



## Societal Determination of Professional Identity in Russian Society

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### Abstract

The aim of the article is to study the integrative and disintegrative nature of professional identity under institutional changes in Russian society. The methodological base of the research involves concepts of “societal effect” and “precarization”, which bring professional identity analysis from the level of professional identification, social and group interaction in professional circle to the level of macro-social analysis. In societies with established labor culture and values of professional excellence, with a stable status configuration in professional groups, professional identity is a priority to the social well-being. Vague criteria of stratification, unstable labor relations, “off-the-books” exercise of profession and other manifestations of crisis in economic and social development in modern Russia deform professional identity and decrease its potential integration.

The practical relevance of the research consists in secondary analysis of Russian empirical studies that allow to diagnose professional identity under Russian precarization at the macro level. The paper provides a conclusion that professional identity among Russian working class becomes diffuse, unstable, with reducing impact of incentives providing its dynamism – mindset on professional activity, professional growth, acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Deprofessionalisation; Integration; Precarization of labor relations; Professional identity; Societal effect

### Introduction

The precarization of labor relations in the world negatively affected modern conditions of Russian society development. Precarized work associated with uncertainty and insecurity in socio-economic relations, unhealthy competition, flexibility of labor relations, different social classes of workers etc. deforms professional identity and decreases its potential

integration. The purpose of this article is to study the integrative and disintegrative nature of professional identity under institutional changes in Russian society.

In the social sciences, professional identity is most often considered at the level of professional identification, social and group interaction in professional circle. At the same time, professional identity has a macro-social determination, which is especially important in the context of deforming social and labor relations in the modern world. In stable economic (balanced labor market, fixed labor rights, long-term guarantee) and social (strong system of values and social relations) conditions, professional identity performs integrative functions with respect to the entire social system, developing current social structure and patterns of socio-labor relationship. In turn, the dynamic changes of social class within professional groups, in the principles of work organization directly affect the living circumstances of workers, their identity and social behavior patterns. This entails societal transformation, which can destabilize the social system under certain conditions.

Therefore, the relevance of the topic is determined by deformation trends of social and labor relations in the world and their edgy occurrence in modern Russian society. Russia has recently experienced a break-up of social structure and social stratification systems that form the basis of societal reproduction. These macro-social changes are accompanied by a destruction of previously established principles of social and labor relations, reasons for profession’s stature and mechanisms of professional identity formation. According to Zaslavskaya, member of the Academy of Sciences, there occurred a degradation of the institutional system in post-Soviet Russia, as well as the imbalance of social structure [1], which led to a long-term disintegration effect in society that has not been overcome to date. Series of economic crises of 2008-2009 and 2014-2015 in Russia even more deepened the social contradictions in society. Therefore, it is urgent to preserve the societal integrity and stability of society, strengthen solidarity backgrounds and relations. The article provides an attempt to study the societal functions of professional identity under crisis of social and labor relations in Russian society.

## Conceptual Outline

### Professional identity in the context of socio-historical development of society

The nature of professional identity, including personal visions of objectives and motives of professional activity and self-knowledge, depends on social, historical and sociocultural context. The phenomenon of social identity with a particular community or group of people, in fact, occurs in destruction of life hoods, where the need for self-determination in the system of social relationships is not revealed and where there is a natural division of labor. Formation of industrial societies radically transforms the living circumstances and identifies the need for correlation of the individual with a new multi-class and dynamic social structure and with new organizational forms of labor relations.

In this regard, some researchers distinguish the concepts of professional identity and labor identity, while the latter is determined by personal relatedness to a particular historical form of labor. This idea can be developed and we could argue that labor identity is correlated with the class structure in industrial society. The classes, unlike the social "stratums", display the unequal access to power resources and economic power (capital). In these circumstances, personality visions about his or her role in industrial relations, his or her place in society and the system of social relations are determined by the labor the person occupies (mechanical work, assembly line, automated production) and how his or her work is rewarded.

On the other hand, professional identity rises in the post-industrial society, when rigid social structure with a stable configuration of main social classes in society is replaced by the mobile socio-professional system of social stratification. In terms of numerical domination of middle class in developed societies, social structure differentiation shifts to values and lifestyles, as well as to substantive nature of work determined by professional's background.

In the advanced stage of industrial development, there are dominating corporate or organizational identity [2] – an employee connects his or her professional fate with service, usually in a large corporation (full-time wage labor). This nature of professional identity is associated with a particular type of social fair trade with the organization and its interests in the center. Institutional loyalty is rewarded by "corporate paternalism". Most often, the achievement of uniform corporate standards means hackwork. This corresponds to the model of continuous production.

In post-industrial society, employment structure and nature of labor relations are fundamentally changing. The important factor remains to be not only the name of employer, but also the kind of labor, which is becoming more qualified. The individualization and customization of labor relations step forward the hackwork and corporatism, reflecting in professional identity. With the development of Internet, wireless communications equipment, cloud services etc. the

principles of business and labor organizations are changing radically. At present, millions of American and European citizens "refuse one of the long-term results of industrial revolution – permanent jobs – and create new forms of employment. They become independent white collar workers, home-based businessmen (...) freelancers and "e-Lancers", independent contractors and professionals ... » [3].

Scientists conceptualize the new type of employment through the concept of free agents (Pink) or network employees [4] with a specific professional identity not matching the specific labor organization and even with particular area of professional activity. Russian theorists distinguish a number of identity features inherent in post-industrial workers, which include creativity, professionalism, self-dependence, creativity etc.

We should also point out a group of theories that cover a numerous class of people without any permanent job and a stable workplace. This group, named as precariat, has an unsatisfactory level of social and legal protection [5,6]. In ever increasing frequency this category covers people with a relatively high level of education that are forced to accept jobs below their qualifications by status or income. In addition, precariat can present itself in society as a group of people voluntarily refused professional activity since it is not a value for them. Hardt and Negri write that on the post-industrial stage of social development precarization affects not only the world of work, but also the entire system of social relations, changing the traditional structure of society in developed and developing countries [7]. Thus, precariat is inherent insecurity of employment, income instability, uncertainty about the future and the lack of long-life strategies that problematize professional development in the context of creative and socially useful activity.

Hence, we can argue that the professional identity and its function in society are transformed in social and labor relations' development, the nature of which is determined by the dominant production model (Taylorist/Fordist system, "ideology of the new global capitalism") and by the type of social life organization (industrial, post-industrial/ information/ mass society).

## Societal Effects of Professional Identity

In modern literature, the concept of "societal effect" is most often used to describe the processes, structures and mechanisms that ensure society integration and integrity at the macro level. According to N.I. Lapin, societal sphere provides "the balanced satisfaction of agents' conflicting needs, values and interests of the system" [8]. In terms of socio-economic inequality and socio-cultural development of society, societal processes carry out the dynamic balance in society.

Lokvuda and Giddensa have formulated conceptual ideas, according to which societal integrity of society is on two levels of integration – at the level of institutional structures and at

the level of intergroup and interpersonal interactions [9,10]. In addition, Giddens refers to different mechanisms of institutional integration formation – Parsons idea of self-regulating systems and conceptualized statement on purpose-based regulation of societal spheres. In this context, professional identity can be considered as both the mechanism and the result of socio-professional structure formation and reproduction. The social system stability in terms of maintaining a balanced socio-professional structure requires efforts aimed at social fair trade formation, increasing value of skilled labor, models' promotion of social success in professional career. It is also important to present a model of professionalism in specific industries and occupations. Therefore, one can say that socio-professional structure development and its set of values, behavior patterns and identity matrices, provide the organizational integration of society.

Professional identity is socially constructed in nature; it refers to societality and compete in priority for an individual with a primordial identification systems. The intensity of professional identity depends on status marker disposition, prestige, profession advantages in paying and personality off base. In societies with established labor culture and values of professional excellence, with a stable status configuration in professional groups, professional identity is a priority to social well-being. Vague criteria of stratification, unstable labor relations, "off-the-books" exercise of profession and other manifestations of crisis in economic and social development in modern Russia deform professional identity and decrease its potential integration.

## Professional Identity in Post-Soviet Russia: Resource of Market Economy or Sense Feathering

In modern Russian society, there was a loss of traditional labor identity, which has been associated with allegiance to particular social class of Soviet society, characterized by productive skills and abilities, employment in the primary social and labor sphere. The social structure restructuring caused the downward mobility of entire socio-professional "stratums" (teachers, doctors, scientists – middle class). This caused a crisis of professional identity among these groups. The Soviet type identification structures with clearly defined intersections of personal and group interests were displaced by new structures of group solidarity, which are characterized by instability, ambivalence, different meaning of social entity.

In the post-Perestroika Russia, there was a so-called "Revolution of claims" associated with indicators' shift if social fulfillment from awareness of sweat equity and labor motivation to high incomes, social independence and prestige (particularly among the young) [11]. Public professionalism values are no longer social resource. In terms of property and social inequality, wage level serves as the main indicator of professional status. Changing manner of labor behavior regulation was largely due to market orientations added in post-Soviet system of values – desire to earn well and to be

well settled in life. This nature of professional identity can be defined as "market".

Focusing on a new "market" professional identity is associated now with active adaptation strategies, the desire to have a concurrent professional mobility. Research on orientations of modern young Russians indicates that a special value for them is the opportunity to do their thing (achieving this objective desire almost 98% of respondents) [12]. At the same time, 76% of respondents expects to achieve success in life and material sufficiency [12]. It can be assumed that the favorite thing includes the possibility of success in life, which correlates with the choice of "market" professions by young people (lawyers, financiers, economists). In the course of professional self-determination, the vast majority of Russians of all generations paid the most attention to the wage level (85%) [13]. If social reality reveals an incompatibility with projective orientations and expectations, there are self-protection mechanisms set in motion, as well as mechanisms of active adaptation, focus on good earnings, regardless of the feeling of professionalism and professional.

Thus, the identity as allegiance to a certain socio-professional group is shifted to indicate demonstrative effect of power, wealth and prestige. Under these conditions, satisfaction of profession is often not correlated with work satisfaction. A hackwork that takes all the fun out of professional activity is balanced by corporate leisure, communication with colleagues, mainstream in "fashionable" social initiatives. From this point of view, professional identity becomes possible as a corporate societality, regulated system of mutual social commitment subordination, voluntary discipline. Professional identity is formed mainly by borrowing, transfer of foreign corporate patterns and standards. In the first turn, from business structures with high reputational capital. Wherein, a person understands the approved patterns adapted to particular professional environment as a way of structuring own actions.

Russian sociologists note that the survival problem, raised in a deep crisis, immediately provides the lower informal level of adaptation to market requirements. There are formed employment strategies driving the informal networks, exchange transactions involving the rejection of qualification. In this regard, it must be noted that, despite the new professional identity in innovative sectors of economy, there is a decline in employment associated with intellectual highly qualified activity conflicting with the idea of "permanent modernization" of Russian society.

At the same time, many important socio-professional groups (teachers, doctors, scientists-middle class) have lost the value and point of group solidarity, ending in the zone of negative professional identity for a long time. In particular, the Russian scientists determine engineering workforce depletion, deceased orientations on public service, the weakening commitment to professional ethics, the lack of perception of one's own professional group as the reference group [14]. Although it is now possible to capture the trend of gradual increase of the social status of teachers, military personnel, doctors in the Russian society, the labor collective has not

become for many Russians a space to realize social ambitions and a sense of affiliation. Moreover, allegiance to a certain socio-professional group is not associated with the group commitment, with group call.

As a result, personal professional identity and determination of group solidarity configuration transforms professionalism into ground of success, career and money. On the one hand, competitiveness and corporativity of the new professional identity promote market values' reproduction in Russian society. On the other hand, establishment of professional identity as demonstrative, containing possibilities of social redefinition may indicate ambivalence of professional identity, its trend to traditional labor values, criteria of professional skills, standards of socio-professional relationships. Professional identity of major Russians can be characterized as unstable with orientations on self-sufficiency and independence, and at the same time, with low potential of social activity.

## Precarization of Labor Relations in Modern Russia and Professional Identity

Precarization of social and labor relations is a world problem. According to OECD experts, more than half of the economically active population of the world, that is 1.8 billion people, is working without contracts and without social and labor guarantees [15]. Currently in Germany, about a fifth of all employees are working in precariousness; in France, the Netherlands and Greece - about a quarter of working population (according to 2010) [16]. The materialization of uncertainty, unpredictability and risk characterize American labor in a greater extent [17]. Employment structure deformation was in Japan, South Korea, where under unstable employment conditions work from 40% to 50% of employees [5,18].

Many researchers have noted that in modern Russian, there is precarization of labor relations- large groups of employees, constantly in episodic job, involved in shadow markets and have disadvantaged social status [19-21]. Series of economic crises (2008-2009, 2014-2015) have unbalanced relationships between employees and employers, which entailed job cuts (8.1 million jobs from 1991 to 2015) [12]<sup>1</sup>, worsen situation in compliance with social and labor rights, increasing workload without any increase of wages. Only about a third of the working population of Russia see the situation as good [22]. Especially negative effect this trend had on qualified young people in large cities [20].

Precarization of labor relations along with the instability and deprofessionalization creates new risks of social inequalities

[23]. On the one hand, one can witness formation of the professional elite, demonstrating that they are The Chosen One by society. On the other hand, there are people doing just something, whose professional identity is not a worthwhile goal due to the permanent search for changing forms of activity, which is an unreliability risk. In addition, the question of their mortal living would naturally arise...<sup>2</sup> However, not only low-skilled workers are in non-guaranteed employment area, but also a lot of professionals and people with high levels of education. In favorable socio-economic conditions, professional skills are guarantee of professional status, as well as accurate portrayal of a professional, demand for competencies and skills. However, the risk of becoming unemployed creates the phenomena of fluctuating unemployment or involuntary unemployment entailing deprofessionalisation of a person, his or her demoralization<sup>3</sup>.

The youth integration (especially university graduates) in Russian society occurs not in a professional differentiation manner or internalized professional standards. Therefore, the youth consider professional identity not to contain specific ways for societality. The majority of young people, who face precarization, are forced to act independently – they do not form a stable professional group focusing on their own capabilities, which are usually limited and based on desire for any job.

In this context, the prospects of professional identity to reach the level of metamotivation can be criticized (by Parsons's terminology) [24]. Apparently, it more likely that motives are under aggregation, because, according to sociological studies, Russians consider professional identity as an instrumental resource in comparison to other types of group identities. They are not focused on the recognition of professional identity as the main form of self-determination. The majority of the population identify primordial groups of everyday communication as their priority (family, friends, community), whereby there is a hierarchy of personal interests [12].

Eventually, in terms of 30-40% of fluctuating unemployment [19], it is difficult to expect the reference of professional identity. In this situation, not the personality identification in professional community is prior, but the awareness of relative social deprivation and competition in the access to material values. Behavioral patterns are associated mostly with balance disadvantage of social risks, especially with the threat of downward social mobility. In this respect, there is a risk of disintegration on a group level, as well as the negative identity in the form of self-protection, self-help does not require social bounds, collective self-determination at the professional level, except for social commitment. In a society at the grassroots level is reduced willingness to connect not only to the

<sup>1</sup> Dynamics of the overall decline in employment in Russian economy – from 73,8 million jobs in 1991 to 64,7 million jobs in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "...when we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause..."

<sup>3</sup> They are taken depression, have breaking mind and morals ..., thereby they are left to wander the desert only with a kettle.

universal social order, but also to the particular normative defined by the specific field of professional activity.

## Conclusion

We consider the problem of professional identity in modern Russia in the macro-social context of sustainability in socio-economic development, social inequalities' elimination, assessment of prospects of Russian middle class. Therefore, the scientific value of the study is in the substantiation of societal effect of positive professional identity among general population – professional identity introduction in the structure of dispositional personality orientations and intensification of professional socialization increases integrative potential of society and opens the door to its permanent modernization.

The practical relevance of the research consists in secondary analysis of Russian empirical studies that allow to diagnose professional identity in the context of Russian precarization. We concluded that in changing social and labor relations and in changing criteria for symbolic indication in the post-Soviet Russia, professional identity becomes with reducing impact of incentives providing its dynamism – mindset on professional activity, professional growth, acquisition of new skills and knowledge. We have to admit that, despite new identities in innovative sectors of economy, professional identification matrix does not acquire a universal character, but it is deformed under precarization and decreased attractiveness of professionalism.

Thus, we can conclude that the professional identity in Russian society is not a meta-motivation, a strong socially balancing and socio-orienting form of self-determination, which carries reproductive and stabilizing function in society. Moreover, it is necessary to pay close attention to the potential of social tensions and dysfunctional effects associated with large differences in carrying out professional roles and depressing professional identity. This is the reason why the research team develop empirical research aimed at studying the strategy-making experience for professional fulfillment in correlation with settlement types and urban saturation, socio-economic and socio-cultural stratifies in the region, as well as with professional area (education, business, public service, law enforcement agencies). Such an analysis will allow comprehensively evaluating the constitutive and destructive effects of professional identity under institutional changes in the world of work and precarization of Russian society.

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