

## Evaluation and Improvement of Education Quality: Psycho-Acmeological Approach



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### Abstract.

The author addresses the issues faced by Russia in the transition to the evaluation of the quality of education on standardised systems. The focus is on the process by which 'acmeological' support is provided to students at the Russian Academy of Public Administration - the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the educational process.

**Key words:** *educational system, quality of education, psycho-acmeological approach, standards, personal and professional potential, the potential for development.*

The Centre of Planning and Forecasting Career was established in June 2008 and is part of the International Institute of Public Administration and Management of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation. The Academy under the President of the Russian Federation (RANPEA) is the largest socio-economics and humanities university in Europe and Russia, holding top spots in all national rankings. The Centre annually conducts applied research aimed at improving the state and municipal services system and the optimisation of management systems.

In 2003, Russia joined the Bologna process. Several months ago the President of the Russian Federation signed a new law on education, adopted by the State Duma, which reflects the trend toward further integration of the Russian education system into the global educational system. In the new edition of the 'On Education' law education quality is defined by how well the educational activities and results comply with federal state standards and meet the needs of the stakeholders of the education system. It is clear that the introduction of standards is important and promising. The Russian education system is becoming integrated into the global educational system. People are becoming more empowered to choose from more possible educational paths. However, along the way there will be and are many serious challenges.

Some of these challenges are associated with standardisation. Others with the possible loss of individualisation and differentiation within the educational system, which reflect the mentality of the culture and responds to the needs of specific society. When we talk about education quality and its measurement, as a rule, there are two aspects: external - how well the educational process complies with the societal standards, and internal - how well the educational process fulfils personal standards and the needs and interests of the students as the subjects of the educational process. We think that there should be less focus on the evaluation of acquired knowledge and competence in training and more on identifying one's practical personal and professional growth potential. We are talking about a shift of emphasis in the evaluation of achievements to the assessment of development potential, formed as a result of completing the educational process. Accordingly, the measurement of quality of the educational process must include an assessment of the dynamics of this potential in the learning process.

Directly related to the improvement of educational quality is, also, the challenge of individualisation. This problem relates more to the internal evaluation of education quality. Our studies have shown that the satisfaction of students depends not only on educational content and the quality of its implementation, but also on their own personal and professional expectations and interests. To improve the quality of the educational process in the Russian Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation, we developed and integrated acmeological techniques that accompany the educational process. The organisation and implementation of the work was conducted by the Department of Acmeological and Occupational Psychology. The psycho-acmeological approach is a very fast-developing field in the Russian Federation.

There are two organically related elements in the short-term psycho-acmeological support programme: 1) the lectures, practical trainings and experiential activities through which the psychological aspects of the professional work come to the surface; 2) psycho-diagnostic support in the educational process.

Psycho-diagnostic software included in the training is composed of two key elements: the 'input' (in the beginning of the programme) and 'output' (end of programme) diagnostics. The main principles of evolving diagnostics are: positivity (the assessment identifies features from the standpoint of potential personal growth), duration/follow-up (holds at least two diagnostic sessions), integrity/holistic (considers the various manifestations of one's personality and their interactions), feedback (includes discussions of the outcomes with the subjects).

The main goals accomplished through the psychological diagnostic support during the training are: 1) to identify the subject's personal and professional profile in order to determine his/her potential and help in determining the most productive ways to improve the professionalism of civil servants, while taking into consideration the individuality of each student; 2) to raise awareness and motivate productivity of students within their discipline of study (economic, legal, etc.) and the psychological development of professional civil servants; 3) to carry out 'prompt' remedial and developmental work based on issues found during the analysis that may hinder the productivity of the students; 4) further our understanding of the dynamics of personal and professional development based on the results of the training.

The 'input' diagnostics are meant to prepare the subjects for learning management and psycho-acmeological techniques. Instead of taking the information shared through the training as something unrelated to them and theoretical, the subjects begin to view the information from a practical standpoint as it relates to them and their personal development. Based on the results of the 'input' diagnostics, an analysis is conducted. This analysis reflects the psychological and professional traits of the subject, contains the subject's expectations of the training and the main challenges/issues that the subjects see in the training thus far.

The suite of tools used in the psychological assessment throughout the training is: comprehensive (able to assess various aspects of the subject's personality) and comparable (able to monitor the dynamics of personal and professional development during the training). Thus, 'input' and 'output' diagnostics use similar indicators and methods as well as some that differ. 'Input' diagnostics uses a combination of methods - some classical psychology approaches to professional diagnostics, and some that were developed by us (psycho-biographical method assessment, evaluation of organisational behaviour test, human resources test, etc.).

Based on the results of the 'input' testing, discussions are conducted in groups of individuals with similar psychological and professional characteristics. The teacher gives advice on how to optimise the use of their personal resources. If the need arises, the student is given the opportunity to go through corrective, rehabilitative, and developmental activities, as well as more in-depth psychological assessment and consultation.

The 'output' diagnosis and discussions are aimed at analysing the dynamics of the students' personal and professional development, disclosing the potential causes of these dynamics, discussing the role of the training in this process, and taking into account the wishes of the student in improving the learning process. An important task in this diagnosis is to assist students in determining the future direction of their individual potential growth as well as collect additional information needed to produce a professional-psychological portrait of the student.

Thus the acmeological-psychological support method within the education process, presents itself as a tool to improving the quality of education (through input diagnostics, customising the programme to the individuals in the group, identifying potentially strong leaders, etc.), and as a means of assessing the quality of education (the input and output of the self and professional development diagnosis).

This programme was integrated into the education process within the academy from 2000–2008. During that period more than 10,000 students participated in the programme. In recent years the programme has not been so widely used. One of the main reasons for this is, again, the standardisation of education. Standardisation does not allow for such careful attention to the individual, individual nuances, and the individualisation of education. Psycho-acmeological support now only exists outside of the formal educational process. Let us hope that it does take its rightful place in the system of modern education truly helping to improve its quality.

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