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SOCIAL RISKS OF UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION IN PERSONNEL ASSESSMENTS

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Abstract

The article considers the transformation of modern universities into specific corporations ("quasicorporations") with the following characteristics: a clear statement of the mission; active involvement in entrepreneurial activity with the help of production and transfer of innovative products to interested public entities on a reimbursable basis; modification of interaction with the external environment through the exchange of goods and services; creation of flexible network structures focused on consumer needs. It is proved that the "corporatization" of universities contributes to the widespread use of administrative management practices. Their features are: branched and hierarchically built managerial (administrative) apparatus; regulation and formalization of activities; widespread use of penalties and sanctions, focused on coercion; emphasis on developing and maintaining a corporate culture. It is proved that the expansion of administrative management practices within the framework of the traditional university environment leads to the set of risks connected with a possibility of not achieving aims of scientific and educational process. Based on the results of universities of the Belgorod region in 2018–2019, dispositions of main groups of university staff in relation to risks are determined. Despite the recognition of defects in the administrative management system, it is shown that the feeling of satisfaction with them is typical for most of the university staff. The risk is usually perceived in a negative sense and identified with the threat, which minimizes the likelihood of using the positive opportunities followed by the risks. It also does not contribute to building an effective risk management strategy.

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1. Introduction

Modern Russian universities are purposefully transformed into specific corporations focused on delivery of educational services (Froumin et al., 2014). Despite the fact that the concept of “corporation” is debatable (Goplikova, 2016; Prigozhin, 2003; Zaporozhets, 2011), it can be stated that the corporatization of higher education institutions has some advantages. Some of them are: a clear mission statement, active involvement in entrepreneurial activity with the help of production and transfer of innovative products to interested public on a reimbursable basis (Blass, 2001; Hanada, 2013; Schelkunov, 2017), modification of interaction with the external environment through the exchange of goods and services (Konstantinov & Filonovich, 2007), creating flexible network structures focused on consumer needs (Firsova & Chelnokova, 2013). One of the logical consequences of the university's corporatization is building a rigid system of administrative management, the characteristic features of which are: extensive and hierarchically built management (administrative) apparatus, which tends to constantly grow and increase the degree of influence on internal and external processes; regulation and formalization of activities; widespread use of penalties and sanctions, focused on coercion; emphasis on the development and maintenance of corporate culture as a tool to unite the staff and develop group thinking.

Administrative management practices have always been applied in higher education institutions, but they have never been in priority in relation to the educational and scientific process focused on the translation of cultural experience and scientific research (Wilson & Corr, 2018; Jon & Baldwin, 2009). Without a doubt, administrative management has positive features, because it significantly streamlines the educational and scientific process, sets clear guidelines for it and allows you to plan both in the short and long term. However, the above specific characteristics of administrative lead to a set of social risks.

There is no solidarity in scientific literature regarding the definition of social risk (Beck, 2000; Douglas, 1994; Giddens, 1994; Wildawski & Dyck, 1994; Zubkov, 2003). However, most researchers see it as a possibility of not achieving aims in the face of uncertainty. Following them, the social risks of administrative management of universities are understood by us as the possibility of not achieving aims of the functioning of higher education institutions in the conditions of their instable external status and internal organizational environment (Yokoyama, 2018).

The presence of risks requires building effective management systems with the participation of both the administration and the university staff, which, in turn, implies an adequate understanding of the process of “riskogenesis”.

2. Problem Statement

The research problem is determined by the contradiction between the need for effective risk management due to the widespread use of administrative practices in a modern university and the lack of an adequate understanding of the nature of risks, their structure and consequences for the majority of university staff (both management staff and teachers and researchers), individual groups of workers and the education system as a whole.

The complexity of the formation of such ideas is determined, on the one hand, by the ambiguity of the risk phenomenon itself; on the other hand, the difficulty of determining the causes of their occurrence

and the functional role in the management process. In practice, a rather paradoxical situation takes place. The influence of the uncertainty factor on "riskogenesis" was noted by Smakotina (2009) and Yanitsky (2003). However, administrative practices are aimed at eliminating uncertainties through the unification, formalization and standardization of the university environment and the university's relationship with external contractors, which, in fact, should help minimize risks. This paradox disorients many subjects of the educational space and generates distorted ideas about risks and the possibilities for managing them.

Of course, our results cannot be "extrapolated" to all Russian universities in a "pure form". However, they are quite typical for the so-called "provincial" higher educational institutions, distant from capitals and large megacities, limited in their resources, but at the same time playing an important role in the development of subjects of the Russian Federation.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the article is the peculiarities of risk perception by university staff.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article is to identify the specifics of the attitude to risks of the main actors of the scientific and educational space of the university – administrative and managerial personnel and scientific and pedagogical workers.

5. Research Methods

The article is based on the results of the sociological study "Social Risks of Regional University Management" conducted by Logvinova (2018) in November 2018 – February 2019 in universities of the Belgorod region. The study included a questionnaire survey based on the quota sample of scientific and pedagogical workers (N = 364) and representatives of administrative and managerial staff (N = 144) as well as in-depth interviews of experts (N = 18), which were researchers who have scientific publications on higher education issues.

6. Findings

The study showed that the tendency to strengthen administrative practices in the management of universities is clearly recorded by university staff. It was noted by 72 % of the surveyed research and teaching staff and by 78 % of administrators. A big amount of the latter is quite explainable by the fact that they are constantly included in these practices, while there are still some specialists who do not experience administrative pressure or feel it to a small extent in the scientific and pedagogical team.

However, it should be noted that the question of the characteristic features of the administrative management system caused certain difficulties among the respondents. None of the proposed characteristics received the support of many scientific and pedagogical workers (SPW) and administrative and managerial personnel (AMP). So the regulation of all internal processes was pointed out by 44 % of respondents from among the SPW and 47 % from the number of AMP; drawing up job descriptions with

the definition of the functions, rights and obligations of employees (27 and 24 %, respectively); a clear organizational structure (25 and 38 %); development and use of a system of sanctions and incentives (25 and 8 %).

Based on the answers received, it can be argued that a clear image of the administrative management system has not yet developed in the consciousness of university staff. Moreover, there is no unity in ideas about its typical characteristics. Depending on their status, respondents pay attention to one or another of its features and underestimate the importance of the rest. Administrators focus on the organizational structure, since its alignment and development are their professional task, teachers and scientists on the sanctions system, since they (especially negative) are most painfully perceived by representatives of this group. It is sanctions and administrative control that have recently become the main tools of motivation in the management of university teams, even though their productivity in areas related to intellectual activity raises serious doubts.

Contrary to the often-expressed alarmistic forecasts regarding the collapse of universities, the study showed that their staff is successfully adapting to the realities of administrative management. 71 % of respondents expressed their satisfaction with it. It is unlikely that this result can be considered as an indicator of the effectiveness of the system. Rather, it indicates a high level of staff loyalty to their institutions. And this loyalty is caused not only by the tradition and ability of the university to provide workers with decent living and creative conditions, but by a lack of choice in the labor market.

An indirect evidence of the negative reflection for administrative management practices is that the main reason for their spread by respondents (45 % of the SPW, 52 % of the AMP) consider the bureaucratization of internal processes. Of course, the bureaucratic management system itself is not uniquely negative or positive. But in the mass consciousness, it is usually associated with its deformation and is perceived in that way.

45 % of the SPW and 52 % of the AMP believe that bureaucratization leads to increase in formal reporting documents, file streams, mainly focused on the administrative apparatus from among top managers and teachers. They confirm that in internal formalized and structured relations “people are governed by procedures and formal rules” (Romanova et al., 2011, p. 63). This fact was recorded during a study conducted by the Center for Social Technologies of the Belgorod State National Research University in 2011. During its course, more than half of the managers (54.39 %) noted “that in recent years there has been more paperwork” (Babintsev & Rimsky, 2014, p. 8).

However, it should be noted that in the course of our study, only a small part of the respondents call other than bureaucratization negative characteristics of the administrative system of university management, which naturally does not allow most of them to correctly assess the risks that arise during its functioning.

Many respondents have a one-sided view on them. Even though the risk itself does not carry an unambiguously negative burden, the survey participants found it difficult to identify possible positive consequences of the risks of administrative management.

At the same time, differences in perceptions of risks inherent to administrators and scientific and pedagogical workers were revealed:

- 66 % of the AMP respondents named the risk of an increase and complication of university workflow, 29 % – SPW;
- the risk of a decline in the quality of education (36 % of the AMP respondents, 57 % of the SPW);
- the risk of increasing lack of professionalism (34 % of the AMP respondents, 29 % – SPW);
- the risk of imitation of management (29 % of AMP respondents, 19 % – SPW);
- the risk of abuse of power (27 % of the AMP respondents, 27 % – SPW).

From the obtained distribution of answers, it follows that teachers and researchers are most concerned about the possibility of reducing the quality of education; administrators – about deformations of the management process itself (complicating the workflow, faking, growth of unprofessionalism). We explain the differences in approaches by the fact that the majority of teachers and researchers are still oriented towards the “Humboldt type university,” whose mission is to transmit knowledge in combination with scientific research and, on this basis, socialize youth within the framework of the maximum free interaction between students and trainees (Sinkovics & Schlegelmilch, 2000).

However, this type of university is currently being replaced by the so-called “entrepreneurial” university, in which technologies that ensure (or do not) the implementation of a scientific and educational product (Jauhiainen et al., 2009) are of paramount importance. Administrators are most consistently involved in the technological process and often pay attention to factors that determine the possibility of not achieving the goals set for the organization. Of course, the quality of education and with this approach is declared as an important task and one of the most important indicators of the image of the university. However, the very idea of quality is changing. It is increasingly being considered within the framework of the so-called “scientometric” approach (Gralka et al., 2019). As Mironov (2016, para. 03) notes, “scientometrics from a tool that helps a scientist navigate in a growing sea of literature, is becoming the main criterion for evaluating scientific activity. In fact, scientometric indicators become a mean of making managerial decisions”.

Contrary to the prevailing trend, many educators are trying to act within the framework of the traditional paradigm, even though it becomes less and less prioritized. They are extremely sensitive to the change in the educational paradigm, openly or indirectly criticizing it. “Universities designed to build a model of the future, instead provide educational services, – state Sevostyanov and Gaynanova (2014), reflecting the dominant position among the SPW,

in the market of services, as you know, supply is determined by demand, and the function of advertising (in this case, advertising of educational services) is reduced to form the needs of potential consumers of educational services that are beneficial to satisfy the manufacturer (in this case, universities). The demand for those or other services is determined by the values that prevail in the public consciousness. (p. 44)

Based on the data obtained, it can be argued that respondents, especially those from the AMP, associate risks not with the administrative practices themselves, but with their excessive use. Clearly,

administrators (to a lesser extent scientists and educators) imagine that by streamlining processes in the education system, administration helps minimize risks, as well as their negative and positive consequences. Problems arise when they are a) introduced inconsistently and thoughtlessly; b) against tradition; c) realized in transformed forms.

However, it seems that the position of critics of administrative defects is unpromising. And it is indicative in this regard that only 51 % of respondents from the SPW (slightly more – 61 % from the number of AMP) believe: at present, the abuse of administration in a university can be limited. Nevertheless, the practical proposals formulated (both by scientific and pedagogical workers and administrators) during the survey to solve this problem are characterized by an extremely general content and the absence of truly creative ideas. So most often the following recommendations were made simplify administrative procedures; increase the level of professionalism of management personnel; introduce effective methodologies for evaluating results; introduce effective methods of public control.

The vagueness of the recommendations reveals a clear general pessimistic attitude of the staff, which does not contribute to building an effective risk management strategy at the university.

7. Conclusion

Based on the study, we can draw the following conclusions.

1. The tendency to transform modern Russian universities into “quasicorporations” stimulates the dissemination of administrative management practices in them. Being initially not quite natural to the traditional university environment, they create a complex of social risks, expressed in the possibility of not achieving goals, not receiving the planned results.

2. Moreover, in many cases, risks are not a natural consequence of administrative management, which is focused on streamlining social processes and usually is the result of instability and uncertainty, while it is determined by the conditions for the implementation of administrative practices.

3. Despite the recognition of defects in the administrative management system, for most of the university staff a feeling of satisfaction with it is characteristic most likely reflects not the effectiveness of administrative practices, but a limited ability to change the situation.

4. Both teachers, researchers, and administrators see a set of risks that are provoked by the administrative practices of the traditionally formed educational environment. Moreover, the risk is usually perceived in its negative value, it is usually identified with the threat, which minimizes the likelihood of using the positive opportunities offered by the risks and does not contribute to building an effective risk management strategy.

5. The risk assessment is based on a system of ideas about the content of the educational process and the role of a modern university (educational paradigm). Teachers and researchers, who for the most part are guided by the “*Humboldt type*” university model, associate the main risks of administration with the possibility of reducing the quality of education, administrators oriented to the “entrepreneurial” university see them mainly in the deformation of managerial technologies.

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