Human Resource Policy in Leading Russian Universities: An Assembly Model

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Abstract

The study discusses the development of human resource policy in leading Russian universities that are members of the Russian academic excellence program "Project 5-100". This topic is presented in the research literature but fragmentarily, and a holistic picture of the transformation of human resource management in leading Russian universities has not been presented. The study includes four leading Russian universities that are members of the Russian academic excellence program "Project 5-100" and utilizes semi-structured interviews and analysis of strategic documents. The impact of global rankings on university governance and HR policies is shown to be significant. The study describes the main features of emerging HR policies in the universities, as well as common challenges. It was found that all the universities studied experience the challenge of HR policy maturation, which includes a necessity to formulate common rules and establish shared practices in areas of hiring, motivation, and assessment. The universities are looking for leadership models appropriate to the rapid changes occurring in institutions and desire an increase in cooperation, transparency, and openness as features of organizational culture. The degree of units' independence in the realization of HR functions is changing, while recently established HR departments have various functions. Policies of employee' development, retention, and engagement are becoming more and more important because of growing global competition for high-performing academics, and the attempts to overcome inbreeding in academic culture are relevant here.

Keywords: University Management, Human Resource Management, Human Resource Policy, University Corporatization, University Transformation, Global Rankings

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Introduction

This paper presents the results of a 3-year research project supported by the Russian Science Foundation, "The human dimension of the transformation processes of Russian universities: historical experience, trends, and responses to the contemporary challenges". It was launched in 2019 and is still in progress. Current findings depict the emergence and development of the human resource policies in leading Russian universities and its main features and perspectives, which is related to the fields of educational policy, leadership, management, and administration. In this paper, first, a brief description of the context that is important for changing HR policies of the universities worldwide will be given. Second, the landscape of research topics associated with HR policies at Russian universities will be presented. Next, the research methodology of this study and its current findings will be reported, and some final thoughts will be shared.

The Context for Changing HR Policies at Russian Universities

Important context for the changing HR policies of universities, especially Russian universities, is the trend of ongoing globalization that massively influences educational policies (Morgan, 2006). Globalization has affected the widespread adaptation of the principle of unlimited competition and its extrapolation to many spheres of life, including education (Wolf, 2005). Besides, the principles of the neoliberal economy affected universities massively. These principles emerged as part of a British policy in the 1970s (Giroux, Karmis, & Rouillard, 2015) and were taken up by the educational and economic policies of developed and developing countries. One of the main results was the ubiquitous corporatization of universities (Riddings, 2010) when corporate management ideas began to be used widely, new methods of measuring performance and regulation of working processes were developed, and a strong tendency to achieve corporate efficiency appeared (Winter, 2009). The corporatization of universities has led to the emergence and strengthening of managerialism, characterized by a "strong managerial culture, entrepreneurial centricity, and ideals associated with profit" (Winter, 2009, p. 121). It came about "by tightening organizational structures, strengthening formalization and, in general, increasing the degree of university control" (Drugova, 2018, p. 74).

Another important effect of globalization on university management is the emergence of global rankings, the growth of their role, and their influence on the strategies of universities around the world. Global rankings set the criteria for comparing and evaluating universities, which gradually reoriented many national and individual university policies toward the achievement of certain success criteria (Froumin & Salmi, 2007). National programs to support universities in the race for world leadership in rankings, the so-called "excellence programs", have appeared (Froumin & Salmi, 2007). A program of Russian academic excellence called "Project 5-100" was launched in Russia in 2014 (https://www.5top100.ru/en/). It stimulated the process of the corporatization of Russian universities, provided the external focus of control over management of the universities, and spurred the growth and strengthening of managerialism (McVitty, 2020). Management practices in the universities that participate in "Project 5-100" has undergone a significant transformation, and this process is still ongoing (Forbes Education, 2020).

One of the interesting dimensions of this phenomenon is the increased attention of university management to the area of HR policy and talent management (Drugova et al., 2018). Since people are the main resource of the university, whether it is lecturers who implement the process of teaching, or scientists who implement research and development, one of the important conclusions for university administrators was the need for more effective HR policy (Lozano, Peris, Aristizábal, & Hueso, 2012).

Elements of Russian Universities` HR Policies in Research Literature

In describing what is already known in the research on Russian universities about HR policies development, it is worth to noting that there are relatively few articles about this theme, as well as few Russian journals on the subject of university management and administration. Analysis of about 60 scientific papers that were found related to this issue revealed some research topics that will be described next.

HR policy at universities

HR policy is seen as an important part of the competitive strategies of Russian universities; however, as noted by a number of authors, "it is at an extremely low level, while the most important resource of human capital is not managed effectively enough, which reduces the competitiveness of universities" (Latyshev, Pokholkov, Chervach, & Shadskaya, 2017). Some authors describe institutional changes affecting the reorganization of universities` HR policy, such as changes in university management with a focus on strategic goals in an environment of high uncertainty and risk, massive recruitment of new personnel, search and support of talents, a transformation of corporate culture aimed at increasing personnel involvement (Sorokin, Latyshev, & Gribovsky, 2019). Bugrov, Ponomareva, and Fedorova draw attention to insufficient elaboration of the university's HR policy. Despite the formulation of some of its elements in various regulatory documents of structural divisions, there is no holistic document that enshrines the principles, rules and norms of university HR management, corresponding to the university strategic goals. (2016, p. 26)

The deficit of conceptualization and research in this area is accentuated. The importance of personnel planning and forecasting the need for personnel as part of HR policy is emphasized by a number of authors, as well as the ineffectiveness of the use of personnel potential and the lack of regular monitoring of personnel (Fadeeva, Shamanaev, & Sokolova, 2011). The growing requirements for the competitiveness of universities also affected the need of universities to position themselves as employers and build their own HR brands. This issue is still very poorly covered in the Russian research literature; the role of information openness is especially emphasized (Lazarev, Martynenko, & Lazarev, 2015).

Selection, recruitment, adaptation, motivation, personnel assessment at universities

Hiring new employees while developing and transforming Russian universities at a time of growing competition for highly qualified academics puts academic recruiting on the agenda. The issue of academic recruiting highlights the problem of academic inbreeding (the practice of higher education institutions to hire its own graduates to

positions of academic staff) as a specific feature of Russian universities. Drugova, Nuzhina, and Koryakovtseva consider the current state and prospects for developing academic recruiting in Russian universities, analyzing external and internal factors that stimulate and inhibit its development (2016). Taradina and Rakitin discuss the possibilities and risks of hiring administrators from business to university management (2016). Academic inbreeding is shown as an inevitable feature of national Russian education, and recommendations for the reduction of its negative effects are discussed (Yudkevich & Gorelova, 2015).

The problem of adaptation of new employees at the university is considered by some researchers. Special attention is paid to the specifics of adaptation of novice lecturers, and the demand of the decentralized approach for the adaptation of new employees is highlighted, as well as the need for internships with a subsequent assessment of the competencies acquired (Alaverdov & Alaverdova, 2016). In addition to the professional component (Bondareva & Sergeev, 2016), researchers also focus on the psychological component of adaptation of freshmen (Gershkovich, 2003). The issue of adaptation of foreign specialists and expats, and their social support during relocation are also considered (Lazarev, Martynenko, & Lazarev, 2015).

Academic motivation is one of the widely researched topics. Motivation systems including bonuses and material incentive are considered in connection with employee productivity. Analysis of the literature shows that there is a need to revise the traditional external incentive systems and create new models of motivation. The first model is oriented towards creativity and stimulation of innovative potential of academics (Gutsu & Chilipenok, 2018). Another model is based on the rating system of personnel motivation and material incentives (Kharitonov, Mikhailov, & Kharitonova, 2014). Alaverdov considers material motivation (additional wages, benefits), and non-material motivation (the role of professional growth, interest, continuing education) for university` employees (Alaverdov, 2015). Also, a number of authors (Berezovskaya & Kryukov, 2014) analyze ways of attracting and retaining lecturers in higher education. Thus, special attention is paid to the problem of personnel motivation at the university.

More and more attention is being paid to the issues of HR assessment at the university and the tasks of building maps or models of competencies of different categories of personnel. HR assessment seems to be a necessary element of the university's strategic management system (Popova & Ibragimova, 2017). Attempts to build competency models of different categories of employees such as lecturers or researchers are made (Andrienko & Kalachikova, 2016).

Talent management is considered through the lenses of change agents, high potential employees, and best talent management practices (Volkova & Plotnikov, 2017; Masalova, 2016) in Russian universities.

Engagement, satisfaction, conflicts at universities

Some studies analyze programs of personnel development and measurement of personnel engagement in Russian universities (Masalova, 2016). The role and factors of stress and professional burnout are also attracting attention (Davydova & Kozmina, 2014). Satisfaction factors and internal communications are important topics (Bugrov,

Ponomareva, & Fedorova, 2016). Particularly, few works describe conflicts of "managers" and "academics" and their roots (Drugova, 2018). The openness of a university management system to the innovations and initiatives by employees is also of interest (Sukhanova, Kovaleva, & Zotkin, 2016).

In general, the literature shows the continuing process of the corporatization of Russian universities and tendency to play the "global competitiveness games" (Forbes Education, 2020). However, as we found out, fragmented case studies prevail among the research literature. Weak conceptualization, lack of systematic studies, comparative studies, and generalized studies were noted. Thy present study was designed as an attempt to draw a more sophisticated and detailed picture of the emerging HR policies in leading Russian universities.

Research Methodology

The research question of this paper is: what are the main features of the emerging HR policies in leading Russian universities? This question consists of four sub-questions:
- What do these HR policies of leading Russian universities consist of?
- How are basic HR functions in leading Russian universities changing under the influence of global rankings?
- What new administrative functions in the area of HR have appeared in leading Russian universities since the launch of "Project 5/100"?
- How do employees of various groups perceive these changes?

To answer these questions, a study of eight leading Russian universities that are participants in "Project 5/100" (two from Moscow, two from St. Petersburg and four regional universities) is planned. It is currently ongoing, and only four of the eight universities were studied yet: National Research Tomsk State University, Tyumen State University, ITMO University, and Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. Two of them are regional universities and two are located in Saint Petersburg. All four universities studied are included in the "top" of Russian universities, "Project 5-100", which includes only 21 universities out of about 950 Russian universities.

To accomplish the study goals, four variations of one guide were developed for semi-structured interviews, including more than 25 questions. Each interview took between 20 and 60 minutes. About 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of each university employees' categories (top management, institute heads, deans, lecturers and researchers, middle administrators, HR specialists), 98 in total. The questions concerned development and elements of HR policy; talent management practices; realization of HR functions (recruitment, hiring, adaptation, motivation, assessment); personnel development, involvement, satisfaction, conflicts; organizational culture transformation. The strategic documents of universities such as "strategic roadmaps" were also analyzed.

Findings

HR policy at leading Russian universities

Not surprisingly, we found that HR policies in the four universities studied to date have been greatly influenced by "Project 5/100" since it was launched in 2014. It requires from the participating universities the implementation of certain policies, such as talent management and academic recruiting, because of the necessity to hire high-performance academics.

HR planning is best developed in the academic life of the university, where we really attract very good specialists with the help of an open competition, using all sorts of fellowships and professorships (University 3, female, middle management, under 35 years old).

HR policies in all four cases can be described as medium maturity policies: a final document formalizing HR-strategy is usually absent, but some new functions have appeared and found their place in the changing management of universities.

Of course, it is under construction. It cannot be said that it has been built completely because this process is endless. As the university develops, everything will change, and it must be constantly rebuilt (University 1. Male, middle management, under 35 years old).

However, long-term planning is still rare while HR planning is often transferred to faculties and institutes. Deep reorganization of personnel departments during the last 6 years, since the launch of the Project 5-100, was discovered in all four universities. It was accompanied by transitions in work regulations at these universities, and it faced contradictory attitudes.

Now the university is not a corporation. It cannot follow the corporate model, where everything is the same. A university is an ecosystem, it is a set of some small teams with their own rules, it is impossible to introduce uniform rules for personnel development for the entire university. They will be different everywhere (University 2, male, middle management, 36-65 years old).

Talent management attracted special attention and became a field of experiments for the universities observed. Also, it was noted that universities tend to reinforce their HR-brands in recent years. At the same time, the role of the regulator, that is, governmental requirements, was shown to be essential.

Recruitment, hiring, adaptation, motivation, and assessment at leading Russian universities

Changes in the traditional HR functions were observed. Recruitment had intensified significantly due to the increase in openness and competitiveness. The personnel inbreeding traditional for Russian universities is being increasingly and steadily overcome. This seems to be true only for leading universities, however, while the remainder is still experiencing a high level of inbreeding, but this should be checked by research.

I am very glad that this year there was a real competition, which used to be rather imaginary. In my opinion, it is very important that it really became a competition, that is, people began to compete for places (University 1. Female, lecturer, 35-65 years old).

New key roles in HR policy have appeared, for example, that of the head of the educational program. It is a new position in Russian universities, and this is a person in charge of recruitment of a teaching team for an educational program (bachelor or masters).

The most important person in charge is the head of educational program. He is actually engaged in the selection of personnel for an educational program (University 4. Male, top management, 36-65 years old).

Simultaneously, new hiring formats such as fellowships and professorships have appeared. Changes in job contracts were observed, with contracts becoming shorter and more performance-based.

We have metrics visible in contracts. Everyone understands what is required and what they are rewarded for (University 1. Male, professor, 36-65 years old).

The hiring of new employees including foreigners revealed the lack of an adaptation system, and this was noted by respondents. There is no formal system of orientation for new employees in universities yet, and this is a growing concern.

But there is no adaptation program as such. And again, until you «burn yourself», you will not know that this is prohibited. We have a bunch of unwritten rules, besides a bunch of written ones. And by trial and error, a person adapts somehow (University 2. Male, lecturer, 36-65 years old).

As to motivation, interestingly, various motives were detected, including contradictory ones. Some employees at the same university noted that interesting and challenging goals motivate them to work at the university, while some employees mention path dependence of their academic careers, so they are compelled to work at the university.

I am insanely interested in this work; this is the most interesting job I have ever had (University 1. Male, middle administrator, under 35).

High salaries, of course, motivate, because the system of material incentives at the university is changing: the salary is still growing, the system of allowances is becoming more and more flexible (University 1. Female, professor, 35-65 years old).

Importantly, the university system of motivation is unclear for most respondents.

The motivation system has a problem with constant change (University 2. Female, middle management, 36-65 years old).

Currently the best and most understandable assessment is the assessment of researchers, as presented by respondents. Less understood is lecturers' assessment,

and forms of such an assessment are being sought. The assessment of administrators is the most unclear.

At the moment, we do not have an assessment system for the administrative divisions. But this task has been set and probably, sooner or later will be solved (University 3. Female, assistant professor, 36-65 years old).

Personnel development, involvement, satisfaction, conflicts at leading Russian universities

Importantly, the request for leadership and management development was heard at all the universities studied, which is in alignment with the trend of reinforcing academic managerialism. Strong emphasis on renewing the management was found in three universities.

Every laboratory leader who is over 50 years old understands that soon he will be replaced by the head of the laboratory, who is over 25 (University 3. Male, top management, under 65).

Attention is beginning to be paid to special training programs for leaders. It is necessary to create special courses to improve the efficiency of university management.

We need to create a training program for leaders because many managers are people who have no management skills and education (University 4. Female, professor, 36-65 years old).

Request for feedback systems was formulated on different levels, for example, feedback from students on the education process. This statement is in line with the demand of the rise of transparency and horizontality expressed by respondents.

If we are talking about the development of human capital, I would literally force all teaching staff to take a course in cooperation, because the collaborative culture is very poorly implemented at the university. Inside the departments, it is expressed quite strongly, but outside it is weakly expressed (University 2. Male, middle administrator, 36-65 years old).

In characterizing the changes in organizational cultures, the transition from stability to competition and mobility was noticed by respondents in all four universities, accompanied by the reduction of academic freedom.

There is a certain cultural heritage of Russian educational tradition, which is the basis for our research and teaching practices. But business requires tangible results now (...). We say yes, we talk to business, we influence business, and business affects us, and we try to save our identity (University 3. Male, top management, 36-65 years old).

Discussion

Universities that were studied are quite different in their history and traditions, but the challenges they face developing their HR policies were found to be similar. They experience the challenge of HR policy formulation and implementation, which includes formulating common rules and establishing shared practices in areas of hiring, motivation, and assessment. This is in alignment with recent research in this area (Latyshev et al., 2017). They are looking for leadership models appropriate to the rapid changes in the institutions and the desire for management maturation in general. The degree of units' independence in the realization of HR functions is not fully clear and should be determined. Currently the tensions between newly established central HR departments, institutions, and faculties are conspicuous. Policies of employee development, retention, and recruitment are becoming more and more important.

Conclusion

The present study has described the main features and common challenges of the emerging HR policies in four leading Russian universities, which are members of National academic excellence program Project 5-100. It was found that all four experience the challenge of HR policy maturation. In the area of hiring, attempts to overcome inbreeding academic culture were shown, as well as a growing tendency toward openness. The role of the HR brand has become more important. The need to establish a more clear system of motivation was found. New practices of assessment have appeared, and correspondingly new types of job contracts regularly appear, which is also shown by previous research (see for example Postnikov & Andrienko, 2015). The search for appropriate leadership models is happening accompanied by a demand for the growth of managerial skills. Organizational culture is characterized by the gradual change from stability to competition, from academic culture to a corporate culture, which is in line with the Winter's argument (2009). The rapid changes occurring in institutions have led to the employee` demand for more cooperation, transparency, and openness, which are, in general, attributes of global human capital trends (Deloitte, 2019). Recently established HR departments have various functions in the universities studied and the degree of units' independence in the realization of HR functions is changing. Talent management, personnel development, and engagement programs have received more and more interest, which is supported by other studies (Volkova & Plotnikov, 2017). The role of the growing global competition and participation of the universities in "Project 5-100", orienting them to the global rankings game, was found to be fundamental in all these changes.

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