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CHANGING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MIDDLE MANAGERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF 'PROJECT 5-100' AT A RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY

In 2013, Russia launched Project 5-100 to place five Russian universities among the top 100 university rankings by 2020. As one of the important changes within universities Project 5-100 sought an enhancement of the management system. This paper provides insights into the changing roles and responsibilities of middle managers in Russian university under Project 5-100. The theoretical approach of new managerialism was applied, using documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and survey as data-gathering tools. The findings demonstrate that significant changes toward more a managerial character influenced the responsibilities of the heads of academic units (HAU). It reveals disagreement between managers and academics on many questions evaluating the changes. The author concludes that managers also may contribute to the implementation of Project 5-100, but agreement between different levels of staff needs to be achieved for further successful development.

Keywords: Russia, higher education, increasing competitiveness, new managerialism, national policy implementation, middle managers, academic management.

JEL Classification: Z

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Introduction

Today the competitiveness of higher education institutions [HEIs] is a measure of their success. Competition in this area has always existed, but recently it has become more intensive. Globalisation has led to the creation of a highly competitive environment [Marginson, 2006], and the massification of HE supports this process. Being in the world top university rankings is often estimated as acknowledgement of success, and this has become considered as a useful tool in helping students and companies to orientate themselves in the field of HE. This leads to a situation when more and more countries seek to develop national programs stimulating universities to achieve prominent results in the global arena, particularly to build world-class universities. To this end the Russian government launched Project 5-100.

In order to achieve the intended results, universities need to transform. One of the key factors in a successful transformation is competent managers [Mader et al., 2013]. While reforming the management system has often been overlooked in many governmental policies in countries using development programs for their HEIs [Salmi and Froumin, 2013], the enhancement of the managerial core at universities is an important issue in Project 5-100. However, Russian university managers, particularly at the middle level, are overlooked in the research. To investigate changes in the roles and responsibilities of middle managers, it is necessary to reveal the conditions created by Project 5-100 at Russian universities. This study analyses the university strategy of increasing competitiveness under Project 5-100 and shows the changes in middle management.

This study uses one Project 5-100 HEI as a case study and analyses the middle management. This article is structured as follows: the next section provides a background of Project 5-100 which is followed by literature review concerned with the strategies of improving competitiveness and management in HE as a basis for the determination of research questions. Next, the methodology of research is outlined. The research findings and discussion follow. The final section concludes, gives the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Basic points of Project 5-100

Project 5-100 started in October, 2012 from a plan for the development of leading universities which should result in the growth of their competitiveness, and support the promotion of five Russian universities into the top-100 world university rankings by 2020. The plan regulates further actions of the government and the universities, outlining the development of the academic and management staff, research and education activities, and economic and organisational support.

The first fifteen HEIs were selected on a competitive basis in July 2013, six HEIs were added in September 2015, but universities started to plan their activities before these dates because, as a part of the requirements for participation in the competition for governmental funding, they needed to have a clear plan to achieve the goals of Project 5-100. Their activities are controlled by the Ministry of Education and Science [MES] with the help of the International Council, which has quite a wide list of responsibilities; the latter reviews the participants' programme of increasing competitiveness (also called road-maps) and their annual reports, and suggests to MES coefficients for the distribution of grants among universities. Although the main aim of Project 5-100, and of university performance indicators are highly correlated with international rankings, the decision about the coefficients of funding is made by the International Council, not only based on the achievement of these indicators, but the general direction and speed of HEI development [Shcherbenok, 2016].

The responsibility of universities to establish their own programme of increasing competitiveness [PIC] with arrangements and KPIs was fixed in legislation. There is a list of widely defined actions which should be included in the PIC, such as carrying-out international programs of academic mobility and conducting research which takes into account priority research areas. Road maps and performance indicators also needed to be set by taking into account the criteria of international rankings such as ARWU, THE and QS. In order to conduct analysis of PICs and to understand the possible effects on the roles and responsibilities of middle managers, the next section provides a brief review of the significant components of governmental and university strategies.

Strategies for improving competitiveness

There is no clear definition of what competitiveness in HE means, but from an economic perspective it can be understood as the ability of certain organisations to surpass rivals in the same conditions. In terms of globalised HE, this often means achieving world leading positions. According to Shin and Kehm [2013], recent competition between universities has resulted in a focus on research rather than teaching. Altbach and Salmi [2011] similarly indicate that leading, or world-class, universities are mainly research universities. This attribute is also supported by global university rankings, such as THE, QS and ARWU, which became a measurement of universities. Therefore, focusing on research is an important strategy to increase competitiveness. However, there are many other factors which can affect the competitive positions of HEIs; consequently, national and university strategies should be complex and include many different activities. The selection of government strategy to improve HE competitiveness is highly dependent on the national context and its needs. Shin and Kehm [2013] emphasise the level of economic

development and of the usage of English in HE as the two main criteria in this selection. Bagley and Portnoi [2014] suggest that the government also plays a role.

According to Shin and Kehm [2013], the main ways to increase competitiveness are internationalisation and investment in R&D; as the strategies of different countries aimed to create world-class universities are usually based on different combinations of these ways and which universities are chosen for development programs. Salmi [2009] similarly highlights that national strategies may be implemented by providing support for small groups of existing elite universities, by merging different institutions or even by creating absolutely new HEIs. The Russian experience reflects both these ways.

Nevertheless, governmental strategy is not enough to transform HEIs to world-class status; each need their own complementary strategy for achieving the intended results [Salmi, 2009]. Shattock [2003] found there is no single successful strategy which HEIs with different backgrounds can use. However, there are not many studies investigating strategies adopted by HEIs within the framework of their national programs. A brief review of earlier studies indicates that most researchers analyse the context and strategies of particular governments [Huang, 2015; Salmi and Froumin, 2013; Shin and Kehm, 2013] or the ability of universities to develop toward world-class status in general [Salmi, 2009], and there is a lack of case studies of universities aspiring to achieve world leading positions [Altbach and Salmi, 2011]. No studies of Russian universities participating in Project 5-100 were found, which motivates my research.

As argued elsewhere [Howells et al., 2014; Mader et al., 2013], the transformation of HEIs requires a high level leadership and management. As Salmi and Froumin [2013] point out the weakness of programs for achieving prominent results in many countries was that they often overlooked the need for management changes. The necessity of these changes is underpinned by the transformation of HE systems toward the implementation of a neoliberal approach [Shin and Kehm, 2013]. Neoliberalism at HEIs started in the UK and the USA, and was then adopted in many other countries; it reflects greater accountability and managerialism, which are integrated into different processes within a university. As the transformation of management is one of the necessary conditions for universities who want to participate in Project 5-100, it is important to analyse conditions which the university creates for itself under this initiative. This will allow us to consider the implications of Project 5-100 on the managerial core of Russian universities. Moreover, an investigation of changes in managerial roles from a university perspective can be useful both practically and theoretically. It can help the institution to shed light on how managers perform under new conditions and what can be done if there are obstacles; and in the case of Russian universities and their managers, may fill the gaps in the existing knowledge of excellence-driven policy implications.

Management in higher education: finding the gaps

The difference between the level of development of educational leadership and management in Russia and such western countries as the UK and the USA is enormous. Nevertheless, the widespread change toward neoliberalism and managerialism allows us to suppose that there are many similarities in HE management among different countries, and the Russian case to some extent can be analysed through the prism of Western research.

One of the leading theoretical approaches considering organisational management in the public sector is new managerialism. It is used in this paper as a framework for the research design and analysis. According to Deem and Brehony [2005] and Trowler [2010], new managerialism is a new ideological conception, where managers obtain a more significant role in university life. However, this conception is rather based on an understanding of management in business. Meek et al. [2010a] argue that a focus on results, decentralisation, greater accountability and a change in hierarchies, all coming from neoliberalism, are becoming common for managers' activities in different countries. Smolentseva [2003] additionally observes that related terms such as efficiency, accountability, performance, and so on, have become common in Russian HE. More generally, new managerialism implies the adoption of management practices, organisational forms and values mostly used in the private sector.

Managerialism has changed much in HE, but it is not the only subject for research. Much has been carried out at institutional or system levels of management and leadership [Meek et al., 2010a]. Bargh et al. [2000], and Breakwell and Tytherleigh [2008] analyse the roles of top managers, while Deem [2009] discusses gender equality and professional development. There is also a growing body of studies about changes in the HE context and the impact on the academic profession [see, for example, Evans, 2015]. However, in terms of the analysis of the transformation of management in universities, implementing different national strategies to increase competitiveness it is interesting to analyse the role of middle managers because departments are recognised as crucial units of universities by many academics [Bryman, 2007; Shattock, 2003].

Middle managers – who they are

Middle management – deans of faculties, heads of departments or schools and research directors – are a group sandwiched between the values of the university and its academics [Jones, 2011]. Meek et al. [2010a] suggest they are the most affected by the shift to managerialism, whose responsibilities are subject to great change. Indeed, a neoliberal approach, under which managerialism is originated, assumes that heads of academic units in HE acquire more power and

authority and may form a separate class with particular interests, while before they were first among equals within other academics of their units. This shift toward a more managerial role happens due to the delegation of responsibilities and of resource allocations from the top to the middle level with a simultaneous set of goals and control mechanisms by the centre.

Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of research considering middle managers. Thematic search shows that publications in this field are not new. Such academics as Floyd [2016], Jones [2011], Meek et al. [2010b], Bryman [2007], Smith [2005], Deem [2004], Knight and Trowler [2001], and Ramsden [1998] focus their works on the roles, responsibilities and leadership development of middle managers, mostly of the heads of departments [HDs]. Less literature can be found on deans [see, for example, Boyko and Jones, 2010].

Studies based on an overview of middle management in the USA [Wolverton et al., 2001 in Meek et al., 2010b], Australia and the Netherlands [Meek et al., 2010b], and Canada [Boyko and Jones, 2010] indicate changes in the nature of middle level positions. Traditionally they were members of the academic staff they represented; their activities were focused on the supervision of the work concerning students and interaction with other academics [Boyko and Jones, 2010; Meek et al., 2010b]. However, middle managers today are part of a university management system with much more complex duties; they are now expected [by universities] to exercise better finance and human resource management, and to set strategies. While Knight and Trowler [2001] argue that knowing the organisational culture and the tacit meanings and practices therein is highly important for managers. The reality is that the expansion of managerialism has led to the origin of the practice of when managers from the private sector are recruited [Deem, 2004].

Although a common direction of changes of the roles of middle managers in different countries was highlighted by Meek et al. [2010a], in fact, their roles can be quite different even among universities within one country [Smith, 2005; Knight and Trowler, 2001]. This means that generalisation may not work in all cases, and examples of changes in the roles of middle managers in other countries should be considered.

Studies of Russian middle managers

Project 5-100 focuses on increasing the competitiveness of Russian HEIs which, among other conditions, includes the transformation of management. However, this ambitious initiative has not prompted a burst of research in HE management. There are a few studies written over the last decade that consider Russian management at the systems level [Gitelman, 2014; Polyboyarov, 2014] and management of education and research [Lazarev and Terentyeva, 2014; Gurakovskiy, 2013] but they are not related to Project 5-100.

Russian middle managers were investigated by Mercer and Pogosian [2013] based on a comparison of roles and responsibilities of Russian and UK HDs. Their findings show that managers have little knowledge about their official duties, but an absence of value conflict indicates that HDs know what they should do. However, while the importance of personal contacts in Russian HE is noted in the study, it seems that this knowledge was interpreted and used in the wrong way. As one of the participants in their research noted, ‘if you have the opposite vision, you can’t be in this system’ [p.193]. In this context, holding interviews in focus groups as they did may be inappropriate and lead to bias.

To sum up, significant gaps in research have been indicated. There are few studies considering the effects of Project 5-100 on universities, and changes in roles and responsibilities of Russian university managers in particular. Therefore, university strategies to increase competitiveness, and the heads of academic units in a Russian university are selected as research subjects in this study. The study design is described below.

Research design

In order to shed light on the changing role and responsibilities of middle managers under the implementation of Project 5-100, based on gaps in the existing studies, the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the university strategy for increasing competitiveness under Project 5-100?
2. How and to what extent did the roles and responsibilities of middle managers at the university change after the launch of Project 5-100?
3. What is the contribution of middle managers to increasing the university’s competitiveness?

Since this is a small-scale study only very limited information can be analysed, and this influenced the decision to focus on only one university; supported by Thomas [2013], who indicates that it is best to limit the number of subjects when examining changes that are happening quickly. Middle managers, particularly deans/heads of faculties/institutions [heads of academic units], at one large Russian university participating in Project 5-100 were taken as the subject of this study. Research questions and the research design are represented in Table 1. To ensure reliability and validity, both methodological and respondent triangulation were used [Briggs and Coleman, 2007]; documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and a survey were chosen as data-gathering tools. Respondent triangulation was covered by representatives of three groups: senior and middle management who participated in interviews, and non-managerial academic staff

(teachers/researchers) who answered a questionnaire. These research questions and triangulation in the research design are important because management is a complex relationship rather than individual phenomenon including different variables, particularly the characteristics of the manager and subordinates, the nature of the organization and the external environment.

Table 1. Research design

	Objective	Related research questions	Method of data collection	Sample details	
				composition	approx. size
1	To identify strategy for increasing competitiveness of chosen university and examine it in departmental level	What is the university strategy for increasing competitiveness under the Project 5-100?	documentary analysis	university documents, federal/regional policies	
			interview	heads of academic units and their deputies	4
				pro-vice-chancellor	1
questionnaire	teachers, researchers at the university	60			
2	To identify and examine changes in role and responsibilities of mid-level managers for the purposes of the 'Project 5-100'	How and to what extent were role and responsibilities of mid-level managers at university changed after launching the Project 5-100?	documentary analysis	university documents, federal/regional policies	
			interview	heads of academic units and their deputies	4
				pro-vice-chancellor	1
questionnaire	teachers, researchers at the university	60			
3	To analyse mid-level managers abilities to contribute towards increasing competitiveness of the university	What is the contribution of mid-level managers to increasing university competitiveness ?	interview	heads of academic units and their deputies	4
				pro-vice-chancellor	1
			questionnaire	teachers and researchers at the university	60

The study took place from April to July 2016. Three data collection stages and methods were used. The first stage was gathering data through documentary analysis, which includes governmental and institutional policies and documents related to Project 5-100 and determining the roles and responsibilities of academic unit managers in HE. This method has particular importance in addressing the first research question about the university strategy of increasing competitiveness, which basically shapes the framework of the university and staff activities. Most of the documents were found online at the university or Project's website; other documents, particularly examples of employment contracts with heads of academic units for three years [2011,

2013 and 2015] were provided by the university. Government legislation regulating heads of academic units' activities was also considered.

At the second stage data were gathered through an online questionnaire for academics. This tool provides data to address certain questions raised after the literature review and the documentary analysis, and to gather factual and attitudinal information about changes at the university from academics. The questionnaire was piloted twice before distribution; the distributed version of the questionnaire included 16 questions. Along with personal questions about gender, work experience, and occupation, respondents were asked to assess how middle managers' activities and their capability to influence their university's and units' activities had changed. At the end of the questionnaire respondents could leave any additional comments and/or their contact details if they wanted to share more information. To ensure valid data, respondents were chosen from academic staff, not in managerial positions, who had worked at this university for at least three years at least 50% of the time in full time work. An invitation letter was distributed to representatives of all academic departments and their response rate was 30%.

The third stage of the research was semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers, supplementing the data from the previous phases. In order to draw a more complete picture of the changes in the roles and responsibilities of heads of academic units, interviews were conducted with a senior manager and academic unit managers and their deputies representing units from different fields of study. Participants were selected to represent different levels of responsibility and units of the university involved in the university program of increasing competitiveness. All interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for further analysis.

All potential participants were contacted by email first. To safeguard the anonymity of interviewees further in this work, I refer to all interviewees as heads of academic units [HAU] or academic unit managers, even if they may hold other titles, and gave them numbers without mentioning names, gender, or other personal information.

Data analysis

The presence of different sources of information obtained in a variety of ways predetermined the character of the analysis as inductive, interpretive and comparative. A small number of comparable studies results in the usage of simple logic, and personal knowledge and experience of the Russian education system serving as a base for the interpretation of findings. In order to answer research questions, data were analysed from two perspectives: what was officially proclaimed (mostly in documents) and what was stated by interviewees and respondents. First of all, data were analysed separately after each stage of the research; for the interview, this was made

taking into account differences in the managerial level of participants. Then, all data were inspected together with a comparison of results obtained through the use of different tools.

This follows a network analysis with theme mapping based on the coding method [Thomas, 2013] for all primary data gathered through the documentary analysis and interviews. The results of the questionnaire were also included in the mapping according to the theme they reveal. The first level of coding was used to distinguish data relevant for each research question. Subsequent coding identified subthemes within each question; similarities and differences; possible interpretation and correlation of information within this study, and findings of other research.

As this study is based on only one university, the generalizability of the results of this study to other universities must be treated with caution even in a Russian context. Moreover, middle managers participating in the interview had strong academic backgrounds which may lead to a one-sided perception, and so other types of middle managers could be investigated in future studies. However, there had been little investigation in this area of educational management in Russian HE, and even small-scale research may be helpful for the further development of issues in Russia and probably better understanding of particular contexts of some other universities [Stake, 1995].

Increasing competitiveness and the changing roles of middle managers: key findings

The chosen method of analysis allows to combine findings gained from different sources by variety of methods according to the proclaimed research questions, what is presented below at this article.

What is the university strategy for increasing competitiveness?

As I stated above, although directions for HE development are given in national policy, universities from Project 5-100 have to create their own strategy to increase competitiveness within the program. The goal emphasizes the importance of academic reputation and the achievement of leading positions in priority directions. According to university documents and interviews, the understanding of the university's goal in 5-100 has been modified over time:

A year and a half ago it was speaking about entering the world's top 100 universities in common rankings [...] then last year, discourse is in achieving a place in the subject rankings where we are quite strong.[...] It is clear that the situation is being more realistically assessed [interviewee 4].

This change of vision reflects a change of university strategy. The PIC adopted in 2013 is not the only document; there are two more documents altering the university's strategy. I refer to them as PIC-2013, PIC-2015 and PIC-2016 respectively according to the year of their approval, while the term PIC is used to refer to the strategy as a whole. These changes are connected with the need to shift to the next stage of development. While differences between PIC-2013 and PIC-2015 concerned structural improvements and the separation of priority directions from strategic initiatives [representing areas of university activities which needed to be developed, see Table 2, PIC-2016 mainly reflects the transformation of the priority directions now called strategic academic units [SAUs]. This change may be explained by the aspiration of the university to update strategy, but interviews reveal the significant influence of MES even in the middle stage of implementation:

This year the Ministry [MES] initiated a project with a conventional name 'strategic academic units', stating that the university should choose its own priority directions for development [...] and shape activities according to these directions in the corresponding SAUs [interviewee 1].

Table 2. Current strategic initiatives of the university

No.	Name of strategic initiatives
1	Development of program portfolio and intellectual products
2	Invitation of external experts and development of the university staff
3	Attracting talented students, doctoral candidates, and young researchers
4	Development of key areas and phasing out of inefficient activities
5	Enhancement of the university's management and financial system
6	Development of the university's infrastructure and services
7	Strategic positioning in global academic community in order to improve academic reputation
8	Developing and implementing the university's marketing strategy and promotion in the global information space
9	Portal-based implementation of university's internal 'Supersite' concept

Source: adapted from the PIC-2015

At first sight this seems to be quite a superficial and unnecessary change but, PIC-2016 provides a clearer strategy in terms of SAUs; it more accurately identifies the aims and plans of SAUs for priority directions. However, there is new SAU based on social science, while in PIC-2015 they were not included in the strategy, and this breaks the evolutionary development of university PIC. Moreover, what is written in the PIC and what was disclosed by interviewees, in terms of the purposes of SAUs, is different.

The MSE and the International Council also control the strategy of universities through the annual report of HEIs. This report can strongly affect the decision of the council and the MES about the level of further funding, which generates even more pressure at universities and which may lead them to making decisions to exaggerate their information. I asked interviewees about how far the declared changes are real:

Most indicators are tracked objectively... there are not many opportunities, de facto, to exaggerate ... the indicators [interviewee 2].

However, the result of the questionnaire is not so definite; 41% of respondents remarked that the unit's management sometimes or in most cases requires exaggerated information about the implementation of activities or the achievement of KPI.

When participants' opinions about the implementation of the HEI's strategy is contradictory, the position of the university in the world rankings may clarify the information about the university's success or failure. From the beginning of Project 5-100 there have been some positive changes in rankings. The university has never been represented in ARWU and the PIC does not provide any intended position in this ranking even by 2020. Results are better in THE; while in 2015 the intended outcome was to achieve the middle of the world table by 2018, this position was accomplished in 2016.

This positive change in ranking positions is expected to be evidence of the increasing quality of university services. However, survey results are again not so obvious. 48% of respondents agreed that activities under the PIC lead to a real enhancement of the quality of university services, while 45% of them have opposite opinion. Interviewees offered their opinions about the influence of the university's strategy and Project 5-100 to the quality of university services:

Our main and foremost indicator is, to be sure, the quality of education, the quality of the preparation of student, provision of their success and employment [...]. [University] self-development ... shape the base for internationally recognised academic staff [...] who provide a high quality of educational services and research activities [interviewee 1].

How and to what extent did the roles and responsibilities of middle managers at the university change?

The main document regulating the work of middle managers is their employment agreements. In PIC-2013, there was a declared change in these agreements to a more effective one. The agreements show that before Project 5-100, middle managers were considered

administrative-managerial personnel and that was fixed in their contracts. At the beginning of Project 5-100 they became teaching staff. This point was deleted from later agreements.

Significant changes occurred regarding bonuses after the launch of Project 5-100. Connections between results and rewards became more explicit and straightforward, and what is important here, bonuses became dependent on performance under the PIC. Now HAU's are able to get triple salary twice per year if their unit achieves its KPIs.

As indicated in work agreements, the number of responsibilities grew from 16 in 2011 to 34 in 2015. Agreement-2013 included the provision that HAU's should create and develop a separate PIC for their unit, and this PIC is considered an integral part of their contract. Other changes included an increased financial role, their responsibility to be effective in terms of using money and facilities. From August, 2013 they also became responsible for the control of construction and repair works for their units, and for educational, cultural, and sports activities. This broadening of their powers indicates a decentralisation of the authority from top to the middle, and an extension of managerialism to the middle level. An important novelty, essential for the achievement of Project 5-100, is the responsibility of heads to care about the university's reputation. Agreement-2015 reflected changes in national policy and activities important for promotion in the world rankings. The document assigns responsibilities for the growth of educational and scientific efficiency and the implementation of innovation technologies in education; the growth of interaction between university units and among Russian HEIs and scientific organisations; the development of civic consciousness among students and academic staff. Some provisions also assign responsibility for promoting the university. Characteristic of changes in the roles and responsibilities given by interviewees correspond with the documentary analysis and indicate an increasing level of heads' responsibility:

So, now more managerial characteristics are required from heads [of units], they even need to administrate the budget by themselves. The job [...] requires more skills [interviewee 2].

Scope of duties is immense... [Academic unit heads] are responsible for everything, starting from fire safety and antiterrorist security [...]. Levels of influence [came with] the organisation of a more or less shaped system of management [interviewee 5].

Interviewees 1 and 2 claimed that there is no difference between real duties to employment contracts. However, interviewee 5 disagreed:

I would say that they match, but additionally there is a lot of what is not written. It is impossible [to define] all heads' responsibilities, even if you write a Talmud [big book], life is richer.

While there has been an obvious transformation of middle managers' responsibilities in the documentation, it is interesting to check whether there has been a real change. Opinion differed between participants. Interviewees 4 and 5 said that their managerial duties increased [the survey showed that most academic staff agree with them], and the survey showed that most academic staff agree with them [64%], interviewee 3 expressed in the way that 'if you manage well [...] no one teaches you how to live'. This disagreement may be related to different levels of managerial competencies at the beginning of the Project 5-100; some people could easily meet the new requirements; other managers needed to make more efforts for that [Ramsden, 1998].

In the matter of leadership as a part of managerial role Interviewee 4 said that it is very important but HAUs do not need it more since beginning of Project 5-100. For effective leadership managers emphasized the points earlier indicated by Bryman [2007]: 'credibility among staff, which is based on the professional characteristics of a leader as a scientist' [interviewee 3], 'being able to persuade people, to lead them, force them to do something' [interviewee 2], 'personal example is a very good tool [...] I have the moral right to demand' [Interviewee 5]. One of the interviewees argued that some HAUs limit themselves only by their managerial behaviour.

The increase in responsibilities of middle managers has been accompanied by an expansion of the units' autonomy from the university. Although some interviewees noticed that their style of management did not change [interviewees 3 and 4], they also admitted that autonomy in decision-making is increased and today academic unit heads can give official orders to their staff. Interviewee 2 stated that now 'there are separate funds devoted; they [HAUs] choose their staff and so on'. However, many of questionnaire respondents [44%] think that the ability of their middle management to determine unit strategies decreased or stayed at the same low level as before.

Talking about other implications of Project 5-100, some interviewees also admitted that they experienced not only changes in roles and responsibilities, but a kind of re-evaluation of their roles and work:

Indeed, some problems became more obvious after that [after the beginning of Project 5-100] [interviewee 2].

When changes started with the Bologna process [...] I adamantly defended the values of Soviet education [...]. But after some time I started to notice [...] that there is no other way. We should clearly realise that in the carriage of the past we cannot drive to the future [interviewee 5].

What is the contribution of middle managers to increasing the university competitiveness?

Interviewees included administrative and managerial authority as well as capability to impact on university strategies in their leverage of influence to Project 5-100 results. A senior manager noted that HAUs are closer to the implementation and they can give timely advice and produce the most effective solutions. The responsibility to create and change PIC is set in HAU agreements, and interviewee 1 said that the ‘mission and goals of our institution [...], and consequently the tasks, up to arrangements – we shape them ourselves’. Participants also admit that creativity in Project 5-100 implementation and initiative are not forbidden by the centre, they can do everything within the law to achieve the intended results.

The academic background of managers also allows them to influence intended KPIs of the unit carrying out research activities as well. As their Dutch colleagues [Meek et al., 2010b], Russian HAUs attempt to engage in research and teaching along with managing activities:

I am an active participant [...] I bring grants every year [...] I try to write articles for Scopus journals [...] I am involved in the preparation of PhDs [...] [interviewee 5].

There is a clear hierarchy of priority directions, or SAUs, and this puts middle managers in an unequal positions in terms of their influence on achieving university goals. This means that while one department holds key positions in implementing SAUs, other departments are engaged much less. So even if heads of the latter units do their best in terms of implementation of Project 5-100, their contribution may be less than the head’s controlling SAUs. However, interviewee 2 noted that everyone has the opportunity to contribute:

Situation is the next – we [the university] have [...] priority areas [directions]. And we have, for example [...] economists, and lawyers [...] If they want to have additional funding they offer their topics within these areas, they accept cooperation, create labs and develop [...]. You know, now the world is global, and it is impossible to be competitive in each area, that is why we choose the priority areas.

If HAUs have some ideas about how to implement the university strategy, they should obtain the approval of senior management and the university Project office. In this context, their freedom is limited by the perception of the university management about the direction of further development and KPIs.

Summary of findings

The analysis of the university strategy of increasing competitiveness revealed that it is well balanced and matches the goals of Project 5-100. The PIC is written up to 2020 and includes all the points required by the government from participating HEIs. University strategy includes recommendations for improving competitiveness given by leading researchers and introduced at the second section of this work. There are a lot of activities in the development: the engagement of international students and researchers, negotiation with companies-employers, and the development of infrastructure and staff. The change of culture to one that is more entrepreneurial is lacking clarification of how to achieve it. Diversifying the funding base and developing an extended periphery [Clark, 2004] is part of the university strategy. Accumulating talented students and academic staff, raising resources and developing effective management [Froumin and Salmi, 2013] as factors in the creation of prominent universities, are also taken into account in the PIC, along with such ‘accelerating factors’ activities as using English in new educational programs, concentrating on fewer stronger fields of scholarship and the constant comparative analysis of the university. Modernisation and innovation of teaching are mentioned in the strategy without any specific plans of activities, but include academic unit heads’ work agreements.

However, the university strategy has its own limitations as well. Firstly, PIC-2015 and PIC-2016 include two different tables of activities, one based on the other which need to be implemented at the same time. It is fair to say that they are quite consistent and logical, but because of the existence of two separate, large documents, it is difficult to see and understand the strategy as a whole, if you were not familiar with it before. This can affect the quality of the work in all levels or even lead to policy refraction [Taylor et al., 1997].

The second limitation of the university strategy is in its medium-term character. MES can control the implementation of Project 5-100, and even affect the plans and programs of universities in any stage. This practice does not support leadership, initiative and long-term planning within the university because it lacks independence. In spite of this, a long-term plan needs to be made for planning today’s activities with a view to the future. Salmi [2009] argues that university modernisation takes 8-10 years; Project 5-100 and the HEI’s strategy are designed for 7 years. To be successful even after the end of Project 5-100, the university needs to think about its further way of development now, and set a long-term strategy and a medium-term strategy.

In terms of the enhancement of management, there are no activities in the PIC-2015, directly engaging with the roles and responsibilities of middle managers. In employment contracts, the switch of perspective about middle management from an administrative-managerial in 2011 to teaching staff in 2013 while their responsibilities became even more managerial shows that the university did not have a clear understanding of the role of HAUs. However, it needs to be admitted that not only the senior management of universities looked to middle managers as academics; HAUs in the university demonstrated a high level of academic identity. Project 5-100 did not change this. Middle managers wanted to continue to be part of the academic community and do a lot to achieve it. Academic unit heads prefer to make collegial decisions and continue their activity as academics. This finding is very similar to results of Deem and Brehony [2005] who state that most manager-academics do not identify themselves as a separate social group, however, they use new managerialism to support power relationships when necessary. DeZure et al. [2014] emphasise that HAUs are concerned about losing their professional academic skills.

Discussion: final points

Although managerialism does not imply the necessity of leadership, the need to be a role model and/or to have credibility is clearly stated by the managers in this study. This may be caused by the aspiration to be an integral part of the academic community of the unit. Bryman [2007] sees leadership as an essential part of the middle management. While Meek et al. [2010a] argue that leadership is based on research reputation, in Russia, it will rather be underpinned by HAUs' scholarship due to the low level research in most universities.

Nevertheless, with the beginning of the 5-100, the roles and responsibilities of unit heads shifted toward new managerialism. Thus, the PIC imply the adoption of a neoliberal approach and an entrepreneurial culture within the university; this means that performance indicators, accountability, and efficiency became part of the managerial work. Today they need to practice all five categories of management distinguished by Meek et al. [2010c]: operational, strategic, external, human resources and academic, whereas before Project 5-100 the first three categories were at the basic level of usage. As well as the roles of their foreign colleagues, the role of Russian middle managers has become more complex and multifaceted. Moreover, HAU s' work agreements indicate the increased responsibilities connected with the internationalisation of department activities, the development of research and the promotion of the university in the international arena – factors which in one form or another constitute QS [2015] and THE [2015] world university rankings.

While this research clearly indicates the change of HAU roles toward a more managerial position, the extension of their managerial responsibilities, the delegation of power from top to middle management and the increase in the autonomy of units, the assessment of these changes is open to question. Although management structure was transformed, managers complain of an excessive workload. While their repeated appointments are evidence of a satisfactory level of their work from the point of senior management, the results from questionnaire are not so obvious.

Another cause for concern is the disagreement of interviewees and questionnaire respondents in many areas. The lack of understanding and agreement between managers and academic staff has also been noted before in other research on new managerialism, so this finding is not surprising. There are some possible reasons for that. First of all, it may be evidence of a poor connection between these two categories of university staff. As pointed out by DeZure [2014], sometimes academics are not familiar with managerial activities; this leads to the situation when the former do not understand the importance of a manager's role and do not appreciate it. The best heads can do is to explain the character of their duties and activities, to show the importance of changes both in university and in academic activities.

A second possible explanation is more specific to the Russian context. The negative assessment of managers by academics in some survey questions may be because many university academics still prefer Soviet traditions of HE and are not ready to change their working style. Interviewee 4 admitted that the development is actually happening, but changing the minds of employees is not easy, some of them hardly work under the new rules. Shcherbenok [2016] also gave an example where older professors refused to change their old practices and so middle managers were not able to implement the transformation. Moreover, this university went through a merger not long before start of Project 5-100. Different cultures, practices, and routines of academics may also have led to their disagreement with higher management and the changes they implemented.

Conclusion

The university's strategy of increasing competitiveness has already allowed it to improve its position in such rankings as THE and QS. However, the university is still lagging in terms of its competitiveness as a research institution and this needs to be seriously addressed in order for the university to improve its global ranking. This could be achieved by changing policies regarding hiring and promotion [Heskett et al., 2007], and having a closer insight into Western traditions of conducting research, publishing, and improving the level of English within the academic staff. There also is a need for planning over the longer term given that Project 5-100 and the HEI's

strategy are only designed for 7 years. To be successful after Project 5-100, the university needs to think about its future development, and set longer-term strategic objectives.

This study finds that despite no explicit changes being outlined in Project 5-100 for HAUs, their role and responsibilities have changed significantly. These changes include the adoption of more business-like managerial practices, entrepreneurialism, and tasks related to international activities. In addition, the role of Russian middle managers has become more complex and multifaceted, and more managerial, with the delegation of power from the top to middle level and an increase in the autonomy of units. This double-role position, where unit heads need to be academics and managers at the same time, may not only create an excessive workload, but influence the quality of work because of difficulty of paying attention to all aspects.

In terms of the contribution of middle managers to increasing the university's competitiveness, this study provides evidence that they are able to contribute to increasing the competitiveness of the university through their active participation in the implementation of the PIC. However, at the strategic level, the results of this study reveal that there is a lack of agreement among managers and academic staff with regard to some important questions. This indicates that both groups may need further clarification of new terms and the goals of Project 5-100 and their intended outcomes in order to maximise staff contributions and goal achievement.

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