching and administrative staff, which is carried out regularly by both executives and students. The results of such evaluation become the data used in making tactical and sometimes even strategic decisions. This information ultimately serves as material to improve processes within the university. As demonstrated by F. Pucciarelli and A. Kaplan (2016), the direction of today's cultural transformation is specific, and Russian universities are at different stages of change than the world's universities.

The transformations experienced by the Russian higher education system, along with positive changes in enrollment rates and the number of students, urge the heads of universities to look for new forms of cooperation to both enrich their educational offer and improve its quality. In the past few years, universities have enhanced their cooperation with the socio-economic sphere. This cooperation is typically justified by mutual benefit. On the one hand, universities increase the practicality of their training programs, raising the value of the diploma and adapting the specializations of graduates to the demands of the labor market. For entrepreneurs, on the other hand, the value of this interaction is represented by a graduate who possesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies that are demanded by employers and allow them to get a job. The very process of building relationships between universities and the socio-economic environment is increasingly becoming a consistent part of university strategies. The professionalization of university management also implies a broader involvement of external stakeholders in the decision-making process. An important element that shapes the quality of established relationships is a reciprocal understanding of the other party's needs and the advantage of long-term cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Previous studies demonstrate that the professionalization of university management is a multifaceted and complex process that requires, above all, time and changes in the perception of academic ethos. A common ground for universities and enterprises can be the sphere of innovations. This area should be regarded as a source of opportunities for the development of Russian universities. Strategies aimed at



conducting scientific research at universities should shape a pro-innovative organizational structure.

Another significant aspect of the professionalization of university management is public policy. State policy must be realized to encourage scientific and research achievements so that the best Russian universities can compete for talent and attract the most talented scholars. The strategy of research and educational universities will consist in finding a balance between these two aspects. Technical universities can also move towards innovation, applications, and applied sciences, while economic universities may aim at building connections with business and practical training.

A vital element in the professionalization of university management is the work of universities involving the implementation of innovative solutions in various spheres, such as research, teaching, administration, and management. This activity has to promote improved quality of education, research, and administrative management of the university.

Strategic investments into the science and higher education system need to come in the form of attracting talent and establishing the most advanced IT infrastructure. Recruiting and retaining talented researchers is possible not only by enabling research and development but also by providing competitive remuneration and motivation.

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, our study is partly limited by the size of the expert pool, and hence its results cannot be extrapolated. Thus, we recognize the need for more studies on the examined topic parallel to ours. The general findings of several studies covering experts in different countries will paint a broader picture of the professionalization of university management as a factor in the transformation of higher education and a precondition for the sustainable development of universities.

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