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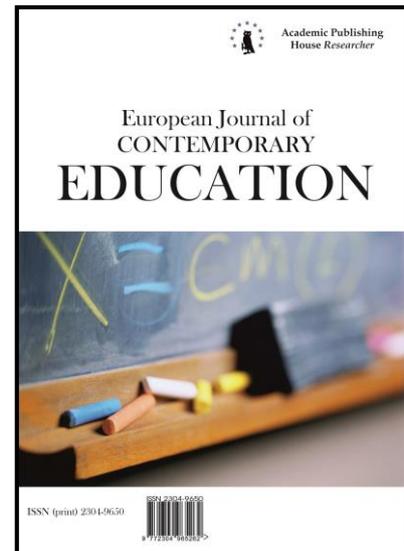
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## Reform of Higher Education in Russia: Habitus Conflict

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### Abstract

This article discusses changes that actually occur in the Russian Higher Education in the process of reform. The thesis that the functioning of the educational system increasingly detects formal rationality, not focused on the senses, and their imitation. It is noted that the Russian system of higher education refers to a specific type, which can be rightly defined as “culture-centric”. This type have a number of traits: dominance conception of education as a complex of practices, with the aim of translation of cultural codes from older to younger generations; the idea of the sacred nature of the educational process as a student-deterministic; installation of universality, according to which university graduates must be not only professionally prepared and fully developed; priority of content and semantic aspects of education in relation to formal, often even to the detriment of the latter; belief in the special position of the higher education sector, as well as education in general in relation to other spheres of activity. It is emphasized that the logical consequence of the transition to the formal rationality becomes a management simulation in which real values and meanings are replaced and replaced by a formal reproduction of operations and procedures, followed by their demonstration, declaration and decoration. It is proved that the main source of formal rationalization is a corporate bureaucracy. What evidence, unwarranted expansion of the administrative apparatus of the university, which is a logical consequence of the formalization of the educational process, excessive standardization and regulation of educational activities, as well as the deformation of the controlling function.

**Keywords:** higher education, rationality, formal rationality, bureaucracy, imitation, gamification.

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## **1. Introduction**

The past two decades have been witnessing a large-scale introduction of new developments into the Russian higher education system provoked mainly by the necessity to tackle two interrelated tasks: to increase the quality of educational services and to bring the education industry in line with the international standards. Such developments include constantly changing admission regulations, introduction of distance learning, adopting the two-tiered education system (Bachelor – Master) with further transformation of doctorate into the third tier thereof. Special attention has been given to ranking systems assessing higher education institutions, their departments and individual employees that have significantly changed the focus and attitudes of the whole academic community. The dynamics of new developments is so intensive that they maybe be misleading not only for students but also for academics. Fluid educational standards, moreover, have resulted in a certain impasse, where the academic staff with their limited personal resources is unable to meet numerous and excessively rigid requirements, as the majority of academics lack time, material resources, social support and do not have the necessary change-oriented mindset.

When facing the need to adjust to new rules, members of academic community often see a solution in simulation practices which formally comply with the established rules but do not require additional efforts. In view of this, a natural question is whether such developments, though considered as innovations, bring the educational process to a higher level, filling it with new meanings and adequate vision of an individual in the new post-industrial society. If not, we have to admit the futility of such innovations that create only a façade of effective reforms.

Besides, some aspects of higher education do not and cannot enter official reports focused mainly on the formal side of the processes. These reports do not consider the content and meaning of certain educational processes which cannot be grasped by crude statistics and require a deeper analysis with the help of sociological methods, including qualitative ones (in-depth interviews, case-studies etc.), that we have used in our present study.

The problem we tackle lies in the contradictions between two main group actors of the reformation process in the Russian higher education, namely, the academics and the administrative officers, whose attitudes determine their behaviour strategies in the context of the system reformation, development and introduction of innovations. It is of critical importance for development of the Russian higher education to understand the causes of this opposition and detect possible solutions.

## **2. Material and methods**

The present analysis is based on the research conducted by the specialists of Belgorod State National Research University in 2010–2013, including a monitoring of students' satisfaction with the education quality (annual poll among candidates, students and instructors using multistage quota sampling, total SN = 1052); the questionnaire survey "Management of Innovational Development of a Higher Education Institution" performed by Ya. I. Serkina in September – November 2012 (conducted in higher education institutions in Belgorod, Volgograd, Kursk, Lipetsk and Orel regions using quota sampling; the respondents included: administration officers: 161 pers., academic staff: 603 pers.); an in-depth interview with experts on improving coordination between university divisions: we have interviewed 17 experts, including deans, heads of chairs, professors with long university careers, and heads of bureaus and divisions; a questionnaire survey conducted among heads of chairs on the educational process organization (2011, N = 78).

Development of Russian educational system has been in the focus of researchers' attention both in Russia ([Agranovich, 2000](#); [Lukatskii, 2006](#); [Panfilova, 2010](#); [Savinkov, 2015](#); [Tavokin, 2012](#)) and abroad ([Itskovits, 2010](#); [Chesbrough, 2003](#); [Morgan, Kliucharev, 2012](#)). Organization of the educational process was specially addressed in a number of studies ([Arutyunov et al., 2005](#); [Viktorov, 2005](#); [Kalinin, 2005](#); [Kolotova, Temkina, 2010](#); [Kravchuk et al., 2011](#)), yet it was analyzed chiefly as a technological challenge. Little, if any, research was conducted on its axiological aspect in the frame of which we may treat innovational reforms as an interaction of its participants' habitussen. Even in studies that take the axiological aspect into account, the current situation is often explained in simplistic terms or within the conspiracy theory.

For instance, D.B. Sandakov, while analyzing education reforms, claims: "In order the program of destruction of education to be not publicly opposed, it should be disguised. The lies

should be large-scaled. As social psychology states, the bigger the lie, the more it will be believed. People tend to think that they may be deceived by bad people (enemies), surreptitiously and on trifles, but few would believe that they are deceived by good people (us), blatantly and in large. Specific actions are needed. First of all, mass media should make constant information noise around modernization, innovation, Bologna-zation etc. To ensure this, individual achievements (victories in contests, academic competitions etc.) should be regarded as the success of the whole system. Secondly, the public attention should be drawn to minor questions. This can be achieved with periodic pointless reforms: substituting the 5-grade systems with the 10- or 20-grade one, changing the duration of the education from four to five years and then back to four, introducing and then abandoning Bachelor's and Master's programs or subject-oriented training, offering to reduce or prolong (there will always be opponents) summer holidays and so on. Let the proactive staff members waste their protest energy on the fight against minor changes" (Sandakov).

He sees current processes as a direct sabotage attack on Russian educational system. There may indeed be reformers aiming at destruction of Russian education because we do live in the state of global competition, and the higher education system, among other functions, builds up the competitive strength of a state, society, and its social institutions. To destabilize it in Russia means to weaken a potential or a real rival of large international corporations.

Nevertheless, we find the conspiracy version one-sided and lacking proofs because it is impossible to claim that the conspiracy covers almost all university administrators and a large part of academics who, if do not initiate reforms, do not oppose them either.

Yet, it is evident that the academic community rather strongly opposes the reforms. They are evaluated negatively by many specialists who do not believe in conspiracy theories. For example, a member of the Institute of the Problems of Continuing Education of the Russian Academy of Education (Krasnoyarsk) writes: "Modernization of Russian higher professional education along the lines of the West-European system, which began almost 15 years ago, was not a natural stage of development of Russian higher school and it played a more negative than positive role" (Kochetkov, 2014). At the same time, to justify this opinion, the author emphasizes the West European origin of educational innovations which, in our opinion, may give only a partial explanation to the current opposition.

We believe that such contradictory assessment of the reforms can be explained with the help of the concept of habitussen by P. Bourdieu. P. Bourdieu defines a habitus as a system of predispositions to a certain demeanour in typical life situations according the specific statuses. In his opinion, habitussen are "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of the conductor" (Burd'e, 2001).

Evidently, habitus has a complex structure based on certain mental dispositions acquired and preserved by subjects due to their belonging to a certain cultural tradition. A child adopts knowledge, rules, norms and values based on the habitus, formed by previous experience which exists in the form of schemes of perception and apprehension which, never having been constituted as explicit principles, ensure consistency of practices (Burd'e, 2001).

These dispositions are legitimized by the system of values and meanings and are embodied in the behavioral patterns within different spheres, including professional activities. Habitussen of social actors are durable, and the attempts to externally change them frequently end in conflicts.

### **3. Discussion**

For many years, the Russian higher education system has been using its all resources to build a separate type of habitus, substantiating it with numerous educational process theories (Kolesnikov, Turchenko, 1991; Nechaev, 1992; Novikov, 2000; Sheregi et al., 1997). This type of habitus can be rightfully defined as 'culture-centric' with the following key characteristics:

- prevailing vision of education as a set of practices aiming at the transmission of cultural codes from the elder to the younger generation. For instance, B.S. Gershunskiy, pondering over the dual nature of education, gave top priority to the "reproductive (transmitting, preserving, consolidating) functions of education shaping the public mindset" (Gershunskii, 1998);

- idea of the sacred nature of education rooted in Ancient Greek tradition which viewed educational as a personal, even intimate interaction between the Teacher and the Student with the former being a certain spiritual parent for the latter (Il'in, 2002);

- orientation to wide general knowledge, with a university graduate becoming not only a trained professional, but also a well-rounded person. Typically, education was treated as “a way of initiation of a person within the coherent cultural existence, of comprehension and embodying of generic and specific life purposes by an individual. Even the modern state of the cultural conscience protests against narrow and pragmatic, oriented to rational knowledge and technocratic education, aggravating the problem of its embracing a new paradigm, or, to be more specific, a new conceptual and structural concept of education” (Ushakova, 2000);

- priority of the content over the form, often even to the prejudice of the latter, which was manifested in the still existing lack of regulation of the educational process and imperfection of its assessment tools;

- belief in a special place of higher education and of education as a whole among other domains (with the sole exception of science as an intrinsically connected field) justified by a high status of knowledge in the society and the fact that its reproduction and distribution was limited to professional educators. A symbolic proof of this specificity was such a high value of academic degrees and titles, that many managers and officers from different industries, public administration and law enforcement agencies tried to obtain them as a proof of their belonging to the academic circles either by writing or simulating writing a thesis;

- combination of encouraging ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking in certain scientific fields and conservatism of the educational process and to a certain extent of the teaching methods. Evidently, the higher education system should be rather conservative to ban ill-grounded developments, but is should remain open to promising innovations;

- specific status-based hierarchy determined not only by the formal position of an individual within the administration system (title), but also by his/her capacity for intellectual activity. The university was perceived both by its employees and by external agents as an intellectual community with a specific perception of the social reality based mainly on conceptual and logical structures and application of scientific concepts to life strategies. Obviously, in reality it was not always true, but the stereotype was preserved for years and still exists to a certain extent;

- belief that the process of entering the academic circles is long and requires special procedures and sharing, even only formal, of its inherent corporate values. The basic values included devotion to science, teaching and formative mission, group solidarity and ideological loyalty (in times of the USSR).

Having these features, the habitus of academic circles, including the university administration (most managers started their career as instructors) has been formed and reproduced thanks to a number of factors. The first factor was related to a specific form of administration which until the 90s prevented any interference in the process of the genesis of the ‘educational’ habitus but supported it by reproduction of traditions. The administrative and management personnel respected the rules adopted in the higher education (with their involvement) and did not try to introduce its organizational principles. The second factor was a high level of autonomy of higher education and its unwillingness to respond to global educational tendencies. The last aspect was consolidation of the academic community around its corporate culture.

Still, radical reforms in Russian education have changed the vectors of each and every abovementioned factor.

The first reform declared introduction of a new educational and academic paradigm to fit the times. In principle, it corresponded to the changes in the new post-industrial society which became a reference for Russian management. V. Lektorskiy spoke of these processes: “The specificity of our times lies in the fact that science, on the one hand, is increasingly getting involved in an argument with the developers of new technologies, and on the other hand, is fusing with their production.

It significantly impacts both the way science is done and the people engaged in it. The German term ‘technoscience’ appears (Lektorskii, 2015). Similar processes can be seen in higher education, a sphere closely connected with science. In their turn, D.L. Konsantinovskiy, A.A. Ovsyannikov and N.Ye. Pokrovskiy write: “In past, knowledge and science were based on the educational worldview and were treated as an absolute and boundless value, the present is dominated with the concept of

useful knowledge, i.e. knowledge, which is limited in principle, focused on specific tasks and oriented towards a result that brings immediate economic benefit” (Sovershenstvovanie, 2005).

Education, similarly with science embraced ‘technoknowledge’ which required new types of managers and performers. Their cre ideas include chiefly pragmatic vision of a higher education institution, perception of the educational process as another type of management that has its specificity but no principal differences from other spheres, and aiming at ‘profitability of education’. Finally, such managers tend to unconditionally accept rules adopted by Federal agencies and to scrupulously implement them.

The traditional ‘culture-centric’ habitus turned out unable to embrace the changes. It was first understood by the education managers of all levels who tried to rapidly change their dispositions. Those who were unable or unwilling to change had to leave the system or lost their titles and resumed their teaching activities.

Within a decade a new reference disposition model for higher education agents was proposed, formally based on innovative development. The effectiveness of this approach was seen in innovations as in the non-losing stake, the importance of which could not be questioned. Innovational development of any university was seen as an ‘objectively required, dedicated and irreversible, unfolding in time process of transition of education to the next stage. It is implemented mainly through the introduction of new elements, attributes and features in the activities of an educational institution. Without it, universities have no future” (Volodin).

Yet, the innovationists did not limit their reforms to introduction of new educational and social practices, but took decisions and actions which were aimed at changing the habitussen of education actors. This characteristic was pointed out by P. Tavorkin who emphasized that “the meaning of the undergoing ‘reforms’ is reduced to destruction of traditional life attitudes and ideals and imposition of values inconsistent with the most Russian citizens’ mentality” (Tavokin, 2012). This resulted in continuous reduction of meanings of managerial activities in three main areas:

First of all, long-term objectives were “cleared” of its conceptual aspect. Administrators were continually losing their interest in the result of their actions. Instead, the key indicator of success was the formal compliance to a set of rules initially adopted by the authorities.

Secondly, the system has adopted an adhocratic attitude to reality, with the focus on finding solutions to current problems and considering the long-term perspective as an obligatory but less important element. In particular, higher education institutions have been trying to admit more candidates and maintain the number of students turning a blind eye to their capacities. It is understandable, as the student body directly impacts the financial security of the university, including the personnel’s salaries. Still, admission of students who are not capable of mastering the required syllabus, even if it decreases current risks for the university, will unavoidably increase them in the long run.

Thirdly, with the content being secondary to the process in many aspects, which is difficult to conceal from the academic staff and the public, managers take measures to decorate the equivocation. This, in its turn, leads to carnivalization of the educational process that is manifested, for instance, in a cycle of routine activities to celebrate real or invented memorable dates. It can be treated as a present-day variant of the cultural behavior based on “inversion of binary oppositions” and the logic of the “inside-out” (Bakhtin, 1965). Nowadays, the carnival elements are not contraposed to administrative practices, but they agree with such practices and are even supported by them. Such intensification of the carnivalesque element has the following characteristic features:

- symbolization and a growing role of the external attributes. These features underlie numerous anniversaries and publication of books and booklets of remembrance which mythologize the history of universities. The university administration invents even more official festive events on different occasions;

- pathos. Administrators’ wish to display themselves to advantage breeds statements and actions that exaggerate the positive aspects of the university life and conceal the drawbacks. It results in a gradual decrease of the level of public and individual reflexivity and to the adoption of system complementarity as the most appropriate way of interaction, even if contradicting the principles of the scientific and academic work. Importantly, they find pride not in real achievements (which is understandable) but in formal indices, such as different ratings;

- compulsory ludification. The education system is adopting the model which transforms natural ludic experiences in formal and compulsory simulation processes. Ludic practices are considered to be a tool of socialization and stress-relieving activities to help individuals overcome the stress of the excessively formalized social environment.

As a result of these changes the reference (modal) habitus of Russian higher education actors has become techno-centric, formal and bureaucratic. This habitus is characterized by an emphasis on the formally organized process over the meaningful result embodied in formal rationality as an administrative standard and principle of organization of university as corporation. Formal rationality is a principle of administration where a statutory procedure becomes an inherent value and prevails over the content. At universities it manifests itself, for instance, in the exaggerated role of quantitative indices of the academic personnel's performance, in misapplication of ratings to assess the work of individuals and departments and in "quasi-planning".

This principle has limited the freedom of instructors, scholars and students with prejudice to creativity. According to our survey, this effect was pointed out by numerous experts. A typical expert opinion is the following: "Rigid short-term and medium-term planning with a system of "road maps" bans long-term and large-scale scientific work because such planning requires immediate results which may be absent, for example, at early stages of research. In the system of "road maps" and constant academicians' assessment, scholars who conduct fundamental research, such as Mendeleev who was working on his periodic system for two decades, would be underachievers".

A natural consequence of adopting formal rationality is the simulation of administrative activities, where real content and meanings are replaced with formal reproduction of operations and processes along with their demonstration, declaration and decoration.

Such simulation of academic practices becomes evident in the domain of innovations, perceived by higher education reformers as a key area for implementation of new developments. In view of this, it is interesting to know the opinion of D. Peskov, Director of Agency for Strategic Initiatives, expressed at a roundtable within the framework of the "Open Government" project. He stressed that universities have learned to simulate innovations introducing Western models. They reduce innovations to a fashion, simulating heavy activity in the field of innovational development of higher education institutions. Such simulation of innovations by the university administration leads only to wasting away budgetary funds" ([Razvitie innovatsionnogo, 2012](#)).

In many cases, simulations are a natural reaction to the excessive formalization of administration. Analyzing the results of social research at Russian universities, Ye.G. Kamenskiy concludes that the "inadequacy of criteria to assess the academic system performance provokes simulation of achieving good results in line with such criteria by complication and manufacturing of bureaucratic processes and making up formal reports that would meet the established standards" ([Kamenskii, 2015](#)).

Formal rationality in higher education, as well as in the public administration as a whole, appeals to bureaucracy, to be more precise, to corporate bureaucracy. While charismatic bureaucracy has the leader as its central figure and rational one is based on legal regulations and processes, corporate bureaucracy is closed on oneself, i.e. on its group egoistic interests. Such interests are guarded by an intricate system of rules which require significant resources for their development and implementation, the situation we are currently facing in the higher education system.

To the extent formal rationality is a corrupted form of "correct" (material, in Weber's terms) rationality, oriented towards meaningful goal definition, corporate bureaucracy is a corrupted form of the rational one. It dominates the modern society, including the system of education.

In view of this, we can cite Vladimir Burmatov, First Deputy Chairmen of the State Duma Education Committee: "To my regret, at present higher education institutions are literally strangled by such bureaucracy. Many universities are forced to create bulky departments within their structure with the only function to maintain correspondence with the Ministry of Education and supervisory agencies and to write frequently overlapping reports. These departments employ a large number of people whose salaries are higher than those of the academic staff. They receive rooms which could have been used for lectures. Chairs and dean's offices also suffer from such bureaucracy: drawing up meaningless reports and plans has become almost the principal activity of universities chairs" ([Burmatov](#)).

**Findings.** Our research has proved the hypothesis of the excessive bureaucratization of the academic environment. Almost all experts named it as one of the most negative and long-term tendencies, pointing at several crucial aspects.

The first aspect they name is unjustified expansion of the university administrative staff which is a natural consequence of formalization of the educational process. As a result, the system loses reasonable restrictions leading to mushrooming of administrative divisions that frequently duplicate one another. Bureaucratization of the academic environment grows significantly, which was frequently reported by the expert respondents. Yet, the experts were not unanimous in the causes of such growth. A part of them attributed it to the general trends in the society, particularly, in the informational society (an expert opinion: “Computers become a fetish. The educational activities become adjusted to the errors in software. As a result, we have two processes: virtual and real; this trend is typical for the country as a whole”).

The second aspect is excessive standardization and regulation of education. Obviously, universities require standards and regulations, but in reality the number of rules exceeds all possible limits and is subject to constant changes due to the lack of a consistent educational strategy. It results in increasing of the number of reports and growth of the paperwork for low-level managers, particularly, for heads of chairs. The number of their administrative functions significantly grows, which is clearly whom in public opinion. For instance, our survey among the heads of chairs has showed that 54.39 % of the respondents agree that the volume of paperwork has grown over the past years. Besides, 29.49 % of the respondents name a large number of formal functions distracting them from their principal activities the main reason of dissatisfaction with their job.

The respondents of the expert interview have also emphasized the intensification of unjustified inquiries and decrees. (Expert opinions: “We can see an increased flow of inquiries and decrees from various ill-coordinated agencies, which prevents appropriate processing of any of them”, “Drawing up of multiple (and constantly changing) plans and reports distracts lecturers and scholars from their principal activities, reducing their effectiveness. Therefore, one of the crucial ways to increase effectiveness is to take planning and reporting functions (their drawing, agreement and bureaucratic support) away from chairs, departments and laboratories to administrative divisions. It is critical to render maximum organizational, administrative and to a certain extent economic freedom to non-administrative divisions, such as departments, chairs, RECs, and laboratories”).

Finally, there exists a certain distortion of the supervising function. The wish to focus mainly on supervision is typical for any bureaucratic system, as bureaucrats consider it to be not only a tool to ensure a certain development level of the managed object, but also as a means to secure their own corporate interests, especially significant in a potentially unstable environment. Such instability is natural for universities with their orientation to intellectual and cognitive activities and underlies their aspiration for the maximum freedom from supervision which is traditionally viewed as a prerequisite for creative work.

Our research has proved that at present the majority of the academic staff still do not perceive supervisory practices as excessive. For instance, 64% of the heads of chairs are generally satisfied with the supervision organization. At the same time, such level of satisfaction reflects the status of this group as supervisors. Yet, even among them one third of the respondents are unsatisfied with the level of control. As the main reasons of dissatisfaction, the heads of chairs name a redundant number of supervisors (61 %) and the formal nature of control (30 %).

Bureaucratic intervention in all areas of society is one of the most notable trends of modern development. Higher education, in this context, is one of the most attractive objects.

To a certain extent, it is justified by the aspiration to maintain stability and public security in the volatile environment. To ensure this, administration cannot but impose control over the education system because it provides socialization of a large number of people and the state has its interest in this process. Besides, higher education attracts significant resources and the way they are used is also important. A special role is given to the intellectual resources that define the social development but frequently become a source of undermining the system ideas which is clearly seen by administrators.

Another important factor is the specific public officers' interests. Traditionally, they perceive the domain of higher education as one of the most prestigious in the society with the exertion of state and municipal administration. For instance, many state and municipal officers aspire to obtain a scientific degree not as a proof of their advancement in science, but as a way to secure managerial positions at universities in case they leave state or municipal agencies. Besides, public officers bear in mind that the education system may give them an opportunity to manage large numbers of people (in line with their leadership ambitions) and to control significant financial flows.

When entering the higher education system, public officers naturally introduce the rules of the game traditional for state and municipal administration. Yet, these rules are inconsistent with the higher education that requires academic freedom to function effectively.

Being unable to openly oppose the bureaucratic intervention that leads to meanings misconception and excessive formalization of its traditional relations, the higher education system finds indirect means to express protest. The main way is simulation of the required actions in the form of ludification. Ludification, in its turn, is an "activity deprived of expediency with all actions taken 'in pretence'" (*Sotsiologiya molodezhi*, 2008). It is manifested in forging of interests, invention of reports (which no one reads and even cannot be analyzed because of their number and volume).

Such activities become everyday practices for established specialists who console themselves with the thought that ludification penetrates many spheres of life, such as business, education, politics and art. Socially constructed gaming practices are introduced in economic, political and social structures. According to Jean Baudrillard, ludic activity shapes our attitudes to objects, people, culture, leisure, sometimes to work and politics (*Bodriyar*, 2006).

Therefore, ludification becomes nowadays a sole possibility for the education system to survive in the Russian society. At the same time, it predetermines a future crisis of the higher education, manifested in the decrease of the common cultural level of graduates, their incapacity of logical thinking and moral disorientation.

Being bureaucratic in their nature, reforms in the higher education system inevitably lead to the conflict of the "techno-centric" and "culture-centric" habituses of its agents. While the latter still remains inherent for a significant number of academics (and for the majority of seniors), the former is referential for the administration staff and younger specialists who do not have such tradition. It should be noted that universities employ an increasing number of specialists from other domains, chiefly from state and municipal administration. Many of them possess neither scientific degrees and titles, showing a certain level of competence in education and science, nor any experience in university management. Yet, the prevailing concept in management that a so-called effective manager can run any entity regardless of its specificity enables intensive administrative labour migration.

The traditional habitus bearers naturally disagree with such state of affairs. They try to oppose it, but their protest rarely goes public because academicians usually depend on administration in resource allocation. Besides, "traditionalists" cannot present feasible arguments for the necessity of the former (culture-centric) academic paradigm. While defending it, they usually appeal to the general ideas of humanism. For instance, that was the most popular argument against bureaucracy in the expert survey we conducted. Typical expert opinions were as follows: "Dehumanization leads to the loss of the meaning of life and of satisfaction with one's work; it induces deep inner discomfort for teachers and students. The university should not turn into a despiritualization factory producing robot-like unhappy people instead of content, enthusiastic and creative personalities capable of leadership and of setting and achieving their own life objectives *pro bono publicum*"; "a real university environment is created not only and not so much by rigid administrative incentives and disincentives, but by careful breeding of a self-regulating intellectual and moral space which encourages the academic staff to create and to develop new insights. They receive moral grounds for devotion to their work and for satisfaction with their life and work. Without such environment, our university will have to further "import" talented scientists promising them accommodation instead of breeding our own scholars".

Nevertheless, as reformers appeal not to content-related arguments, but to formal rationality, all references to humanism and the need of harmonic personal development and the freedom of creativity are now considered as insignificant.

Evidence suggests that the higher education system is not immune against the techno-centric habitus bearers for multiple reasons. First of all, it is rooted in the specificity of the selection of academic staff in the 90s – 2000s. In order to earn more and to develop careers (which was difficult in education) a part of the most intellectually advanced, therefore, independent and ambitious young specialists decided to leave the domain. As a result, universities became limited to, if we may call it, “professionally dull” personnel. At the same time, a decrease in education and culture of students contributed to less effective selection of academics. Mediocre specialists were adequate to mediocre students.

Besides, the need to create favourable conditions for performing of their work and to maintain certain life standards without being forced to the outside labour market has made academic staff loyal to administration. Such loyalty is considered as a certain cost of the social status and possibilities, though limited, to gain profit from their position using, among other means, corrupt practices.

Finally, a part of academics have grown significantly affiliated to bureaucrats serving their corporate and individual interests. An example of such practices is a simplified process of obtaining scientific degrees and titles through defending a corresponding thesis by public officers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Therefore, the analysis of the reformation of the higher education system in Russian proves that many existing challenges are not of a technical but of an axiological nature. They may be attributed to the conflict of habitus of the education agents and cannot be resolved by formal administrative and regulatory actions. The main issues are not the selection of a rating system for the university or the academic staff, nor the form of distance learning, but the objective of innovations and their benefits to the society and individuals. Answers to these questions depend on the prevailing ideas about the functional role of higher education in the society. We can claim that the higher education system currently sees two opposing paradigms that determine the higher education agents' habitus: culture-centric (traditional) and techno-centric (innovational).

Bearers of both habitus show exceedingly low interest in finding a balance of their interests and values which leads to difficulties and confrontation within the education system. Without such balance, the educational process is increasingly devolving to simulation with reformers having to tolerate the fact that most developments are implemented only formally while their opponents have to simulate innovations.

In view of this, the effective development of higher education is hardly probable without the consensus between two parties.

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