Cause Analysis and Coping Approaches towards Job Burnout of College Counselors Based on Psychological Contract Theory

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Abstract. College counselor is one of the hit groups for job burnout, which directly harms psychological health and the college education quality. Based on localized psychological contract theory, the author analyzes four aspects: normative obligation: ambiguity in duty boundaries and non-identity in financial return; interpersonal obligation: lack of necessary interpersonal support and humanistic care; developmental obligation: obscurity in career development and limit of promotion; lack of effective interaction and humanistic care. It comes to a conclusion that psychological contract violation is the main cause to job burnout of college counselors. Therefore, colleges must take certain intervening measures to relieve job burnout of college counselors, such as making duty boundaries explicit and improving the performance evaluation; providing effective and on-going coaching and development, standardizing the career planning and affording honor motivation; creating the atmosphere of respect, opening communication channels and affording emotional stimulus.

Introduction

American clinical psychologist Freudenberger firstly proposed job burnout in the field of mental health to describe the sense of exhaustion due to various working conflicts in 1974. Psychologist Maslach gave the definition of job burnout from three aspects which are the most recognized by scholars. Job burnout is a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. Based on this definition, combined with the occupation characteristics of college counselors, this paper argues that: counselor job burnout refers to when counselors facing complex tasks, their occupation value and social status are not effectively recognized so that a series of negative emotion, consciousness and behavior are produced, as follows: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment..

As the backbone of college student ideological and political education, college counselors face enormous work pressure and role conflicts in long term. They are easily to have job burnout which is not only harmful for their physical and mental health, but also deeply influential in college education quality. Existing analysis focuses on either construction of counselors from the perspective of speculative, or improvement suggestions from the macro level, which lacks in-depth analysis on the root cause and interactions between the counselors and college. Psychological contract theory is originated in western organizational behavior research. Studies have shown that psychological contract violation is individual work attitude and main explanatory variables of behaviors. Psychological contract violation has positive prediction function and can lead to job burnout, influencing the most on emotional exhaustion dimension. Therefore, this study theoretically defines psychological contract of college counselors, demonstrates that psychological contract violation is one of the main causes of the job burnout of college counselors, and accordingly puts forward certain intervening measures.
Theoretical Definition of Psychological Contract of College Counselors

Concept Definition of Psychological Contract of College Counselors

The earliest using of "psychological contract" is the organizational psychologist Argyris written in his book "understanding organizational behavior", he used "psychological contract" to describe a hidden and informal relationship between subordinates and supervisors. Different from Rousseau (1989) unilateral definition of psychological contract. Herrit and Pemberton (1995) emphasized bilateral that psychological contract is perceived responsibility to provide for each other, the perception comes from the perception of the formal agreement, or hidden in various expectations."

Combined with the research of the domestic scholar, this paper consider that psychological contract is a kind of perception is an expectation and consciousness of responsibility both sides should bear, it is the implicit and inner psychological agreement and two-way psychological contract which can restrain and stimulate behaviors through the organic combination of individual and organization up by definition of mutual responsibility. The significance of constructing the psychological contract is to realize the development of human initiative, and avoid the low working efficiency due to the "information asymmetry" between the organization and its members.

In addition to the formal economic contract signed by counselor, there still exist informal, implicit and well aware of the psychological contract. Accordingly, counselor psychological contract refers to the expectation and subjective psychological agreement of the rights and obligations both colleges and counselors should bear.

Content Dimension of Psychological Contract of College Counselors

At present, the research on content dimension of psychological contract is based on the theory of two dimensional structure proposed by MacNeil (1985) and three dimensional structure raised by Rousseau (1996). "Two dimensional structure" refers to "transaction contract" and "relationship contract", the main cause of transaction contract is specific economic benefits and relational contract involved economic transactions and emotional engagement. Li Yuan, a Chinese scholar, combined with the current situation of China concluded that: it is more appropriate to describe the psychological contract of Chinese employees with three dimension model which include three dimensions: normal obligation, developmental obligation, and interpersonal obligation.

Therefore, with the college counselor job responsibilities, the psychological contract of college counselors are divided into three dimensions: (1) normal obligation: to emphasize the responsibility of both colleges and counselors. College should put forward counselors work responsibilities clearly and provide the benefits guarantee, and counselors should fulfill their duties and complete the task. (2) developmental obligation: to emphasize the mutual trust and respect. Colleges and counselors should organize justice and harmony organizational environment together and give the necessary humane care. (3) developmental obligation: to emphasize the responsibilities to win success for each other. Colleges should help counselors to obtain a sense of accomplishment by providing career development opportunities and exploring their potential, counselors should devote themselves into work loyally to obtain professional satisfaction.

Dynamic Development of Psychological Contract of College Counselors

Dynamic development of psychological contract focus on its formation, breach and violation. Psychological Contract Violation refers to employee perception of unfulfilled responsibility committed by organization.

The research shows that psychological contract violation is an important explanatory variable of individual work attitude and behavior, and has a negative impact on individual's attitude and behavior. According to the affective events theory, if the psychological contract violation is counted as a work event, and this resulting anger is regarded as an emotional reaction, thus this kind of emotional experience will inevitably reduce the job satisfaction. In addition, the psychological contract violation affects the work attitude and the corresponding work behavior, and has a negative impact on individual mental health. Once counselors think colleges are untrustworthy because of contrary to the original commitment, anger experience would be produced. But in reality,
counselors can not balance or offset the negative emotional experience through job-hopping under the economic and social pressure. What’s worse, counselors have to restrain anger; then emotional dissonance would be generated. Emotional disorders difficulties will further lead to mental health problems, such as the emergence of job burnout. The related research also confirmed this view.

Therefore, the psychological contract violation of college counselors is an important reason for the counselors’ job burnout.

Cause Analysis on Job Burnout of College Counselors Based on Psychological Contract Theory

Normal Obligation: Ambiguity in Duty Boundaries and Non-Identity in Financial Return

"The counselor team construction" issued by The Ministry of Education clearly points out the proportion of front-line counselors and students enrollment must not less than 1:200. It is because of unknown scope of counselors responsibilities that change counselors from ideological and political teacher into student full-time nanny. Multiplicity of fuzziness and roles beyond the counselors psychological expectations and affordability, the complicated degree of some counselors work is also beyond their psychological contract.

In addition, as the most basic and the most busy group, the actual workload and remuneration are not equal. Compared with teachers and administrative cadres, counselors can not enjoy the same treatment in job evaluation, job training and income allowance allocation. Because occupation definition fuzzy and specific work trivial, lack of due respect and recognition, there are certain degree of contempt by universities and the society, a huge gap between the reality of their own work, all of these lead to cognitive imbalance and psychological contract violation, and then result in the reduction of job satisfaction, negative emotional reaction and negative self evaluation, job burnout is eventually produced.

Interpersonal Obligation: Lack of Necessary Interpersonal Support and Humanistic Care

College counselors have strong self actualization needs, they hope their work can be approved and valued. But because universities generally attach much more importance to teaching and scientific research instead of administrative staff and counselors, Because of lack of necessary interpersonal support and humanistic care, counselors often become marginal man. Some counselors even tacitly approve themselves as service-oriented nanny, their occupation identity, self-worth and sense of belonging are accompanying low. Counselors are prone to depersonalization such as dereliction of duty and perfunctory.

Developmental Obligation: Obscurity in Career Development and Limit of Promotion

College counselors own double identity both of cadres and teachers, their occupation has certain development space, which is counselors’ psychological expectations before the formal entry. But the reality is that there are no clear occupation development planning for counselors in colleges and a complete counselor job evaluation system, the vast majority of counselors feel confused.

Colleges demand counselor team development to the direction of professionalization, specialization and expertization, and counselors need to master job specification possessing characteristics of scientific, informative and applied. Quite a number of professional counselors are not the ideological and political education or psychology background and lack of effective training plan, they have to spare time to self-enhancement. The contradiction between the practical work requirements and their ability to work bring great frustration to them which lead to diminished personal accomplishment. The counselor career loyalty, responsibility and mission also reduced.

Lack of Effective Interaction and Humanistic Care to Cope with Psychological Contract Violation

Due to some objective reasons, counselors psychological contract inevitably breach. At this moment, effective communication between colleges and counselors and timely repair and update to psychological contract violation appears to be of essence, because it will directly relate to dynamic development of psychological contract of college counselors.
Although many colleges and universities set up a communication platform for counselor, but form communication than substantive exchanges, transactional communication more than the effective communication, so the counselor aspirations has not been really hearkened. What’s more, feedback delay and two-way communication obstacles intensified misunderstanding between counselors and colleges. If defecation and emotional adjustment are not taken by colleges to respond to the demands of the counselor when their psychological contract breach, breach would evolve into the violation, and the psychological rift between university counselors would deepen, as a result, job burnout come to being ultimately.

Enlightenment of Reliving Job Burnout of College Counselors

Making duty Boundaries Explicit and Improving the Performance Evaluation

Pre-employment is important stage of the formation of counselors psychological contract, when colleges need to introduce job duties and communicate with counselors on the rights and obligations of both parties and interests effectively with the purpose of making rights and obligation more clear for both of them. Therefore counselor psychological expectations would be more close to the reality so as to achieve better matching between the individual and the position, the individuals and organizations to establish a good psychological contract.

Colleges should make a clear definition of counselor responsibility, delimit the scope of work, and highlight the priorities to make the counselor's psychological contract clarity after the induction of counselors. Facing the reality of counselors complex work pressure, colleges should equip sufficient counselors in accordance with relevant state regulations and make college students ideological and political education as the core of the work, and ensure reasonable division of labor according to their expertise and interest. The point of these is help counselors to reduce work burden, achieve professional development and improve the sense of achievement.

Moreover, non-identity in financial return is important factor leading to job burnout, making work pay is key to solve job burnout. Colleges should pay attention to improve the salaries and benefits for counselors and give the necessary material incentives.

Providing Effective and On-going Coaching and Development, Standardizing the Career Planning and Affording Honor Motivation

Giving counselors effective occupation training and perfecting the occupation promotion mechanism so as to help counselors achieve reasonable occupation career planning are not only important way to expand counselors occupation development space but also necessary way to achieve their own professional growth.

Firstly, various forms of training system during different work stages should be established to help counselors achieve professionalism, specialization and expertization. Secondly, academic title evaluation adopting double standard can be provided to counselors. For those are suitable for engaged in management, colleges can cultivate and promote them according to the management duty; for whom are willing to work in the counselor, the corresponding development ladder should provided for them. Finally, Counselors should ensure their own developments to be consistent with the development goals of colleges and universities when making career plan, so as to realize the virtuous circle of psychological contract.

Creating the Atmosphere of Respect, Opening Communication Channels and Affording Emotional Stimulus

Subjectivity and uncertainty of the psychological contract determine its imbalance and rupture. Colleges and universities should make full use of network technology, promote effective communication between counselor and make explanation confusion of instructors in a timely manner, so as to achieve dynamic balance in the counselor's psychological contract. In addition, colleges should attach importance to cultivating the counselor and build a caring, understanding and respecting atmosphere for counselor, counselor will feel respect and care, the cohesive affinity and
the sense of belonging can be enhanced, work enthusiasm can be inspired. All this is to avoid the generation of job burnout.

**Conclusion**

Psychological contract violation is the main cause to job burnout of college counselors. Therefore, colleges must take certain intervening measures to relieve job burnout of college counselors. This study is of theoretical and practical significance to some extent.

**References**


