



ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF OF KONSTANTIN PRES LAVSKY UNIVERSITY OF SHUMEN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract: *The diagnostics analysis of the appraisal system of the academic staff of Shumen University is subject to formal and informal rules, requirements and procedures for the assessment of performance of faculty members as well as the conditions that are set up for this activity. The conducted empirical sociological study attempts to clarify the effectiveness of this system, considering the appraisal as a motivational factor for increasing productivity, improving quality of work and professional and qualification skills.*

Key words: *quality of academic staff, appraisal of academic staff*

The evaluation of the quality of the academic staff of Shumen University is an important part of the appraisal system and maintenance of the quality of teaching. Its performance is regulated by the Higher Education Act and the Regulations for the appraisal of the academic staff of the university, which regulates the manner, timing and criteria for assessment. The purpose of the assessment, according to Art. 2 of the Regulations is to improve the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching, research and music and arts activity, improvement of the selection, training and development of faculty, stimulating individual creative scientific and academic expression and activity.

This study attempted to assess this goal – Is it achieved or not completely? Is there any improvement of competence and professionalism on a personal and organizational level? Does the assessment execute its role as a motivational tool for teachers or it's conducted fictitiously? The answers to the following questions are sought through the academic staff's point of view.

The analysis of the appraisal system is an activity aimed at revealing its status and development and the effectiveness with which it fulfills its purpose. There are three reasons to carry it out:

- There is evidence that the practice of performance assessment of academic staff does not fully carry out its purpose;
- There is will on behalf of the leadership for changes in the motivational environment which imposes the necessity for changes in the appraisal system;
- Looking for opportunities to improve practice in this area.

Object of evaluation is the practice of performance appraisal of academic staff, the use of outcomes and procedure, techniques, criteria and indicators by which it is conducted.

The empirical survey is conducted in 2012. Interviewed are 120 teachers from all faculties of the total 346. This provides its representativeness. The tools of the study are a direct anonymous questionnaire and a content analysis. The questionnaire is partially standardized with open and closed questions. It themes refer to criteria, period, procedure and overall assessment of the performance appraisal system of the academic staff. There is enclosed a content analysis of the strategy and policy of Shumen University on evaluations of faculty set in the internal labor standard that regulates the appraisal activity – Regulations for Appraisal of Academic Staff

There are representatives of all posts in the cross section: Professor - 5.45%, Associate Professor - 45.45%, Assistant Professor, Ph.D. - 9.09%, Senior Lecturer - 24.55%, Assistant - 15.45%. The majority of respondents have experience in Shumen University. With more than 20 years are 31.82%, from 5 to 20 years are 47.27%, from 1 to 5 years - 15.45%, and less than 1 year - 5,45%. This structure of the scross section implies sufficiently long experience in the professional activity, significant impression with the management of the university, which in a great degree justify the given evaluation.

Faculty appraisal is one of the issues that have key a meaning for motivation. Work evaluation in general is a management activity which is to measure and assess the results (success, achievements, deficits) of people in the organization, the way in which they achieve their potential aimed at creating the optimal conditions for professional development and equitable remuneration. Employees' appraisal system is designed to measure the individual contribution of each employees, as well as deficits in his job performance.

The most important in the studied system is the employee to understand and to know exactly how his work will be evaluated and how it will influence his development and promotion in the organization.

The data show that not all of the staff members are familiar with the current labor standard that regulates the appraisal system. It turns out that 87.27% of

respondents are aware of the Regulations for the Appraisal of Academic Staff that is active at the time of the study. The fact is that there are faculty who are not aware (12.73%). Probably the proportion of the personnel that is not familiar with it is higher because of the control question: *What are the criteria according to the Regulation for the Appraisal on which the evaluation is based?* 25.45% don't specified any criteria. There is no way to be familiar with the Regulation and to have no knowledge of its content. Assuming that this category of people not familiar with the regulations justifies the fact that about ¼ of respondents do not know how is evaluated their work. Generally the evaluation procedure should be clearly regulated and known to all. In Shumen University regulation is in place, but its popularization is not enough. This suggests unconstructive communication with staff . The flow of information in the downlink and uplink is not effective. In a working system for evaluation of human resources the person receives information about the position, including the appraisal criteria at the time when applying for it. In practice often the university teacher learns about them during his first appraisal, i.e. after years of work at the university. In case the employee is not informed about his assessment how it will have a positive effect on both him and the university. In this sense the appraisal does not play the role of a regulator of the professional behaviour for 25.45% of the respondents.

For the majority of respondents - 63.63%, the current performance appraisal system has a stimulating role for their work. There is however a quality shade. Those who fully share this view, represent 26.36% of the population. The remaining 37.27% agree, but partly. There is such variation with faculty with opposed thinking (36.37%). 23.64% indicate "not quite" and other 12.73% are deffinite that the current system does not encourage them to work.

Lecturers have a different idea of the role evaluation performance of the faculty in Shumen University. Only 36.36% have a positive attitude and say that it is a motivational mechanism. The largest is the share of respondents who believe that it makes equal the quality of the evaluated- 42.73%. Adding the share of persons with skeptical attitude that accept it as an oppressive and superficial procedure (12.73%) and 8.18% who see it as a trivial and unnecessary practice in this form, therefore the negative minded is majority of 63.64%. It is evident that in this form the appraisal system does not fulfill the role of a motivational tool.

The appraisal period depends on two groups of factors. The first includes the aim of the evaluation – stimulation of individual creative development and activity. The second is related to the specificity of the performed work. In this case the work implies some sort of a completed cycle for whole performance of

the personal, organizational and professional and qualification qualities. In the Higher Education Act which has an imperative regulation norm is regulated the period for evaluation of non-habilitated personnel once each three years, and of habilitated lecturers – once per five years. The Regulations for Academic staff appraisal of Shumen University the period for evaluation for the whole academic staff is five years.

The views of faculty on evaluation period is united around the idea that five-year period of sufficient duration - 89.09% say that. For about 5.45% it is a long period to other 4.55% - too long. There is one interviewee whose share is practically negligible - 0.91%, which believes that it is a short period.

It is clear from the conducted study that overall respondents approve such periodicity of evaluation. However, there are 10% of respondents who believe that the duration is long. Their reasons is due to the fact that in five years the momentum has its influence and if the teacher does not have a corrective form of appraisal, the reaction of the leadership is late. It is true that there is a risk if a person does not show his professional and qualification skills the establishment of the level of compliance or non-compliance with job requirements to be delayed. Then appraisal will fulfill its role as a motivational tool to improve the quality and effectiveness of training and teaching, research and creative activity. Therefore differentiating the evaluation period it is as in the Higher Education Act could be considered.

The evaluation of the quality of faculty is done through a system of criteria representing norms for establishing compliance with academic standards. The criteria are specified by a set of indicators. The reporting of the indicators is on the basis of a set procedure. The implementation of the criteria and indicators leads to the development of a comprehensive evaluation of each faculty member of the University of Shumen .

The conducted content analysis shows that the determination of the assessment criteria is unclear. Indicators for each criterion are written in details. They are clear, but they are not explicitly measurable. The way how they refer to textual assessment is not specified - satisfactory, good and very good. There is no coefficient of importance of the criteria in the overall assessment.

The opinions of the faculty related to the above matter vary. Nearly one third of respondents are supporters of parity between criteria (30.91%). According to 40.91% priority should have the educational work. About 26.36% think that the focus should be on research . Those who give priority to administrative and organizational to only 1.82% .

The higher part of the study participants support the statement that concrete quantitative indicator could be introduced for each characteristics of the criteria.

Nearly half of them (48,18%) think that it would be good, 20% say that it definitely should happen. About ¼ have a negative attitude – they think it is not necessary (23,64%). The respondents that can't specify are 8,18%.

There is no convincing opinion on whether the criteria are sufficient or not. Less than half of the respondents - 40% believe that they are sufficient, and 12.73% - that are insufficient. Nearly half of the respondents - 47.27% - did not answer. This indifference at best is an act of passivity.

Lecturers have a different idea of the inclusion of additional criteria such as initiative in during work, workload, performance, and persistence in the rhythm of work, labor discipline, contribution to the image of the University and others. Definite about the inclusion of such criteria are only 13.64%. Evasively agreeable are 58.18%. Nearly one fifth are strongly opposed (19.09%) and 9.08% can not define their answer. It is evident that 71.82% of the surveyed teachers have attitude to adopt such criteria.

This explains the fact that the majority (67.28%) respondents support the idea of different degrees of the evaluation scale to be linked to specific measures in financing activities such as: reduction of wages , bonuses, advantage / withdrawal of the right in opening of a procedure for habilitation, advantage / deprivation for participation in conferences abroad, Erasmus mobility and others. One part of the people that support that are definite - 23.64%, others are not so sure (43.64%) and support the it partly. There is such a nuance in the approval rate among the ones rejecting the idea - 32.72% . In this category there is parity between the ones that definitely denied it, and evasive deniers (by 16.36%) .

As a logical outcome of this understanding is the opinion of respondents to form a complex assessment in the evaluation. Unfortunately for less than half it's objective - 46.36% . 30% define it as formal , but as 13.64% as subjective. 10% of respondents can not specify their answer.

The grounds for that conviction are few but mostly associated with the registration of the activity of individual indicators. Reported in this way different criteria do not allow for an objective assessment of the degree of realization and creative achievements in the research and learning process. There are no methodological means for reporting the efforts of appraised person, and the influence of factors that are outside his abilities.

The appraisal procedure allows opportunity to provide reliable information for each criterion. It does not only allow but also devotes considerable space for the evaluated person to participate in this process. The way in which he participated in the evaluation procedure is immediate and active: the provision

of a written report for work on three sets of criteria. The main work of the procedure is carried out on *Departmental* level: visiting classes are, conduct questionnaires on trained by the appraised person students, to vote on proposals for evaluation criteria. Here are the comments related to the questions in the questionnaire. Respondents believe that they are outdated and do not reflect the required information. According to the study the performance appraisal at this level is estimated for the most part as accurate - 71.82% .With some reservations ("less strict ") are 13.64% . According to 14.55% it is done formally

Not so unanimous is the assessment of respondents' overall appraisal procedure. There is a small margin between the groups that define it as needed (29.09%), useful (35.45%) and formally operational (31.82%). But the fact is that only one third of respondents accept it as useful! While the other third define it as formal. However, there are cases where the Faculty Council has made a proposal for a negative appraisal - 17.27% of respondents have witnessed this .

Despite this divergence of opinion for the most part the respondents believe that the current performance appraisal system reflects the level of competence, responsibility and work performance. Strong supporters of this idea are 24.55%, partially supporting - 45.45% . Rejecting the thesis are 21.82% and others 8.18% can not judge the answer. Anyway, about 30% of respondents believe that the appraisal system does not reflect the competence and diligence of the teachers.

The roots of this negativity can be searched in the product of evaluation. With a larger or smaller share of teachers the results of the appraisal are not used by management. They are not bound by any salary or training and qualifications nor extend the responsibilities. A reasonable question is what is the effectiveness of its usage? It could be said that there are no reservations.

As a conclusion it can be said that in Shumen University has established a system for the appraisal of academic staff with precise rules, procedures and clear criteria. In this form, however, it does not contribute significantly to increasing the efficiency of the work of individual lecturers and the university as a whole.

The current system for the appraisal of academic staff is not known by all. There are people in the academic community who do not know who, how and at what time they are evaluated. This fact is a sign of poor management of the system. This is evident by the fact that for only one third of respondents this system is useful and acts as a motivational mechanism. For less than half of the faculty the formed complex evaluation is objective. According to nearly half of the respondents it implies levelling of the qualities of the evaluated people.

It is obvious that conduction of such an appraisal helps ensure a minimum requirements for the lecturer's activities. Whether the assessment of the criteria would be satisfactory, good or very good, it ensures the lecturer to remain in the guild for five more years. People are different, work differently, achieving different results, but get the same evaluation - positive. This complex assessment does not measure the individual contribution for the specialty and the university. The extent of the asset is not bound in any way with benefits for the individual. It is undisputed that the system for assessment of faculty needs change.

The preparation for appraisal should be laid in the appointment of the lecturer. The manager and the employee are obliged to determine their agreed targets, which to be used as a standard for future evaluations. Lecturer should be able to discuss why and how his work does not comply with the standards, requirements, what is the reason for this, and above all, what can be done to improve performance. Therefore the feedback in communications at the University will be optimized.

The assessment is regular, complex and systematic. It can be supplemented by interim evaluations of each academic year. Most young teachers need encouragement, assurance that they are in the right direction that they are able to handle their duties. Differentiation of the period of appraisal could be considered. Period of evaluation should be shorter for the young and non habilitated faculty and longer for the staff that have worked for many years and the habilitated one.

The current system for the appraisal of academic staff does not evaluate the qualities as much as results of the work activity. The adopted nomenclature of criteria and indicators not only allows but requires a quantitative estimation for each indicator. It would be better that they are differentiated for habilitated and non habilitated faculty. Every labor result should have a quantitative determination. This reduces the probability of subjectivity and randomness in the evaluation. The more precise and detailed are the formulated requirements that must be met in order to be awarded an appropriate assessment of the indicators, the more objectively will be assessed the work performance of faculty .

The adoption of the recommendations in the policy for appraisal of the university would create conditions and prerequisites for effective engagement of faculty with its strategic objectives.