

Artículo de investigación

Method for influencing the development of elderly education in Russia**Технология воздействия на процесс развития сети проектов геронтообразования в России****Las herramientas de gestión de proyectos educativos para los adultos mayores en Rusia**

Recibido: 27 de agosto del 2019

Aceptado: 15 de octubre del 2019

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SPIN-ID <https://elibrary.ru: 6099-5475>**Abstract**

The paper discusses the problem of mass education for the elderly in Russia. To deal with this issue, we ground the expediency of using the resources of non-formal education projects for senior citizens. We analyze the totality of specialized educational projects implemented in the country as a social network, i.e. a specific self-organized object resistant to external management. The article presents the results of an online survey of experts (organizers of education projects for senior citizens and researchers on the problems of elderly education). Based on the respondents' answers, the research concludes about the specificity of the elderly education network as an object of management and analyzes the possibility to adopt centralized educational management. The paper formulates the general principles and techniques of management in the field of elderly education in Russia and provides the authors' method to control the development of elderly education projects in the country.

Key Words: Elderly education, sociology of education, social network, population aging.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена проблеме массового образования пожилых граждан в России. Обосновывается целесообразность привлечения ресурсов проектов неформального образования геронтов для решения данной проблемы. Совокупность функционирующих в стране специализированных образовательных проектов анализируется как социальная сеть – специфический самоорганизующийся объект, слабо поддающийся внешнему управленческому воздействию. В статье приводятся результаты онлайн-опроса экспертов (организаторов проектов геронтообразования и исследователей проблем образования пожилых граждан). На основе ответов респондентов делаются выводы о специфике сети геронтообразования как объекта управления, анализируется возможность централизованного управления ею со стороны различных структур. Формулируются общие принципы и методы управленческого воздействия на национальную сеть геронтообразования в России. Излагается авторская технология управления процессом развития сети проектов геронтообразования в России.

Ключевые слова: образование пожилых людей, социология образования, социальная сеть, демографическое старение населения.

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Resumen

En este artículo se expone un problema de la educación de personas mayores en Rusia. Para abordar este problema se propone crear más proyectos de educación no formal para las personas de tercera edad. El conjunto de los proyectos educativos del país se percibe como una red social que se organiza por sí misma y es bastante difícil de gestionar desde fuera. En el trabajo se presentan los resultados de una encuesta en línea en la que participaron los promotores de proyectos educativos para los adultos mayores y los investigadores que se especializan en esta área. Los datos de la encuesta se estudian e interpretan y a partir de ellos se extraen conclusiones acerca de las posibilidades de establecer un mecanismo centralizado de gestión de estos proyectos por diversas entidades, se elaboran unas herramientas específicas e innovadoras de gestión de proyectos educativos para los adultos mayores en Rusia.

Palabras clave: Educación de personas mayores, sociología de la educación, red social, envejecimiento de la población.

Introduction

Currently, the number of the elderly in Russia is constantly increasing. Negative consequences of population ageing are becoming more obvious in the economic and social spheres: a declining birth rate, a ballooning deficit of labor resources, and increasing load on the social services, the healthcare service and the pension system (Savinov, Bistyaykina & Solovyova, 2018). In Russia, as with most European nations, the problem of developing adaptation measures to transformations in the age structure of the population is becoming increasingly relevant (Eakin & Witten, 2018; Trofimov, 2017; Watanabe, Miyake & Yasuoka, 2018). It is of utmost importance, therefore, to use the social, economic and cultural potential of the older generation to resolve pressing state problems and integrate senior citizens in all spheres of public life.

Any strategies of social management suggesting the use of senior citizens' resources are inevitably associated with the task to increase their educational level (Laufer & Bengston, 1974). In Russia, the topicality of providing education to the elderly is due to the pension reform initiated in 2018, as well as to the growing share of older employees in the job market (Gusenko, 2018). It is obvious that there is a need for an integrated and diversified approach to tackle the problem of increasing the level of the elderly's education. One of such measures is to attract the resources of non-formal education projects that already operate in the country.

Nowadays, specialized non-formal education projects are the most popular agents for educating the elderly in Russia that annually reach tens of thousands of students (Sorokin & Fokina, 2019). However, the state's power to influence the non-formal education programs for

the elderly is limited by the specificity of its organization. The community of the Russian educational programs for the elderly is functioning as a social network. The educational projects (the network nodes) that comprise it are independent in establishing their goals and objectives and forming their own infrastructure. They autonomously function in a common sociocultural environment and interact with each other directly or through a thesaurus – a virtual data array. Traditional management technologies applied to such a specific object of management prove to be ineffective (Davydova, Dorozhkin & Fyodorov, 2016). The key issue here is the quality of education, the criteria of which are rather subjective (Dalati & Hamwi, 2016).

The aforementioned aspects ground the relevance of the search for non-traditional mechanisms for managing the national system of elderly education that focus it on resolving problems urgent to Russian society. *The purpose of the paper* is to develop a variant of technologization of the process of managing the national network of educational projects for the elderly in Russia. To achieve the stated purpose, we aim to accomplish the following objectives: (a) to collect empirical data characterizing the potential object of management; (b) to develop general principles and methods for managing the network of educational projects for the elderly in the Russian Federation; (c) to determine the specific mechanisms for controlling the development of the Russian non-formal education projects for senior citizens.

Literature review

Social network as a scientific category is actively studied in modern sociology. Castells (1999) proposes the most detailed description of the

specificity of networks, the peculiarities of their functioning and development. The great role of social networks in modern society and their increasing influence on various social institutions are highlighted by Ferguson (2017) and Ogilvie (2000). Obukhov (2008) addresses the problems of social networks management: the researcher characterizes networks as a specific object of management with low manageability. Davydova, Dorozhkin and Fyodorov (2016) study network structures in education and identify the factors of their formation and development. The scientists also evaluate the possibility of applying traditional methods for managing networks in education and conclude that they turn out to be inefficient.

At the moment, there is a vast number of publications on the psychological, pedagogical and social aspects of education for the older generation. Among the most notable works are those by Draves (2001), Bollnow (1962), Smith (1995), Ghosh (2016), Driouchi and Gamar (2017), Garcés-Voisinat (2016). They examine the specific psychological and physiological characteristics of older students and justify the need to categorize elderly education as an independent sphere of adult education.

Trends in the development of elderly education in the world and individual countries are closely explored by Khalitskiy (2000), Taziev (2015) and Kromolicka (2015). In general, there is an increase in the number of specialized educational projects and the number of their participants. It is also stressed that society is forming a positive attitude towards the phenomenon of elderly education.

Kononygina (2008) undertakes a thorough study of the existing practices of elderly education implemented in Russia. She managed to collect extensive empirical data that reflected the major trends in elderly education in the country. The researcher mounts a number of convincing arguments about the feasibility of the state support for the national system of non-formal education for the elderly and the state participation in the development of the national elderly education system.

At the same time, it is worth noting that, in spite of the fact that elderly education practices in Russia exhibit the features typical of networks, no attempts have been made so far to implement a network approach to investigating the nature of elderly education and the possibilities of managing its development in Russia.

Materials and Methods

In 2019, to collect empirical data necessary to develop general principles and particular mechanisms for managing the network of institutions of non-formal elderly education in Russia, we conducted an online survey of experts.

The sample comprised organizers of educational projects for the elderly and researchers studying the problems of elderly education. Fifty experts from seven Russian cities participated in the study: Moscow (10 respondents), Saint Petersburg (10 respondents), Kazan (10 respondents), Novosibirsk (5 respondents), Omsk (5 respondents), Smolensk (5 respondents), and Tyumen (5 respondents). 80% of the sample consisted of individuals with academic degrees of candidate and doctor of sciences. The average age of experts was 42 years. More than half of the respondents had already participated in elderly education practices as teachers. The snowball method was used to form the sampling frame. The interviewed experts recommended to question their colleagues, whose status and area of scientific interests corresponded to the object of study.

The survey was performed using Google Forms. The respondents were asked 11 questions, both open and closed with a limited number of answer options. The questionnaire was divided into three logical parts.

The first part of the questionnaire was aimed to identify the views of experts on the conditions and prospects of mass education for senior citizens in Russia.

The second part of the questionnaire assessed the possibilities of using the resources of elderly education institutions as agents of education provided to the older generation.

The third part focused on revealing the specificity of the network of elderly education projects as an object of management and identifying possible mechanisms for managing this network structure. The experts were asked to assess the significance of specific features of elderly education projects as factors that hamper their external management.

Specific features (factors) were assessed on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – does not interfere with management, 5 – significantly interferes with management). As a result, each respondent

determined the weight of factor w_i (where i is the number of the questionnaire from 1 to 50). The experts' estimates were summarized. For each specific feature identified in the questionnaire, the coefficient k was calculated by formula

$$k = \sum_{i=1}^{50} w_i$$

of the values obtained. According to the ranking, their significance increases as the corresponding coefficient rises.

Results

According to the respondents, the crucial objective of educating the older generation is to adapt them to innovations and changes in society (93%). Despite the expected increase in the number of older workers in the Russian job market, only 26% of responses indicated professional training of senior citizens as the main task of their education. This only slightly exceeded the factor "organization of social activities" (20%). On the mean scale, there were "counteracting negative age-associated changes in the psyche" (60%), "establishing dialogue

with representatives of other generations" (53%) and "intellectual and cultural development of the elderly" (33.3%).

In general, we can ascertain that the respondents conceived elderly education as a universal means of resolving the problems of senior citizens, rather than a tool for dealing with the problems faced by the state and society. We suppose that the position of the experts reflects the inertia inherent in the whole community of elderly education teachers in terms of their perception of social tasks of elderly education and following traditional attitudes adopted over the past few decades. This substantiates the fact that strategies for social management of the elderly education network should include some measures affecting its socio-cultural environment, i.e. a wide range of social and cultural factors that determine the functioning and development of the elderly education network.

Assessments of the opportunities available to various structures to solve the problem of elderly education in Russia are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Expert assessments of potential agents of mass education for the elderly

Type	Unable to implement effective elderly education programs	Unable to reach the masses of elderly Russians	Able to tackle only some problems of elderly education	Capable of resolving the problem to the full extent
Vocational education institutions (universities and colleges)	6.7%	0.0%	66.7%	26.7%
Non-profit organizations	6.7%	33.3%	40.0%	20.0%
Cultural institutions (libraries, clubs, etc.)	20.0%	13.3%	60.0%	6.7%
Social welfare institutions	33.3%	0.0%	40.0%	26.7%
Employment services	6.7%	6.7%	80.0%	6.7%
Public authorities	6.7%	0.0%	20.0%	73.3%

According to the respondents, most of the institutions indicated in Table 1 can cope only with particular problems of elderly education. We can conclude that it is feasible to involve various agents to handle the problems of mass education for the elderly. The fact that certain tasks can be tackled by various institutions

allows us to make an assumption about the possibility of "division of labor" between different agents of elderly education.

We juxtaposed the answers to the corresponding question with the previously identified expert views on the current objectives of elderly

education. The frequency of mentioning an agent capable of resolving certain problems of elderly education was compared with the main, in the experts' opinion, problems of elderly education. We obtained the following results. The priority agents of elderly training were employment services and vocational education institutions (27% each). The respondents indicated that adaptation of the older generation to innovations and changes was the task of universities and colleges (60%), cultural institutions (53%) and non-profit organizations (40%). Cultural institutions and social welfare institutions (33% each) demonstrated the greatest potential for establishing dialog between different generations. Intellectual and cultural development was the function of vocational education institutions (27%) and cultural institutions (33%). It is expedient to implement programs to counteract negative changes in the psyche of an aging person on the basis of non-profit organizations and social welfare institutions (20% each).

The findings prove that the current education programs for the senior citizens in Russia can take a significant part of the burden when implementing state strategies for mass elderly education. In particular, projects organized on the basis of cultural institutions and social welfare institutions can perform the following functions: to adapt the senior citizens to the social environment; to update their professional, social and cultural potential; to reintegrate the elderly into the education space. This also includes organization of social activities, the prevention of negative age-associated changes in the psyche, and the establishment of dialogue with younger generations.

The respondents' opinions on what institution could tackle the problem of mass elderly

education to the fullest extent are of special interest. According to the results obtained, the main agent capable of doing that is public authorities (73.3%). This allows us to view public authorities (the state as a whole) as the most promising governing body of the national network of educational projects for the elderly. It is also noteworthy that a significant number of the respondents indicated the possibility of improving the educational level of senior citizens on the basis of vocational education institutions (26.7%). This result is explainable by two obvious reasons. Firstly, mass education is the primary task of such institutions. Universities and colleges possess necessary human resources and facilities. Secondly, of all the mentioned agents, they are most closely associated with vocational education – a task that, in the light of the ongoing pension reform in the country, is becoming increasingly relevant for the elderly.

Nearly a third of the respondents (26.7%) emphasized a high potential of social welfare institutions as an agent capable of resolving the problem of mass elderly education to the full extent. This is due to the fact that some respondents are certain that the main function of elderly education is social adaptation of seniors. However, a much larger number of experts believe that such institutions are originally unable to implement effective training programs for older citizens (33.3%). Such a sharp disagreement in the respondents' opinions casts doubt on the feasibility of building mass education strategies for elderly Russians based on projects implemented in social welfare institutions. This conclusion, however, is not a reason for ignoring the potential of these projects when solving particular problems of raising the educational level of the elderly.

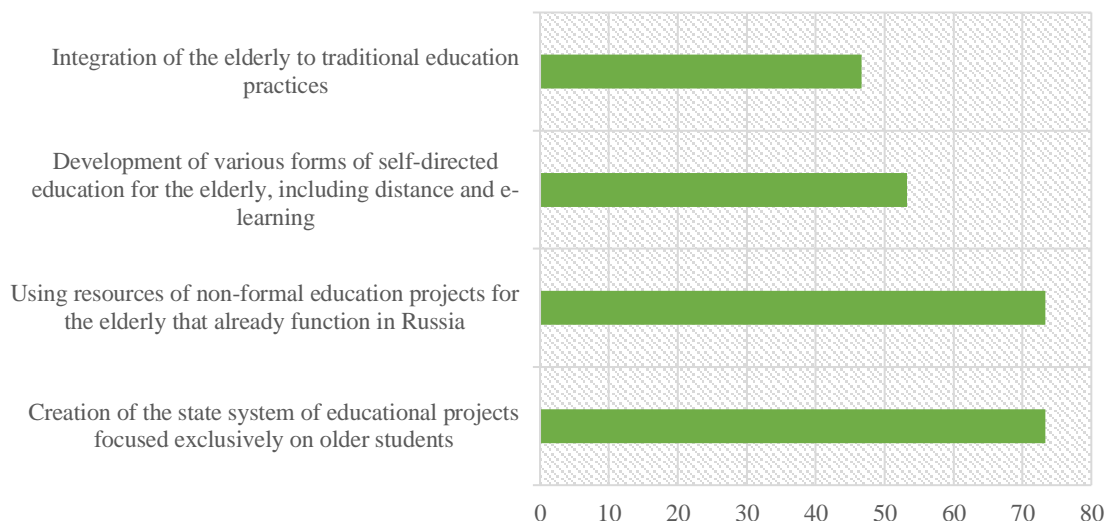


Fig. 1. Effectiveness of strategies for organizing mass elderly education, in %

Figure 1 shows the answers to the question “What are the most suitable strategies for organizing mass elderly education under modern Russian conditions?”. The experts were rather positive about the feasibility of using each strategy. This proves the importance of developing different methods and forms of educational activity to enhance the effectiveness of measures aimed at providing mass education for the senior citizens in Russia. It should be noted that more than half of the respondents indicated that the strategy for integrating the elderly into traditional education practices (university courses, continuing education courses, etc.) appeared to be ineffective. The idea of creating a special state education system for the older generation, on the contrary, elicited a positive response from the vast majority of experts. The revealed patterns indicate that the Russian education system is unable to solve the problem of raising the older citizens’ educational level. One should not expect measures for integrating the elderly into traditional education practices to be highly effective. Serious actions have to be taken to develop special educational programs across the country.

To sum up the respondents’ answers, the creation of the national system of elderly education in Russia is a necessary measure, rather than a logical and final solution to the problem. The country needs the education system for adults that “accompanies” people throughout their life. Considering the environment in which the older generation live today, the development of the national system of elderly education is the most

effective, if not the only possible, strategy for the short-term.

The significant finding of our research is the fact that the respondents support the idea to attract resources of the existing elderly education projects. 73% of the experts favored the implementation of this strategy. The survey results demonstrate that the effectiveness of this strategy is similar to the creation of the national system of elderly education and even higher than integration of the elderly into traditional educational practices. When answering the extra question, only 6.7% of the experts were skeptical about engaging the existing projects of elderly education to increase the older generation’s educational level, whereas most of the respondents were positive about that (“Yes” – 6.7%, “Rather yes” – 86.7%). At that, 66.7% suppose it is possible to use the facilities of the current elderly education projects; 86.7% – to use the experience gained by the projects (pedagogical methods and techniques). 93.3% of the experts indicate it is expedient to attract human resources involved in the projects and teachers of specialized education programs.

Most of the respondents agree that the national system can be managed by the state or other institutions (“Yes” – 33.3%; “Rather yes” – 60.0%). It is worth noting that some respondents were concerned that centralized project management can formalize and emasculate the idea of elderly education.

It is logical that mechanisms for managing elderly education projects should be non-

traditional and largely determined by the specificity of the object of management. The respondents were asked to assess to which extent the specific features of elderly education projects

can impede centralized management across the country. Table 2 presents the ranking in which the significance of a factor, as an obstacle to management, increases as its coefficient rises.

Table 2. Ranking of factors impeding external management of elderly education projects

Specific features of elderly education projects	Coefficient
1. Reluctance of project organizers to change the direction of work	63
2. Different projects have different tasks, lack of a common goal	52
3. Self-sufficiency of projects, independence from the external environment	45
4. Different forms of organization of training in different institutions	33

The most serious obstacle to centralized management was the reluctance of project organizers to change the direction of work (coefficient 63). The respondents note the unwillingness of project directors to collaborate with similar projects and engage new people in teaching and management staff. This makes the interaction of a project with the external environment more complicated and slows down its modernization. To some extent, the position of organizers is due to the conservative views of a significant part of the community of elderly education teachers (educators working with the elderly). However, the situation appears to be more complicated given that the third most important obstacle is self-sufficiency of projects. Independence of Russian projects of elderly education from the external environment (in particular, external funding) is traditionally seen as an induced form of existence. Projects do not receive long-term funding and have to raise funds for their functioning themselves. Nevertheless, some respondents highlighted that autonomy of projects was not at all a forced form of survival. Organizers merely enjoy their independence and freedom when establishing goals of their activity and methods for achieving them. Having the project under external control actually means losing freedom in organizing the educational process, while keeping the function of raising funds independently.

The second most significant obstacle is the lack of a clear organization and management system within the projects (coefficient 59). In most cases, organization and the governing body are present within a project. However, lots of projects are, in fact, informal organizations, communities of teachers and students, and clubs, where learning activity is just a reason to gather together. Frequently, when educational programs are implemented on the basis of a certain institution's facilities, this institution performs managerial functions. For this reason, to increase

the effectiveness of elderly education management, it is necessary to concentrate on the goals of educational programs that ultimately influence their content.

A third of the respondents stated that various organizational forms of the learning process in different projects was another obstacle to external management. Here, we can conclude that there is no need for affecting organizational forms of the learning process, as well as the mechanisms of self-organization of a project. The managerial impact is successful, when the project produces the results set by the governing body. Specific way for achieving that is the issue, in which the subject of management is more competent than the object of management. Among other factors hindering external management are a short life of projects and lack of long-term funding.

As for applying various measures to influence educational institutions for the elderly to focus their activities on specific goals, the opinions of the respondents were distributed as follows. The majority of the experts believe that it is expedient to provide elderly education projects with educational programs and finance such programs (86.7%). 46.7% of respondents support another way to offer investment support, i.e. to fund institutions engaged in the priority socio-economic activity. The effectiveness of investments in human capital has convincing evidence (Prakapavičiūtė & Korsakienė, 2016; Lincaru et al., 2018). The respondents also confirm the effectiveness of managerial impact on the socio-cultural environment of elderly education. 40% of them indicate that organizers and teachers of educational projects should learn about principal purposes of elderly education; 33% of experts claim it is reasonable to make the entire population more aware of these purposes through mass media and other channels. A number of research studies (Sorokin, Rybakova

& Popova, 2019) prove mass media to be effective for this purpose.

Discussion

Based on the results of the research, we have devised a method for affecting the development of the network of elderly education institutions in Russia. The method aims to identify and implement corrective actions to influence the network's development. It suggests that the measures should be taken across the country, therefore, public authorities are considered as a subject of management.

As specified by the method, the network of elderly education institutions is regarded as a self-developing system, and it can only be managed effectively if the management style is soft. According to this management approach, organizational agents create conditions in the social space that regulate the behavior of interacting entities and determine the process of self-organization (Bondaletov, 2016)

In compliance with the concept of soft management, we propose four methods for managing the development of the network of elderly education institutions:

1. *Affecting intra-network relationships.* The subject of management is capable of encouraging the consolidation of the network's elements through forming their alliances, associations and virtual communities; holding scientific-practical conferences; organizing educational seminars and courses. At that, the reason for establishing the relationship between the nodes can be determined by the subject of management on the basis of goals and objectives. Another effective way to influence the intra-network relationships is the use of a thesaurus. Thesaurus is not a node of a network, but a form of connections between its elements that can be replenished, among other things, from the external environment of the network. Concentrating the network development on a particular area is possible through media coverage of the activities of certain institutions, posting proceedings of conferences, methodological literature, etc. in the public domain.
2. *Selective support for central nodes.* The activity of individual elements of a
3. *Introducing agents of influence.* The governing body can initiate the creation and integration of new institutions into the network, form their infrastructure and organize financial support necessary for its functioning. If there are stable connections established with other elements of the network, the subject of management gets a highly manageable element in the network that can be used as an agent of influence on various intra-network processes. In this case, the means of indirect influence on the activity of other nodes, network segments or the entire network will be the transmission of the experience of the agent of influence in intra-network connections, as well as the development of its own subnetwork. In Russia, governing bodies potentially responsible for managing regional elderly education institutions prefer to initiate their own projects rather than support the existing ones. Such an approach allows establishing clear objectives of a project, producing concrete results and resolving a number of management issues. In their quantitative and qualitative indicators,

network can be stimulated by the subject of management via financial or information support, development of the infrastructure and other types of assistance. In terms of elderly education, the idea of the method is to help an institution do what it does well and meet the goals of the governing body. The selection criteria for such nodes are not only goals and objectives of the functioning, but also the availability of their own subnetwork of institutions, a large number of students, high capacity, and popularity of the educational project in mass media. The results of the method are a growing subnetwork of a given node, an increase in the number of participants in its educational programs, and enhancing influence of the node on other elements of the network. It is noteworthy that supporting all nodes of a network is unreasonable: due to the multiplicity of subjects included in a network, this measure can produce results conflicting with management tasks. In this case, support is provided to numerous institutions whose activities do not correspond to the ideas of the subject of management.

agents of influence significantly exceed educational projects that operate without clear external governance mechanisms. This fact makes it possible to evaluate the method for introducing agents of influence as an effective mechanism of social management.

4. *Forming a socio-cultural environment.* Since the functioning of a network is affected by its sociocultural environment, the impact on the latter can also serve as a mechanism for managing the network development process. Qualitative changes in the functioning and development of a network can be initiated through strengthening or weakening the influence of specific factors of elderly education and forming public opinion about certain tasks or spheres of elderly education.

The diagram illustrating the development of the network of elderly education institutions is given in Fig. 2. The management process is presented as a cycle consisting of three stages: establishing current purposes and objectives of management, implementing management methods, and analyzing the network status and socio-cultural environment. At the first stage, the governing body determines relevant purposes and objectives of management. At the second stage, necessary managerial methods are selected and implemented in accordance with particular goals and objectives. At the third stage, information about the network and socio-cultural environment of elderly education is collected and new trends are identified. Once the third stage is completed, a new iteration of the management cycle starts.

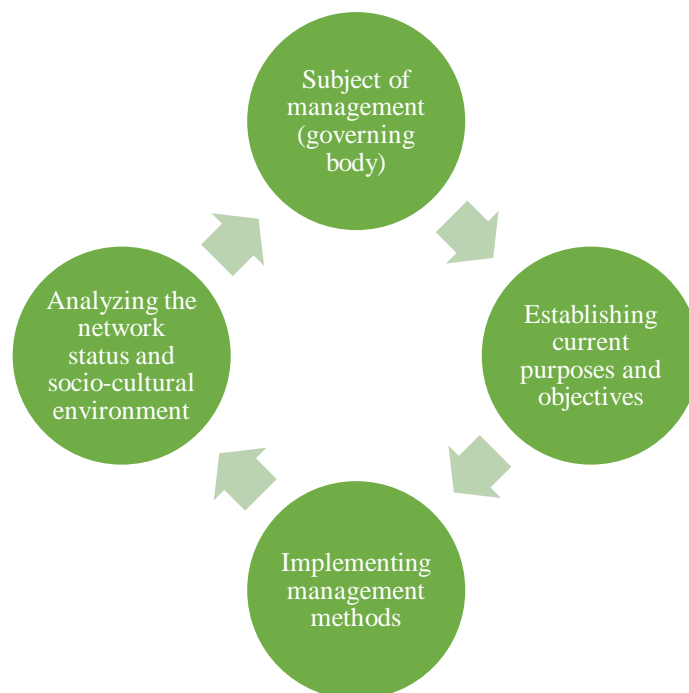


Fig. 2. The management cycle of the network of elderly education institutions

The method for affecting the development of the network of elderly education institutions does not imply that it is required to establish certain management variables and measures for influencing the system of elderly education institutions. It frames only general management principles and methods. The method's obvious advantages are the following:

- 1) Focus on supporting natural processes of self-development taking place within the network of elderly education;
- 2) Availability for implementation at any level of network structure management – from the node level to the network level at large;
- 3) Opportunity to use a wide range of management variables (infrastructure of

- nodes, connections, socio-cultural environment);
- 4) Possibility to combine various management methods;
 - 5) Thinking beyond the precise content of a network's node (form of project organization, type of founder, etc.);
 - 6) Immediate correction of the management style if the properties of the subject of management change or new goals are defined.

There are two main areas for future research on the management impact exerted on the network of elderly education projects. Firstly, this is the study of the complex of non-formal elderly education programs as an object of management, identification of unused management variables and establishing new ways of influencing. Secondly, this is an analysis of the practical application of the developed method to particular segments of the Russian network of elderly education. The implementation of the proposed method is expected to reveal its shortcomings, initiate additional restrictions and contribute to the design of new management mechanisms.

Conclusions

Currently, Russian society is experiencing negative consequences of population aging. Effective counteraction to them is impossible without attracting economic, cultural and other resources of a constantly growing cohort of senior citizens. Any strategies for reintegrating the elderly into all spheres of social life are directly related to the need to increase their education level and require the implementation of large-scale activities for the training of senior citizens. This problem should be tackled from different perspectives while attracting various public institutions. The largest agent of elderly education in Russia is non-formal education projects.

The network-based organization of elderly education projects and their independence from governing bodies significantly limit the opportunities for external management. To realize the potential of elderly education projects, it is necessary to employ non-traditional management approaches. The collected empirical data allow us to state that the optimal style of management within the network of elderly education is to concentrate the network activity on certain areas while maintaining the self-organization mechanisms inherent in it. The method proposed by the authors is one of the ways to exert a direct influence on intra-network

processes happening in elderly education projects in Russia.

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