

## **DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN SOLVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

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### **Abstract**

Recently, businesses, governments, societies, and individuals have demonstrated an increasing interest in using self-organized communities, in general, and inviting experts to resolve specific issues, in particular. Initially, professional communities were formed to protect, however, at the beginning of the 21st century, they refocused on activities related to providing information and sharing experience. And nowadays these communities are invited to actively participate in professional standards creation, the assessment of draft laws, etc.. The present research focuses on the development of these communities and the study of their role in solving socio-economic issues of organizations and regions, as well as the whole country. The literature review section of the paper examines the current state of knowledge on professional communities' activities and factors affecting their effectiveness. Drawing on the research findings, the author provides a definition for professional communities, identifies the factors for their development and the successful cooperation, and develops a classification of the professional communities' types. In modern society, the development of professional communities is primarily determined by economic factors, therefore, when studying the prospects for their development, one should take Economics into account.

**Key words:** professional communities, communities of expert, community management

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Businesses, governments, societies, and individuals have recently demonstrated an increasing interest in self-organized communities inviting experts to resolve any specific issues. In recent years, the role of professional communities has significantly grown, they have become an important party of social and economic relations. Scientists such as Ostrom E. (Ostrom, 2000), Aligica P.D. and Boettke P.J. (Aligica, Boettke, 2009) point out relevance of studies on professional communities: "Local self-organizing communities are the most important asset in the institutional portfolio of humanity and they must still exist in the 21st century".

### *Concept and Essence of Professional Expert Community*

The "professional community" term is the most commonly used in modern scientific literature when it comes to studies of communities (Adler N., Bartholomew S., 1992). A professional community is usually described as a self-organizing union of people with same profession who are the bearers of its values and norms. This term has been used for a relatively long time. Professional communities have existed from long ago in the form of guildhalls, guilds, unions, societies, associations, etc.

"How and why do people join their efforts, and what does success of such uniting depend on? (Kapelyushnikov, 2010). Researchers have been trying to answer this question for centuries. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French scientist and political theorist, dreamed about "creation of science and art of association some time in the future".

It should be noted that the meaning of the "professional community" term is changing due to transition of the society to the post-industrial stage, development of computer technologies, and ongoing transformations of enterprises. The criterion of belonging to one profession loses its relevance. The primary requirement is to be an expert in a particular field (Martyanova N.A. 2013).

An expert is not only a professional in the traditional sense of the word, but an actor of an essentially different kind. The generally accepted meaning of this term is that an expert is someone who influences the decision-making process and has no responsibility for implementation of the decision. In this sense, the task of an expert is to conduct an intuitive and logical analysis of the problem with quantitative evaluation of the opinions and processing of the obtained results. Generalized conclusion of the experts is taken as a solution for the problem.

In view of the above, we may conclude that professional and expert communities have differences and are not always a part of some other community. N.A. Martyanova confirms this opinion and singles out the following differences (Martyanova N.A. 2013, pp. 136-140): "despite the fact that experts are often described as professionals, there are major differences between these terms. First of all, professionals make decisions and take responsibility for them, while experts provide services and give advice. Secondly, an expert basically must transform professional knowledge into general one. An expert is an interpreter, a translator from a professional language into the ordinary one".

In our previous works we defined "professional community" as a union of professionals

from various enterprises of a particular professional field who regularly communicate with one another in order to share knowledge, experience, best practices, search for new ideas and more effective ways to perform their tasks (Dolzhenko R.A., 2015).

The present research focuses on the professional communities, one of the main activities of which is expertise. Thus, we believe **that a professional expert community** is a union of professionals from different enterprises of a particular professional field, the distinctive characteristic of which is the fact that members of the community possess high knowledge, experience and skills in that particular field of professional activity.

### **Types of Professional Expert Communities**

Let us analyze the criteria of classification through the example of professional communities in the field of HR management, activities of which we discussed in previous studies (Dolzhenko R., Ginieva S., 2017). 104 Russian professional communities in the field of HR management were studied in 2017. In 2019 the research was continued. We singled out only those communities which carried out expert activities and were suitable for our study — the professional expert communities that establish more ambitious goals, such as:

- support of public discussions and making suggestions to improve the legislative and regulatory base of the Russian Federation in the field of HR management;
- implementation of innovations in the field of HR management in the working process of enterprises, etc. (Ginieva S.B., Fedorova A.E., 2010).

According to the analysis results, we singled out 50 communities (48% of studied communities) which can be considered as professional expert communities. Let us analyze types of professional expert communities through the example of activities of these communities.

The first criterion of classification is the form of ownership (see. Fig. 1):

1. formal community (with legal status);
2. non-formal community (with no legal status).

**Fig. 1. Structure of professional expert communities in the field of HR according to the form of ownership**

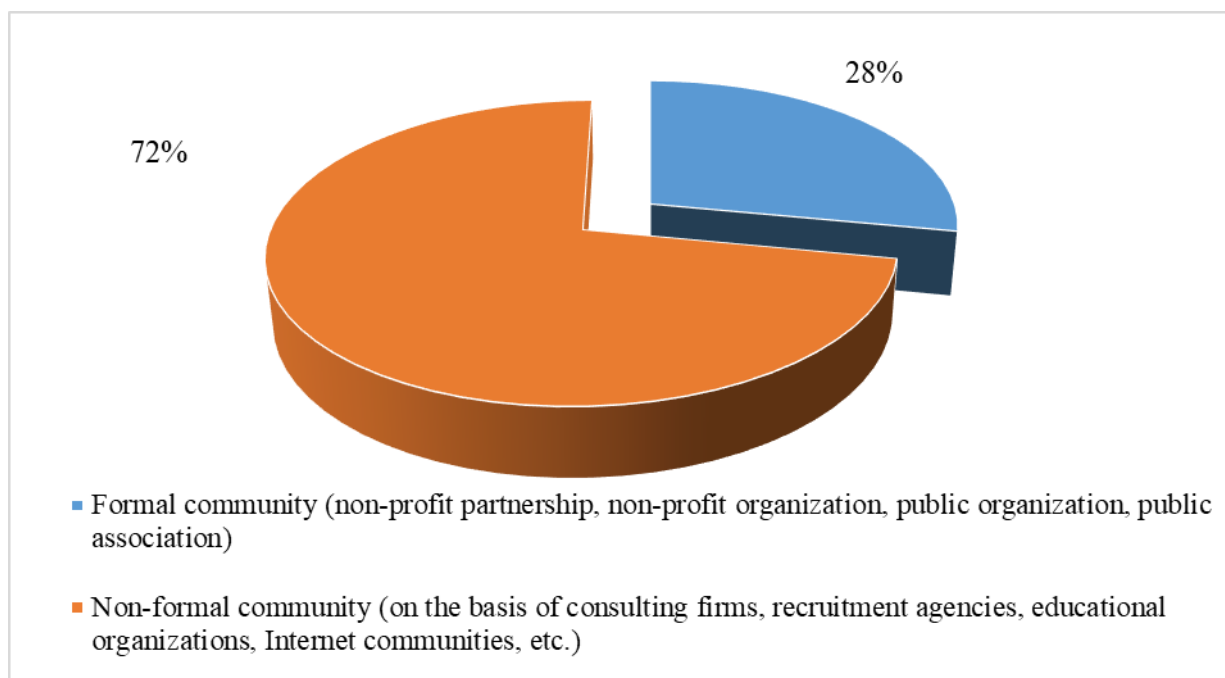


Figure 1 shows that about 72% of the communities (36 organizations) are "formal" communities. They have legal status and are usually founded as non-profit organizations. This conclusion is quite obvious because in order to carry out expert activities (on a commercial basis as well) a company must have official bank details, a bank account, etc.

As for the non-formal communities, they include those created on the basis of social councils, methodological councils, science and technology councils.

Another criterion of classification is the format of interaction:

1. Offline format (traditional format of interaction with no Internet communications);
2. Online format (Internet resources, job portals used by HR professionals for online interaction and discussions in certain areas of activity in the field of HR management);
3. Combined format (combines both offline and online interaction formats).

The analysis results showed that there are no communities that use only offline interaction format nowadays. According to the study, 100% of the professional expert communities use not only offline format but also exist in the Internet space and carry out online interactions through the web-sites, social media, and chats. Moreover, some of the communities are switching exclusively to the online interaction format. They use modern digital technologies and crowdsourcing platforms to discuss projects and tasks and conduct some of the expert examinations. It means that motivation for such work is different from the

one generally accepted in the offline environment. Similar conclusions were made by Ardichvili A., Page V., and Wentling T. in 2003.

The third criterion of classification is the territory (see Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2. The number of communities in Federal Districts of Russia, % of the total number of communities**

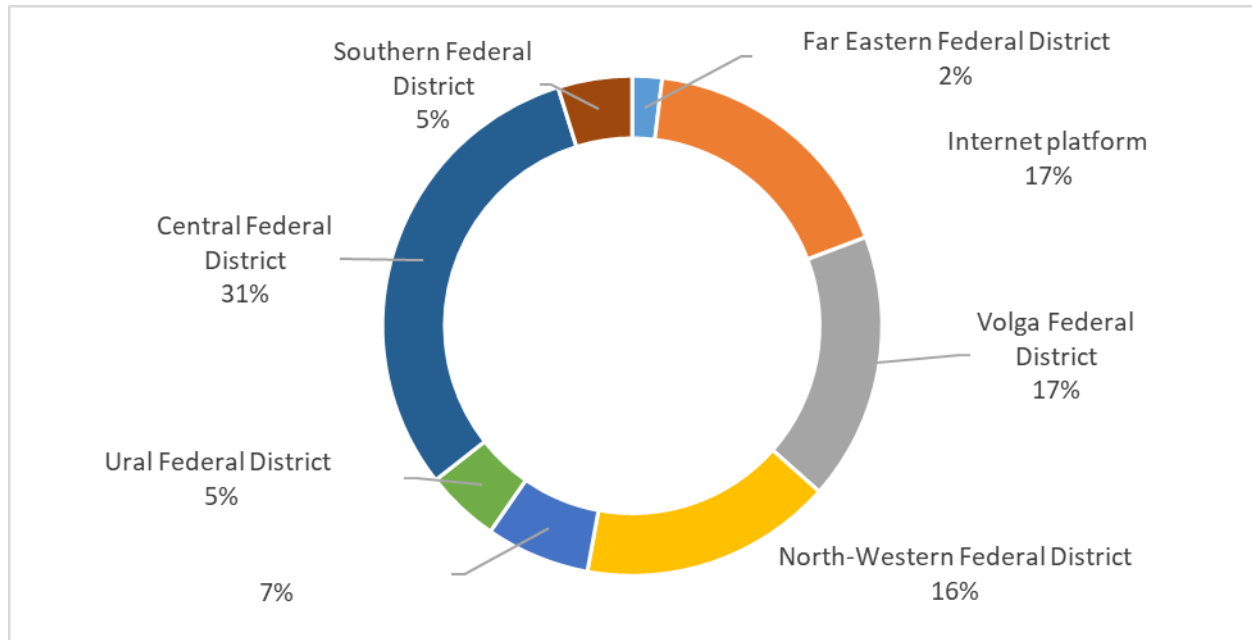


Figure 2 shows that the districts where the number of employees in the field of HR management is prevailing, as well as larger and more developed districts, have more communities:

- Central Federal District (31% of the total number of communities)
- Internet platform (17% of the total number of communities)
- Volga and Northwestern Federal Districts (17% and 16% of the total number of communities).

The communities can also be classified according to the level:

1. International level
2. National level
3. Regional (municipal) level
4. Corporate level

It shall be noted that corporate communities have gained popularity lately. Their area of activity includes expert and project activities aimed at discussion and handling of specific professional issues.

The fifth criterion of classification is the field of professional activity. The present research focuses on the communities in the field of HR management. Fields that also have professional expert communities include politics, economics, medicine, law, military defence, various branches of engineering, science and education, religion, art, IT technologies, etc.

### **Factors of Communities Development and Successful Cooperation of Their Members**

Before Nobel Prize Laureate E. Ostrom it was widely believed that the problem of interaction inside collective communities has no optimal solution, at least in those cases when people are left to their own devices. It was believed that this problem can be solved only through intervention and regulation of the state. E. Ostrom rejected this approach. "Her works revealed a huge layer of social reality which was hidden from eyes of the researchers. She made a revolution in the ideas of social disciplines on possibilities for public resources management, to be more exact — in the ideas on the abilities of "ordinary" people for self-organization and self-management" (Kapelyushnikov, 2010).

E. Ostrom came up with eight general principles of institutional design which increase probability of success for specific self-organizing communities. We have analyzed these principles and find it necessary to focus on those of them which are most suitable for the professional expert communities.

- The first principle: establishing clear boundaries of the group.

This principle is used for the professional expert communities because it allows their members to understand clearly who is included in the community and who is not, who are the people to interact and cooperate with in order to solve a particular issue.

- The second principle: rules for access to the resources should set limits on the amount, time, and technology of their use, distribute the benefits proportionally to the costs, take into account local characteristics of the environment.

The key resource for the professional expert communities is information (knowledge pool, results of discussions, data on experts) which requires combined efforts and collective participation to maintain it. If one of the community members uses the resource without incurring expenses for its maintenance, there is a risk that other members will also stop following the rules.

- The third principle: most of the members shall be involved in making decisions that establish or change the rules for access to the resources.

The authors of this study find it necessary to widen this principle: for the professional

expert communities it is important that all the experts participate not only in making resource-related decisions but also in expert discussions of particular issues. V.A. Ryzhko points out that the expert culture suggests variability of estimates and situation of choice. The "expert" is a postmodern term in the sense that an expert is not a monopolist in his/her evaluative judgements (*Ryzhko V.A., 2006*). Large variability of the responses that experts may have during their discussions requires to increase the number of participating experts, which increases relevance of the conclusions and, consequently, status of the community.

We also find it necessary to point out the following factors important for formation and development of the communities:

1. Common goals, interests, and needs of the community members.
2. Common resources that the community members have access to.
3. Common context and language of communication for all the members of the community.

Efficiency of expert community organization depends on a properly organized motivational system for the experts which ensures involvement of highly trained professionals in the community and makes them strive to achieve high results. The traditional system of motivation does not work in the professional expert communities, because the community members are independent and have no formal subordination to the head of the company, duties of the experts are usually not regulated, and there is no employment contract (except for civil contracts).

Thus, we can single out the following factors of motivation:

- organizational and economic factors (financial bonuses, working conditions, working tools, expert ratings);
- informational factors (obtaining of exclusive analytical information);
- social and psychological factors (professional recognition, professional development, powers and authority (status), achievements, independence in decision-making, the group, belongingness).

Work of the group of experts united in the community obviously requires additional knowledge on organization of interaction and improvement of mutual understanding. Which means that another important factor for development of the professional expert communities is organization of additional training programs for the experts.

### ***Role of Professional Expert Communities in Socio-Economic Problem-Solving***

Since this research is focused on the professional expert communities in the field of HR management, our task was to assess expert potential of these communities to achieve federal-level objectives aimed at development of the personnel management profession together with the Council for Professional Competence in the field of HR management. This objectives include participation in development and discussion of professional standards in the field of HR management, participation of the experts in organization of national professional competitions, etc.

The interview results of 50 professional expert HR communities confirmed the study results of 2017: only 15 communities (30% of the total number of communities) expressed their willingness to carry out expert activities in cooperation with the Council for Professional Competence in the field of HR management. The representatives of the other communities mentioned the following main reasons why they are not ready for such cooperation: absence of competent experts, lack of time and financial resources to hire experts, lack of financial benefits from the expert activities. It is worth mentioning that such expert activities are carried out on the free-of-charge basis.

The communities which have expressed their willingness to carry out the expert activities specified the following areas of cooperation with the Council for Professional Competence in the field of HR management (see Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3. Areas of cooperation with the Council for Professional Competence in the field of HR management**

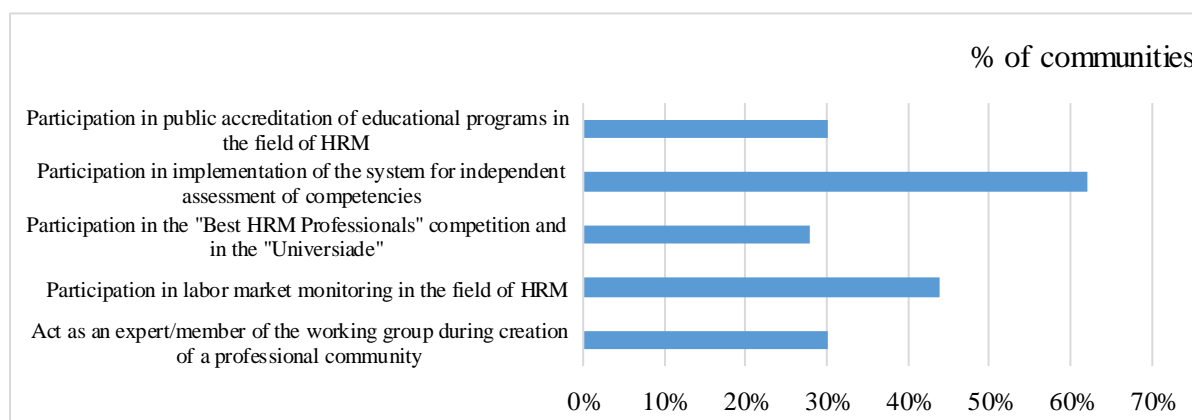


Figure 3 shows that the most popular areas of expert activities for the communities are:

1. Participation in implementation of the system for independent assessment of competencies (being accredited as the Center for Competence Assessment). This area seems



to be interesting for the communities because it may bring financial benefits in case the community opens a Center for Competence Assessment.

2. Participation (as experts) in labor market monitoring in the field of HR management. Despite the fact that this expert work is carried out on the free-of-charge basis, it may give access to useful information and statistics.

So, we can make a conclusion that despite the fact that there is a pressing need to involve experts of the professional communities with their experience and knowledge to perform different expert tasks, the professional communities are not interested in such kind of activities. The main reason for this is the fact that there is no financial reward for such work. Our next area of research which will be discussed in other articles will focus on motivation of the experts in the professional communities to carry out the expert activities.

### **Conclusion**

In the modern society, development of the professional communities is primarily determined by economic factors, therefore, one should take Economics into account studying the prospects for development of the communities. As a rule, members of such self-organized communities are volunteers and are not paid. In order to engage the community members, it is necessary to update the scope of issues constantly and make the activity more interesting with the help of initiating actions and new goals.

There is an obvious contradiction between the potential that such self-organized professional communities possess and the way this potential is utilized as well as the issue of the institutional economics frameworks for cooperation between members of the professional communities and between the professional communities and third parties. Study of the professional expert communities from the economics viewpoint helps to determine possibilities and prospects for their use in public life through collection of knowledge, skills and abilities. In future, they could help to solve various challenges presented by the state, society, other communities, businesses, and individuals.

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