Methodology of professional self-reflection development
(on the example of management activity)

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Abstract

The effectiveness of management personnel, their ability to professional communication at the level of self-organization, their analytical and predictive abilities are determined by culturally organized self-reflection which promotes the realization and development of the innovative potential of the individual. The aim of the research is to theoretically substantiate reflexive self-organization in managerial activities, to develop and implement a professional module on the reflexive thinking of management personnel, and to identify effective methods for the development of professional reflection. The general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalization, formalization and language schematization) and specific-scientific (observation, comparative analysis, questionnaires, tests) methods were used. They allowed obtaining an integral picture of the influence of reflection on the success of professional and social activity and creating conditions for the further development of reflection, personal qualities and the formation of an emotional and value-related attitude towards the activity. The article defines the essential features and functions of reflection, reveals the content of the reflexive method, establishes the links between the elements of reflection (analysis, criticism, standardization) and traditional types of managerial activity: goal-setting, support, correction and control of activity, and describes levels of reflexive thinking in managerial activities. The theoretical substantiation of the problem of reflexive self-organization and its solution in the course of realization of the professional module in undergraduates of the field ‘State and municipal management’ is presented in the paper. Practical significance lies in creating a professional module aimed at developing reflection and implemented in the form of organizational and activity game, as well as diagnostic techniques for measuring the level of reflection.

Keywords: Reflection; Professional Reflection; Managerial Thinking; Reflexive Method and Methodology; Reflexive Self-Organization.

1. Introduction

Management activity in the era of intensive socio-economic and political changes requires from its subject strategic thinking, the formation of which plays a decisive role in the ability to communicate effectively, in the innovative potential of the individual, analytical and prognostic abilities, determined by the ability to culturally organized reflexive activity. Reflexive activity is given special importance, since only the reflexive experience of past communications, events and their results enables the leader to successfully carry out their activity in the future. Reflection is understood as a form of mental activity aimed at overcoming the arising difficulty and subjective impossibility to continue the activity, and including analysis, a critical rethinking of the previous activity and the search for new norms (Fig. 1).

The identification of the essence, structure and general regularities of the management process by the development of professional reflection in managerial activities, including in the public service, is of exceptional relevance. Fundamentals of managerial reflection were considered in the work of the founder of the Russian methodological school G.P. [1]. The theory of development of professional reflection in management activity is presented in the work of [2], where the development of levels of managerial thinking from the execution of a fixed norm to the level of reflexive self-organization is of particu-
At the heart of the problem of management activity development lies the contradiction between the need of society and the state in managers who are able to independently solve the problems of their professional development in order to achieve higher results in activities with the help of reflection mechanisms, and the lack of reflexive abilities sufficiently developed for this. This problem, in addition to its political and socioeconomic conditioning, is linked to the educational system which does not fully provide for the public and state in the professionals in the field of managerial activity, capable of working in conditions of constant modernization, and does not support this process with appropriate educational practices. This, in turn, requires the elaboration of theoretical and methodological aspects of the development of reflexive abilities in the conditions of continuous professional education, including postgraduate education. The study of [6] is devoted to theoretical aspects of reflection development in the system of postgraduate education; here the reflexive method is substantiated as didactic, the andragogical features of its use are noted and its axiological essence is determined. This work can be used as a basis for the concept of the development of professional reflection in managerial activities, including a set of scientific provisions on reflection and its methodological functions, a complex of reflexive techniques based on the criteria of a reflexive didactic method and providing a personal-professional development of the subject to the level of reflexive self-organization. The development of reflection is manifested in the process of overcoming difficulties in the activity and analysis of the subject's own professional experience, in creating conditions for personal and professional development, in improving professional competence and achieving "acme", which ultimately contributes to the formation and development of managerial activities.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Methods of research

The following general scientific methods were used in the study:

1) Generalization - to identify common signs of reflection and their extension to particular or individual manifestations in the process of applied research;

2) Formalization and language schematization, involving the use of schematic images of reflection - to denote methodological schemes in order to obtain the most accurate understanding of the expressed thought;

3) The analysis necessary to classify the features of the studied object: the level of expressiveness of reflection, the types of reflection, the degree of mastering the mechanism of reflection, the focus on the axiological result;

4) Synthesis - to get a new idea about the professional reflection patterns of manifestation and development in postgraduate education, and also to compile typological characteristics on the basis of the degree of reflection expressiveness in the professional activity of civil servants, and of its qualitative characteristics.

The study also used the following empirical and scientific methods:

1) The methods by which the diagnosis and correction of reflection development in groups were carried out, and also the effect on the course of its change. To obtain the result, interactive methods were used, including communicative and personal reflection, discussions in which cooperative reflection was manifested, allowing to ensure the active inclusion of respondents in the process of creating new content, and in processing and analysis of the results. Since professional activity was the subject of the research of reflection, it helped include mechanisms for transforming existing professional activity: to work with existential phenomena (meanings and values), to create a holistic, multifaceted image of the reality under study, to conduct a psychologically safe (non-assessing) expertise of professional qualities and to use results for professional development;

2) Included observation, necessary for a systematic, purposeful perception of the process of reflection development in undergraduates in the course of applied research;

3) Comparative analysis in the study of documentary sources and phenomenal material (reflective reports, schematic reports, transcripts of events and other materials of undergraduates – participants in the organizational and activity game);

4) Test method of O. S. Anisimov to determine the level of reflection thinking, adapted to study managerial activities. The technique is a questionnaire consisting of eight blocks containing questions on the methods of solving problems and the answers of which the interviewee chooses the preferred ones. The method allows to obtain quantitative data (in conventional units) on the level of reflection expressiveness in activity, and also to determine the manifestation level of personal qualities that to some extent influence the reflection development, and to determine the level of collectivity, leadership, and self-criticism. The reflection level was determined on the basis of the sum of points scored;

5) Method of analyzing the products of activity (content analysis of experimental materials on the reflection of professional thinking of management personnel). The content analysis of the documentary and phenomenal material obtained in the course of the experiment illustrates reflection and its elements in professional activity. The units of analysis were the elements of the process of reflection, namely:

- Fixation of the difficulty in one’s own activities;
- Analysis of ones’ own activities;
- A critical position in relation to one’s own activities;
- Attempt to overcome the difficulty or to find a new standard;
- Self-change in activity.

6) Methods of interview and questionnaires, the use of indirect indicators of the professional’s involvement in activities and its effectiveness. When using these tools, it was taken into account that one of the tasks of reflection diagnostics is not only obtaining quantitative and qualitative indicators, but also creating conditions for the further reflection development in professional activity, and, consequently, the development of personal qualities and the formation of an emotionally valuable attitude to activity.

2.2. Experimental research basis

The experimental basis of the research was Ural State Economic University, particularly the field of state and municipal management. A total of 112 people took part in the study - graduates in specializations ‘Technologies of Public Administration’ and ‘Economic and Social Policy’.

2.3. Stages of research

The study was conducted in 2012-2015 in three stages:

- At the first stage, the theoretical and methodological analysis of the concept of reflection was carried out on the basis of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical studies, the problems and the aim of the study were singled out, its methods were determined;

- At the second stage, a professional module for reflection development was developed within the framework of managerial competencies formation; the method of reflection development was substantiated, suggesting problematization, collective thought activity and discussion, constructed according to the scheme of complex communication; a module for the development of managerial reflection in the groups of undergraduates was implemented;
3. Results

3.1. The concept of reflection

Reflection is a complex integrative quality, conditioned by individual psycho-physiological and personal characteristics, abilities and knowledge. The essence of reflection is the identification of the process of comprehension, reinterpretation and transformation by the subject of the content of consciousness and the forms of one’s own experience, reflecting the events of human life, the tension of problem-conflict situations, and generating an effective attitude of the individual as a holistic self to one’s own behavior, communication, and activity.

Successful performance of any kind of activity is associated with the psychological and physiological characteristics of the individual, with competences developed within a certain profession and mediated by the functions of personal, intellectual, and activity reflection. The more harmoniously are types of reflection in the process of professional activity combined, the more harmonious the person feels in the surrounding world and in their profession. The polyfunctionality of reflection gives it the character of a system-forming factor that determines the result of thinking and activity efficiency, and also determines the level of personal and individual-psychological conformity to the requirements of high professionalism.

The study and understanding of reflection as a method arose almost in conjunction with its fixation as an epistemological phenomenon associated with the activity of thinking and cognition. Reflection as a philosophical method of cognition had come a long way in the history of thought before it became recognized as a methodological category associated with the subject’s thinking activity. References to this property of reflection are found in the works of Kant: ‘Reflection is the comparison of knowledge with the cognitive ability from which it arises; this is the consciousness of relations, of representations with our abilities; reflection involves considering how different views can be encompassed in one mind and how representations arise that are common to several objects’ [Kant, 1994]. In this case, I. Kant closely approaches the formulation of a method that manifests itself in the generalization of similar realities, in the patterns of manifestation of various but similar objects united by one law, one way, one direction of consideration. It is important to note that reflection is the method of such consideration.

In modern science, along with the concept of reflection as an activity of self-knowledge and understanding of something through study and comparison, revealing the specifics of the spiritual world of man, such aspect as reflexive methodology is singled out. It is a form of systematic theoretical activity of a socially developed person, aimed at the creation and comprehension of the social product, its actions and their laws. Of the many prospective trends in the study of reflection as a phenomenon of epistemology, culture, logic, methodology, praxeology, heuristics, management, education, communication, the methodological direction is of greatest interest, since it provides tools for management activity (Lefebvre, 1971). The analysis of the methodological literature on reflection allows to speak about reflexive methodology as a revision of established patterns and stereotypes of the known experience and organization of the creative process, leading to the generation of innovations not only in professional life, but also in life activity in the whole [Schedrovitsky, 1997]. Reflexive methodology has made it possible to identify different types of reflection. Currently, reflection is actively used as a method for solving problems of organizing and conducting interdisciplinary research, for the future development of tools for the integrated study of system design objects, collective thought activity, the processes of rethinking experience, identifying mechanisms for social and cultural integration, etc. [7]. The boundaries of the application of the category of reflection have expanded to general scientific use - it acts as an explanatory principle for both natural and humanitarian sciences [8].

Another important feature of reflection as a scientific phenomenon is its acquisition of the role of a methodological tool in social and human sciences. In this connection, it is important to consider the possibilities of the reflexive method in the theory of learning, and its didactic potential [9].

Understanding the method as a category has traditionally been associated with the ways of achieving some goal, of solving a specific problem, with the totality of methods of cognition of reality. Particularly distinguished here is the philosophical method as a way to build and substantiate a system of philosophical knowledge. O. Anisimov, who gave a historical analysis of the development of the method theory from the dialectic method of Socrates and Plato, the induction of Bacon, the rational method of Descartes, the phenomenological method of Husserl towards methodology, considered reflection as a philosophical method that gave special importance to the works of Hegel, who considered the method as a form of content, and the concept as a means of self-evidence of content, a condition of awareness of the form of internal self-movement [10]. The importance of self-reflection in social processes is noted in the works of foreign authors [11]. We note in this series of studies devoted to the analysis of V. Lefebvre’s works devoted to the psychological aspects of reflection [12].

In practice, the method is often identified with forms and algorithms, so to understand the essence of the method and its difference from specific forms of activity, it is important to understand the way of its formation. O.S. Anisimov states: “Methods are located in the middle level of abstraction of the hierarchy of norms, but not in the lower one, which is in contact with the very construction of actions. Methods are used in solving abstract problems or those that organize a basic process” [13]. Anisimov connects the genesis of the method with the need for mental activity. To isolate the method, activity is subjected to cognition (research, reflection), as a result of which the image of this activity is constructed. With the passage of time, this image, with constant reproduction of activity, begins to repeat itself, but each time it is somewhat different. So, with the repetition of activity, a variety of its repetitions arises, in which it is possible to single out patterns that give grounds for fixing a generalized image of this activity. In the case when a lot of similar activities are investigated, the result is a generalized image of the typical (abstract) activity, and this exactly is the method. A special case of the application of the method under certain conditions is qualified as a technique in the paper present.

3.2. Reflexive bases of management activity

Professional reflection is a way out of professional difficulties, characterized by the impossibility of continuing an activity due to lack of results in it. The way out is the analysis of this difficulty, the critical reconstruction and renormalization of said activity. Knowledge of the reflection mechanism as of a tool for solving the difficulty is a condition for the success of any professional activity, including management.

Reflection influences the formation of motivation and goal-setting in management activities, which means that awareness of one’s motives urges a person to set a certain goal. The goal reflection determines the model of activity and its realization, and the reflection of the difficulties leads to the necessity of fixing the activity results and analyzing individual components, including its subjects, especially one’s own personality. Due to the combination of creativity, high level of internal motivation in professional activity and reflexivity, a person is able to reach the level of creative activity [14]. This means the achievement of professional culmination and the emergence to the level of creative activity can be intensi-
fied by optimizing reflexive thinking leading to reflexive self-organization. Reflection is a methodological means of developing professional experience, and it requires personal inclusion as a special condition, since only meaningful, personally significant activity becomes an experience. The genesis of professional experience corresponds to the process of reflection. An important condition in this case is that the subject of the reflection of professional activity in the search for experience is the subject of activity itself. For the development of managerial thinking, it is important to study the creative process as reflexively self-regulating, which in practice leads the manager to a highly organized professional reflection. To ensure this process in the system of continuous education of management personnel, a reliance on a reflexive method is necessary [15]. The need for the application of the reflexive method is also connected with the basic functions of managerial activity, which traditionally boils down to goal-setting, provision, correction and control of activities. Ensuring the activity of performers with the necessary conditions, means, materials and other resources for the performance of work is the primary function of the manager, following the activity of the performer, and the fulfillment of this function prompts the manager to reflect. The existing norm, or the idea of a result in its original representation, requires comparison with the one obtained in the activity reproduced by the performers. As a result there is a reflexive process of analyzing, comparing the results and the norm, which correlates with the control function in managerial activity. Further there is an inevitable necessity of critically comprehend the results, which generates the function of correction. Thus, primary management functions are already reflexive by nature, as their reproduction is provided by the mechanism of reflection, namely: analysis (control), criticism (correction), rationing (provision) and goal-setting. The reflexivity of basic managerial functions means that their successful implementation is possible only with reflexive management thinking, the formation of which is based on a reflexive method. It should be noted that managerial activity, being reflexive in relation to the performing one, ensures reproduction of activity, obtaining stable results; in other words, it ensures functioning. It is important to note that overcoming professional difficulties in an independent reflexive process determines the quality of management activities and its development. Management reflection providing development of activities and critical consciousness begins to develop at the analysis stage (and this requires theoretical thinking and taking possession of the ability to reflect their performance, which ensures the reliability of obtaining the desired result and responsibility in unpredictable working conditions. In this case, the reflection is aimed at operating with norms, reconstructing the situation and choosing the method of rationing. Reflexive accompaniment of the action with fixation of the problem and tactical correction of the norm. Within the framework of systematic reflection, the need to set a task and determine the sequence of actions can be formed. A prudent approach to the construction of the performing action presupposes the ability not only to understand the content of the norm, but also to shift to a reorganization of the process that has a normative prescription to self-determination in activity.

2) In the modern social system self-analysis, self-control, conscious choice of ways of existence take an increasing place, therefore a person can successfully develop only if they constantly think, experience what is happening to them, and reflects on themselves in the process of building their life and organizing their activities.

3) Reflection is a prerequisite not only for a purposeful change of self, but all aspects of life, including the professional ones. Reflection allows analyzing professional qualities and abilities, as well as stimulating their development, enriching, strengthening. In this regard, reflection should include a holistic process of life, in which the personal and professional are inseparable.

4) Reflection in the phase of critical reconstruction of human actions implies doubts about oneself, one’s position, capabilities, but this should not provoke passivity, inaction, lack of faith in success, but on the contrary encourage activity in overcoming oneself and circumstances, in finding and realizing ways of self-affirmation.

5) The formation of reflexive thinking. For a civil servant at this level, an understanding of an externally fixed norm (laws, regulations, instructions) and the ability to execute it is characteristic. Here, it is possible to separate functions or co-operate in activities for greater efficiency.

6) Successful fulfillment of a fixed norm in reflection. At this level of professional activity, the ability is acquired to perform any situationally specified norm in the standard process and within the permissible amount of time without unreasonable stress.

7) Reflexive fulfillment of a fixed norm. At the third level of professional activity, the manager successfully implements a fixed rate by choosing from an admissible set of norms and takes possession of the ability to reflect their performance, which ensures the reliability of obtaining the desired result and responsibility in unpredictable working conditions. In this case, the reflection is aimed at operating with norms, reconstructing the situation and choosing the method of rationing.

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rial activity, and includes a social need for activity, goal-setting, the construction of an activity mode, its implementation and control adjustment. With the transition from goal-setting to organizational-managerial stage, the professional meets with management problems and organizational problems in communication. Personal reflection is required, without which the withdrawals from the professional environment, conflicts, individual and group tension increase.

9) System formation in the reflexive link of professional activity. The expansion of the volume and complexity of the reflection material in management activity urges the subject to isolate individual reflexive processes, to design them into reflexive actions. This turns reflection into a system of thinking activity, which makes it possible to single out the subject, to build a strategy, to conduct a critical analysis. At this level of reflection, personal and professional development takes place associated with the change in the conceptual value system, socio-cultural norms of cooperation, and the innovative and creative potential is actualized.

In managerial activity, professional reflection is manifested in management situations not only by processes, but also by relationships, which requires the formation of such kind of reflection as the personal one. Management is carried out through the interaction of people who have their own individual characteristics which they bring to work, so the leader must take into account the laws that determine the dynamics of mental processes, interpersonal relationships and group behavior. In these cases, the personal potential of the manager is mobilized, namely determination, strong will, self-confidence, purposefulness, emotional-volitional stability, extravertedness, the ability to be even and maintain relations with all, to extract and analyze information, to predict, to accept non-standard solutions, etc. At the stages of analysis, decision-making, adjustment and results evaluation the action requires a reflexive awareness.

Thus, reflection can be defined as a major factor in professional development, manifested in the ability of the subject to constant personal and professional self-improvement, to creative growth on the basis of psychological mechanisms of self-analysis and self-regulation. This is especially important for the sphere of managerial activity built on the type of ‘man to man’, having an unregulated nature and requiring increased reflection in the knowledge of the person themselves and a heightened sense of responsibility for another person.

The necessity of mastering professional reflection as a cultural mechanism of activity and thinking is one of the urgent needs of modern management activity. Reflection as an element and condition of professional competence, as a mechanism for analyzing experience, as a component of the structure of professional abilities is an acmeological condition for professional development. It influences the development of the individual and professional self-awareness, self-actualization and self-realization, the disclosure of creative potential necessary to achieve acme, provides personal, creative, professional and social growth.

In the experimental part of the research a professional module was designed aimed at developing reflection in the undergraduates of the field ‘State and Municipal Management’ in ‘Technologies of Public Administration’. The volume of the module corresponded to 1 unit, divided into four blocks and was implemented in the form of an organizational activity game. The content of the module was devoted analyzing the problem of developing the competencies of a civil servant. Each block of the professional module contained a problematic report, collective thought activity, a discussion organized according to the scheme of complex communication, and group reflection of the event. In determining the level of reflection of undergraduates O. Anisimov’s method was used, adapted to the learning conditions, special attention was paid to the accounting of subject (activity) experience and life experience of undergraduates, their actual personal-professional inquiries, their actual personal and professional inquiries, their ability to think openly and refuse dogmas, the level of motivation that was important for achieving a professionally significant goal and development of creativity was taken into account, the inclusion of personal functions in the process of professional activity was analyzed: autonomy, responsibility, independence, etc., and the capacity for collective thinking and cooperation, important for the design and team forms of activity.

The results of the research showed that only 7% of undergraduates have developed reflexive thinking at the level of self-organization. Reaching such level of reflection gives an opportunity to harmoniously combine external and internal circumstances, act independently, analyze the causes of failure, and identify everyday and professional prospects for development. In this case, the personal-professional development is provided with a continuous process through which the personality is able to manage events, be open to new knowledge and ready to absorb it, analyze and determine prospects, build positive interpersonal relationships. Thus, the mechanism of reflection is a methodological tool for the development of activities, including the entire spectrum of transition to higher performance results: an analysis of the perfect activity, its reconstruction based on a critical rethinking of the personal foundations of activity and reaching a new norm (a new peak) in personal and professional development. They enable to design innovative technologies that involve the development of abilities to analyze personal and professional experience and independently find new knowledge, acquire meanings and values of life, and thus respond to the challenge of time and form new approaches to management.

4. Discussions

Considering the mechanisms of reflection, points to its ontological status and notes its importance for professional activity, including personnel management. Reflection ensures the realization of the function of beingness, when the subject of managerial activity evaluates the results of their professional activity through the prism of meaning and social significance. Discussing the problems of developing thinking in the civil service. Pointed out the need for a professional to have methodological reflection that could generate innovative content. Describing the process of implementing reflexive and innovative technologies in activities, he noted: ‘Reflection, generally, is rethinking. Creating a reflexive environment allows one to model special conditions unique to the subject in which their personal and intellectual experience not only proves insufficient, but also serves as a kind of obstacle (and not only a means) to achieving their goal. At the same time, problematic is revealed as an intellectual contradiction that is actualized in the form of a clash of knowledge and skills with those special innovative conditions where the subject realizes the modes of action available to them … Overcoming this contradiction acts as discovering the innovation and simultaneously as a personal and intellectual development, expressed in the active self-adjustment of the personality, the reorganization of thinking’. This statement means reflection is a reinterpretation of personal stereotypes. With this method of resolving a conflict situation, the experience of conflict is not suppressed or ignored, but exacerbated. The desire to solve the problem is expressed in the comprehension of the situation as vital, a mobilization of the resources of one’s own self to achieve the goal takes place. This serves as a prerequisite for predicting and creating innovation, a common productive mode of action that is realized in the form of intellectual reflection. The conclusion of V.A. Slastenin, who studied professional pedagogical activity, is interpreted for the development of professional reflection of civil servants within their management activities.

5. Conclusion

It was established that the level of reflexive self-organization in professional activity (involving the reconstruction of activity in the face of difficulties and the emergence of a new norm through the process of analysis and critical attitude towards oneself) is
characteristic only for 7% of subjects of management activity. The rest prefer simpler reflexive outputs, consisting in implementation of an externally imposed norm, less often in posing the problem and solving it. The materials of this article can be useful to personnel managers of organizations, enterprises and governmental bodies, as well as to teachers for designing the training courses which set the task of developing the reflexive thinking of personnel management. During the research, new questions arose in the design of high-tech educational practices aimed at developing reflexive thinking.

6. Recommendations

The materials of this study are significant for the training of undergraduates and the upgrading of personnel management skills, since they contain the methodology for designing a professional module for reflection development. The paper contains a detailed account of the content and reveals the stages of organizational and activity games, which can be useful for teachers to master high-tech forms of professional pedagogical activity. The results of the study can also be recommended for the work of human resources services in assessing the professionalism of managing personnel.

References