

# ACADEMIC MANAGERIALISM IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

Academic managerialism has established in Russian universities. As in universities in other countries, the new model of educational management has created new conditions for the development of “academics” human capital. However, different Russian universities have different conditions for adapting employees to the new conditions. The author focuses on the negative and positive consequences of the implantation of the academic managerialism in regional universities in Russia. The research question is to show the problems of the human capital of the academic community in regional universities in the context of new model of educational management. Empirical basis of the paper includes results of a semi-formal interview with teachers of the universities of Yekaterinburg (2020-2021, n=20), and results of secondary analysis of research data on university management and the academic community in Russian universities. We selected studies in both leading and regional universities in Russia. The data was structured according to the same criteria as the results of the semi-formal interview conducted by the author.

**Key words:** university management, academic managerialism, academic community, “academics” human capital, competition in higher education

**JEL Code:** J24, I23, I28

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## Introduction

The university management model, called academic managerialism, was implemented in Russian universities later than in higher education in the USA and Europe (Sokolov et al., 2018). Its key elements and characteristics were formed by the mid-2010s. (Abramov, 2012). As in universities in other countries (Arimoto, 2010; Whitchurch, 2018), the new model of university management has created new conditions for the develop human capital of Russian faculty (Sivak, Yudkevich, 2017). These include, firstly, the introduction of competitive

procedures for election to positions based on indicators that correlate with the priorities of the university's strategy (Lovakov et al., 2019). And secondly, a system of formalized reporting and methods for assessment the effectiveness of pedagogical and scientific work were introduced. Third, the mechanisms of competition for resources that ensure the academic development of teachers and researchers of the university began to actively develop. Fourth, the goals of professional development of faculty were brought into compliance with the priorities of the university's HR-policy and administrative agenda. In a certain sense, there was a revolution in the academic world, because the goals, methods, and results of the development of “academics” human capital were set not by the academic community, but by “administrators” (Musselin, 2013; Pekkola et al., 2018).

The problem is that different Russian universities have different conditions for adapting faculty to the new conditions. The range of barriers varies from misunderstanding of the key ideas of the “new university management” to a banal deficit of financial resources. Meanwhile, the educational policy sets a unified management model in Russian universities and uniform standards for the academic development of teachers and researchers. The author focuses on the negative and positive consequences of the implementation of the academic managerialism principles in Russian regional universities. The aim of the paper is to show the problems of the development of the Russian faculty human capital in the conditions of new model of educational management in regional universities. The objectives of the study are: 1) characteristics of the features of academic managerialism in regional universities of Russia; 2) to identify the perception of the “academics” in regional universities of the academic managerialism principles; 3) to identify the negative and positive consequences of the academic managerialism for the development of human capital of the academic community in regional universities in Russia.

## **1 Empirical base of research and methods**

The study of the impact of academic managerialism on the development of the “academics” human capital is a sensitive topic. For its study, quantitative methods associated with mass questionnaires or statistical data analysis are irrelevant. In this regard, the author chose a qualitative research strategy based on three methods – interviews, summarizing the data of previously conducted research on the topic (their secondary analysis) and participant observation.

The main information base of the study was the results of semi-formalized interviews with researchers and teachers of the universities of Yekaterinburg (2020-2021, n=20). Statements concerning their attitude to the principles of academic managerialism were singled out from the texts. Further, the statements were grouped depending on the pole of assessment this management model (positive or negative).

For secondary analysis, we selected studies on university management and the academic community in modern Russian universities. We selected studies conducted earlier in both leading and regional universities in Russia. The data was structured according to the same criteria as the results of the semi-formal interview conducted by the author. This allowed us to conduct a comparative analysis of the conditions for the development of the faculty human capital in leading and regional universities, to identify specific problems of “academicians” in provincial universities.

The author carried out the participant observation as an employee of one of the regional universities of Russia. He has many years of teaching experience. This allowed him to compare the conditions and opportunities for academic development that existed at different stages of the reform of Russian higher education (from the 1980s to the present).

## **2 Results and discussion**

### **2.1 Features of academic managerialism in regional universities of Russia**

We will not reveal the characteristic features of academic managerialism in this paper, they are well described in the literature (Woessner, Kehler, 2018; Miller, 2014). We will show the features of this management model in regional universities in Russia, which hinder the development of the “academics” human capital. Among such features, our informants noted, the simulation management strategies, i.e. imitation of the experience of leading Russian and foreign universities without taking into consideration the specifics of the region, the status of the university. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

“I have an opinion that the university management blindly borrows and replicates approaches to the management of research teams and teachers. Either an American or European university is as a model for them, or some kind of Russian university in Moscow. This, on the one hand, is good – the best samples are always needed for development of university and faculty. But they forget that regional universities have other goals and mission. It is impossible to bring the strategies of all universities under one template” (A.P., professor, head of the department).

The reforms in Russian higher education a priori requires a “reformatting” of the scientific and pedagogical community. This is one of the tasks of the “new university management”. However, another “knot” of contradictions is formed around its achievement. The socio-cultural inertia of the scientific and pedagogical community in regional universities is quite strong, and the university administration solves the problem of the qualitative development of faculty using the principle: “There are no indispensable people, there are simply unsubstituted ones”. As a result, the replacement of their own “inefficient” employees with “effective” ones is made. The widespread reduction of the contract terms, the usage of open competition mechanisms, and the active invitation of foreign specialists from the category of highly qualified specialists are convenient ways to solve this problem. Thus, it would be nice, the necessary indicators of the new quality of the scientific and pedagogical staff are quickly and effectively provided. The effectiveness of such a measure in reality shows an excerpt from the interview:

“The word "efficiency" means that the result is formulated. What result do you want to get? If it is just an increase the number of articles, then without a contract with a foreign researcher you will not get joint articles. If the result is the formation of a sustainable scientific school, then these contracts should include requirements for the result and be longer. Now there is just a certain increase in activity in some direction. But as soon as we run out of finance, this activity will both arise and disappear. We can still lose young people: after this foreign scientist, the most talented guys will simply leave and that's it ... Why are you inviting a Nobel laureate?! Well?! We need to show our competence center a planned result: this Nobel laureate has a high H-index. All these are very operational goals and objectives, not of a strategic vector” (S.K., vice-rector).

Russian regional universities do not have enough time and financial resources to develop their own faculty (they spend a large amount on expensive foreign specialists). Therefore, not only employees from the category of those who “do not want and cannot” leave universities, but also teachers with positive potential who simply do not want to be in the position of “university slaves” and in a situation of uncertainties and fear.

## **2.2 Perception of the model of academic managerialism by faculty in Russian regional universities**

The results of the interviews showed that in regional universities “academics” ambivalently perceive the academic managerialism model. According to one of the informants, the academic community can be divided into three groups – those who have a positive, neutral and negative

attitude to the practices of academic managerialism: “And it depends on the age of the employee, his proximity to the management structures, the benefits and preferences that he receives or, conversely, loses due to the new approach to university management” (E.G., associate professor).

According to the respondents, the older generation of “academics” is more critical of the new management culture and of the “administrators”. Interviews have shown that the reason is not the conservatism of this cohort, but deeper contradictions. First of all academic managerialism largely annulled the rent that the older generation of “academics” at the expense of their regalia, positions, academic degrees: “The older generation at our university, of course, is still treated with respect. But this will not be the basis for the automatic renewal of the contract or the payment of a premium, stimulating allowances. Professors need to work even more than young teacher or researcher to prove their right to work at the university” (G.Z., professor).

Another reason for criticizing the “new university management” is the violation of the principles of justice. Representatives of the older generation of the academic community believe that the “administrators” themselves do not make a significant contribution to the development of the university, but at the same time they decide what the criteria for assessing the faculty human capital will be, who they will include in the cadre reserve, who will be allocated funds for advanced training courses, scientific trips.

The group of “academics” who are critical of the “new university management” also includes teachers who did not adapt to the new strategy of university development. They have low motivation and insufficient resources, which are necessary to achieve results in educational and scientific activities. This is a group of low-resource academic staff.

According to the informants, the younger generation of university employees, who do not know the traditions and principles of management in the “old” universities, are tolerant of managerial innovations. They approve the new conditions and requirements of professional development. One of the informants noted: “I think that the reason for such a positive or neutral attitude is that better conditions are created for university youth today than for the older generation. Universities and foundations announce special grant competitions for them. Some universities have special adaptation programs for young teachers and researchers. And informally, university management often gives the “green light” to young academic staff. They have more opportunities for personal and professional development” (O.N., associate professor).

According to the interviews, we identified another group of “academics” who are positive about the new management model. These are employees who simultaneously carry out

the duties of teachers (or researchers) and “administrators”. By virtue of their job responsibilities, they support new standards of professional development and encourage their subordinates to fulfill them in various ways.

### **2.3 Positive and negative impact of academic managerialism on the development of the academic community's human capital in regional universities**

On the one hand, the informants noted the following positive consequences of the introduction of the model of academic managerialism:

1. The system of remuneration for teaching and research has become more fair and objective: if an employee writes a lot of papers, researches, receives grants, has achievements, then he earns well, and the university pays more attention and respect to him.

2. The “new university management” sometimes initiates and finances interesting projects focused on cooperation with external partners and foreign colleagues. Such projects stimulate the professional growth of teaching staff, since only strong teams and strong university employees can attract external partners.

3. Academic managerialism is associated with the implementation of university development strategies. And for the strategy, financial resources are always allocated, including for the academic development of employees (courses in English, academic writing, the formation of digital competencies, professional competencies).

On the other hand, the academic community is ambivalent about such principles of academic managerialism as competition, transparency and accountability, and formalized criteria for the effectiveness of academic work. Summarizing the interview data allowed us to identify the following negative consequences of the academic managerialism:

1. “New university managers” do not intend to invest in the human capital of employees. Most likely, they allocate minimal resources and “skim off the top” that academic work provides at the expense of available personal resources. Here is an excerpt from the interview: “In order to get funding for events that are important for the development of professional competencies, professional relationships, and the creation of research teams, teachers and researchers need to withstand fierce competition among themselves. They need to actively prove that such investments will bring quick and concrete results, which are actually highly probabilistic in the academic environment” (Ye.G., professor).

2. Differences in values, models of corporate behavior, and goals of professional activity create distrust between “academics” and “administrators”. Distrust also generates a breakdown of social ties, opportunistic behavior strategies among teachers, and imitations. All of this is a

negative context for the academic development of faculty, reduces their motivation to learn and improve.

3. Due to competition, overstimulation of individual success, the phenomenon of fragmentation of the scientific and pedagogical community has appeared:

“In my opinion, today there are increasing differences between us, there is a vertical and horizontal differentiation and polarization. I observe a high level of disunity in the team, the relationships break down. And the administrative leaders do nothing to save them. And faculty are also quietly getting rid of this solidarity. But this solidarity is the essence and feature of university culture. Relationships are maintained on a personal level. And on the group, collective, they are absent” (F.S., associate professor).

For the development of the “academics” human capital fragmentation is dangerous because it destroys the most important non-material sources and resources of development, as well as distorts the patterns of professional behavior and exchange. “Organic” connections and relationships within the academic community can partially compensate for the resource constraints of a modern university. Academic managerialism in Russian regional universities, unfortunately, does not take this factor into consideration well. Such destructions reduce the quality of the “academics” human capital and reduce the already weak resource base of regional universities and deplete the positive potential of the academic managerialism model.

## **Conclusion**

Academic managerialism in Russian regional universities has both positive and negative consequences for the development of the human capital of research and teaching staff. The positive ones include clear and transparent criteria and procedures for assessment the effectiveness and efficiency of academic work, clear goals for academic development that are consistent with university development strategies, and the implementation of competition principles.

The negative consequences of academic managerialism can be attributed to overly formalized and depersonalized approaches to the organization of academic development, the emergence of imitative care for “academics”, unintentional stimulation imitative publication activity, unfair competition, etc. Incompetent university managers often have a professional background in the form of work in business or government. They often use management approaches that fragment and “divide” the academic community, depriving it of significant social and cultural incentives and resources for professional and personal development.

The study showed the ambivalent nature of the impact of the new model of university management on the development and accumulation of human capital in universities. The obtained results open up prospects for the development of more cautious and variable approaches to the management of research and teaching teams, taking into consideration the strategies, mission, and resource capacity of regional universities in Russia.

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