

Monitoring of participation of professional expert communities in solution of tasks related to the development of the national qualification system

Seguimiento de la participación de comunidades expertas profesionales en la solución de tareas de desarrollo del sistema nacional de calificación

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the results of monitoring the presence in the Russian Federation of communities of professional experts that have a special impact on assistance in solving problems of a socio-economic nature, including the development of certain elements of the education system and the national system of qualifications in the country.

The results may be of interest to state authorities in the implementation of policies aimed at developing the education system and the national grading system, in solving problems aimed at developing and combining educational and professional standards, conducting an independent assessment of grades. , etc.

Keywords: communities of professional experts, national qualification system, professional competencies, community management

Resumen

El artículo está dedicado a los resultados del monitoreo de la presencia en la Federación Rusa de comunidades de expertos profesionales que tienen un impacto especial en la asistencia para resolver problemas de naturaleza socioeconómica, incluido el desarrollo de ciertos elementos del sistema educativo y el sistema nacional de calificaciones en el país.

Los resultados pueden ser de interés para las autoridades estatales en la implementación de políticas destinadas a desarrollar el sistema educativo y el sistema nacional de calificaciones, en la resolución de problemas dirigidos a desarrollar y combinar estándares educativos y profesionales, realizar una evaluación independiente de las calificaciones, etc.

Palabras claves: comunidades de expertos profesionales, sistema nacional de calificaciones, competencias profesionales, gestión comunitaria

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1. Introduction

Contemporary works of Russian and foreign scientists draw attention to a substantial change in the significance and role of competence-based communities. At the beginning of the 19th century, researchers studied their essence and purpose of creation as a solution for protecting the interests of the members of professional groups, which were considered as strongholds of intellectual and moral homogeneity (Durkheim, 1996; Veber, 1990). At that time, the core values for a professional were professional attitude to work, the use of the competence of a professional group member for the benefit of the entire society, i.e., for “general good health of the social body”, and protection of public interests (Abramov, 2005).

In the 21st century, attention to professional communities does not fade away. For example, Ostrom (2000), Aligica and Boettke (2009) pointed out the significance of such research. “We will all be the poorer if local, self-organized institutions are not a substantial portion of the institutional portfolio of the twenty-first century”, wrote Ostrom (2000). At the same time, the main motive for the activities of competence-based communities is not public interest, but a desire to have a certain social status, even through “lobbying the interests of members of a professional group” (Shafer and Owsen, 2003; Jones and Joss, 1995). This opinion was confirmed and studied by other scientists (Freidson, 1970; Mills, 1943; 1953), who showed that representatives of individual professional groups tended to maintain the status quo. One of the ways to maintain positions and to raise the status is to portray the members not just as representatives of a certain professional community, but as possessors of knowledge and experience in a certain area of vocational activity. Thus, the criterion of belonging to the same profession loses its relevance. The primary requirement is to be an expert in a particular field. It is the ability to be an expert that becomes an important factor in the growth of attractiveness and significance of professional communities, which are considered as social actors involved in decision making at the state level, including strategic solutions related to the development of the education sector and the National Qualifications System.

In this connection, the works that study expertness as the main criterion of communities are of particular interest, especially the research conducted by Martyanova (2013). The social role of communities and assessment of their significance as social actors have also been studied by Russian scientists (Mersiyanova, 2011; Yacobson, 2008; Mansurov, 2009; Romanov and Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2015; Dolzhenko, 2015).

Based on the above mentioned works, another research object has been identified - professional communities that position themselves as expert unions, enroll recognized experts and are involved in expert activities.

Based on the reviewed papers and on the author’s own research work (Dolzhenko and Ginieva, 2017), a professional expert community may be defined as a union of people, who belong to the same profession, have the highest level of expertise and use their knowledge to solve (on behalf of the community) the tasks in the corresponding professional field, both at the level of individual companies and at the state level.

One of the key areas, in which experts from professional communities may invest their efforts - is the development of the NQS elements. It should be noted that one of the most important issues to be resolved in professional sphere is the formation of the National Qualifications System in Russia, starting from monitoring the labor market and finishing with elaboration of professional standards, which should be introduced through staff training, educational standards and independent qualification assessment mechanisms.

The first publications on the NQS in Russia date back to 2006, when a group of researchers (Muravyova, Oleinikova, Koulz, 2006) identified the principles and procedures for developing of a national qualifications

framework. These procedures were based, inter alia, on the accumulated experience of foreign researchers related to the development and introduction of national qualifications frameworks and systems, which are constantly being updated (Pilcher, Fernie, Smith, 2017; Allais, 2017; Mikulec, 2017).

Since 2006 several steps to form the NQS have been taken. Thus, in 2012, a decree of the President of the Russian Federation was issued, which entrusts the Government with the task to develop 800 professional standards for the most popular types of professional activities by the end of 2015. The Presidential National Council for Professional Qualifications (hereinafter referred to as the National Council) has become a unified platform for the development of the National Qualifications System in our country.

After creation of the National Council, the experts of the professional communities started actively participating in the NQS development. Thus, in accordance with the approved Statute, the main tasks of the National Council include, among all other things, the tasks of “expert assessment of draft Russian Federation legislative and other regulatory legal acts... related to the development of a professional qualifications system in the Russian Federation; expert examination of draft professional standards; assessment of draft federal state standards for vocational education, assessment of their compliance with the approved professional standards”.

The National Council may include not only representatives of state authorities, but also of various non-profit associations, namely: associations of employers, trade unions, public associations, educational, scientific and other communities.

Thus, the relevance of the study is determined by the growing need for improvement of the mechanisms, which will enhance public engagement and involvement of professional experts in consultations and pre-legislative scrutiny of draft bills and other legal acts, discussion of documents directly related to the development of certain areas of expertise, and promotion of the findings related to the studied phenomena in professional environment.

The purpose of this research is to study the essence of professional expert communities, to assess the factors influencing their involvement, and to determine their role in solving expert tasks at the federal level related to the development of the NQS elements.

The objectives of the study are:

- To review the existing theoretical background and conceptual framework associated with professional expert communities and the basic NQS (National Qualifications System) elements.
- To monitor the level of active participation of professional expert communities in the development of individual NQS elements in the Russian Federation.
- To assess the involvement of professional expert communities in generation of ideas and development of the NQS elements and the education system.

The author of this article has formulated the main hypothesis as follows: the key factors, which determine the involvement of a professional community in solving the problems related to the NQS and the education sector are: inclusion of expert non-profit activities in the general list of the community activities; high level of expertise (participation in public councils and other bodies); recognition of the community in the professional environment; final phase of the community institutionalization; selection of candidates based on tough admission requirements.

2. Methodology

Based on the theoretical analysis, the author of this article further develop the approaches to assessing communities, which were analyzed in previous studies (Dolzhenko and Ginieva, 2017; Ginieva and Dolzhenko, 2017). As an example, the activities of the Councils for Human Resource Management will be considered. The study, which was conducted in 2016-2017, allowed creating a database of 104 Russian professional communities in the field of HR management. Some content was refreshed in 2019 taking into account the updated information published on the sites of these communities. However, it should be noted that, first of all, a representative sample was selected based on the general classification of professional communities, without taking into account their compliance with the criteria of expertise.

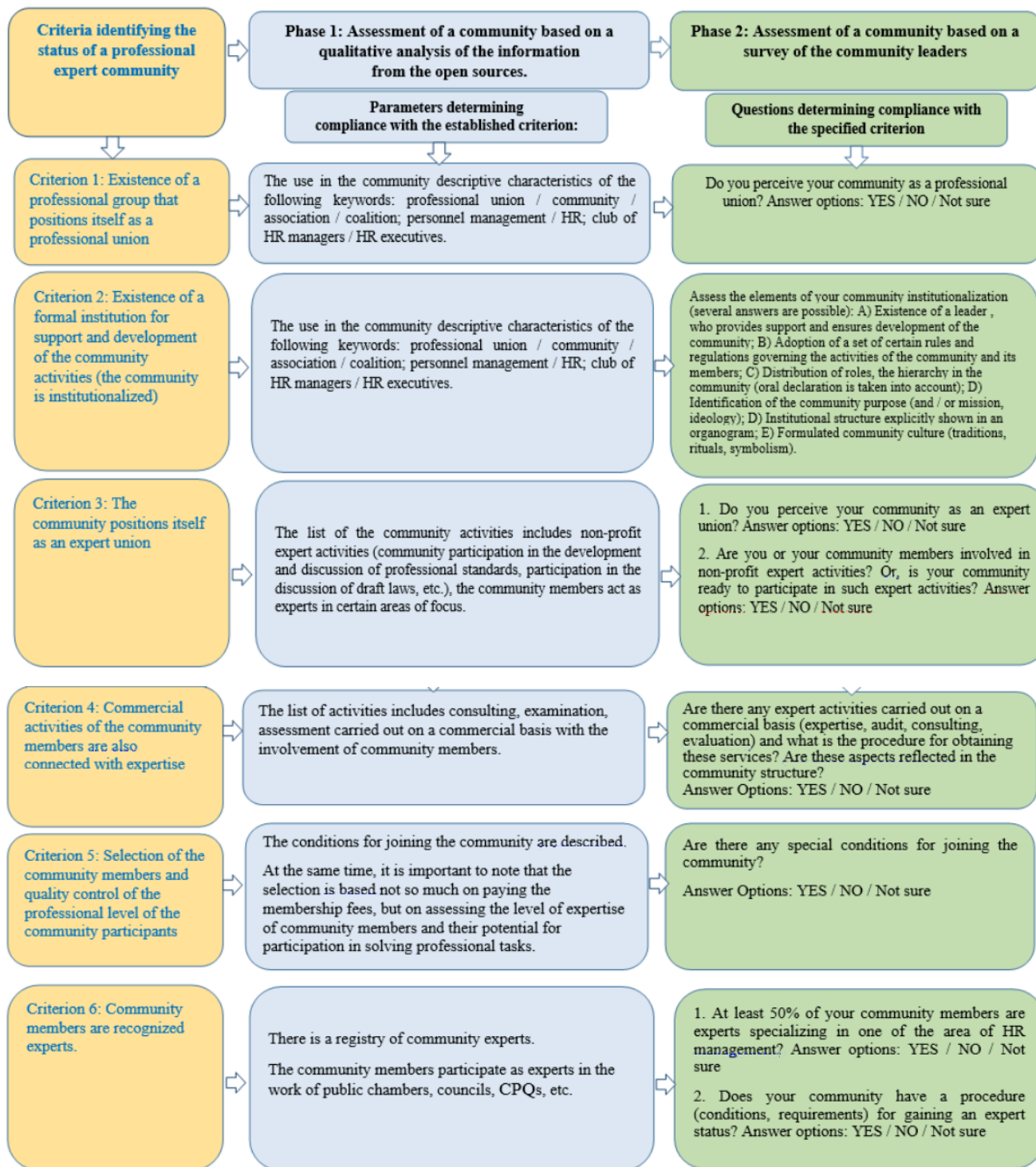
In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, it is necessary to identify the main criteria for classifying the existing communities as professional expert communities, and to develop approaches for assessing these communities from the point of view of their compliance with the requirement of the criteria indicated.

The assessment was two-dimensional and followed two successive phases of empirical research. Phase 1 was a qualitative analysis of the professional community attributes, which could be found in open sources (on the sites, pages and groups of the community social networks), and assessment of their compliance with the established criteria. The author of this article formulated the parameters for each criterion, which indicated compliance with the requirements. Phase 2 of the study was aimed at clarifying the results, which were obtained by carrying out a social survey of community representatives.

The evaluation criteria and the parameters developed by the author of this article with the aim to identify professional expert communities are presented in the following diagram (Fig. 1).

The results of phase 1 study, allowed selecting a representative sample of communities (34 communities, or 33% of the total number), which to the greatest extent met the criteria described in Figure 1. According to the author's methodology, a professional community may be considered an expert union if at least 4 out of 6 criteria are satisfied. As part of phase 2 study, the author assessed compliance with the established criteria from the points of view of the community leaders. To collect the required information, survey method was used. A total of 104 community leaders took part in this survey. The list of questions met the criteria listed in Figure 1 (see phase 2).

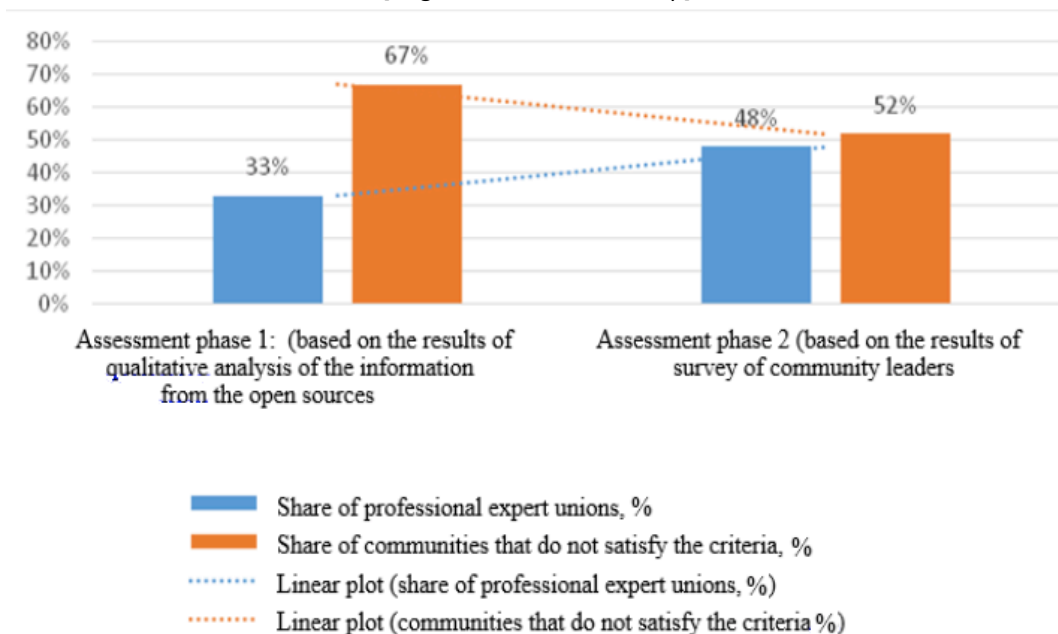
Figure 1.
Criteria of professional expert communities and parameters for their identification
[original work of authorship]



3. Results

The results of the leader’s survey were compared with the earlier qualitative analysis of these communities. As it can be seen from Figure 2, phase 2 of the assessment allowed correcting the previously obtained data. As a result, an increase in the share of professional expert communities that met the established criteria was noted: according to the respondents, this figure rose from 34 to 50 communities (from 33% to 48% of the total number).

Figure 2
The share of professional expert communities based on two-dimensional assessment of the studied community compliance with the established criteria. [original work of authorship]



Thus, phase 2 of the study made it possible to obtain a broader selection of professional expert communities (50 associations). This selection of professional expert communities will be used at the next phase, when assessing the level and factors influencing the involvement of the communities (and their leaders) in solution of socio-economic problems. To assess the unions’ real readiness for such activities, the author sent them proposals for cooperation with the CPQ in the field of HR management to the extent related to certain areas of expert activities.

The survey showed that only 30% of communities take part or are ready to participate in non-commercial expert activities. Thus, the study confirmed the general trend of recent years - the level of community involvement in the implementation of non-commercial projects is not high, even despite the high degree of expertness declared by these communities.

According to community leaders, the main reasons for low interest of the community members in personal participation in problem-solving and decision-making may be explained by lack of human resources, i.e. insufficient number of competent experts; lack of time (“commercial projects are of primary importance since they shape and energize community life”); lack of financial resources (“there are no financial opportunities to motivate community members to be involved in expert work”); lack of personal interest of the community leader (“there are no economic or any other benefits for experts from volunteering”).

From the perspective of the objectives and the hypotheses posed, the communities that have expressed their willingness to cooperate with the Council for Professional Qualifications (15 communities), are of particular interest for this study.

In this connection, , the author of this article will analyze the data of 15 communities for their compliance with the established criteria (Table 1):

Table 1

Criterion	Criteria identifying the status of a professional expert community	The results of the study of professional expert communities, which are ready to take part in non-commercial expert activities			
		Phase 1: Results of assessment based on a qualitative analysis of the information from the open sources	Share of communities satisfying the criteria, %	Phase 2: Results of the survey	Share of communities satisfying the criteria, %
1.	Existence of a professional group that positions itself as a professional union	YES	100%	YES	100%
		NO	0%	NO	0%
				Not sure	0%
2.	Existence of a formal institution for support and development of the community activities (the community is institutionalized)	YES	67%	YES	87%
		NO	33%	NO	13%
3	The community positions itself as an expert union; The list of the community activities includes non-profit expert activities; the community members act as experts in certain areas of focus.	YES	47%	YES	80%
		NO	53%	NO	13%
				Not sure	7%
4	Commercial activities of the community members are also connected with expertise (consulting, audit, evaluation).	YES	67%	YES	87%
		YES	33%	NO	13%
				Not sure	0%
5	Selection of the community members and quality control of the professional level of the community participants.	YES	60%	YES	100%
		NO	40%	NO	0%
				Not sure	0%
6	Community members are recognized experts.	YES	47%	YES	93%
		NO	53%	NO	7%
				Not sure	0%

As it becomes evident from the table above, a significant increase in the proportion of communities meeting the established criteria is observed, which confirms the hypothesis posed by the author in this study. Thus, the total representative sample of communities showed that institutionalization was completed in 26% (phase 1) and 48% of all cases (phase 2). In contrast, the share of institutionalized communities shown in the table above increased approximately 2 times - 67% (phase 1) and 87% (phase 2). As regards all other parameters, an increase in the share of communities meeting the established criteria is also confirmed. It means that the share of communities that position themselves as experts and are involved both in commercial and non-commercial expert activities has grown. The proportion of communities that control selection of candidates by their professional skills and level of expertise has also increased. The last criterion showed the most significant growth: the share of communities whose members are recognized experts increased from 13% (phase 1) - 14% (phase 2) to 47% (phase 1) - 93% (phase 2).

Community leaders, who expressed their willingness to face expert challenges, commented in their responses as follows: "We are ready to be useful for the professional community", "It is interesting to talk with experts of federal agencies", "Participation in such projects will increase the status of our community", "Decision-making at the federal level creates the opportunities for our own development", "Such projects are consistent with the mission of our community", "We are personally interested in the requirements for HR professional competencies", "We are concerned about the future of our profession", etc.

4. Conclusions

The theoretical analysis of approaches to the study of the professional groups and expert communities allowed formulating a definition of a professional expert community, and to identify its place and role in the development of the NQS elements.

The basis for methodological approaches to monitoring of professional expert communities was a two-dimensional assessment of the community compliance with the established criteria based on a qualitative analysis of information from the existing open sources and a sociological survey of community leaders.

The research results allows confirming and supplement the hypothesis formulated during the preliminary theoretical study of the topic. The author has discovered that those communities, which have expressed the greatest willingness and which have the largest potential for interaction, may be characterized by: the highest level of competency of their members; the final stage of their institutionalization; selection of candidates based on tough admission requirements; inclusion of not only non-commercial (as the hypothesis suggested), but also commercial expert activities in the general list of the community activities. The last factor generally means that there is a certain financial resource and sufficiently high qualification of experts. The combination of these two components creates opportunities and motivation for the community members to be engaged in additional non-commercial projects.

As a recommendation to the institutions currently responsible for the development and introduction of the National Qualifications System elements in Russia, the author can offer to intensify cooperation with those professional communities, which position themselves as experts, have high potential and readiness for collaboration, and meet the criteria for professional expert communities established by us. These communities will be actively involved in collaboration with the Council for Professional Qualifications and will assist in solving federal tasks and implementing federal decisions.

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