

Research on the Incentive Mechanism of Counselors in Private Universities Based on Expectancy Theory

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Abstract: As an important component of the university teacher team, counselors' work and services directly affect the quality of talent that universities provide to society. At present, there are problems in the work of college counselors, such as unstable counselor teams, heavy workload and low status, low salary and benefits, and lack of a sound evaluation mechanism for promotion. To address these issues, expectancy theory should be introduced to construct mechanisms for counselor compensation incentives, goal incentives, assessment incentives, and training incentives.

1. Introduction

With the development of higher education in China, private universities, as an important component of the higher education system, undertake the important task of cultivating diverse talents. In this process, the counselor team plays an irreplaceable role. They are not only guides for students' learning and life, but also a bridge for communication between schools and students. However, the work of counselors in private universities often faces significant pressure and challenges, including heavy workloads and unclear career development paths, which directly affect the enthusiasm and efficiency of their work.^[1]

2. Overview of Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory, proposed by American psychologist Victor Vroom, is a theory about individual behavioral motivation. This theory holds that people's behavior is influenced by expected outcomes, and these expected outcomes can satisfy certain needs or values of the individual. Therefore, when individuals believe that a certain behavior will lead to a positive outcome, they are more likely to take action. Applying expectancy theory to the design of incentive mechanisms for counselors in private universities can help managers understand the needs of counselors, design more effective incentive measures, and improve their job satisfaction and performance.^[1-2]

3. Problems in the Work of Counselors in Private Universities

3.1. Unstable counselor team

The instability of the counselor team in private universities is mainly reflected in high turnover rates and low job satisfaction. Due to high work pressure, limited career development opportunities,

and relatively insufficient salary and benefits, many counselors feel uncertain about their career prospects, which has led to a decrease in their loyalty to their current positions. In addition, some private universities have insufficient understanding of the role of counselors, lack effective support systems and career development paths, which makes counselors feel confused and frustrated when facing heavy student management work and personal career planning. Under the combined influence of these factors, counselors may choose to resign in search of better career opportunities, thereby affecting the stability of the entire team and the quality of educational management in the school.^[3-4]

3.2. Large workload and low status

Private college counselors often face the dual challenges of heavy workload and low status. They not only need to be responsible for students' ideological and political education, daily class management, but also provide psychological counseling and career guidance services.^[5] Often, one person has to take care of hundreds of students, resulting in extremely heavy daily work. At the same time, the status of counselors in schools is relatively low, and their job importance is sometimes not fully recognized. Whether in terms of salary and career development opportunities, they may not be as good as teachers in teaching or research positions. This situation further exacerbates counselors' sense of professional burnout and dissatisfaction.^[6]

3.3. Low salary and benefits

The salary and welfare benefits of counselors in private universities are generally low, with their monthly salary usually around 3000 to 5000 yuan, and their year-end bonuses are relatively limited.^[7] In addition, some schools only provide basic social security such as five insurances and one fund according to the minimum standards. This kind of treatment not only fails to meet daily life needs, but also lacks competitiveness compared to public universities and other industry positions in the same region, resulting in greater life pressure for counselors and affecting their long-term commitment to their profession and work enthusiasm. In addition, the lower salary and benefits also limit the possibility of personal career development for counselors, making it difficult to attract or retain outstanding talents, further exacerbating the instability of the team.^[8-9]

3.4. Lack of a comprehensive evaluation mechanism

Counselors in private universities often face the problem of lacking a sound evaluation mechanism, which is reflected in unclear evaluation criteria, insufficient transparency in the assessment process, and a lack of feedback mechanisms. Due to the lack of a systematic evaluation system, the performance of counselors is difficult to be fairly and reasonably measured, resulting in outstanding performers not receiving the recognition and rewards they deserve, and areas that need improvement are not identified and guided in a timely manner.^[10] This situation not only affects the personal career development of counselors, but may also lead to a decrease in work enthusiasm, which in turn affects student management and educational quality. Establishing a scientific, reasonable, fair and transparent evaluation mechanism is crucial for improving the professional level and job satisfaction of the counselor team.^[11]

4. The Application Foundation of Expectancy Theory in Counselor Work

The expectancy theory, also known as the "valence means expectancy theory," was proposed by American psychologist and behavioral scientist Victor Fromm. This theory quantitatively analyzes

various contingency factors, identifies key variables that determine behavior and their interrelationships, establishes incentive analysis models, and explores the psychological process of individuals from motivation to action. Fromm believes that due to different expectations of one's ability to perform a certain job and the varying levels of satisfaction that completing the job can bring, people will receive different levels of motivation. On this basis, Fromm proposed the expectancy theory and quantified the expectancy model using the formula: $M = V \times E$. Among them, M represents motivational force, V represents valence, and E represents expectation. Motivational power refers to the strength of motivation, indicating the degree to which a person is willing to put in effort towards a goal; Potency refers to the target value, which represents people's evaluation of the degree of satisfaction that completing a certain task can bring, that is, the value evaluation of the work; Expected value refers to the expected probability, which represents people's estimation of the probability of successfully completing work, with a magnitude between 0 and 1. Expectation value and effect value, as the two dependent variables of motivational force, will produce different motivational effects in different combinations. Only when both the expected value and the effective value are higher can a higher level of motivation be generated.^[12-13]

In order to maximize motivational power, Fromm described the process of human expectation relationship: effort → performance → reward → need.

Therefore, when exploring how to harness the power of motivation, the expectation theory focuses on following this process to handle the three relationships well.

4.1. Effort performance relationship

Individuals always hope to achieve corresponding goals through certain efforts. When the goal setting is relatively reasonable and the possibility of achievement is high, individuals will have stronger motivation to take action.^[14]

4.2. Job performance → reward relationship

When individuals achieve corresponding goals through hard work, they always expect to receive appropriate material or spiritual rewards. When the achievement of target performance can be matched with rewards, individual motivation will be positively strengthened, otherwise it will be weakened.

4.3. Reward → Personal Goal Relationship

The satisfaction level of rewards for individuals depends on their evaluation of their importance, that is, whether rewards can meet individual needs. The higher the individual's evaluation of rewards, the greater the motivation.^[15]

5. Analyzing the Reasons for Insufficient Motivation of Counselors Based on Expectancy Theory

5.1. Effort is not proportional to performance

Private college counselors often face the dilemma that their efforts are not proportional to their performance. Despite investing a lot of time and energy in handling student affairs, conducting ideological and political education, and providing psychological counseling, their efforts often fail to receive corresponding recognition and rewards due to the lack of a clear performance evaluation system and incentive mechanism. In this situation, even if counselors perform well in their work,

there may not be significant improvements in salary and career promotion, which may reduce their work enthusiasm and job satisfaction. Over time, this may also lead to talent loss, affecting the stability and work efficiency of the entire counselor team.^[16]

5.2. The correlation between performance and rewards is relatively low

The correlation between the performance and rewards of counselors in private universities is relatively low, as even if counselors perform well in student management, ideological education, and other aspects, their work results are difficult to be transformed into substantial rewards or career promotion opportunities through a clear performance evaluation system. In this situation, whether it is salary increases, bonus payments, or job promotions, they often fail to fully reflect the actual contributions and efforts of counselors, resulting in ineffective incentive mechanisms. The lack of effective performance reward correlation not only weakens the work enthusiasm of counselors, but may also affect their confidence in career development and long-term career commitment. Therefore, establishing a more fair, transparent, and effective reward mechanism that reflects job performance is crucial for improving the overall effectiveness of the counselor team.^[17]

5.3. The disconnect between rewards and teacher needs

There is a disconnect between the reward mechanism for counselors in private universities and the actual needs of teachers, manifested in a single form of reward and a lack of specificity. Usually, rewards may be limited to basic salary adjustments or small bonuses, while ignoring the needs of counselors in terms of career development, professional training, and improvement of working conditions. For example, counselors may require more opportunities for further education, support for academic exchanges, reduced administrative burdens, and improved work environments, but existing reward systems often fail to fully consider these aspects. This disconnect makes it difficult to truly stimulate counselors' work enthusiasm and career satisfaction even with reward measures, thereby affecting their long-term retention and development. Therefore, establishing a reward system that is closer to the actual needs of counselors, diverse, and targeted is the key to improving their work enthusiasm and sense of belonging.^[18]

6. Improvement measures for incentive mechanism of counselors in private universities based on expectancy theory

6.1. Strengthen teacher work motivation

In order to strengthen the motivation of counselors in private universities, improving incentive mechanisms should include the following aspects: firstly, establishing a fair and transparent performance evaluation system to ensure that the efforts and achievements of counselors can be accurately measured; Secondly, provide competitive compensation and benefits, such as bonuses based on job performance, increasing basic salary levels, and improving social insurance; Once again, establish clear career development paths, provide regular professional training and personal growth opportunities for counselors, and support their participation in academic research and further education; Finally, enhance the participation of counselors in student management and school decision-making, and improve their sense of professional honor through commending outstanding individuals, organizing experience exchange meetings, and other means. Through these comprehensive measures, the enthusiasm of counselors can be effectively stimulated, promoting their professional development and career satisfaction.^[19]

6.2. Improve teacher job skills training

Improving job skills training is a key aspect of the incentive mechanism for counselors in private universities. Schools should regularly organize professional training and seminars, covering various aspects such as student psychological counseling, career planning, crisis management, and modern educational technology, to enhance the professional abilities of counselors. In addition, a special fund can be established to support counselors to participate in domestic and international academic conferences and continuing education courses, broaden their horizons, and introduce the latest educational concepts. By establishing a mentorship system, experienced senior counselors can guide new hires and promote the inheritance of knowledge and experience. These measures can not only help counselors better cope with the complex and ever-changing student management work, but also enhance their confidence and sense of belonging to their profession, thereby improving the overall quality and efficiency of their work.^[20]

6.3. Optimize the teacher assessment and evaluation mechanism

Optimizing the assessment and evaluation mechanism is a crucial step in improving the incentive mechanism for counselors in private universities. This includes developing clear, fair, and comprehensive evaluation criteria that cover multiple dimensions such as student management, ideological education, mental health counseling, and career guidance, and ensuring that these criteria objectively reflect the actual work performance of counselors. At the same time, regular peer review and student feedback mechanisms should be introduced to enhance the transparency and credibility of the evaluation process. In addition, the assessment results should be closely linked to performance rewards. Excellent counselors should not only receive salary increases, but also have the opportunity to obtain more career development resources and support, such as opportunities for further education and research project funding. In this way, it can more effectively stimulate the enthusiasm and innovative spirit of counselors, promote their continuous professional growth and personal development.

6.4. Improve the spiritual needs of counselors

In the improvement measures of the incentive mechanism for counselors in private universities, meeting the spiritual needs of counselors is an important aspect of enhancing their job satisfaction and professional identity. This includes creating a supportive and respectful work environment, enhancing communication and collaboration among counselors through regular career development workshops, mental health support services, and team building activities. Schools should also value the opinions and suggestions of counselors, encourage their participation in the school's decision-making process, and enhance their influence in campus management. In addition, the contributions of counselors can be recognized through the establishment of "Excellent Counselor" awards, public recognition, and other means to enhance their sense of honor and belonging. Through these measures, not only can the spiritual needs of counselors be met, but their work enthusiasm can also be stimulated, promoting a more positive and upward working atmosphere.

6.5. Provide humanistic care for counselors

In the improvement measures of the incentive mechanism for counselors in private universities, providing humanistic care is an important means to enhance their job satisfaction and loyalty. This includes providing a good working environment and support system, such as establishing psychological counseling services to help counselors cope with work pressure; Regularly organize

team building activities and social gatherings to enhance communication and understanding among colleagues; Implement a flexible work system that allows counselors to adjust their work hours based on personal circumstances to better balance work and life. In addition, school management should actively listen to the opinions and needs of counselors, promptly solve practical problems they encounter in their work, and express care and respect for counselors through small details such as holiday condolences and birthday wishes. This comprehensive humanistic care not only enhances the professional happiness of counselors, but also promotes their more active involvement in student management and education work.

7. Conclusion

Through this study, we have delved into the incentive mechanism for counselors in private universities based on expectancy theory and analyzed its practical application. Research has shown that effectively utilizing expectancy theory to design incentive programs can significantly improve counselor job satisfaction, motivation, and overall job performance. Specifically, measures such as clearly setting achievable goals, providing sufficient support to help counselors achieve these goals, and ensuring that the results meet the personal career development needs of counselors can greatly stimulate their work enthusiasm. Only when managers truly understand the specific situation and career plan of each counselor, can they develop more personalized and effective incentive strategies. I hope that the methodology proposed by this research institute can provide valuable references for private universities and other related institutions to continuously explore and improve counselor incentive mechanisms that are suitable for their own characteristics in practice.

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