STRATEGIC CAREER PLANNING OF STATE CIVIL OFFICIALS WITHIN THE FRAMES OF PERSONNEL POLICY REALIZATION

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Abstract

It is essential to study career strategies and trajectories in the state civil service of modern Russia because a well-planned career trajectory enables state civil servants to find their right place in the system and allows them to fully realize their professional, managerial, and personal potential. It is obvious that, on the one hand, the society needs a civil service that consists of the best and highly motivated servants and, on the other hand, governmental agencies are often unable to provide their employees with a clear career path. Contenders can enter the civil service through a competitive selection procedure or they can be selected directly from the candidate pool. For our research objectives, we conducted a personnel audit of state civil servants in Sverdlovsk region, we also studied the statistical data on the candidate pool for the regional civil service and the relevant technologies of pool management. Our survey has brought to light the factors preventing prospective employees from building a career and realizing their potential in Russian governmental agencies, which allowed us to identify the best ways of dealing with these problems.

Key words: career management, candidate pool, strategic career planning, HR technology

JEL Code: M12, M51

Introduction

Studies of career strategies and trajectories in the state civil service are crucial for modern Russia because a well-planned career trajectory enables state civil servants to find their right place in the system and allows them to fully realize their professional, managerial, and personal potential. Thus, complementarity of personal and public goals can be achieved: while state civil servants attain job satisfaction and self-expression, the state and the society acquire competent and motivated officials. Even though the government is interested in recruiting the best and the most motivated staff, it is unable to provide civil servants with a clearly defined career path. Therefore, it is important to study the factors and problems of career growth in the state civil

service, which will allow us to develop guidelines to enhance employees' performance and the efficiency of the whole civil service.

1   Theoretical and methodological backgrounds

The concept 'career' can be used in different meanings: in its narrow sense, it refers to the advancement within an organizational hierarchy; in a wider sense, it is associated with upward mobility, which means not only work promotion but also financial prosperity and public recognition (Aurel, Lefter, 2008). The most commonly accepted understanding of career is close to the one proposed by Michael Arthur: 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur, Hall, Lawrence, 1989). Miller and Form put forward a theory of career stages, which described career development patterns throughout a person's lifetime and included initial work period, trial work period, stable work period, and retirement. According to this theory, career success is characterized by the person's salary and their promotion up the hierarchical ladder. This is a 'classical' view on the vertical career (Miller, Form, 1951). Edgar Schein saw career as one of the key mechanisms of personnel development, as a factor of work motivation, and as a prerequisite for normal functioning of a company. He introduced a concept of 'career anchors' that shape a person's career objectives and, in our case, allows state civil servants to develop their individual career trajectories (Schein, 1971). Douglas Hall emphasizes workers' individual perception of their careers: a career is seen not only as a movement up the career ladder but also as a complex of individual attitudes to work-related experiences and activities. In order to decide whether one's career is successful or not we should take into consideration this person's individual perception as well as the public opinion (Hall, 1976). According to Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden, who followed the social capital theory, career success is determined by the three factors: access to information, access to resources, and career sponsorship (Seibert, Kraimer, Liden, 2001). Granrose and Portwood studied the hierarchy of different management levels within an organization, its functional division, and other structural characteristics that determine employees' careers within this organization (Granrose, Portwood, 1987). Strategic planning and career management have been extensively studied by Mitchell (Krumboltz, Mitchell, Jones, 1976) and Bandur (Bandura, 1977) within the framework of the social-learning theory, which considers a person's self-efficacy to be the key to realization of their career plans. We define strategic career planning as the process in the course of which civil servants' capabilities, competencies and goals are being analysed and matched to the requirements, objectives and focus areas of specific governmental bodies (Baruch, 1999). This

process results in a strategic plan for this person's professional career growth. Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth and Larsson point out such types of career as linear (upward movement), expert (commitment to a specific occupation), spiral (cyclical, aimed at self-realization), and transitory (career choice involves frequent change of fields and organizations, with the need for independence being the dominant force) (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, Larson, 1996). As a rule, researchers distinguish between two basic career pathways: external-occupational and internal-organizational. The first type has occupational boundaries and deals primarily with the development of professional expertise. The second type of career is linked to progression within an organization and can be subdivided into horizontal, vertical, and centripetal. Career in the state civil service generally implies vertical promotion within one set of positions or to those in the higher levels of the system (Veit, Scholz, 2015). By promoting certain civil servants, a governmental agency fills managerial and specialist positions in its structural divisions, thus stabilizing the personnel turnover and enhancing employee performance.

After analyzing theoretical approaches it can be concluded that strategic career planning contributes to:

- professional and career development of a civil servant;
- an increase of their significance for the employer
- ensuring that the qualifications of a civil servant correspond to the new opportunities that can be provided in the future
- increasing civil servants' responsibility for their career.

We conducted a sociological study: a personnel audit of civil servants in the Sverdlovsk region, a public survey (survey respondent) an expert survey resulting in the development of the schematic algorithm for strate*gic* career planning for state civil servants and candidates.


1.1   Research Results: Personnel audit

Our personnel audit of state civil servants in Sverdlovsk region comprised the analysis of their qualitative and quantitative characteristics. According to the staff data of governmental agencies, in 2013 in Sverdlovsk region there were 6,049 staffing positions; in 2014, 6,123; and in the beginning of 2016, 6,059. These data show that from 2013 to the end of 2014 the number of staffing positions in the state civil service of Sverdlovsk region was growing. This might be explained by the fact that some new governmental structures were established. By the end of 2015, however, the number of staffing positions had declined again, and at the moment, this trend is not only continuing but is also increasing: at the end of 2016, the number of staffing

positions was approximately 6,000 while the functions of those made redundant were redistributed among the remaining employees. Thus, the quantitative analysis shows that the number of staffing positions in governmental agencies of Sverdlovsk region has been declining and that in the three-year period there was a 10% reduction.

Let us now turn to qualitative characteristics of the staff. State civil servants have to meet specific qualification criteria, which include a certain educational level, experience in civil service or work experience in a specific field, specialized training (as a rule, in the sphere of 'state administration'), and professional competencies necessary to fulfil their official duties. According to the available statistical data, out of 5,814 civil servants that held office at the beginning of 2016, the majority or 2,924 people (50.3%) were 30 to 40 years old. There were 1,395 civil servants aged between 40 and 50, who accounted for 24% of the total staff number. As for young specialists, there were 930 civil servants aged between 20 and 30, or 16%. A comparatively small group of civil servants consisted of those aged between 50 and 60 – 332 people or 5.7%. Civil servants that had already reached the retirement age (60-70 years old) were also comparatively few in number – 233 people, or 4%.

**Fig. 1: Age-related dynamics of the civil service workforce in Sverdlovsk region**
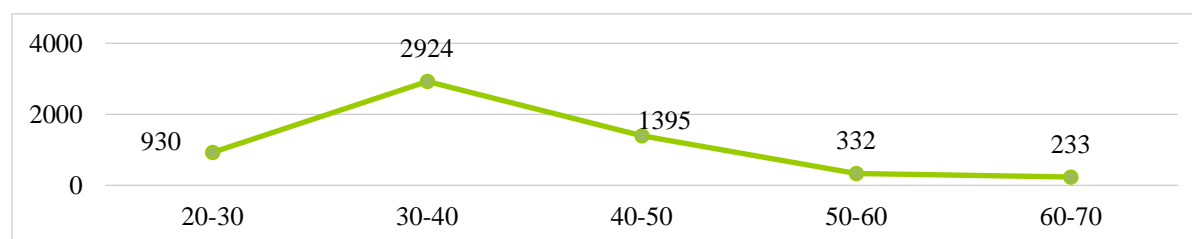
Source: Compiled by the authors drawing from the Central Base of Statistical Data of the Regional State Statistics Service, 2017

This age-related dynamics of the civil service workforce can be explained by the fact that employees aged 20 to 30 normally occupy junior and senior positions, which are characterized by low salaries and high workloads. Civil servants aged 30 to 40 have already accumulated sufficient work experience and can climb the career ladder to more profitable positions. There is also a declining trend in the number of civil servants aged 40 to 50, which can be explained by the fact that these people either have already achieved certain progress in their profession and thus move to the federal level of civil service or they have failed to advance in their careers and switched to jobs in commercial organizations. Unlike those who enter this profession at the age of 30 to 40, for those entering this profession at 40 to 50 it already holds little promise. The decline in the number of civil servants aged 50 and over is usually associated

with the fact that they are approaching women's retirement age and that people in this age group are facing even more serious barriers to entry to the profession than those in the previous group.

The gender distribution of civil servants in Sverdlovsk region is the following: out of 5,814 civil servants, at the beginning of 2016, 4,768 were women, that is, 82%. There are considerably fewer male civil servants – 1,046, or 18%, which means that this profession has been significantly feminized. Our analysis of the statistical data shows that 93.2% of state civil servants, that is, 5,416 people, have a higher education. 8.8% of civil servants, or 514 people, have two or more higher educations. 6.8% (398 people) have a secondary vocational education, out of them 30 people have a general secondary education. It should be noted that 1.8% of civil servants or 106 people hold a PhD or a post-doctoral degree.

Fig. 2: Educational level of civil servants in Sverdlovsk region
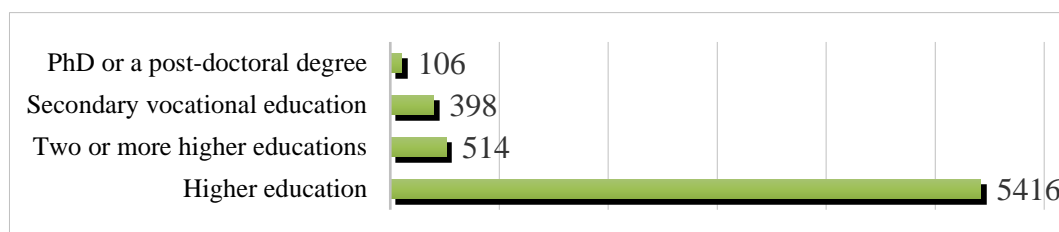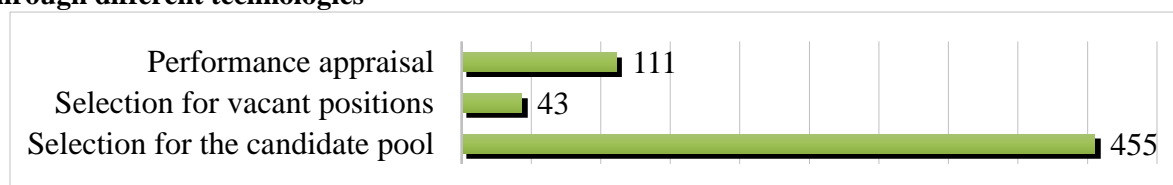

Source: compiled by the authors

In most cases, state civil servants in Sverdlovsk region have a higher education, but it does not always coincide with their current field of work. It should be noted that this lack of field-specific education can be compensated for by additional professional training. For instance, 1,600 civil servants underwent this kind of training in 2015.

Let us now turn to the makeup of the candidate pool in Sverdlovsk region and the technology of pool management applied by the Personnel Policy Department. It is required that the candidate pool in Sverdlovsk region should not exceed a third of the total number of state civil servants in the region. Since the overall staff number was 6,084 at the start of 2016, the maximum number of candidates in the pool had to be 1,938 or less. According to the available data, in this period the candidate pool comprised 1,100 people. We have identified the key technologies of candidate pool management in Sverdlovsk region, such as competitive selection for the candidate pool of a governmental agency; competitive selection for a certain vacancy, which can result in a candidate being recommended to be included into the pool; and performance appraisal of state civil servants. There are also cases when the employment contract has to be terminated due to circumstances beyond the control of the parties – then civil servants are automatically included into the candidate pool. Let us now analyze these technologies and find which of them are applied most frequently. For example, in 2015, 209

people entered the candidate pool, 455 (74.7%) of them had passed the competitive selection for entering the candidate pool; 43 people (7.1%) had passed the competitive selection for vacancies; and 111 people (18.2%) had completed their performance appraisal procedure.

Fig. 3: The number of people (internal and external candidates) included in the candidate pool through different technologies

Source: compiled by authors

Thus, our analysis of statistical data demonstrates that the main technologies to create a candidate pool are competitive selection for the candidate pool and performance appraisal, which allows the most successful civil servants to enter the candidate pool.

1.2 Research Results and Discussion: Survey Respondent and the expert survey

In May 2016, we conducted a survey by applying a stratified sampling method (N=258). The general population was divided into strata according to the following characteristics: people who were not employed by the state civil service but had a relevant experience (in state or municipal service) and were registered in the candidate pool (51%); state civil servants registered in the candidate pool (40%); and those who had never been employed by the state civil service, had no relevant experience and were registered in the candidate pool (9%).

It is interesting that over a half of people included in the candidate pool said that their expectations had not been met. It is known that 60% of respondents were planning to enter the state civil service through the candidate pool system. Since some of them are likely to have no previous experience in the state civil service, we can conclude that for this category of contenders this way of entering the profession is not very effective.

Our research has shown that 45% of respondents were in the candidate pool for less than a year; 29%, from 1 to 2 years; and only 26%, over 2 years. This means that in general, if you are in the candidate pool, it will not take long before you are appointed to a position in the state civil service. It should be noted that the majority of respondents were at the bottom level of the candidate pool corresponding to the regional civil service; 30%, in the pool for a federal government body; 13%, in the federal candidate pool, and only 7%, in the candidate pool of Sverdlovsk region, which explains the fact that 48% of candidates were selected while the other 52% either remained in the candidate pool or were excluded for different reasons. In our survey,

over 60% of respondents pointed out the factors that negatively affected the transparency and accuracy of these procedures: favouritism and nepotism; changing requirements to candidates that have already been included in the candidate pool, which is against the rules. Our respondents also said that external candidates without previous experience in the state civil service stood little chance of success. As for those external candidates who were to be selected directly from the candidate pool, only one out of ten actually landed a job in the civil service. Our survey confirmed this fact: over 60% of respondents said that being included in the candidate pool does not work for people without prior experience in civil service. Moreover, 52% said that external candidates are rarely selected while the same percentage of respondents also stated that internal contenders in the candidate pool are chosen quite frequently.

Fig. 4: Frequency of appointments of internal and external candidates from the candidate pool
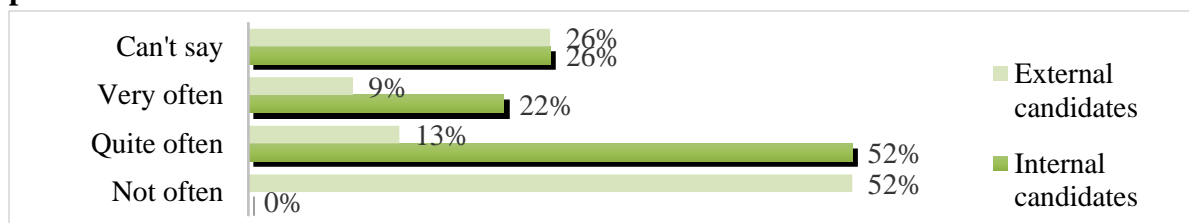
Source: compiled by the authors

Preparation of candidates for state civil service evidently follows the same patterns: over 60% of respondents said that civil servants can undergo advanced training or retraining in accordance with the procedure established by the law but this form of preparation is accessible only to internal candidates.

Our survey has demonstrated that the technologies of competitive selection have a number of drawbacks: for instance, the mechanism of engaging talented external candidates is not working .

The efficiency of the candidate pool is calculated according to the following formula:

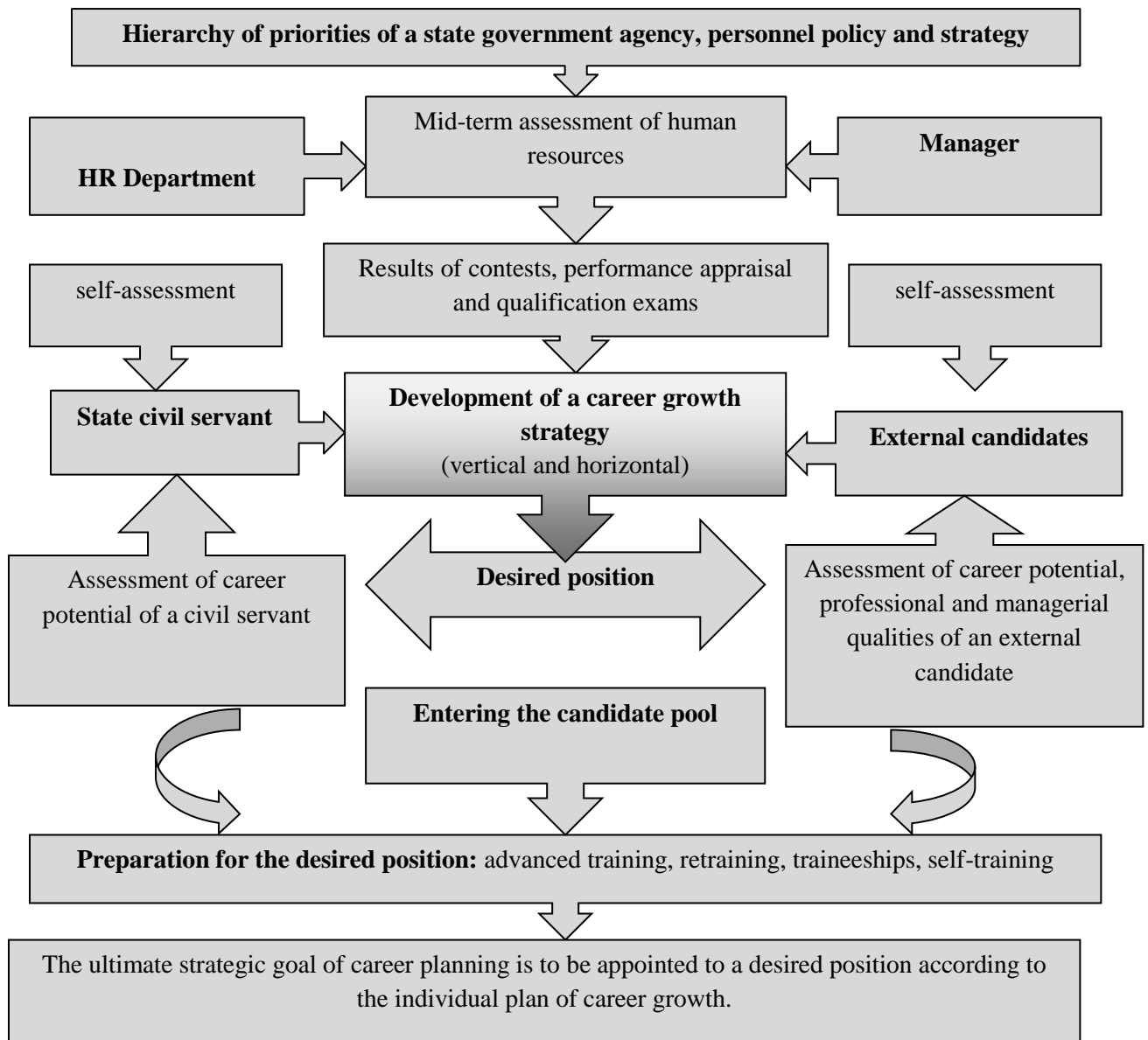$$\text{Fpr} = a\frac{dy}{dx} \times 100\%, \qquad (1)$$

where d_y is the number of civil servants promoted to senior positions from the candidate pool, d_x is the total number of candidates in the candidate pool.

In 2016 this indicator was 45%, which can be estimated as lower middle. Our calculations and the expert survey conducted in November 2016 (N=15) have demonstrated that the turnover of the candidate pool is 15%, which is a bit higher than normal. This can be explained by the deficiencies of the technologies used to fill the pool, unequal treatment of

candidates, the lack of adequate assessment methods and technologies, and the overall structural uncertainty of the state administration system. Nowadays in Russia there is a trend to value and promote those civil servants who are loyal to their superiors.

Conclusion

Fig. 5: Schematic algorithm for career strategy planning for state civil servants and candidates

Hierarchy of priorities of a state government agency, personnel policy and strategy

Mid-term assessment of human resources

HR Department

Manager

Results of contests, performance appraisal and qualification exams

self-assessment

self-assessment

State civil servant

Development of a career growth strategy (vertical and horizontal)

External candidates

Assessment of career potential of a civil servant

Desired position

Assessment of career potential, professional and managerial qualities of an external candidate

Entering the candidate pool

Preparation for the desired position: advanced training, retraining, traineeships, self-training

The ultimate strategic goal of career planning is to be appointed to a desired position according to the individual plan of career growth.

Source: compiled by the authors

Our survey of respondents and our personnel audit of state civil servants in Sverdlovsk region and our expert survey of strategic career planning among state civil servants have

identified the following impediments to their career progress and to the realization of their career potential:

- high impact of nepotism and favouritism in Russian state organizations;
- corruption;
- lack of real equality of internal and external candidates;
- high turnover of candidates;
- low efficiency of the candidate pool;

  the absence of clear algorithm for strategic career planning.

To solve these problems we have developed a schematic algorithm for strategic career planning, which makes it possible to reinforce the candidate pool by attracting not only internal but also external candidates, which is legal but, as our study has shown, hardly ever happens. This will allow the state civil service to implement procedures of strategic career planning and management for its employees and will contribute to the general development of the workforce potential.

We collected data from 258 civil servants with work experience to test our hypothesized model. The results generally supported our hypotheses. Our research sheds light on how preparation for the desired position: advanced training, retraining, traineeships, self-training are related to strategic career management. Our findings offer practical advice for vocational scholars.

Acknowledgment

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