

The Job Burnout Phenomenon of Chinese University Counselors and the Countermeasure to it

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Abstract: The harmfulness of the job burnout phenomenon of Chinese university counsellors cannot be neglected. How to relieve counsellors' job burnout effectively by improving their involvement in work is an important research field. Firstly, to start from three aspects of social roots, organizational roots and personal factors, the writer conducts a preliminary interpretation about the key factors leading to the job burnout of university counsellors which include the workload, role conflict, role ambiguity, a sense of fairness, job characteristics, personality factor, etc. Then, to start from the roots as well as the connotation of job burnout, the writer elaborates that job burnout is a state of body, emotional and spirit exhaustion, especially the wastage and continuous fatigue of body, a sense of hopelessness and desperation, negative self-concept and a negative attitude towards life and work. Finally, from three aspects of mind emancipation, firm faith and clear roles in profession, solution, learning strengthening and self-efficacy enhancing, the writer proposes a countermeasure to solve the job burnout phenomenon of university counsellors, and compares the effect of dealing with job burnout phenomenon according to the data before and after one year practice.

Keywords: college counselors; job burnout; measures

1. Introduction

As a special profession in Chinese universities, counsellors are an important part among teachers in higher institutions, the backbone to engage in moral education and to carry out the ideological and political education in higher institutions.

At the same time, China has stepped into the stage of popularization of higher education, the enrolment scale has been expanded in colleges and universities, and contemporary university students pursue personality, are fond of unconventional and unorthodox things and rebel stronger in thinking and behaviours. Counsellors bearing heavier tasks and the pressure coming from the particularity of students work itself cause the emerging of job burnout among counsellors team, in which it is unstable and brain drain phenomenon is serious [1].

Dalian city has carried out a questionnaire about the job burnout of all self-compiles counselors who participated in psychological health education training classes from 2004 to 2008. [2] [3] (figure1)

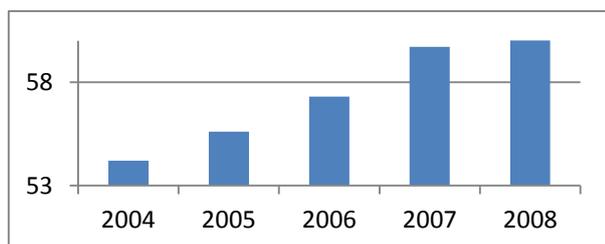


Figure 1. Counsellors Job Burnout Tendency

They come from 14 institutions of higher learning in Dalian, aged 22 to 57. The questionnaire results show that the current job burnout of university counsellors is on the rise, especially in 2006 and 2007[4].

In Recent years, the job burnout phenomenon has caused the attention of domestic and foreign experts and scholars. Western researchers' theories are as follows.

(1) Emotional conflict view. A representative, Berg at Luton, think job burnout is a state of exhaustion that a person is working too hard in order to meeting unrealistic personal and social expectations as to neglect his own needs [5].

(2) Emotional exhaustion view. Representatives, Maslach and Pines [6], hold the view that job burnout a psychological state consisting of three facets: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of achievement. The individual having job burnout may lose passion for work and even treat the service objects in a humane way.

(3) Emotional adaption view. A representative, Kyle Nice [6], considers when an individual cannot adapt to the change of social environment or feel his effort and reward is out of proportion, job burnout will appear. The research angle of domestic scholars focuses more on factors such as individual teacher's personality and China's education environment background to carry out research. They believe that the main causes of job burnout of university counsellors are the following aspects [7]: 1) High social expectations bring psychological pressure to counsellors'; 2)The imperfectness of education mechanism and school management system leads to work difficulties, heavy tasks, indistinct orientat-

tion and a lack a achievement of counsellors; 3) The professional quality of university counsellors is generally low and they lack specialized business training, so counsellors have little development space and poor way out. Based on the discussion above, research of this paper, by finishing reading related materials, writing and literature, and boldly absorbing the beneficial results, mainly analyses the present working situation of university counsellors which collects systematically, the reasons of job burnout and does research on the countermeasures.

2. Job Burnout Phenomenon of University Counsellors

Job burnout of university counsellors refers to a state of emotion, attitude and behaviour exhaustion, which appears when university counsellors, under long-term pressure, cannot effectively alleviate the pressure of work and properly handle the setbacks of work. From the performance point of view, it is that some counsellors has low sense of identity and no interest, is lack of motivation and innovation towards work. They are busy with daily management and stabilizing order work only with enthusiasm and responsibility.

Counsellors' job burnout is characterized in three aspects : long-term emotional burnout and exhaustion, depersonalization towards work and a lack of accomplishment.

A. Long-term emotional exhaustion

In a state of burnout, counsellors often show fatigue, rashness and irascibility and low tolerance. There is a sense of exhaustion and helplessness, an indifferent and pessimistic attitude towards life. Lack of energy, no enthusiasm, and a feeling of a state of extreme fatigue, they have a sense of emotional resources depletion and often feel anxiety, nervousness, loneliness and emotion distress. Emotional exhaustion is the core dimension of job burnout, as well as the most representative indicator.

B. Coldness towards work

One of the performances of coldness towards work is reducing contact with or refusing to accept students; treating students as feelingless objects and showing an attitude of numbness, coldness and irritation towards them. Apart from this, they often hold skeptical and delusional attitude towards colleagues.

C. A low sense of achievement

Counsellors start to feel in their work that there is nothing worth doing and they cannot bring more changes to their students. Also, when their professional rewards such as money and social recognition are few and far between, most counsellors have a strong sense of inferiority. When low sense of achievement mixes together with the two previous job exhaustions, they will greatly reduce the counsellors' work driving force. Eventually, it leads to the recession of working ability, the reducing of the ability to cope, the decline of career motivation and enthusiasm and the decreasing satisfaction with their work. Often occupation withdrawal behaviours, such as absenteeism and departure appear.

D. Social adaption anomie

As university counsellors' work is the most basic work with large workload, high work pressure as well

as low social status and treatment, and with the continuous development of social economy, people's social values and attitude towards life are constantly changing, all these can trigger their inner strong conflict and contribute to their discomfort. At the same time, most young counsellors have just left campus and went to work. They hold idealistic ideas for work, future and work objects. Once they don't get along well with work, the students don't obey the management or they handle improperly some emergencies, they tend to be frustrated and lose confident.

E. Psychological imbalance

Some counsellors cannot timely relieve pressure and adjust attitudes. Once they face setbacks, they prone to psychological imbalance, negative feelings as envy and depression, slow reaction, memory decline and lost control of their emotions. Under a long-term state of nervousness, anxiety and depression, counsellors' psychological health will be decreased and they will be in a psychological sub-health state.

University counsellors' work is cultivating developing people. Compared to other professional people, job burnout of them has more serious effect and has great impact on their own mental health, students' healthy growth and the teaching quality of higher learning institutions.

3. The Root and Nature of Job Burnout of University Counsellors

The job burnout symptom highlights in university counsellors team. The root lies in the fact that the particularity of students work itself brings extraordinary pressure to counsellors. For an individual counsellor, the causes of job burnout vary. In recent years, however, research has confirmed that social, organizational and personal factors have a great relationship with job burnout.

3.1. The Social Root

Most countries in the world hold high expectations for their education, because teachers shoulder the heavy responsibility to cultivate the talents and of history and culture. In Chinese universities, as a direct supervisor of students, teachers are thought to cause the bad results every time education quality is declined and students problems are increased. Thus counsellors will generate a serious inner sense of humiliation and loss, job burnout rises inevitably.

But the truth is, even if counsellors are fully involved, they cannot eliminate the role of accidental factors. It is closely related to the integrity of education, the double check of the early primary and secondary education condition on the longitudinal and family and social education on the transverse. Counsellors, on their job, have too high expectations for work and students. But in reality, counsellors do not fully get the respect from society, low wages, low social status and poor working conditions. High expectation and the contrast displayed cause trouble.

At the same time, a lack of support and resources in work will also lead to counsellors' work pressure. Payne and Fletcher put forward the pressure demand-supports-constraints model, which believes that restrictions to persons on support and resources can lead to stress.

Besides, social support research suggests that support from the superior is more important than that from colleagues.

3.2. The Organizational Root

3.2.1. The Workload

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3.2.2. The Role Conflict and the Role Ambiguity

Numerous studies have shown that the role conflict and the role ambiguity are of medium or high degree correlation with job burnout [8]. The doctor's job is done by curing a disease, the lawyer's job is done by putting an end to a case, but the counsellor's job is not the case. In time and space, counsellors' work has the nature of continuously expanding contact and the characteristics of no boundary. Because there is no clear boundary, counsellors do not know in deed when he has finished the work. This creates a contradiction between counsellors' needs to see achievements and the invisibility of many achievements in their role playing. In addition, as counsellors feel institutional arrangements and the way people treat them in the society are different from the social status and self-image they expected, role conflicts arise.

3.2.3. A Sense of Fairness

From Adams' equity theory, we know that the staff's work motivation is not only affected by their absolute remuneration, but also by relative remuneration. People will compare their own labour with their rewards on self-historical longitudinal and others on the transverse. Only when they feel the consistency of labour and rewards can they have the greatest enthusiasm. From the angle of input-output, we summarize the characteristics of students as three highs and three lows: high expectation, high strength and high requirements in terms of input, low rewards, low creation and low development in terms of output. Compared with other teachers in universities, three highs and three lows characteristics of students work contribute to the job burnout of counsellors.

3.2.4. Job Characteristics

One study compares the job burnout situation of five types of work, teachers, social service, medicine, metal health and law enforcement, in the United States and Netherlands. The results show that job burnout has similar characteristics in the two countries. In judicial circles, the staffs show high working snub and invalidity but low level of failure; however, teachers show high level of failure and average working snub and invalidity. Counsellors' job is typically a profession of helping others, with heavy tasks and social responsibilities, and high self-expectation, which tend to it that teachers cannot deal with the pressure in work

smoothly. This sure will harm teachers work passion and job burnout psychology is inevitable.

3.3. Personal Factors

The personality characteristics of counsellors are also an influencing factor of job burnout. The achievement motivation of university counsellors is generally high and studies have shown that those with higher goals and expectations, with enthusiasm to enter in the profession field are more likely to experience the job burnout. Type A personality individuals have relatively high rate of job burnout. After years of work with high quality, enthusiasm and quantity, suddenly they lose interest in work, show obvious symptom and even cannot continue to work. The five personality dimensions study show that job burnout has a close relationship with neurosis dimension (one of the personality traits) Studies have shown that the higher the tenacity of personality, the lower the job stress and job burnout severity. As externals tend to own events and achievements to others and opportunities, they experience more burnout than internals. Individuals who cope with stressful events in a passive and defending way experience more burnout than people using positive ways.

To sum up, the fundamental cause of job burnout of university counsellors is due to the long-term work pressure. To seek effective measures to relieve job burnout of counsellors, we must carry out a deep analysis of the career pressure counsellors face, and find the main causes of job burnout of counsellors so as to find reasonable countermeasures

4. The Countermeasure to the Phenomenon of Job Burnout of University Counsellors

Through the analysis of the third part, the generation of job burnout of university counsellors has the social aspects, as well as the organizational and personal reasons. So, to prevent and alleviate the counsellors' job burnout, we should start from the three aspects: social, organizational and individual aspects.

4.1. Social Support, Improving the Environment Provides Powerful Support

First, a good trust atmosphere of counsellors and students work should be formed. In an atmosphere of trust and support, the society should formulate a reasonable and practical goal neither too simple, nor too unattainable. In daily work, attention should be paid to and timely praise should be given to every bit of success, so as to improve the job satisfaction, and strengthen the motivation. Thus, the counsellors will have professional sense of honour and belonging, and consider students work a promising business, career and profession to do. Also, the society should establish a reasonable expectation towards counsellors and students work, break the mode thinking of treating ideological and political education as key factors that cause social problems or colleges and universities unrest, and can not own university students' belief crisis and conduct problems only to the inefficiency of ideological and political work.

4.2. Organizational Support, Improving Management Embodies Humanistic Concern

4.2.1. Attaching Great Importance to Students Work and Formulating Corresponding Policies

The society should change the long-term thought that students work is dispensable and the passive situation that students work is a fire brigade, put students management work in an equally important position as teaching and scientific research, and treat students work as a science.

While changing the concept, the society should put forward policy initiatives favourable for students work. On the one hand, we should stabilize the team, enhance the attraction and have more high-quality and high levels comrades join in students work team through the policy orientation role, thus improving the quality of the whole team; On the other hand, appropriate actions should be taken in terms of the specific benefits, such as going out for further education, housing distribution, promotion and rewards to which equal treatment should be given, thus improving the cohesion of students work team

4.2.2. Clarify responsibilities

Clarify counsellors’ task allocation, roles and responsibilities; adopt more the counsellors’ suggestions about the school students management system; while evaluating job performances, put the advantages, contributions, mistakes and faults of counsellors all in an important position, and try to find the best in counsellors instead of seeing the disadvantages only.

4.2.3. Introducing Competition Mechanism and Advocating Flow Mechanism

Reform personnel management system and strengthen the competition mechanism. Create a variety of competition forms, such as open recruitment, investigation, democratic appraisal, etc. and increase transparency. Implement public, equal and preferential employment principle and eliminate firmly few unqualified persons. Universities are now implementing institutional reform and have gradually established a competition pattern, which will undoubtedly reduce the job burnout phenomenon greatly. Talent flow is inevitable and it is the way and outward manifestation in which human resources are combined and distributed. No flow, no stability. Universities should take effective measures to

promote the rational flow of students work cadres so as to realize the dynamic stability of students work team.^[8]

4.2.4. Establishing Reasonable Training Mechanism

One of the biggest goals of human resources management is to get the right people assigned to the right post. And an important means of achieving this goal is training the staff. For counsellors, the needs for training are more intense and the training conditions are more convenient. They can mainly take part in two types of training: one is vocational skills training, that is teaching the trained students work cadres the latest research achievements and working experience through regular professional skills training, lectures, seminars, visits and other forms, to help improve the work performance, such as taking part in the certification study of psychological consultant. The other is knowledge learning which refers to it that counsellors improve their own quality through a higher level of degree education. This can be not only considered to be one of the incentives, but is also conducive to the improvement of students work.

4.3. Personal Aspect, Coping Actively with Job Burnout

Knowledge change request that instructors know clearer of their abilities and opportunities, and do not feel job burnout because of the appropriate expectations and failure; to treat the problems in a positive and constructive way instead of escaping; to attribute training; to make an individual more of an internal controller and to own reasons to individual controllable factors, such as abilities and efforts; to express views more actively and try to change the environment as much as possible; to develop some hobbies and creative activities outside of work; to have reasonable diet and exercise, etc.

The job burnout not only causes individual career and social function damage, lowers the quality of individual life, and also brings destructive effects to the organization. University counsellors are high-risk job burnout groups. To know, evaluate and intervene in teachers' job burnout not only has significance to safeguard counsellors’ health and happiness, but also to the cultivation the talents and the sustainable development of society.

| | Shanghai | Anhui | Hunan | Xi’an(a year ago) | Xi’an(now) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| Emotional exhaustion | 4.11±0.54 | 1.87±0.72 | 3.49±0.63 | 3.67±0.58 | 2.53±0.63 |
| Deindividuation | 3.01±0.77 | 0.97±0.65 | 2.82±0.60 | 3.23±0.67 | 2.99±0.46 |
| A low sense of achievement | 5.11±0.66 | 2.69±0.54 | 4.74±0.61 | 4.07±0.56 | 3.03±0.65 |

Table 1. The Results of the Survey

5. The Survey and its Conclusion

With the support of school management and after a year or so of implement work to job burnout, counsellors' personal burnout has obvious reduction, and at the same time has obvious advantages over counterparts in other schools. Administrative departments for education in many places also conduct questionnaires about the job burnout of university counsellors. For example, six universities in Shanghai investigate university counsellors according to Maslach's job burnout scale, Maslach Burnout out Inventor (MBI); Anhui province investigates university counsellors in five universities, Anhui University of Technology, Anhui Engineering Institute of Technology, Anqing Teachers College, Western Anhui University and Suzhou University in reference to the teachers' job burnout questionnaire compiled by Maslach MBI[5] and the CMBI questionnaire revised by Dr Li Chaoping in Renmin University of China[6]. I also conduct questionnaires about university counsellors in some universities in Xian according to Maslach's job burnout scale part and the specific data of questionnaire survey results is shown in table 1.

Through the questionnaire results above, the corresponding strategies put forward in this paper based

on the three root causes, and the remission of counsellors job burnout situation, it has been proved that the analysis in this paper is objective, and the proposed corresponding approach is effective and easy to operate.

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