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Staff Management as Social Interaction: Analysis and Modeling

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The article details the author's approach to social research of staff management in organizations from the perspective of social interaction. A brief overview of sociological conceptions allows defining the nature of social interaction, its types and characteristics. The author provides a sociological interpretation of staff management, presents and substantiates a methodological approach to the analysis of staff management as a system of social interaction and enumerates its specific characteristics, identified empirically. Basing on this study, the author has developed an organizational model of staff management, the scheme and description of which are given in the article. This model is based on the identified characteristics and possibilities of social interaction, as well as traditional approaches to structuring organizational subsystems and can be used to form a socially efficient and sustainable system of staff management.

Keywords: social interaction, staff management, the system, the subjects of interaction, the organizational model.

Introduction

The process of managing employees (or staff management) in organizations today is a popular subject of research, but most of these studies are in the spheres of economics and psychology. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that companies, ordering such research, pursue very specific objectives of reducing economic costs and increasing profits, or are aimed at searching for specific personal qualities of employees. Sociological studies in the sphere of staff management in Russia are mainly conducted on a national or regional scale (but not in a separate organization) or have a specific aim, for example, study motivation or are focused on evaluating a

certain aspect. Staff management is most often considered as one of the organizational activities, but not as interaction of organizational subjects (Vesnina, 1998, Ulrich, Brockbank, 2005, Krymov, 2009).

However, organizations are increasingly having management problems related, to lack of understanding of laws of social interaction, absence of coordination of actions of their main participants, misuse of means of communication, etc. According to the author, the consideration of staff management from the perspective of social interaction is necessary due to development of horizontal and network management, the desire of employees to take an active part in

organizational processes, the need for effective feedback.

Conceptual basis for the research

The category of interaction is one of the basic methodological principles of research of natural and social phenomena. This is a general scientific concept which, however, characterizes the essence of social relations better than other fundamental concepts.

One of the most prominent conceptions of social interaction is the theory of P. Sorokin, according to which the structure of social interaction includes such elements as: subjects of interaction, mutual expectations, purposeful activity, means of interaction. (Sorokin, 1993).

T. Parsons has created two models of social action (interaction): voluntarist model of a single action and a conception of cybernetic systems of action, which includes four major inter-related types: social system, culture, personality and organism (the scheme of AGIL) (Parsons, Smelser, 2012).

Social interaction as such is seen through the emergence of social reality in line with two sociological paradigms: the paradigm of social definitions and the paradigm of social behavior. The first includes symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology, the second -- behaviorism and exchange theory. These theories predominantly focused on everyday social interaction as a primary element that shapes society, determines social roles of individuals and their impression from interaction, is realized in spiritual unity, symbols, meaningful patterns of behavior of people, in exchange of benefits and rewards between them (Adams et al., 2001).

Social interaction in terms of the integrative approach is the center, combining individual social activities and social structures, as described in the conceptions of E. Giddens, J. Habermas,

H. Luhmann, P. Bourdieu and J. Turner (Giddens, 1986, Habermas, 1991, Luhmann, 1995, Bourdieu, 1990, Turner, 1988).

According to the principle of duality by E. Giddens, the basis of unity of actions of an individual and the structure is social practice. In the course of social practice social integration (interpersonal and intergroup interaction) and system integration (interaction between social systems in the extended space-time frame) generating social contradiction and social conflict, that cause social change, are formed. (Giddens, 1986).

The essence of interaction from the point of view of the integrative approach can also be defined in terms of the possibility of establishing non-vertical modes of social being, refocusing to the subject-subject structure, modeled by interpersonal communication (J. Habermas). "Strategic behavior" aimed at achieving goals within an asymmetric subject-object procedure and pragmatic use of the Other as an object (means) should be replaced by "communicative behavior" (subject-subject), which implies acceptance of the Other as a self-sufficient values (Habermas, 1991).

Social interaction (communication) and its meaning, by N. Luhmann, is the basis for "autopoiesis", meaning self-reference and self-reproduction of social systems, such as: functional (the media, politics, science, etc.), the system of face-to-face interactions, and also organizational systems. Each functional system tends to include communications that are specific only for it, but at the same time, to exclude communication of a different kind. Communication as such is the trinity of information, communication and understanding (awareness of difference between information and communication) (Luhmann, 1995).

Social interaction in the field theory by P. Bourdieu is defined through the notion of social

space as a systematic intersection of connections uniting subject with similar characteristics. In social space, people interact and group according to similarity of their positions and “habitus” that “is at the same time a system of models: of behavior reproduction and the system of models of perception and evaluation of behavior” (Bourdieu, 1990).

Social interaction can also be considered at the micro- and macro-levels by analytic theorizing (J. Turner). At the micro-level, the form, direction and intensity of interaction depends on importance of the four types of motivation, based on the need for security, self-assertion, “factuality” (general agreement, order) and need for resources. The degree of mutual accommodation and cooperation between individuals in interaction directly depends on the amount of common knowledge and its use in signaling and interpretation. Interactions and structure are systemically interrelated. Reproduction of the structure during interaction depends on the extent to which individuals are able to “regionalize” (to order spatial location and mobility), “routinize” (form regular interaction procedures), “standardize” (set norms of interaction), “ritualize” (create patterns of behavior), and “categorize” (mutually typify each other and their relationships) their joint actions. At the macro-level social interactions cease to be interaction of individuals and manifest themselves in processes of increment (increase in resources), differentiation (formation of sub-groups, sub-cultures and hierarchies under the influence of competition, exchange and mobilization of power) and integration (coordination, unification and symbolic confrontation between social units) (Turner, 1988).

In general, the integrative approach allows analyzing the space of society at all levels, to take into account their interaction and mutual influence.

Therefore, approaching any phenomenon of social life as social interaction allows the researcher to conduct its detailed analysis and form the system model, taking into account interests of participants, their activities, social medium and other communication attributes.

Definition and classification

We believe that social interaction as a means of uniting social elements (subjects, individuals) into the integrity of the structure (organization, society) occurs between these elements in the process of exchange of social actions (functions), for which different means are used (speech, gestures, signs, etc.), and leads to socially significant results. Social interaction is cyclical and reproducible. The whole cycle of social interaction depends on the environment, in which it occurs. Thus, social interaction exists and can only be represented in totality of elements connected by system relations. This totality can be described as follows: interacting entities carry out social activities in a particular environment by available means, which leads to socially meaningful results. Each element of interaction has properties and qualities that distinguish one kind of social interaction from another, which determines the basis for different classifications, for example:

- by the types of subjects: interpersonal, between an individual and the group, inter-group, international social interactions;
- by the presence of people-mediators: direct and indirect;
- by the specifics of action: information (exchange of knowledge messages), material and symbolic (the exchange of money, gifts, documents), physical (exchange of movements);
- by type of means: spoken, gestural, written, electronic, etc.;

- by characteristics of the medium: political, economic, professional, organizational, family, etc.;
- by length in social time: temporary (episodic) and permanent (long-term);
- by direction in social hierarchy: horizontal and vertical.

In general, the number, composition and characteristics of subjects of interaction, types of performed activities, selected means of interaction, social results and description of the environment in which social interaction takes place, all of this, in our view, determine the structure of social interaction and can be used to analyze and describe it.

The distinctive feature of staff management as a system of social interaction, according to the author, is that the whole set of described elements is in the focus of study. This theoretical and methodological premise allows characterizing personnel management as a category of sociology of management.

In this capacity, it has its basic categorical features, which present staff management as:

- a type of management activities aimed at developing socially significant properties of employees and workforce as a whole;
- a generic term in relation to other definitions, such as “personnel management”, “human resource management”, etc.;
- a basis for formation of functional roles, social and economic statuses of organizational subjects, and their personal and work potential;
- a system of social interaction with general and special (unique to this system) characteristics.

Staff management as a system of social interaction is characterized by the following features:

- staff management is an open system, since the medium of interaction affects the entire cycle and its elements;
- elements of staff management are separate subsystems and are connected to one another by cause-and-effect relations, the connection of elements of staff management is fixed in rituals;
- each of the elements of staff management has its own important characteristics, for example, subjects of interaction are characterized by status; the environment (medium) –by organizational culture, the means are determined by discourse, the results of interaction are indicators of social well-being.
- staff management is intersubjective and purpose-rational, each of its subjects is endowed with individual will and pursues important goals ;
- staff management as a system of social interaction has different functions: it creates and changes organizational structures, facilitates socialization of employees, it is the mechanism of transmission of cultural experience, it creates social climate, etc.
- the system of staff management cannot exist without feedback, through which the results and the degree of achievement of goals of interaction are assessed;
- staff management as a system of social interaction is variable and develops according to various scenarios, as its subjects can choose alternative courses of action;
- staff management has the property of integrity and displays its properties only in interconnection of all elements of interaction;
- it is a self-regulatory system, as the subjects act on the basis of stable patterns

of behavior, reflecting during the process of interaction.

In this context, we define staff management as the system of directed social interaction of organizational subjects, performing their respective roles and functions, corresponding to their status, performance of which leads to achievement of results significant for this system.

Methodology and methods of analysis

For the analysis of staff management as a system of social interaction the author formed a methodological approach, based on the propositions of structural-functional and discourse analysis, the integrative approach, as well as the conception of social interaction by P. Sorokin (Fig. 1).

The main elements of the analysis, as indicated in the figure, are the actors of staff management (such as top management of an organization, middle- and lower-level managers, HR specialists, as well as non-management workers), their activities (functions), means of communication, social

results of interaction, but also a certain social environment (internal-organizational and external). Each element is endowed with its own characteristics, which are researched by various sociological methods.

Basing on the proposed approach, the author of the article conducted the empirical research, which included the method of observation, analysis and content analysis of documents, using questionnaires, tests, expert surveys (Arlashkina, 2012).

Modeling

The conducted research revealed specific characteristics of staff management, including: duality of social relations, manifested in simultaneous existence of pair interaction types (e.g., linear and functional); resource interdependence and role-defined position of subjects of staff management; underestimated status of middle / lower-level managers and HR specialists, high degree of regulation, standardization and ritualization of interaction; specific discourse based to use speech patterns, terms and jargon; importance of feedback,

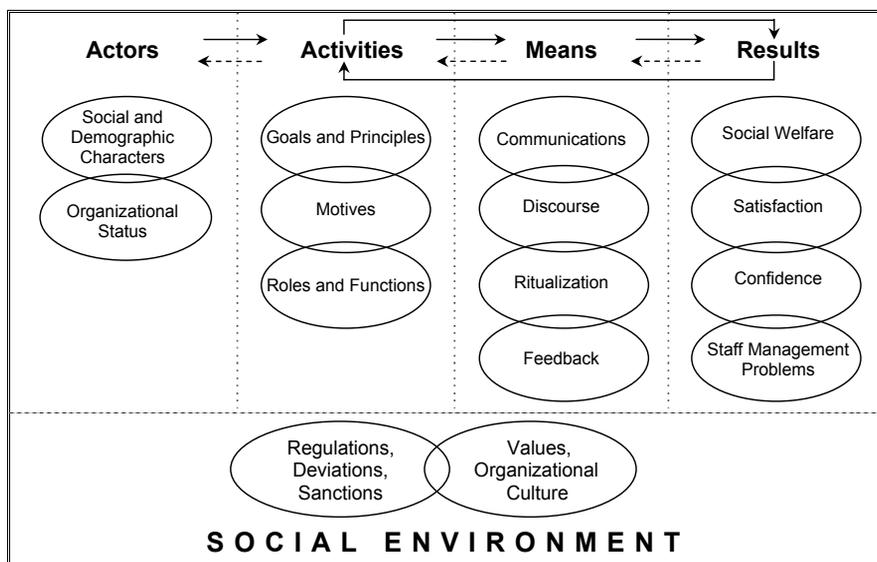


Fig. 1. The methodological approach to the study of staff management as a system of social interaction

satisfaction and mutual trust for achieving results of social interaction.

However, our theorizing and empirical data are insufficient to assess the fruitfulness of the approach to staff management as social interaction. The leaders of organizations, in our opinion, should also get an intelligible management scheme that would allow taking into account the specifics of the type of social interaction, which is staff management, and would be comparable to conventional approaches to making such kinds of schemes.

In this connection, we have developed a model of personnel management for practical application in organizations, schematically shown in Fig. 2. This model defines the scope of powers and responsibilities of actors of interaction and establishes the content of their activities in interconnection of goals, functions, principles and methods of staff management. Activities are

carried out with the help of social techniques, practices and procedures. Socially significant results of staff management complete social interaction.

The model also considers the impact of internal factors (business strategy, organizational culture) and external environment, which makes the model of personnel management fully completed. Environmental factors (indicated in the diagram on the right) have an impact on the totality of internal elements (inside the dashed line marking the boundaries of the organization).

There is a direct connection between the internal organizational elements of the model (indicated by a straight line) and a reverse one (shown in dashed lines). Along the direct connection the higher (superior) element of the patterns of social interaction determines all the positions of a subordinate

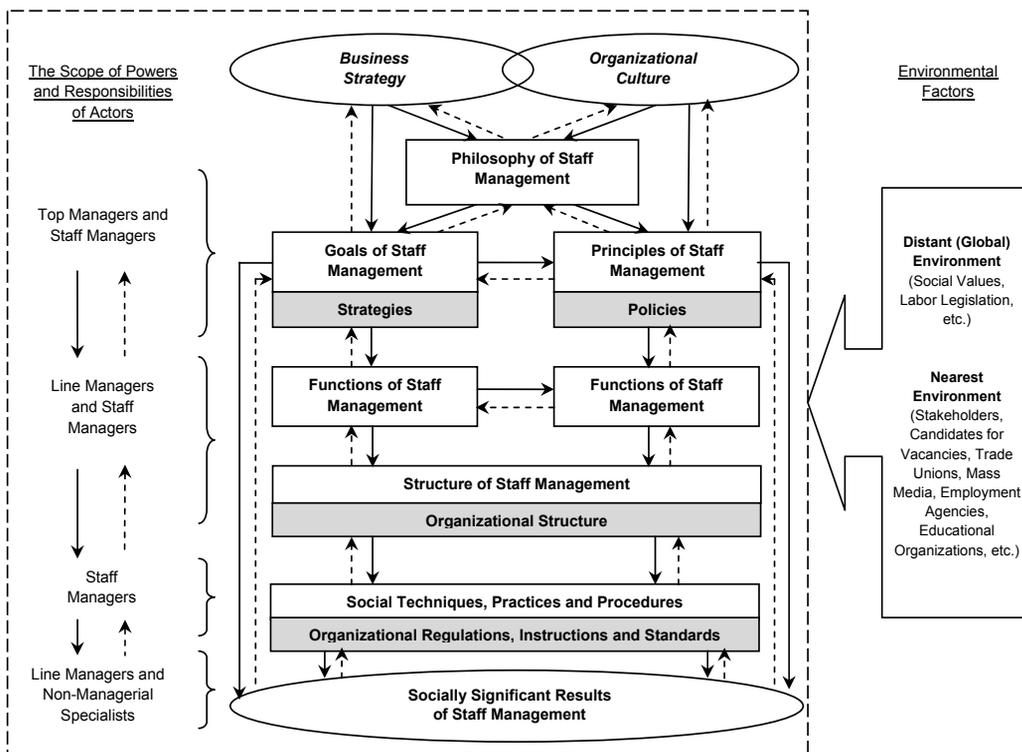


Fig. 2. The model of social interaction in staff management

element. A reverse connection between the elements corresponds to systemic nature of staff management and has the practical goal of continuous improvement.

Conclusions

The developed model of staff management does claim to cover all the characteristics of social interaction, it is only intended to demonstrate a version of the system organization of social management functions, the cycle of exchange of resources at the disposal of organizational

subjects and exchange of activities, forming effective relations of trust.

It is obvious that emergence of social reality will never allow full covering of the studied form of social interaction—staff management. However, we hope that our proposed analytical approach and social modeling based on it will not only improve efficiency and manageability of organizations, but also draw attention to the possibility of creating comfortable organizational communication, where efficiency, rationality, and innovation will arise organically and naturally.

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Управление кадрами как социальное взаимодействие: анализ и моделирование

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В статье подробно излагается авторский подход к социальному исследованию управления кадрами в организациях с позиции социального взаимодействия. Краткий обзор социологических концепций позволяет определить сущность социального взаимодействия, его виды и свойства. Автор дает социологическую интерпретацию управления кадрами, представляет и обосновывает методологический подход к анализу управления кадрами как системы социального взаимодействия и перечисляет его специфические характеристики, выявленные эмпирическим путем. На основании проведенного исследования автором разработана организационная модель управления кадрами, схема и описание которой приведены в статье. Данная модель выстроена с учетом выявленных характеристик и возможностей социального взаимодействия, а также традиционных подходов к структурированию организационных подсистем и может быть использована для формирования социально эффективной и устойчивой системы управления кадрами.

Ключевые слова: социальное взаимодействие, управление кадрами, система, субъекты взаимодействия, организационная модель.
