

EdCW 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference Education in a Changing World: Global
Challenges and National Priorities****DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AT
THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

The article dwells on the essence of leadership as a major trend in modern society. The authors study the phenomenon of leadership in the student environment, the attitude of students and teachers towards it; they search for effective technologies to develop leadership qualities in students during their studies at a university. The research results in the analysis of today's youth preferences in regards to their role in the team, to communication with the leader and the possibility of becoming a leader. The article examines the current research by Russian and foreign scientists in the field of leadership; it singles out the peculiarities of developing the professional culture of a leader and discusses the possibilities of using the university digital educational environment to develop leadership qualities in students. The authors of the article define the most important leadership qualities, namely, responsibility, creativity, sociability, emotional stability, the knowledge of a foreign language, a high level of digital literacy, the ability and willingness to motivate, to inspire, and to lead. To stimulate the leadership potential of students it is strategically important to find the most effective ways of teamwork organizing, to create conditions for expanding the digital transformation of educational content, to shift goals, objectives, and educational content towards meta-subject. The article is of interest for scientists dealing with leadership problems, as well as for project team leaders, for young people interested in self-establishment, self-development, and self-management in the digital economy.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, society is characterized by the intensive use of digital communications in the professional life. New technologies are changing the professional picture of the world, the role and capabilities of the individual in various activities. At the same time, the role of individual motivation and value attitudes, of moral and ethical qualities that can affect the success of professional activity increases. At present, one can say that the development trends of the professional society are determined by the following factors: digital economy, new digital technologies and the digital generation (Blinov, 2020).

These areas have become priorities of the Russian Federation state policy; they are included in the federal strategic documents “Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the Russian Federation for 2017–2030”, the program “Digital Economy of the Russian Federation” (part 2 – “Human Resource and Education”), the project “Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation” within the framework of the Federal Project “Education”.

The digital economy development is inseparable from the digital environment, i.e. “the environment that defines professional milestones, attitudes to making a career, ideas of professional future, and productive strategies of behavior” (Brodovskaya et al., 2019, p. 232).

International and Russian researchers of digital economy and digital education distinguish a broad range of competencies which determine the competitiveness of a professional.

According to the author of the digital professional education and training concept “the key constituent of the new economy is not a single qualified employee – a “person in the right place”, but a team that can effectively solve project or functional problems” (Blinov, 2020, p.14).

Analyzing the features of education in the context of the digital society transformation, Kondakov (2019) notes that at present, key competencies are shifting towards communicative and creative ones. In his opinion, it is communication and teamwork that will become the basic characteristics of the professions in the future - the professions of digital economy.

In the report “Global Education Futures”, the authors emphasize the growing role of such meta-competencies, as creative abilities, negotiation and collaboration skills, empathy, teamwork, etc. (Obrazovaniye dlya slozhnogo obshchestva, 2018).

The Atlas of Professions presents the most important supra-professional skills for any employee of the future, in particular:

- the skills of interdisciplinary communications, knowledge of technologies in a variety of related and non-related industries;
- the ability to interact both with individuals and with entire groups (Atlas professii, 2020).

These positions are confirmed by analytical research of various international organizations aimed at developing fundamental skills models of the digital economy. According to the World Economic Forum, the top 10 key skills include, among others, the ability to work with people, coordination and interaction skills (The 10 Skills You Need to Thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2016). The Dig Comp digital competency model also includes communication and collaboration competencies (DigComp 2.1. The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens..., 2017).

The model “Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society” has gained particular popularity among educational communities; it offers four fundamental competencies (“Four Cs”): critical thinking, communication, collaborative work, and creativity (Obrazovaniye dlya slozhnogo obshchestva, 2018).

Thus, there is a pronounced tendency to underline significance of the communication skills for a future professional; according to Spivak et al. (2018), these skills could be developed during team and group work. One cannot but agree with the opinion of Belaya (2018) that nowadays “a professional is expected to successfully interact with other people, to motivate oneself and others effectively, to display a well-reasoned position, to be efficient in resolving problem situations” (p. 34), to possess “teamwork skills bringing the synergistic effect due to the complex solution of problems” (Ermakova, 2019, p. 130).

These ideas appear in the strategic regulatory documents in the field of education (federal state educational standards for higher education), where universal competences play a special role (Shekhonin et al., 2019). One should underline that the composition and content of universal competencies at different levels of education (Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees) are the same for different areas of training; it emphasizes their universal essence and importance for the professional training of a future specialist.

The research on Russian educational standards for various areas of undergraduate and graduate programs identified such universal competencies, as the abilities to carry out social interaction and to perform a certain role in a team, to organize and to manage the work of a team, developing a team strategy to achieve the goal; the ability to apply modern communication technologies for academic and professional interaction, in a foreign language as well, which corresponds to such professional competencies as “teamwork” and “leadership”. It proves the increasing role of joint activities, group interaction, and leadership.

The content characteristics of these competencies are focused on the development of abilities that allow a person to interact successfully in a team, as well as to master communication technologies in native and foreign languages, if the team is international. Any process, including the communication process, must be organized, controlled, and motivated. Our research is focused on the universal competences that are presented in the categories “Teamwork and Leadership” and “Communication”. The success of joint activities of team members is critically determined by the competencies of a manager or a leader (The 10 Skills You Need to Thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2016).

2. Problem Statement

In English, a leader means “the one in charge, the first one walking in front”. Leadership is studied in various fields of knowledge: psychology, social science, management theory, sociology, and pedagogy. For example, in political science, a leader is a party leader, an influential person (Sanzharevskiy, 2015). *The Comprehensive Explanatory Sociological Dictionary* (2020) describes a leader as “an authoritative member of a group, organization, society, who performs the role of organizer, initiator of group interaction, who is recognized by the group due to his/her ability to solve problems and tasks important for the group”. *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology and Pedagogy* (Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar po psikhologii i pedagogike, 2012) characterizes a leader as a member of a group with the highest sociometric status, whose special role in group decision-making and organization is recognized. *The*

Comprehensive Economic Dictionary describes a leader as a person capable of influencing a group of people, of directing and organizing their work (Azrilyan, 1997). According to P. Drucker, the theoretician of management, “leadership is the ability to raise the human vision to a broader horizon, to bring human performance to higher standards, and the ability to shape a personality while going beyond the usual, limiting frameworks” (Drucker, 2014, p. 81).

Thus, it follows from the above definitions that a leader is a person, a central member of a group who has influence, enjoys recognized authority, regulates relationships in a group during joint activities, where his/her right to make responsible decisions is recognized. Then, leadership can be understood as a person’s ability to influence people in order to encourage them to work aimed at achieving the goals. The main purpose of a leader is to perform the role of coordinator, facilitator, psychological organizer and moral leader (Mirzoyan, 2013).

There are several theories of leadership. According to F. Fiedler’s situational theory of leadership, a leader’s effectiveness depends on how focused he/she is on a task or a relationship. Behavioral theory suggests that people can learn and become leaders through learning and observation. Management theory emphasizes the acquisition of resources or rewards in exchange for recognition of leader’s power by followers, while transformation theory emphasizes the activity and creativity of the leader and the sincere commitment of the followers to the leaders’ ideas. A leader can be formal or informal.

A leader is a person who leads the group towards a specific goal and who is not afraid of responsibility. A leader can achieve the goal in different ways: by making decisions singly or by delegating authority. In the second case, it will contribute to the development of all team members.

Among the most important qualities of a leader, researchers single out stress tolerance (Williamson, 2016), flexibility, perseverance (Chen, 2019), intuition, erudition (Chien, 2018), organized nature (Christner et al., 2020), responsibility (Ye et al., 2020), and ability to establish communication (Raveendhran et al., 2020).

The leadership qualities of a future professional are developed at the university. However, we believe that the traditional organization of educational process does not sufficiently employ all educational opportunities for the development of leadership as a professionally significant competence. Leadership qualities cannot be developed within the framework of one academic discipline; they require a revision of the goals and objectives, building up the over-subject content. Leadership qualities development at the university should turn to meta-subject direction.

At present, the globally significant communication trend is “the shift towards the distance education”, when the goals and content of communications are preserved, but their forms are changing. The university’s responsibility and task during the development of leadership qualities in students is to use various information and educational opportunities and environments, including digital ones.

Contemporary higher education is actively embedded in the paradigm of the digital economy, which sets targets, changing the development vector to the priority of interactive communication, teamwork in a digital educational environment. In the system of higher education, the digital educational environment of the university is an electronic information and educational environment, which, according to Donina and Vodneva (2019), “provides meaningful informational and technical support for the

educational process, administrative and economic activities of the university and increases the effectiveness of its educational and management activities” (p. 28).

Korshunova (2019) suggests that the main factor in the globalization of young people is their possession of digital technologies; it is the modern “digital youth” that can lead the emerging technological changes, since the digital biosocial environment is comfortable for young people” (p. 127). The leadership qualities of a future professional should be developed as early as possible. For university graduates, these qualities should become professional ones (Brodovskaya et al., 2019).

Thus, there is a question about the potential of the university digital environment for the development of the leadership qualities in a new generation of people living in this environment.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What leadership qualities do students consider most important for interaction in a digital environment?
- 3.2. What are the strategic directions of leadership qualities development in the digital environment?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose is to identify the importance of leadership qualities for present-day students, whose professional development takes place in the digital environment, as well as to determine the strategic directions of leadership qualities development in students in the digital educational environment of the university.

5. Research Methods

The major research methods are observation, method of analogy, survey (questionnaire), and system analysis.

6. Findings

The experimental part of the research involved 164 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs of “Pedagogical Education”, “Linguistics”, “Management”, and “Journalism”.

Students were asked to analyze their experience of interaction in a team, determine the leadership qualities necessary for a professional, and to identify possible forms of organizing the educational process for the development of leadership qualities in the digital educational environment of the university.

The results of the survey allow stating that more than half of the respondents (63%) have little experience of leadership in educational activities, but most of them (78%) feel the need and are willing to act as a group leader both in educational and extracurricular activities.

According to students’ opinions, leadership qualities will help them to achieve more success in their professional activities. Thus, they consider the following leadership qualities as the most important

ones: responsibility (91%), creativity (86%), sociability (82%), emotional stability (75%), and the ability to lead (69%). Also, most of the students stressed the need for foreign language proficiency (64%) and a high level of digital literacy (69%).

The data obtained fully correlate with the characteristics of universal competencies defined by educational standards of higher education.

The experience of active educational interaction of students in a distance format (March – June, 2020) showed, in the opinion of the majority of the respondents (85%), that the digital educational environment of the university provides unlimited opportunities for organizing teamwork. Students note the positive experience of group educational interaction (72%), which allowed them not only to learn how to build business relationships in a group, but also gave them the opportunity to take leading positions in a team.

However, as the research results show, students urgently need a deeper study of digital educational resources during classes (79%), interactive communications in group activities or during group interaction (67%), the readiness of teachers to tailor digital educational resources for a specific student audience (61%), and for interdisciplinary integration of training modules in a digital environment (58%).

The respondents also state that with the transition to a distance interaction format the importance of managing the digital environment increases. Students expressed a wish that within the framework of the studied disciplines more attention should be paid to the development of universal and professionally important qualities, one of them being a leadership.

7. Conclusion

The research data obtained allow identifying the strategic directions for the development of leadership qualities in students in the university digital educational environment. These directions include identifying and studying the didactic possibilities of the digital educational environment of the university for the development of leadership qualities in students; finding the most effective ways to organize teamwork in regards to the digital economy needs; creating conditions for expanding the digital transformation of educational content through the stimulation of digital learning communities; reformatting the goals, objectives, and the content of education in the metasubject direction.

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