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## Socio-Cultural and Value Paradigms of Public Civil Servants in Russia



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**Abstract.** In the modern Russian society, there is a contradiction between the goals and objectives of civil service, its social relevance and applied nature, on the one hand, and the growing dissatisfaction of the population on the other hand. The article describes and analyzes the socio-cultural and value paradigms of civil servants in the Russian Federation, which define the characteristics of their activities. The authors emphasize the importance of a motivational resource such as socio-cultural and value paradigms in the process of reforming the modern institution of civil service. The research results revealed a number of problems. A significant part of the structure of life goals of civil servants is occupied by material interests; according to the respondents' estimates, the activities they do are not related to the categories of "favorite activity", "interesting job". Some government employees consider "service to the Fatherland", "useful contribution to the society and the state" as the main purpose for their professional activity. The research confirmed the hypothesis that the efficiency and effectiveness of occupational work of civil servants depends not only on motivational factors but also on life experience, moral principles, understanding

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of one's role in the process of implementing the state policy and life strategy. The routine nature of work does not live up to employees' expectations evening political activities and state administration. Bureaucratic values, lack of interaction with the external environment, authoritarian management style, and rigid subordination affect the employee's identity and behavior. Government employees due to personal characteristics and character specifics, assessing themselves and their experience higher at the career ladder, either search for a new position themselves, a different kind of activity to meet their life strategy, or stop developing professionally. Socio-cultural and value paradigms of government employees vary according to the category and group of positions. We also confirmed the hypothesis concerning the category "experts" of leading and senior groups of positions that public service is considered by employees and citizens not as a value-regulatory complex providing interaction between the state and the society in order to meet the interests of the latter, but as a mechanism for achieving financial success.

**Key words:** civil service, value paradigms of public civil servants, life strategies of a civil servant, image of public service, career.

**Introduction.** Civil service in modern Russia is an institution of administrative power reflecting the milestones in the history of the Russian statehood formation, constantly reformed in order to optimize and fight corruption.

According to Federal Law No. 58-FZ "On the system of civil service in the Russian Federation", dated 27.05.2003, state civil service is "a type of civil service representing professional civil activity of citizens occupying positions of state civil service in order to provide the execution of powers of federal state bodies, state bodies of constituent entities of the Russian Federation, people occupying substituting state positions in Russia and people occupying substituting state positions in constituent entities of the Russian Federation"<sup>1</sup>.

In the broadest sense, state and municipal service is understood as a type of professional activity of citizens implementing the objectives and functions of state and municipal authorities. Civil service provides the implementation of

state functions and powers. Civil service as a political institution performs the following functions: protection of the state's political system; creation of conditions for strengthening the relations between the state and the citizens, public associations; overcoming alienation of power from the citizens; building effective interaction of political elites and civil servants, etc. Civil service as a social institution performs functions of control over the realization of citizens' interests; promotion and protection of their rights and freedoms; organization and provision of state social services; regulation of the social status of civil servants, etc. The effectiveness of implementation of objectives set for the institution of civil service depends on the citizens' assessment of work performed by government bodies, the satisfaction of the society with the work of the system of public and municipal administration [1], the stability of the political system, citizens' interaction with the current government, which together determine the socio-economic well-being of the population.

In recent decades, there have been discussions about the crisis of civil service legitimacy, reducing citizens' trust in it and its

<sup>1</sup> Article 5 of Federal Law No. 58-FZ "On the system of civil service of the Russian Federation", dated May 27, 2003. Available at: [http://base.garant.ru/185886/1/#block\\_100](http://base.garant.ru/185886/1/#block_100) (Accessed: 5.05.2016).

system, inability of the administrative system to respond to challenges of today and especially tomorrow. According to sociological surveys, in some countries the number of people who consider the amount of taxes they pay proportionate to what they receive from the state is declining, and, conversely, the share of those who believe that the state waste taxpayers' money is increasing. It is recognized that the existing systems of administration "proved completely inadequate for addressing both political and administrative objectives" [2, p. 233]. The reduction in corruption, the development of pluralism in public administration, and the focus on citizens' needs are the most important areas of modernization of the civil service in modern conditions [3]. "The most significant constraints for the country's socio-economic and political development are the ethical erosion of civil service, challenges in succession planning, and lack of competent leadership" [4]. Public services must meet the needs of the population and basic citizens' requirements [5].

Over the past decade, research works on preparation, training, career, construction of organizational culture [6; 7], and direct professional activity of civil servants [8; 9; 10] became particularly relevant. The development of a stable employer brand by civil service bodies is seen as an opportunity to attract and retain young professionals [11]. We stress the need to reform the bureaucratic system of public administration through using a competency-based approach to civil service [9].

The study and formation of the socio-cultural and value paradigms of civil servants is one of the topical areas of the scientific discourse. The complex of ethical and legal mechanisms is considered one of the most effective ways of overcoming the obviously unsatisfactory situation in this sphere of social

life in modern conditions [12]. A number of scholars investigated the issue of formation of value paradigms of civil servants using an aspect-oriented approach [13; 14], others used the psychological-acmeological approach [15; 16].

In the framework of establishing a new model of civil service in Russia we should emphasize a special role of a motivational resource [17] such as socio-cultural and value paradigms. In a number of research works these concepts are treated as identical. However, the authors distinguish the key elements of their content the following way. The value paradigms of civil servants include the reflection of values, moral ideals, moral convictions and ethical principles formed during the socialization process. The socio-cultural paradigms of civil servants largely characterize their social expectations, standards, life strategies defined by their lifestyle, social status, and membership in a particular socio-professional group.

#### **Method**

*The purpose for the study* is to identify and analyze the major socio-cultural and value paradigms of civil servants.

*The empirical framework includes the results of the following sociological research:*

1. Sociological research "Development of social, cultural and moral values of state civil service" for 2013–2014 (R1). The research involved citizens who participated in competitive selection for civil service positions in the Government of the Moscow Oblast (N=365), as well as those occupying state civil service positions in the Government of the Moscow Oblast (N=130). The payroll-based probability sampling method is used.

2. Sociological research "Building a positive image of civil service" (R2). Single-stage sampling is used: 97 civil servants of the Central Office of the State Duma of the

Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 42 – of the Beskudnikovo Council of Northern Administrative Okrug of Moscow, 30 – of the Lyublino Council of Moscow, 89 – of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation, 38 – of the Prefecture of South-Western Administrative Okrug of Moscow, 58 – of the Department of Education of Moscow (N=354), 73 state and municipal management students from Russian State Social University. The study was conducted from October 2014 to April 2015.

3. Sociological snapshot surveys of state and municipal management graduates from Russian State Social University through distribution of questionnaires on the Internet (R3). The survey included graduates from 2008, 2009, 2014 and 2015 (N=103). Among the graduates were selected those who work or worked in civil service. The survey did not take into account the tenure of civil service at the moment.

We also used research results from VTsIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) and FOM (Public Opinion Foundation).

#### **Research results.**

*Life strategies of civil servants.* Today, due to the personnel policy pursued by the government over the past 10–15 years, citizens who have extensive experience in commerce pursue civil service. “The statement that to increase the efficiency of civil service and successfully fight corruption in public organizations people should work with special motivation, is considered axiomatic” [18]. The most important incentives are the stability of civil service amid economic crisis (68% of respondents applying for the senior group of positions) and the opportunity to benefit the society and the state (47% of respondents pursuing leading and main groups of positions). However, only 34% of respondents

chose the variant “working peacefully until I retire” (R1, N=365).

An important issue is how civil servants and citizens participating in competitive selection for civil service positions see themselves, their contribution and their place in the state. As shown by the research results (R1), almost half of respondents think that they deserve more than they have at the moment. During the working process there is a contradiction between the citizen’s life strategies, their position in the society and their current service occupation. After two or three years of work the labor efficiency of a service employee begins to decline, their interest in professional activity subsides. Forty-eight percent of respondents claimed “I would like to change my current position more frequently within career development”, and 35% – believe that their “personal and professional experience and knowledge exceed their job functions”. It is probable that personnel reshuffling within modern civil service do not reflect the real needs of the employees; more efficient work with personnel reserve would improve labor performance of the entire state system. According to the results of assessment, 1/3 of the employees undergoing the procedure shall be enrolled in the personnel reserve, while only less than 5% of candidates get the real promotion during the next 1–3 years. The practice of carrying out personnel-related activities for the development of the potential of civil service candidates is not widespread. Civil servants due to their personal characteristics and specific characteristic features of those considering themselves and their experience above their current position try to either search for a new job satisfying their life strategies or stop developing professionally; it becomes difficult to motivate them to effective action (R1, N=130).

The algorithm of life strategies of civil servants depends both on their personal potential and self-esteem and on socio-cultural paradigms, spiritual and moral development. In many surveys civil servants of leading and main groups note that the main purpose for professional activities is “to benefit the society and the state”, “to serve the Fatherland”, “to solve important public issues”, “patriotism”, etc. Forty-eight percent of respondents mark the priority of patriotic values, 36% – sustainable social situation, 29% – material well-being (R2, N=354). These indicators conclude that for them, there is no direct dependence of labor productivity from incentive payments; the performance is significantly affected by life experience and life strategies.

*The values and personality characteristics of modern Russian civil servants.*

Modern civil service in Russia is a prestigious job with a closed recruitment system despite the declared principles of transparency and citizens’ equal access to it. Despite government actions and implemented personnel selection information technology, the gap between the state and the society remains significant. The study of moral contradictions of the society and state authorities remains relevant: creation of unified standards and ideals, overcoming citizens’ moral degradation, implementation of moral and ethical principles in everyday life. The studies show that professional culture of civil servants is focused on bureaucratic values since there is no open interaction with the external environment; authoritarian management style is used, rigid subordination takes place. It affects the personality of civil servants, their behavior and manner of interaction. Thirty-five per cent of respondents believe that government employees are a special category of citizens with a specific style and external features of behavior (R3).

Many state and municipal management graduates after receiving higher education venture into civil service, but only 5–10 % stay in office after 3 years. This is due to a number of reasons: inflated expectations in the level of material security and its compliance with labor efforts (76%); excessive bureaucracy and red tape (72%); specific features of corporate culture of public authorities (25%); psychological problems within the team (18%).

During the survey of civil servants (R1, N=354) 31% of respondents said that in the early years of working in civil service they experienced certain socio-psychological discomfort due to changes in perception and submission of information, demeanor and interaction with colleagues.

According to the results of the VTsIOM survey, civil servants are characterized by certain limits in the system of values defining possible behavior parameters in order to achieve success. Only 38% of respondents gave an affirmative answer to the question: “Do you personally agree with the following opinion: in order to succeed in our days, one has to break all the rules?”

Contrary to the stereotypes about a great significance of personal contacts for career in civil service, the survey results indicate the opposite and illustrate the role of factors such as personal motivation and professionalism. Civil servants, choosing significant factors of success in life, prioritize financial resources (31%) and education (25%). The role of personal motivation was stressed by 31% of respondents: “desire and determination” (19%), “purpose in life” (12%)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> VTsIOM sociological database. Available at: [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=894&q\\_id=62143&date=17.02.2013](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=894&q_id=62143&date=17.02.2013) (Accessed: 12.07.2014).

In the system of socio-cultural values, the most important are characteristics of individual's life goals. The respondents were asked a question: "What would you like to achieve in your life?"; a number of options was offered to them in order to assess their significance. Considering the option "doing business", only a third of civil servants feel that they "already achieved what they wanted", but each fourth said they did not set such a life purpose<sup>3</sup>. Another option of a life purpose was "having an interesting job". Considering the categories of respondents who felt they have already achieved their goal include businessmen and entrepreneurs – the majority (74%) consider their work interesting. Similar results are typical for professionals with higher education. The results obtained for the group of civil servants (46%) are only identical to the category of low-skilled workers. Thus, each fifth civil servant is pessimistic considering that hardly ever will they be able to achieve their life goals; 12% claim they did not set the goal to have an interesting job, this share is 2 times higher than the average (this answer was chosen by only 6% of all respondents). Becoming wealthy is the goal for a half of respondents, while 25% of them think that it is unlikely, and 25% said "they have not yet achieved it, but it is likely"<sup>4</sup>. More than one third of respondents do not set such life goals. Of course, achieving material well-being is a justified living strategy of any human; however, we are not talking about the parameters of a middle-class life, but about a very high level of life – "becoming a rich person". Thus, civil service is seen as a mechanism for achieving financial success; the

structure of needs of government officials is dominated by material values. It is interesting that "becoming famous" is not included in the life plans of the vast majority of respondents (69%), the share of government officials seeking wide public recognition is much higher. Only each second civil servant claims his life plan is not related to "becoming famous"<sup>5</sup>.

*Democratic principles in the system of value orientations.* Analysis of value paradigms revealed imbalances in the perception of democratic values. The respondents were asked a question: "What in your opinion is "democracy"?" The responses of state and municipal government officials differed from other socio-professional groups surveyed by VTsIOM in rather negative attitudes. The answer such as "freedom of speech, press, religion" was chosen by 47% of respondents in general and by only 22% of civil servants. Democracy is described as "economic prosperity" by each fourth respondent (24%) and by only each tenth government official. The survey results indicate that public authorities do not yet realize the "need" to develop democratic processes as they are not associated with positive trends in the minds of civil servants. According to the survey, it is possible to assume there is a contradiction between citizens' democratic demands and authoritarian trends in civil service due to specific features of value paradigms of its employees. Thus, the negative perception of democracy is characteristic of civil servants rather than of the general population. The answer "idle talk" was chosen by 22% of public servants, which is 14 p.p. above the average. The answer "anarchy and power vacuum" was chosen 10 times more often by government employees than by the respondents in general:

<sup>3</sup> VTsIOM sociological database. Available at: [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=925&q\\_id=63927&date=01.09.2013](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=925&q_id=63927&date=01.09.2013) (Accessed: 11.07.2014).

<sup>4</sup> VTsIOM sociological database. Available at: [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=925&q\\_id=63920&date=01.09.2013](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=925&q_id=63920&date=01.09.2013) (Accessed: 12.07.2014).

<sup>5</sup> VTsIOM sociological database. Available at: [http://wciom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=925&q\\_id=63922&date=01.09.2013](http://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=925&q_id=63922&date=01.09.2013) (Accessed: 12.07.2014).

each third civil servant (33%) chose this answer. Such results can be explained by several factors:

1. Lack of information, contradictory views about the nature of democracy due to the experience and specific perception of Russia's historical peculiarities, when in 1990–s democratic transformations were associated with prevalence of corruption.

2. Lack of willingness to cooperate with the civil society among Russian government officials, which implies openness and accountability. In addition, modern civil servants are not fully skilled and competent to effectively interact with the institutions of the civil society, which is determined by lack of democratic traditions in the Russian society [19].

**Discussion.** According to Zh.T. Toshchenko, “demagoguery has led to the fact that the word “democracy” became even dirtier than the word “communism” for people. It is manifested, first of all, in unjustified and often irresponsible allegations. On the one hand, government's commitment to democratic principles is observed, on the other hand, simulation of activities to support freedom of speech, autonomy of local government, discredit of the phenomenon of multi-party system” [20].

The country's sustainable socio-economic development is largely determined by efficient management activity organically linked to human resources in civil service. High correlation of the level of efficiency of decisions and conditions, the quality of life of a large number of individuals put high demands on the personnel in civil service.

On the one hand, in the Russian society there is currently a contradiction between the goals and objectives of civil service, its social relevance and applied nature, on the other

hand, the population's increasing dissatisfaction and distrust of it.

Reluctance of the Russian society and, first and foremost, its government to form and develop real democratic practices is expressed in the declaration of “new”, “special” forms of democracy in Russia, such as “sovereign democracy”, “supercontrollable democracy” etc. Russian society popularizes conservative, statist concepts; actively replicates ideas about malicious influence of democratic values on the society; emphasizes the priority of the state over private institutions. The democratic inversion is related to the peculiarities of the Russian mentality, firstly, among the representatives of the older generation. The Soviet ideology has left a mark on the formation of their value orientations. Underdeveloped civil society during that period was manifested in lack of democratic values such as: trust in the civil society, proclamation and pursuit of a free independent personality, which is emphasized by Western countries. In the Soviet society, however, the Soviet ideology formed its own specific values: patriotism, collectivism, readiness to sacrifice, and predominance of public interests over private ones [21]. In line with these values, the idea of priority of an individual, government's accountability to its citizens, institutions of the civil society, appears to be entirely alien.

As a consequence, the main determinants defining the content of social justice in Russians' value perceptions are the principles of the statist doctrine based on priority of the state over an individual. Analysis of the socio-group differences in perception of justice, according to the survey conducted by VTsIOM, indicates the following patterns: the idea of state regulation is supported, firstly, by military personnel (73%), state and municipal officials

(64%), to a lesser extent by businessmen and entrepreneurs (45%). State and municipal officials act as a conservative social group and support tighter control functions of the state (58%). Only each tenth respondent among state and municipal officials claimed that strengthening state control over the media would now be to the detriment of Russia<sup>6</sup>.

The inclusion of tools forming moral values and ethical principles of behavior, which would form a new image of a civil servant, new internal moral principles of behavior, in the professional development of an employee will help convert modern civil service into highly moral one: with a special understanding of the role of service to the Fatherland. The transformation of modern civil service from the standpoint of improving its moral aspect will create a positive image of this institution, reduce the level of corruption within the government, ensure the efficiency of public employees focused on serving the society, which in turn will improve the population's welfare and ensure the state's socio-economic development.

**Conclusions.** Analysis of the socio-cultural and value paradigms of civil servants revealed a number of common issues. In the system of their life goals, a significant part is occupied by material interests; according to respondents' opinions, their activities are not related to categories such as "favorite activity" or "interesting work". However, civil servants pursuing leading and main groups of positions note the importance of their work from the point of view of benefit to the society and the Fatherland.

Analysis of the research results revealed a contradiction between the life strategies of civil

servants, their position in the society and their workplace. After two or three years of working labor efficiency of government employees begins to decline, their interest in professional activity subsides. The research also made it possible to assume that the routine nature of work of modern civil service does not live up to the expectations of employees who even political activities and state administration. This is the conclusion we came to when analyzing the needs of public servants in public recognition ("becoming famous", "being among the elite"). Another significant issue is the distortion of professional culture of civil servants focused on bureaucratic values since there is no open interaction between the external environment; the managers use the authoritarian management style; tough subordination takes place.

Another issue is the contradiction between the citizens' increasing needs for democratization of civil service (primarily among the representatives of the younger and middle generation) and authoritarian trends in public administration. Democratic principles are declarative and are not supported by modern civil servants; this acts as a limiting factor to the development of civil initiatives and the formation of the system of public control over the activities of government authorities.

Thus, it is advisable to begin socio-economic transformations in the country, region, or settlement with the mobilization of intellectual, cultural, moral, and professional potential of civil service. The identified value issues of modern civil servants emphasize the importance of accounting and including the mechanisms and technology of formation of morality and moral values among government employees into the concept of civil service reformation and modernization.

<sup>6</sup> VTsIOM sociological database. Available at: [http://vtsiom.ru/zh/print\\_q.php?s\\_id=706&q\\_id=51051&date=09.01.2011](http://vtsiom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=706&q_id=51051&date=09.01.2011) (Accessed: 12.07.2014).

The main steps towards resolving the specified issues are: training and workshops promoting ethical standards within the framework of activities aimed to prevent corruption; consideration of socio-cultural and value paradigms in selecting candidates for vacant positions in civil service; modernization of the personnel policy, individual approach to developing career paths of civil servants. Exclusion of corruption, high level of responsibility and priorities of public interest in activities of government employees are priority determinants of management efficiency, citizens' increasing welfare and improving socio-economic indicators of the development of the country and its regions.

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