UNIVERCITY: MANAGEMENT DECISIONS AND EXPRESS SOCIOLOGY

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Abstract

The article reveals the status of express sociology as a scientific discipline. Were identified the factors that contributed to the appearance of operative sociology. These include: social dynamics, the time factor, the modern technology of public opinion surveys. Also were disclosed methodological bases of express sociology. Operative sociology relates to the field of humanitarian technologies and can serve as a management tool. In addition, benefits and risks of operational sociology technologies were established.

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Introduction

Express sociological support for innovation activities relates to effective means of management of a university community. The purpose of the operational sociological support is to create real conditions and quality information background for solving social problems arising in the implementation of innovative educational programs.

Overview of the research literature

First of all let us analyze the external circumstances. What factors contributed to the emergence of operational sociology?

The first factor is caused by the fact that the sociality has become more dynamic, fluid and mobile. Leading sociologists analyzing sociality resort to such metaphors as “liquid modernity” (Z. Bauman), “the consequences of modernity” (A. Giddens), “society of social changes” (P. Sztompka).

The second factor is related to the transition from hourly time to instantaneous time. If the hourly time was perceived as a “manageable resource”, the instantaneous time is associated with instant transmission and simultaneous access to ideas and information from anywhere in the world (J. Urry).
The third factor is caused by the fact that polling technologies are actively used in marketing, in the electoral process, in the press. Sociology lost monopoly in the field of applied research and using quantitative and qualitative collection strategy for empirical data.

In Russian scientific literature discussions are underway about the content of the concepts “social technologies” and “humanitarian technologies.” The term “social technologies” appeared in the scientific circulation earlier than the term “humanitarian technologies”, and dates back to the ideas of social engineering. Russian researcher B.F. Usmanov summarized the main approaches to the definition of this concept. Social technologies are understood as a set of methods and tools for solving social problems; body of knowledge about how to organize social processes; activity, which is essential for the solution of social problems; element of control mechanism to solve social problems; system of innovative ways to solve social problems.

It should be noted that “social technologies” implemented predominantly in the social work. In the opinion of B.F. Usmanov, “technology of social work is a system of innovative and traditional methods, means, methods and forms activity of social workers and social institutions, which will be applied in a specific sequence for the successful resolution of a particular social problem.”

Instrumental approach among sociologists is dominating. According K.N. Tulinov, there are at least two main interpretations of the concept of “social technology.” “On the one hand — as rationally constructed system of operations, which is a method to achieve certain goals in the transformation of social relations and structures; objectives in this case are the subject of these transformations. On the other hand — as the functioning of social systems, that considered as a technological system.” Zh.T. Toshchenko gave the following definition: “social technology is a set of sequential operations, procedures for targeted implementation and realization of previously outlined plans (programs and projects) and for obtaining the optimal social outcome.”

In contrast to the instrumental and technological approach proponents of the humanitarian approach hold different positions. It is about fundamentally different things rather than manipulation, even in a soft form. S.M. Eliseev indicates compound of philosophical and methodological, political and conjunctural moments: “In principle, the humanitarian technologies are both a good brand and independent methodology, which, perhaps, still not quite consistently and clearly outlined.”

Sociological knowledge is hierarchical in nature and involves five steps.

The upper stage is a scientific picture of the world. It includes universal knowledge that is forming the basis of social sciences and the most common set of theoretical propositions about how is arranged the social reality and which laws it is subordinated.

The next step is the general sociological theories. These theories are intended to provide a description and explanation of the development of society as a whole; to reveal the main trends in the development of social relations as a whole system; to touch deep, essential moments of the development of society, the historical process as a whole; to give generalizations and conclusions about the causes and effects of social functioning; to operate categories such as: society, social structure, social stratification, social action.

The third stage is the special theory. These theories present an opportunity for creation of a framework for studies in specific areas of human activity and the individual components of social structures without the use of cumbersome and abstract conceptual apparatus of the fundamental theories; to enable an interaction with the real people's lives, which is always in sight of theories of the middle level, reflecting the practical problems of life of individual spheres of society; and to demonstrate the possibilities of sociological research in the eyes of practitioners scientists specializing in other fields of knowledge.

The fourth stage is the empirical sociological researches. They are large-scale studies that meet the stringent requirements of science and aimed to confirm the particular theory. Their main goal
is to contribute to the increment of new knowledge, to discover new patterns and to detect unknown social trends. Empirical studies provide a basis for recommendations to address current and future challenges of public life.

And the last step is applied sociological research. This is small-scale study conducted at a single site (organization or enterprise), designed to explore a specific social problem, social development plan and to give practical recommendations for achieving the result.

There is a relation between stages of socio-economic development of society and the development of social science. The first two stages (the scientific world and the general sociological theory) emerged in situations of transition from traditional to industrial society. Subsequent stages (special theory and empirical methodology of applied social studies) were formed from the end of XIX to the mid-twentieth century.

And what happens now? Does sociology resides in an invariable condition for more than sixty years or body of sociology is changing?

Dynamism of social processes, the compression of time and social competition in the information services market have necessitated new field of sociology — operational sociology.

Methodological basis for the justification of principles of express sociology is the competence approach. Concept is based on the following provisions.

First. Result of the activity can be described using the concept of “professional competence.” For example, under the professional competence is understood an integral characteristic that determines the ability of experts to solve professional problems and typical occupational tasks encountered in real situations of professional activity, using knowledge, professional and life experiences, values and inclinations. “Ability” is not understood as a “predisposition,” but as a “skill.” Ability in this case is the individual psychological qualities of the person to successfully perform a particular activity.

Second. Competence is manifested in the activities, so you cannot “see” the unmanifested competence.

Third. Fundamentally important is in what proportion in single professional competence different types of competencies serve — key, basic and special.

In the logic of the competence approach express sociology turns out as a variation of technology. Humanities technology decides on the one hand, the problem of person’s and group’s self-realization, on the other hand — the problem of the development of communication within the communication strategy. In the context of humanitarian technologies person acts as a peculiar symbolic system, highly informative and opened for contacts, which facilitates the updating of individual personal meanings, acting, in this case, as the reformative and converted outset. Specificity of humanitarian communication technologies consists in that they, theoretically, are not indifferent to the existential or ethical content of action. In the greatest degree they are dependent on humanitarian content of communicative practice; otherwise they are just social manipulation technologies. Humanitarian technologies require mandatory presence of feedback, dialogue/communication between the participants in the communicative process.

According to the content, express sociological support is a management tool. The purpose of express sociological support is to create effective conditions, quality information background for solving social problems in the functioning of the organization. Realization of this goal contributes to improving the self-development and self-realization of the organization. This leads to the formation of a new quality of the organizational environment. New quality involves constructive engagement and dialogue between the various target groups that make up the organization.

This feature of express sociological support makes its essence and its main qualitative difference from other types of sociological research. Express sociological support belongs to a class of humanitarian technologies that are built on the principle “here and now.” This class of
technologies involves two constraints. First is the temporal constraint that synchronizes the process survey with the process of management decision. This leads to the fact that sociological information has value only if it is part of the administrative decision. Spatial constraint clearly identifies areas where the spread of sociological information streams (target groups responsible for the enactment and enforcement of administrative decisions).

Temporal and spatial constraints define the specific of tasks, at the implementation of which technology of operational sociological support for innovative educational programs is directed.

The first task is aimed at creating conditions for responsible decision-making within the organization. The solution to this problem involves the orientation of self-examination and self-analysis during the execution previously adopted management decisions.

The second task is aimed at creating conditions for making decisions that assume changing of the situation in the organization. Realization of this task involves adjusting the decisions themselves by introducing new parameters identified in the study of a problematic situation.

The third task is aimed at studying the alleged processes and phenomena that occur in the course of project activities. Implementation of task activates the innovative potential of the organization.

The fourth task is aimed at changing public sentiment within the organization. Implementation of task, on the one hand, shows based on what data was prepared a management decision, on the other hand encourages members of the organization in the implementation of the decision.

Specificity of technology of express sociological support is a combination of quantitative and qualitative social research strategy. A quantitative approach represents a specific research methodology and practice, when the starting points of the research are theoretical hypotheses that are verified during the study. In this case, verification procedure is based on the use of mathematics in evidence: on the measurement of social features that interest researchers, mathematical analysis and obtained sociological information.

Qualitative approach is a sociological research methodology and specific sociological practice whose purpose is a study of social phenomena and processes primarily from the point of view of the individual acting as the beginning of any sociality; individual is interpreting the world with other people acting in it according to their own interpretations. Researcher here must necessarily “dive” into the world of personal meanings of studied people, to understand the motives and goals of their actions, their explanations of what is happening, then to design a concept designed to absorb this subjective experience.

Differences between these two methodologies are essential. They consist the selection constructs and, as consequence, the methods. Quantitative methodology gives a fairly accurate picture of statistical distribution of features, but it cannot talk about individuals. Qualitative methodology gives an accurate picture of the inner world and the behavior of the individual, but it cannot give an accurate picture of the social group as a whole. So what to do?

Is there something in common that unites two methodologies? Of course there is. This common is expressed in the logic of the study. The logic of research search has the form of processing chain: formation of goal — programming — collection of information — data processing — data analysis — resulting sociological document. Both cases involve research of social processes within the organization.

Thus, qualitative and quantitative methodologies both are mutually antithetical and complementary. In our case, the principle of complementarity of two methodologies is a manifestation of interdisciplinarity. The combination of these two methodologies generates not only the effect of volume of sociological reconstruction of reality, but also the effect of adequate reflection of reality, due to mutual control in the process of obtaining empirical data.

Activities of a professional, which uses technology of express sociological support, should be directed to the formation of a business organization. Professional may be part of the design team
targeting development programs; may to participate in the development of a mechanism for interactions between employees and managers of various structural units; to create channels for the participation of the social partners in the implementation of the development organization and the evaluation of its results.

An example of express survey technology can be the research in the field of efficient contracts which was conducted by the author on scientific and pedagogical staff in Russian State Pedagogical University.

What is the effective contract? Russian high school is on the verge of change. In the period from 2012 to 2018 in branches of social sphere are scheduled qualitative changes aimed at improving the efficiency of education and science. Particular attention in the roadmap of transformations is given to human resource development in higher education. One of the innovations is the development and implementation of mechanisms for effective contract with the scientific and teaching staff of educational institutions of higher education. Developers of roadmap convinced that the transition to effective contract will raise the quality of higher education, the creation of new economic and financial mechanisms to ensure competition among faculty members and increase the level of motivation of scientific and pedagogical staff.

Let us turn to the estimation of parameters of the teacher at the university. Research activity. This parameter is possible to estimate by the number of publications, their quality, as well as the number of citations and references to the work of a particular author. Research activity is easily amenable not only to quantitative but also to qualitative assessment. The only question is: what indicators are most accurately reflecting the research ability of the teacher (publications in which journals worth considering? Whether to consider publicistic editions, written manuals and monographs?)?

Teaching activity. Its external evaluation is difficult. Few people outside the university (employers or the scientific community) are aware of the pedagogical abilities of a teacher. Internal evaluation is also difficult. Management of university, deans of faculties or department heads may say about who of the professors bright lecturer, a skilled methodologist and who is not are. But these judgments would be rather subjective opinion of a particular administrator.

Expert activity. Certain aspects of expert activity can be considered both within the university (expert activities intra-university contests and grants) and the external market of educational services (participation in the dissertation councils, participation in expert communities).

Now back to the question of evaluation of specific activities of the teacher. Based on what indicators can be formed material reward for a teacher?

Among the indicators of research activities can be identified: the number of published monographs and textbooks, when the teacher is the author or scientific editor; the number of published scientific articles in domestic publications; number of published scientific articles in the most prestigious international journals; defenses of dissertations; number of citations or references to the work of a particular author in other publications; and availability of grants and research projects with external financing.

Among the indicators of teaching activity can be identified: availability of awards for excellence in teaching; number of methodological publications and developments; level of educational programs (bachelor, master, and postgraduate); number of points based on the results of questioning of students.

Among the indicators of expert activity can be identified: participation in the work of dissertation councils; participation in the work of expert councils at various levels; participation in the work of expert communities.

It should be kept in mind, when developing indicators, that it is impossible to create a universal scale of material rewards. Results of activity of professor and assistant will always be different. Work of young teacher involves the necessity to gain experience in teaching and expert
activities, as well as the preparation work for the qualification of an academic degree (candidate and doctoral degrees) and obtaining academic titles (associate professor and professor). Therefore it is necessary to develop two types of effective contracts. One type is for experienced lecturers and professors, and another — the outpacing contract for applicants for academic degrees and titles.

Thus, the regulatory component of effective contract includes the following components. First of all, a complex of financial, material and social guarantees to ensure the sustainable development of the university in a situation of increased competition in the market of educational services, as well as the condition for the realization of professional competence, creative self-realization and freedom of choice for the teacher. Next, the availability of an optimal model of interaction between the university and teacher oriented to rational choice or building consensus as mutual agreement between the parties. And also, a system of indicators devoted to measure of the teacher's work.

Another component of the effective contract is axiological by nature — this is the level of corporate cohesion of the university community in a situation of social change. Methodology of the expert survey can help to reveal level of corporate cohesion regarding the transition of university to the effective contract.

In the Russian State Pedagogical University named after A.I. Herzen in March 2013 was carried out an expert sociological survey on the topic: “Human resource development and performance appraisal system of the staff with the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the university and its rating indicators.” Poll participants were members of the academic council of the university. Among them: 3 vice-rectors, 23 deans of faculties and directors of institutes, 3 heads of departments, 14 heads of academic departments, 2 professors, 3 associate professors and 8 students. Overall 56 experts, that accounts for 67 percent of all members of the academic council of the university.

The first indicator of corporate cohesions is the conjunction of policy for personnel development, pursued by the university administration, and social expectations of teachers in respect of contracts system of employment. This index is confirmed in the comparison of one of the key objectives set out in the “Program of development of the Russian State Pedagogical University named after A.I. Herzen on the 2011 – 2015” and the results of the survey.

Priority task is to establish a corporate environment that encourages innovative activity and the growth of creativity, personal and professional fulfillment of employees and students. In turn, the experts' responses to the question: “What determines the human potential of the RSPU?” were distributed as follows.

First place: “The team of teachers and staff of the University is in the optimum age, the team consists of experts in their field.”

Second place: “Personnel potential of the university will be high while maintaining the leading departments and divisions.”

Third place: “The condition of maintaining a high human potential of the university is the combination of scientific research and practical experience.”

According to experts, the main directions of development of human resources in the university in the near future are:

A) On a personnel policy:

- Rejuvenation of faculty members;
- Continuity of trained faculty members under the scheme: student — postgraduate student — teacher;
- Calling in the leading specialists of relevant enterprises and establishments with work experience;
• Intra-high-school exchange of experience in the field of teaching and research activities.

B) In the field of material incentives:
• Acceptable salary;
• Active forms of moral and material encouragement;
• Assessment of staff from open and stable criteria.

The second indicator of corporate cohesion is agreement on the constituent elements of effective contract within the expert community.

According to experts, the basic in determining salary bonuses to faculty members are the following indicators: number of publications in leading Russian and foreign scientific journals (88 percent of respondents); grant activities (56 percent); teacher's perception by students (54 percent); international (Web of Science, Scopus) and Russian (RSCI) science citation index (52 percent); high place in the contest of professional achievements (46 percent).

Experts called the additional indicators that can serve as a basis in determining the bonuses to the salary. These include: participation in social and educational work (9 mentions); educational activity, development of new lectures and practical courses (7 mentions); research work with students, guidance of post-graduate students (7 mentions); preparation of monographs, textbooks, teaching materials (6 mentions); participation in the development of targeted programs (4 mentions); presentation activity (2 mentions).

The third indicator is the understanding of the necessity of formation of personnel reserve for various levels of university management. On the appropriateness the formation of personnel reserve the experts' responses were distributed as follows: at the level of administration answered affirmatively 58 percent of respondents, at the deaneries — 76 percent, at the departments — 82 percent of respondents.

The fourth indicator of corporate cohesion is the understanding of the need for outpacing contract for young teachers and researchers. According to experts, the main means of stimulation that provide fastening of young teachers and researchers at the university are: bonus for a specific result (80 percent of respondents); salary increment (72 percent); social benefits (70 percent); forms of moral encouragement (48 percent); organization of competitions of professional achievement (32 percent); information about personal achievements in university media (24 percent).

Results of the survey revealed that corporate cohesion is a result of historical traditions, administrative decisions and social expectations that keep teachers in the university community. When the university community is characterized by cohesion, all its members are focused on the mission of the university, its strategic goals and objectives. Each member of the community actively supports other teachers and students, encouraging their dedication to university. University community as a whole contributes to the reproduction of collective sources of spiritual and material development of the university.

Analysis of the research raises the question: what are the cognitive features of express sociology? The first feature of operative diagnostics is the focus on practical problems, adoption of certain management decisions. The second feature — the fact that research is conducted not by the initiative of the research team, but by initiative of the customer. The third characteristic is that outcome aimed at the adoption of specific management decisions.

The share of the fundamental bases is minimal. The basis of this variety of sociology constitutes different rapid methods. This can be explained by the high information availability of research object and preferred orientation of a survey at solving practical problems of the university community. Thus it is necessary to comply with one simple rule: you only need to ask what cannot be obtained by using objective information.
Compared with the traditional version of the methodological part of sociological research program, which includes five basic elements (formulation of a problem, the definition of the object and the subject of research, setting goals and objectives and interpretation of basic concepts; preliminary systematic analysis of research and hypotheses), technology of express sociological support includes only two elements: the first — formulation of the problem, identification of the object and subject of study; and the second element — hypotheses.

Regarding the hypotheses, it is necessary to impose a restriction. Development of a scientific hypothesis is a highly professional job. In the case of rapid diagnostics it comes to temporary hypotheses. Such hypotheses are made simply on the basis of the questions that you have included in the questionnaire. This other arrangement or description of them does not claim the particular scientific depth.

In order to quickly and efficiently carry out operational research, it is important to have a catalog of standardized questions. A group of three or four specialists in the short term can not only develop the program, but also to get the final results.

What are the benefits of express sociological support for innovation activities of university community?

First of all, it is efficiency. Efficiency, as a real opportunity to quickly and timely examine the specific situation in order to identify ways to remove the negative trends in the development of a particular situation; it can be achieved by reducing the time of analysis the research problem, simplification of elaboration the procedure program, the intensification of the process of gathering information.

Another advantage of the proposed technology is the accuracy of the information. Credibility is a required element of any sociological research carried out at the professional level. In terms of efficiency reliability of the information is provided by the depth of analysis of the problem situation, the trustworthiness and quality of sampling techniques.

Finally, it comes to such advantage as concreteness. By its very nature operative support aimed at achieving practical purpose.

Risks of using the technology are caused by two reasons. On the one hand the humanitarian technologist strives to obtain timely information, and on the other — the reliability of the results. It leads to contradictions. On the one hand, if principle of reliability is implemented more consistently, than pace of research work are slowing down, making solution of acute social problem more difficult. On the other hand, the intensification of the process carried out by reducing the number of investigated and simplifying procedures for obtaining information, distorts the result. In the first case can be lost relevance in the second there is a risk of distorted information.

Literature:


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