OCCUPATIONAL WELL-BEING OF COUNSELORS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: CURRENT REALITY AND ENHANCEMENT PATHWAYS — AN EMPIRICAL STUDY BASED ON UNIVERSITY D

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Abstract. *University teachers form the solid backing for the connotative development of higher education. As university teachers responsible for the ideological and political education of students, counselors are the organisers, implementers and guides of students' daily ideological, political education and management. Counselors in private higher education institutions are mainly engaged in the ideological and political education of private-university students and bear special responsibilities in talent cultivation; compared with their counterparts in public institutions, they undertake more arduous and complex duties. The quality of counselors' work directly affects the quality of student management in private universities, while their occupational well-being directly influences their performance and the ideological and political work of the institution. Taking 85 counselors from University D as the research subjects, this study introduces Herzberg's two-factor theory and combines questionnaire surveys with in-depth interviews to systematically examine the current characteristics and influencing factors of counselors' occupational well-being in private universities. On this basis, the paper constructs a four-dimensional collaborative enhancement pathway — individual, organisation, institution and society — so as to provide theoretical reference and practical inspiration for the development of counselor teams in private higher education institutions.*

Keywords: *private higher education institutions; counselors; occupational well-being; two-factor theory; establishment-status anxiety.*

Annotatsiya. *Oliy ta’lim muassasalari o‘qituvchilari oliy ta’limning mazmunli rivojlanishining mustahkam tayanchidir. Talabalarning ma’naviy-siyosiy tarbiyasiga mas’ul bo‘lgan o‘qituvchilar sifatida fudauyanlar talabalarning kundalik ma’naviy-siyosiy tarbiyasi va boshqaruvining tashkilotchilari, amalga oshiruvchilari va*

yo‘naltiruvchilaridir. Xususiy oliy ta’lim muassasalari fudauyanlari asosan xususiy universitetlar talabalarining ma’naviy-siyosiy tarbiyasi bilan shug‘ullanadilar va kadrlar tayyorlashda o‘ziga xos vazifalarni bajaradilar; davlat oliy ta’lim muassasalari hamkasblariga nisbatan ular ancha mashaqqatli va murakkab vazifalarni bajaradilar. Fudauyanlar ishining sifati xususiy universitetlarning talabalar boshqaruv sifatiga bevosita ta’sir qiladi, ularning kasbiy farovonligi esa muassasaning ishlash ko‘rsatkichlariga va ma’naviy-siyosiy ishlariga ta’sir qiladi. D universitetining 85 nafar fudauyani tadqiqot obyekti sifatida olingan holda, ushbu tadqiqotda Gerisbergning ikki omilli nazariyasi asos qilib olindi va so‘rovnoma bilan chuqur suhbatlar uyg‘unlashtirildi; xususiy oliy ta’lim muassasalari fudauyanlarining kasbiy farovonligi holati va ta’sir etuvchi omillari tizimli o‘rganildi. Shu asosda, fudauyanlar jamoasini rivojlantirish uchun nazariy asos va amaliy tavsiyalar beradigan “shaxs – tashkilot – muassasa – jamiyat” to‘rt o‘lchovli hamkorlik yo‘nalishi ishlab chiqildi.

Kalit so‘zlar: *xususiy oliy ta’lim muassasalari; fudauyanlar; kasbiy farovonlik; ikki omilli nazariya; shtat maqomi xavotirliligi.*

Аннотация. *Преподаватели высших учебных заведений составляют надёжную опору содержательного развития высшего образования. Как преподаватели, отвечающие за идейно-политическое воспитание студентов, кураторы (фудаоюань) являются организаторами, исполнителями и наставниками повседневной идейно-политической воспитательной работы и управления студентами. Кураторы частных вузов занимаются преимущественно идейно-политическим воспитанием студентов частных университетов и несут особые обязанности в подготовке кадров; по сравнению с коллегами из государственных вузов они выполняют более трудные и сложные задачи. Качество работы кураторов напрямую влияет на качество управления студентами в частных университетах, а их профессиональное благополучие непосредственно сказывается на показателях деятельности вуза и идейно-политической работе. В качестве объекта исследования взяты 85 кураторов университета D; в работе используется двухфакторная теория Герцберга и сочетание анкетного опроса с глубинными интервью для системного изучения особенностей и факторов профессионального благополучия кураторов частных вузов. На этой основе предложена четырёхмерная модель совместного повышения благополучия — «личность — организация — институт — общество», — призванная дать теоретическую опору и практические рекомендации для развития корпуса кураторов в частных вузах.*

Ключевые слова: *частные высшие учебные заведения; кураторы (фудаоюань); профессиональное благополучие; двухфакторная теория; тревожность в связи с отсутствием штатного статуса.*

Introduction.

Counselors in higher education institutions perform the dual function of ideological and political education and student management, and their work is closely connected with the study and daily life of students. For a long time, university counselors have faced a large amount of tedious administrative work and found themselves trapped in predicaments such as unclear career development, ambiguous role boundaries and relatively low pay. With the gradual advance of personnel-agency and non-establishment reforms, the mobility of counselors in private universities has increased and the stability of the team has been undermined. At the same time, because student work is by nature unpredictable and emergent, counselors are frequently required to work overtime; this not only reduces the efficiency of daily management but also, to some extent, harms their physical and mental health. Against this background, many counselors have experienced declining occupational well-being, lower job satisfaction and serious burnout. On this basis, taking University D as a case, this paper conducts a systematic study of counselors' occupational well-being in private universities, and strives to propose operable improvement strategies after revealing the real problems.

Literature analysis.

The two-factor theory (Two-Factor Theory) proposed by the American psychologist Herzberg provides a classic paradigm for analysing occupational well-being. According to this theory, the factors affecting employees' work attitude can be divided into two categories. The first is hygiene factors, which include remuneration, working conditions and management systems; their absence causes dissatisfaction, yet their improvement can only eliminate dissatisfaction rather than generate satisfaction. The second is motivation factors, which include promotion opportunities, professional identity and a sense of achievement; their improvement can substantially stimulate employees' work enthusiasm and satisfaction. In the context of private higher education institutions, counselors' occupational well-being presents a distinctive dual structure. On the one hand, owing to the enterprise-style operating logic of private universities, hygiene factors such as pay, benefits and hardware facilities are often compressed by cost control; together with the generally weak learning autonomy and frequent psychological problems of private-university students, the counselors' working

environment and labour intensity easily give rise to burnout. On the other hand, constrained by the awkward ‘non-teaching-establishment’ identity and a single promotion channel, the motivation factors concerning counselors' long-term development are seriously insufficient. This double overlay of ‘deficient hygiene factors’ and ‘missing motivation factors’ constitutes the deep mechanism behind the low occupational well-being of counselors in private universities. Guided by this theoretical framework, the paper offers an in-depth interpretation of the survey data from University D.

Research object and applied methods.

The research object of this study is the occupational well-being of counselors in private higher education institutions, with University D taken as the empirical case. University D is a private undergraduate institution; a total of 85 counselors from the university participated in the study. A mixed-method design was adopted, combining a structured questionnaire survey with semi-structured in-depth interviews. The questionnaire covered four dimensions — welfare and compensation, working environment, development pathways and professional identity — and collected both closed-ended ratings and open comments, while the in-depth interviews supplemented the quantitative data by exploring counselors' subjective experiences, role conflicts and career expectations. The analysis is guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory, which provides the framework for interpreting the survey results. The study does not claim representativeness of all private universities; it aims to reveal structural problems through a typical case and to propose a transferable enhancement pathway.

Results and their analysis.

The survey reveals that counselors' occupational well-being in University D is generally low and is constrained by a nested structure of hygiene and motivation factors.

Welfare and compensation. The survey data show that counselors' after-tax monthly income is concentrated in the range of 3,000–4,000 yuan, accounting for 62.35% of respondents, and only 1.18% earn more than 6,000 yuan per month. This level is significantly lower than the standard for equivalent posts in public universities and also falls short of the local average wage. Most counselors report a rigid pay-increase mechanism lacking performance incentives and weak occupational attractiveness. The pay structure is dominated by base salary, with a low proportion of floating components such as post allowances and performance bonuses that fail to reflect differences in work. In terms of satisfaction, only 4.71% of counselors are ‘relatively satisfied’ with their pay, 54.12% consider it ‘not very satisfactory’ and

18.82% even feel ‘very dissatisfied’, indicating an overall low level of satisfaction. This discontent mainly stems from the imbalance between pay and work intensity: 81.18% of respondents believe that ‘effort is not matched by pay’. Internal fairness is also insufficient — compared with full-time teachers, 95.29% of counselors think their pay is markedly lower. The prevalent ‘teaching-first, management-second’ tendency in private universities means that counselors, as the main force in student work, receive significantly lower pay than full-time teachers, deepening their identity crisis. External competitiveness is weak as well: compared with other private universities in the same region, only 3.53% of respondents consider their pay to be at a medium level and 88.24% consider it ‘low’, leading to frequent talent mobility and weak team stability. Furthermore, the welfare and security system is incomplete. Apart from base salary, only 13.24% of counselors enjoy supplementary commercial insurance or occupational pension, and the coverage of housing subsidies and child-education support is below 10%. Relying on an enterprise-style model, private universities' welfare provision is constrained by school funds and cannot establish the multi-tier system of ‘establishment + performance reward + long-term security’ typical of public universities; this ‘low security, high pressure’ situation directly affects counselors' occupational well-being and work efficiency.

Working environment. Office facilities and space are inadequate: only 3.53% of counselors are ‘very satisfied’ with office facilities and space, 54.12% think the facilities are ‘average and need improvement’ and 18.82% consider them ‘crude and harmful to efficiency’. Specific problems include backward hardware, unreasonable spatial planning and a clear gap with public universities. The need for informatisation is urgent but meets strong resistance. A notable generation gap exists between the digital transformation of counselors' work and the development of artificial intelligence: it is characterised by ‘lagging tool iteration, absent platform integration and insufficient application level’, which restricts the implementation of the education-intelligence strategy. Although 74.12% of counselors support informatisation and believe that automated processes can reduce repetitive work, problems remain in practice, such as poor technical adaptability, missing training resources and an imbalance between cost and benefit. The overall working atmosphere is harmonious, yet latent contradictions should not be ignored. Although most respondents consider team relations good, interviews reveal that role conflicts in informal communication (for example, blurred boundaries between counselors and full-time teachers) may aggravate latent contradictions. The ‘enterprise-style’ management style of private universities also weakens some counselors' sense of belonging to the organisation.

Development pathways. Counselors face many difficulties in professional-title assessment and post promotion. In the past two years, 43 counselors applied for professional titles, with a pass rate of only 13.95%. Some counselors lack a clear career prospect and the motivation and confidence for long-term development. There is a structural contradiction between the perception of promotion channels and their reality. Although the university provides certain promotion channels, clear difficulties remain in practice. Promotion proceeds mainly through administrative posts and professional-technical posts, yet both have limits: administrative posts are scarce in establishment, and 85.88% of respondents see ‘limited promotion quotas’ as the core obstacle; the transfer mechanism is largely nominal — although 78.82% of respondents believe they could transfer to full-time teaching, successful cases are very rare. The deep contradiction of blocked promotion channels is mainly reflected in quota rationing: 85.88% of respondents believe promotion quotas are constrained by the university's administrative establishment, forming a ‘pyramid-style’ competitive structure. In addition, individual development resources are scarce — 56.47% of respondents feel a lack of professional-development training, and per-capita training expenditure in private universities is only 35% of that in public universities. Expectations of career prospects are divided: 49.41% of respondents consider the promotion channel ‘not smooth’ and hold a pessimistic attitude toward their career prospects.

Professional identity. Professional identity shows structural differentiation and contradiction. The perceived organisational status is low: only 7.06% of counselors think that ‘university leaders attach importance and status is equal to that of administrative and subject teachers’, while 37.65% think they ‘have no status and feel somewhat inferior’. Social recognition is internally and externally unbalanced: 38.82% of family members or friends consider counselor work ‘tedious and development-limited’. Self-identity is contradictory: 54.12% of counselors ‘relatively accept the post’, yet only 9.41% say they ‘strongly accept it and are willing to engage in it long-term’. Professional identity follows a ‘U-shaped curve’ distribution across years of service.

Discussion.

Drawing on the implications of the two-factor theory, enhancing counselors' occupational well-being requires both consolidating the ‘hygiene factors’ to eliminate dissatisfaction and activating the ‘motivation factors’ to raise satisfaction. In response to the problems revealed above, and taking account of the flexible governance mechanism of private universities, this paper proposes the following four-dimensional collaborative pathway.

Optimising the compensation and welfare system: consolidating the ‘hygiene factors’. Dynamically adjust the salary baseline by referring to the average salary of counselors in local public universities and the local urban non-private wage standard, and establish a regular pay-increase mechanism linked to teaching seniority and assessment results. Reconstruct a diversified pay structure that splits salary into ‘base pay + post allowance + performance reward + special subsidy’, with performance rewards accounting for no less than 30% and directly tied to indicators such as student satisfaction, emergency-handling effectiveness and educational outcomes. Fill the gaps in welfare protection: on the basis of full payment of the ‘five insurances and one fund’, gradually promote enterprise annuities and supplementary medical insurance, and introduce housing-rent subsidies and priority enrolment for children of young counselors.

Improving the working-environment ecosystem to reduce professional depletion. Upgrade hardware resources by guaranteeing independent counselor workstations at a 1:150 teacher–student ratio, and set up at least one standardised student counselling room and one student-archive informatisation room per college. Advance adaptive informatisation: jointly develop a student-work system suited to private universities with third parties, embedding a psychological-profile database of private-university students, automated early warning of student-status changes and online approval of activities, and provide no less than 16 credit-hours of informatisation training each semester. Foster a supportive organisational culture by establishing a regular joint communication mechanism among ‘counselors – full-time teachers – administrative staff’, clarifying rights and responsibilities, and introducing a ‘first-responsibility system’ and an ‘error-tolerance and correction list’ to avoid simply blaming counselors for student incidents.

Unblocking career-development channels to break the growth bottleneck. Improve the dual-track promotion mechanism by strictly implementing counselors' dual identity as ‘teacher + manager’, running administrative ranks and ideological-political-teacher title review in parallel, and adding non-leading ranks such as ‘senior counselor’ and ‘student-work supervisor’ on the administrative line. Strengthen transfer and training support by opening an orderly flow from counselors to full-time teaching and administrative posts, and establishing a counselor-development special fund at 0.5% of annual tuition income to ensure no less than 40 off-campus training credit-hours per person per year. Strengthen support for academic advancement by cooperating with provincial universities to open special in-service master's and doctoral training

programmes, and granting subsidies of over 50% of tuition fees to counselors who have served three years and passed excellent assessment.

Reshaping professional identity to dissolve social bias. Clarify the organisational identity by formally establishing counselors' status as ‘core teachers of ideological and political education’ in the private-university charter, guaranteeing them equal access to teaching-research resources and equal participation in excellence awards as full-time teachers. Strengthen positive public guidance by regularly pushing exemplary counselor-education cases through the university's official WeChat account and local media to reverse the ‘nanny’ stereotype. Empower individual value by establishing a ‘counselor studio’ incubation mechanism that supports counselors in building distinctive work brands based on their strengths, with special funding.

Conclusion.

Counselors in private universities are the ‘last-mile’ implementers of moral education and talent cultivation in private higher education, and their occupational well-being is directly related to the quality of student management and the effectiveness of ideological and political work. Taking University D as a sample, this study reveals the common problems faced by counselors in private universities today: a mismatch between pay protection and high-intensity work, limited development channels and blurred identity. The proposed enhancement pathway responds both to individuals' micro-level demands and to the deep structural contradiction of ‘teaching-first, student-work-second’ in private-university governance. In the future, it is necessary to track the effect of policy implementation and dynamically optimise measures in light of the actual operation of different types of private universities, so as to truly enable counselors to ‘stay, work well and retain dignity’, and to provide solid talent support for the high-quality development of private higher education.

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