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Russian Lectures at the Crossroads of Reforms: Strategies of Survival and Adaptation

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Abstract:

Abstract

The article is dedicated to topical questions of Russian education modernisation from the point of view of the conflict of scientific interests and educational staff of higher school, namely the analysis of adaptation strategies of lecturers in the conditions of modernisation of higher education. Main transformation trends of Russian higher school have been singled out and their influence on the position of lecturers has been revealed. Basing on the results of opinion poll, dynamics of conditions, content and character of teachers' activity has been revealed.

We have also identified important behaviour strategies of teachers on the professional labour market in the conditions of significant intensification of competition and real risk of losing their jobs. Significance of academic degrees in the system of strategic guidelines of the faculty community has been studied.

Most high-demand technologies of self-marketing have been identified, and their use allows increasing competitive advantage of teachers and strengthens their positions in the professional field in the modern period.

Key Words: *Adaptation strategies, lecturers, higher school modernisation, labour market.*

JEL Classification: *I20, I21, I28*

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1. Introduction

Russian system of higher education has entered a period of transformations again. Strategic necessity, practical significance and social and economic effectiveness of transformations being conducted in higher school today are not obvious and are a subject for discussion. But there is no doubt that in the modern period it is the faculty that has to become the subject and the object of many transformations at the same time, since innovation processes in higher education institution affect the interests of almost all working teachers. The requirements to the faculty are toughened; the situation on the professional higher school labour market becomes more stressful. Works of many Russian researchers (Gokhberg *et al.*, 2011; Novikova, 2014; Popova, 2012; Borovin *et al.*, 2015; Gorina, 2016) are dedicated to the issues of increase of competitiveness of lecturers and their adaptation in the conditions of reformation of higher school.

Transformation of conditions and content of labour of lecturers in the modern period is studied by specialists and in other countries with market economy. For instance, experts notice that the state of lecturers on the labour market of the USA and Europe is becoming worse (Musselin, 2013; Stocum, 2013), they reveal negative dynamics of the level of wage and labour conditions of teachers (Ouardighi *et al.*, 2013). Most studies that have been recently conducted in Russia and abroad show that there are more and more negative trends among the staff in higher education (Sazhin and Saraikin. 2016).

2. Methodology

The need for comprehensive analysis of the present situation among the staff in higher school coordinated active use of a wide range of scientific research methods. Such general scientific methods as structural analysis, synthesis, and system approach are used in the work. Methods of typological, historical and genetic, comparative micro and macroeconomic analysis are also used in the work. Empirical background is based on the use of comprehensive system of economic and statistical data and results of sociological studies. We use official statistics data provided by Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) and also the data received during the monitoring of the educational field conducted by the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Indikatory nauki, 2015; Indikatory obrazovaniya, 2016; Obrazovaniye v tsifrakh, 2013; Obrazovaniye v Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2014). Empirical basis of the research is the results of opinion polls of teachers of Russian State Social University (RSSU) conducted in 2009-2011 within the project “Development of theoretical and practical foundations of motivation and stimulation of the higher school faculty in the modern conditions”, as well as the results of sample interview with RSSU teachers conducted in 2015. Collection, accumulation and generalisation of the information reflecting main strategies of

lecturers will allow creating the basis for further advanced analysis of issues of the development of higher school in the modern conditions.

3. Results

3.1. Modern trends in the field of higher education and their meaning for the teaching community

Complex and contradictory transformations of the system of Russian higher education conducted in the late 20th-early 21st centuries dramatically changed the position and conditions of professional activity of a lecturer.

In the USSR the profession of a lecturer was one of the most prestigious. Their high status was confirmed by rather high wages and different benefits, such as shortened working day, long holiday, extra space in the flat for a study, etc. The average salary of a lecturer was about 300% of the average salary in the economy on the whole and 110–120 % for a young lecturer (Buduschee vyshego obrazovaniya, 2013). Russian researchers evaluate the position of a lecturer in command economy in the following way: “The position of a professor on the national labour market was defined this way: high (or rather high) wage plus greater freedom within labour contract in exchange for very high (unique or highly specific) qualification level. While the salary was sufficient, universities did not lack for young people ready to take this path...” (Kontrakty v akademicheskome mire, 2011).

The situation drastically changed with the beginning of market transformations. In early 2000s average monthly pay of Russian lecturers at their primary place of employment was about 75-90 dollars. Only in Moscow average pay was more than 100 dollars (Artamonova, 2008). Sudden reduction of the faculty’s wages, bringing lecturers down to low-paid workers resulted in significant losses. Tens of thousands (or maybe even more) professors and associate professors went abroad or changed the field of activity, many young teachers left higher education institutions in search of a better paid job. Only recently there has been a positive trend – it is planned to bring the average salary to 200% of the average in economy by 2018 (Decree, 2012).

The period of active market transformations became a really serious challenge for Russian teaching community. However, until lately the professional labour market of teachers was notable for its stability. In the beginning of the 21st century total number of lecturers in state and municipal higher education institutions increased by 1,8 from 2000–2001 to 2012–2013 academic year, while total number of lecturers in non-state higher education institutions increased twice. But the situation has started to change recently, and total number of lecturers in state and municipal higher education institutions decreased by 8%. The main reason for the deterioration of the situation on the professional labour market of lecturers is the policy of “optimisation” conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian

Federation. The reduction of the total number of higher education institutions in the country inevitably leads to the reduction in the number of teachers and intensification of competition on the professional labour market. Much of the reduction in the number of higher education institutions is owed to the “demographic hole” into which the higher education system almost sank in the last 3-5 years (Druzhilov, 2011). Due to significant decline in the birth rate in 1990s, in the time of crisis, there is great reduction in the number of young people graduating from schools and entering universities. It is predicted that by 2018 the number of young people aged 18-25 will have reduced by 30%.

According to different sources, by 2018 there will be 200 to 270 universities left in Russia, which is 8 times less than today. The process of reduction in the number of higher education institutions has been very active recently. According to Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (Rosobrnadzor RF), 800 higher education institutions and their branches were closed down in 2014-2015. It is planned to close down another 600 higher education institutions and their branches in 2016-2017 (Ilina *et al.*, 2016).

Intensification of crisis trends in Russian economy in 2014–2015 also had a certain effect on the field of higher education. Reduction of budgetary financing forced the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation to toughen the requirements to state higher education institutions urging them to reduce the expenses on staff.

3.2. Change in the character and conditions of professional activity: lecturers' opinions

Large-scale social and economic transformations conducted in the Russian society since 1990s could not but influence the character and content of work activity of lecturers. Results of opinion polls of lecturers of Russian State Social University (RSSU) conducted in 2009-2011, as well as sample interviews conducted in 2015, show the dynamics of attitudes in teaching community.

In 2010 62% of interviewed regular RSSU lecturers said the greatest problem was imperfection of the mechanism of labour stimulation. The second biggest issue was low quality of student community (45,2 %). More than 2/5 of the teachers thought the top-priority problem was lack of respect to lecturers' work. Over 70% of the interviewed were positive about moral and psychological climate in their community.

Unfortunately, most changes that occurred in higher education institutions during the last five years were negatively assessed by RSSU lecturers. In 2015 over 90% of the interviewed mention that the salary should be significantly increased and the mechanism of evaluation of lecturers' labour should be improved. Many of the

interviewed lecturers connect the urgency of these problems with considerable toughening of requirements to the community of professors and lecturers on the whole. More than a half of the respondents are sure that social status of a lecturers has lowered within recent years.

Students have also changed. According to lecturers, a modern student feels more like a consumer in a supermarket or an exclusive boutique (depending on the university). This student comes not to study or acquire knowledge, but to buy, mostly what they like and what entertains them. Overall social and psychological climate in a higher education institution in 2015 is characterised by predominance of negative expectations at the level of certain groups (for instance, expectations of further reduction of income, reduction of staff), as well as at the macro-level (risks conditioned by overall social and psychological instability).

Among positive trends identified on the basis of the last research is activization of research activity of teachers. Almost the entire interviewed note that it is necessary to increase their competitiveness on the professional labour market through improvement of core indicators of research activity.

3.3. Specifics of a lecturer's position in the conditions of the transformation of higher school system

Position of a lecturer in contemporary Russian society requires “supercompetence” – apart from their main educational activity, they should also do scientific research, commercialise their intellectual property, prepare methodical plans, educate students, etc., - and all that in the conditions of tight financial restrictions (Kataeva et al., 2015).

But is the Russian lecturer ready for that?

In the conditions of significantly complicated situation in the professional field an average lecturer becomes really vulnerable due to a number of reasons:

- Being used to stable life;
- Feeling relative freedom due to the absence of strict requirements to professional activity and lack of control on the part of higher school administration;
- Low level of labour mobility (total unpreparedness to territorial mobility);
- Insufficient knowledge of foreign languages;
- Availability of considerable theoretical knowledge with obvious lack of practical experience (that is, lack of work experience and useful contacts outside higher school);
- Lack of culture of “knowledge commercialisation”, that is skills and abilities to transform one's intellectual capital into real money (that said, using non-criminal methods);

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- Lack of skills of competitive struggle for a working place, insufficient law knowledge preventing one from efficient protection of one's rights in an argument with an employer;
 - Being absolutely sure that high professional status (candidate's or doctor's degree) is life assurance of being in demand in the system of higher education.

Undoubtedly, teaching community is heterogeneous. And presently it is being differentiated even more, depending on the character, degree and forms of adaptation to new conditions.

3.4. Behaviour strategies of lecturers on the professional labour market

In the modern period each lecturer chooses their own strategy on the professional labour market. Considerable number of teachers works only in one higher education institution. Sudden severisation of requirements to a lecturer in the recent years has significantly complicated professional activity of lecturers; there is practically no free time left after they have performed all their duties. That said, the salary in most Russian higher education institutions does not provide acceptable level and quality of lecturers' life that have only one source of income. (According to the official data, in 2014 the average salary was 45,4 thousand roubles for lecturers and 37,9 thousand roubles, in 2015 due to rouble devaluation real salary was considerably reduced). Individual "effective contracts" for each lecturer are now introduced everywhere, there is real, not formal competitive selection for an academic vacant teaching position. In such conditions none of the lecturers, even those who dedicate all their time to work in one higher school, can be sure about stability of their position.

Another strategy of lecturer's behaviour is related to secondary employment, that is, having several sources of income. Considerable number of lecturers have a side job, most often in higher schools, although they can also be tutors, give consultations, work in academic institutes, etc. Combining jobs is really difficult – sometimes such lecturers are late, they confuse their students and even the subjects they teach. At the same time, they cannot be called unprofessional, because they managed to keep up several jobs in the conditions of ever-increasing competitiveness on the labour market. It is obvious that in the conditions of continuing optimisation of higher school (in fact, abrupt reduction in the number of higher schools) there are fewer possibilities for side jobs and, as a result, fewer lecturers combining jobs. In 2010 69% of regular lecturers had a second job, while in 2014 their number decreased to 54% (Roschina, 2015). Within worsening situation on the professional labour market the level of concealed unemployment or forced sub-employment is increasing. This means that a lecturer is trying to catch at their working place and agrees even to disadvantageous conditions, for instance, a part-time job (0,25-0,5 of the rate) or even hourly pay. (It should be stressed that we mean primary and the only place of employment). Instability and uncertainty of this employment model is

combined with extremely low income and thus this employment option is a forced form of adaptation for some categories of low-competitive lecturers. This situation is usually faced by young inexperienced lecturers, elderly people (over 70) or other discriminated categories of workers. There is a risk that on the competitive labour market discrimination of various categories of lecturers will only increase.

According to survey results, teaching community is concerned about losing their jobs (Irina *et al.*, 2016). In 2009 2/5 of the interviewed lecturers were afraid they could lose their job at any time, while 45,3 % of the interviewed were sure they would not lose their job. Today none of the lecturers are sure about stability of their position. That said, over ¾ of the respondents are sure they would face serious difficulties when looking for a job on the professional labour market.

3.5. Academic degree in the system of strategic guidelines of lecturers

For most lecturers academic degree is the underlying purpose, and to achieve it one needs to overcome multiple obstacles – not only scientific, but also organisational, administrative, economic ones. Candidate's and, moreover, doctor's degree allows taking a higher step in the hierarchy of educational community. For many decades the desire to receive higher professional status has been the main motivation factor and strategic guideline for thousands of Russian lecturers doing scientific research (Laptev, 2013).

In general, getting an academic degree allows:

- Considerably strengthening one's status positions as an expert, as academic degree increases the possibility to be invited to take part in some prestigious or well-paid events;
- Increasing one's competitiveness in the conditions of general worsening of the situation on the professional labour market of lecturers, reducing the risk of losing one's job;
- Advancing one's professional authority and influence in local educational community;
- Increasing one's level and quality of life through insignificant but guaranteed growth of income as a result of getting a higher qualification grade;
- Getting real chances for career promotion in the position of the head of sub-department, laboratory chief, vice-chancellor, chancellor;
- Getting a possibility of greater influence on the process of distribution of academic workload, subject choice, etc.;
- Feeling real superiority over less successful colleagues who have not achieved this stage yet;
- Satisfying one's "competitive" ambitions, feeling a winner in the whole higher school community race.

The number of lecturers with an academic degree has been constantly growing during the last 15 years. In the 2000–2001 academic year, one in ten teachers of state or municipal higher education institutions had an academic degree, while in 2005–2006 doctors of science accounted for 11% of all lecturers and for 12,5% in 2011–2012. The number of candidates of science also changed – in 2000–2001 they accounted for 47,2% of the faculties of state or municipal higher education institutions and for 53% in 2011–2012. Today 13,7% of the lecturers have doctor's degree and 54,7% have candidate's degree (Indikatory nauki, 2015).

The results of opinion polls of RSSU lecturers conducted in 2009–2011 allow identifying main strategies of the lecturers in respect of academic degrees. Almost all the interviewed lecturers without academic degree said they were not going to defend their candidate's dissertation, while 43% of the respondents without doctor's degree said the same about defending their doctoral thesis. 70% of the interviewed of the most active age (31–40 years) had firm intention of advancing their professional and qualification status and receiving doctor's degree; one in two representatives of the youngest age group (less than 30) had the same intention.

The system of academic degrees has been influenced by contradictory trends lately. One can suggest that in the conditions of drastic reduction of the number of dissertation committees and considerable complication of the procedure of defending the dissertation the position of candidates of science and particularly doctors of science should improve. But lately a big and scandalous anti-plagiarism campaign has been launched, and as a result over a hundred of people have lost their candidate's and doctor's degrees. It is obvious that professional and qualification status of a lecturer with candidate's and even doctor's degree has been significantly discredited, while academic degrees in the system of strategic guidelines of lecturers are becoming less important.

3.6. Self-marketing and self-branding as new strategies of professional activity of a lecturer

The concept of self-marketing implemented on the labour market should be the basis for the development of new strategies in the professional activity of a lecturer. Self-marketing is defined as an interconnected complex of measures including objective assessment of one's own knowledge and skills, business qualities and specific psychological features concerning a particular working place, as well as a set of methods and measures for self-improvement, for increase of the quality and level of one's knowledge and skills, reasonable development of personal business qualities and specific psychological features (Anciferova, 2010).

The idea of this approach is forming and promoting personal brand, constantly increasing one's own market value and, finally, selling this personal brand on most advantageous terms. The need for active self-marketing in the conditions of

toughening competition becomes obvious for representatives of Russian educational community as well. Modern lecturers find themselves in a very complicated situation as they have to take part in a tiring rush for “image” points. Not many can cope with these tasks successfully. But the main stimulus that forces a lecturer to be “in a good shape” is the real risk of reduction in income and even losing their job. Selfbrand-oriented behaviour model presupposes maximum activity of a lecturer in several fields (Ilina, 2016):

- Lecturer as a researcher (active publications, grants);
- Lecturer as an educator (study guidance, original courses);
- Lecturer as an expert (member of expert communities, business associations, dissertation committees, positions in different foreign ratings).

In our opinion, self-marketing of a Russian lecturer in the modern conditions is based on the following basic principles:

- The time of “modest workers” is over, a modern successful lecturer actively builds their own career using all possibilities for self-branding and self-advertising;
- Lecturer becomes a more public figure and cannot hide their strong and weak points anymore: key performance indicators of scientific activity are in free access and generate constant interest (amazement/delight/ jealousy) on the part of colleagues; “scientific achievements” are monitored by the higher educational institution represented by this worker;
- The art of teaching by itself cannot be officially measured and thus does not have any image value; only creating original courses and electronic textbooks can help one to assert themselves in teaching and guiding field;
- It is necessary to use any possibility to reinforce one’s expert positions and establish business contact in scientific community, as well as become a member of well-established academic structures; constantly look for new forms of participation in different science-oriented business structures;
- The most important formal measures of scientific activity (publications, in the first instance) are the main trump cards of a lecturer in the conditions of toughening competition on the professional labour market.

Therefore, one of the principal strategic tasks of a lecturer is to achieve optimal balance between conscientious fulfilment of their main professional duties (giving lectures, being a scientific adviser, etc.) and providing acceptable level of “image”

4. Discussion

Problems arising in the field of human resources of Russian higher educational institutions in the conditions of reformation of higher school are actively discussed not only within the faculty, but outside it as well. Thus, the analysis of most successful adaptation strategies of lecturers to new social and economic conditions is of significant interest (Gorina 2016; Borovin *et al.*, 2015; Medvedeva *et al.*, 2015; Nechaev and Antipina, 2016; Thalassinou and Pociovalisteanu, 2009; Sazhin and Saraikin, 2016; Vovchenko *et al.*, 2017; Sultanova and Chechina, 2016).

Certain points of the conducted study were reported and actively discussed at various scientific conferences. Particularly, the issues of professional labour market of lecturers in the period of modernisation of higher school were discussed at All-Russian sociological and pedagogical congress conducted at RSSU on 5-6 June 2014.

The most topical trends and problems of adaptation of the faculty to new sociological and economic conditions were the topic of discussion at XV International Social Congress on 25-26 November 2015. During the discussion it was noted that significant toughening of higher schools' requirements to lecturers and escalating competition in the professional field had led to drastic changes on the labour market of lecturers. Professional and status characteristics are being transformed; motivational preferences and strategic guidelines are changing. Among negative factors making the position of lecturers worse are low level of professional mobility and lack of scientific and innovation activity of educational community. The authors have prepared a number of publications in Russian and foreign scientific journals on the topic of this research (Ilina *et al.*, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Presently, theoretic and empiric material on the problems of adaptation of Russian lecturers to new conditions of higher school operation is being collected and systemised. There is no doubt that the conducted research does not reveal all the aspects of the transformation of the human resources field and the development of professional labour market of lecturers. We believe that analysis of new forms and methods of adaptation of the faculty to new requirements is a promising line of research. A modern teacher willing to "survive" has to care not only about their teaching skills or development of a new promising line of research, but also about the achievement of the most significant formal results in modern higher school.

Attention should also be paid to the development of particular propositions for softening social and psychological stress among higher school staff due to the fact that negative trends on the professional labour market makes lecturers' position more uncertain and unstable. Recommendations for minimisation of negative consequences of managerial decisions in the field of human resources are important both for theory and practice.

Undoubtedly, low level of adaptation and lack of the faculty's interest in transformations explain slow development of the Russian educational field at the present stage.

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