

On the Causes and Countermeasures of Professional Burnout among Administrative Staff in Normal Universities

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Abstract: With the increasing demand for higher education in society, administrative staff at normal universities are confronted with mounting challenges. In the context of developing new-quality productivity, college administrative personnel must not only adapt to the swift progress of technological innovation but also satisfy the new demands for efficiency and quality in the education sector. However, professional burnout, a widespread phenomenon, poses a serious threat to the mental well-being and job engagement of administrative staff in higher education, potentially leading to diminished work efficiency and a lack of creativity in management practices. This can impede the ongoing development and competitive edge of normal universities. A thorough investigation into the causes of professional burnout among administrative staff, along with the analysis and proposal of effective preventive measures, is crucial for advancing the role of universities in serving the development of new-quality productivity. By mitigating professional burnout, safeguarding the mental health of administrative staff, igniting work passion, enhancing work efficiency, and fostering innovation in management, the overall excellence of universities can be enhanced, thereby contributing positively to societal advancement and growth.

Keywords: Professional Burnout, Normal Universities, Administrative Staff, Strategic Recommendations.

1. Introduction

Administrative personnel in higher education institutions are specialists dedicated to non-instructional functions, shouldering critical responsibilities in areas such as party affairs, academic administration, personnel matters, and other administrative duties, thereby supporting and serving the institution's full-time faculty and students. Within normal universities, these administrators are tasked with managing the day-to-day operations of educational entities, which includes handling academic affairs, document processing, organizational coordination, and other tasks pertinent to educational administrative management. In order to effectively support the advancement of new-quality productivity, the administrative staff at normal universities confront unparalleled challenges. These challenges arise not only from the swift progress of technology but also from the new benchmarks for efficiency and quality established by the educational sector. The concept of new-quality productivity highlights the need for innovation, flexibility, and adaptability, setting new requirements for the work style, content, and environment of administrative staff. In this context, the problem of professional burnout among administrative workers has become increasingly evident, exerting a considerable influence on the management efficiency and educational achievements of universities. Consequently, it is a shared and vital duty for university administrators, educational governing bodies, and the wider community to focus on the well-being of administrative staff in normal universities and to aid them in dealing with professional burnout.

2. Manifestations of Professional Burnout among Administrative Staff in Normal Universities

In 1974, the American psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger coined the term "burnout" to describe a range of psychological and physiological symptoms that individuals experience under prolonged work-related stress. Later, social psychologist Christina Maslach elaborated on the concept, defining burnout as a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment in roles that involve serving others. In more detail, emotional exhaustion is marked by a loss of passion and confidence in one's work, leading to feelings of tension, defeat, and even phobia towards the job. Depersonalization refers to an individual maintaining a psychological distance from colleagues and work content, showing a lack of engagement in work, skepticism about the meaning of work, and a negative work attitude. The diminished sense of personal accomplishment is felt as a decline in professional achievement, holding a negative self-evaluation, a sense of incompetence in the job, and feelings of helplessness and despair.

In the context of advancing new-quality productivity, university management is encountering unparalleled challenges and opportunities. The growing societal demand for higher education has set higher standards for the scientific and efficient management of universities, necessitating that administrative staff possess stronger execution and innovative capabilities. However, professional burnout, a prevalent issue, poses a threat to the mental health and work enthusiasm of administrative personnel, potentially leading to a decrease in work efficiency, a lack of innovation in management, and ultimately impacting the sustainable development and competitiveness of universities. Therefore, in-depth research

into the causes of professional burnout among university administrative personnel, comprehensive analysis, and the development of effective preventive strategies are crucial for fostering the sustainable development of universities within the context of new-quality productivity. By addressing burnout, we can safeguard the mental health of administrative personnel, reignite their work passion, enhance work efficiency, and foster innovation and advancement in management. This not only contributes to elevating the overall standards of universities but also makes a positive contribution to societal progress and development.

3. Causes of Professional Burnout among Administrative Staff in Normal Universities

3.1. Work Characteristics

Within the administrative structure of normal universities, the nature of the tasks undertaken by administrative staff is a pivotal factor contributing to professional burnout. These individuals are typically burdened with an array of routine and repetitive responsibilities, such as document management, data sorting, and event coordination. The inherent qualities of these administrative tasks—characterized by their high degree of repetition and limited opportunities for creativity—can evoke a significant sense of ennui and a lack of fulfillment among staff members. The granular and highly ritualistic nature of certain grassroots management functions at universities can chip away at the enthusiasm of administrative staff, potentially trapping them in a vicious cycle of burnout (Liu Jinfeng, 2023). The sustained singularity and dearth of variety in their work can progressively dilute their enthusiasm and interest, thereby impacting their drive and professional contentment. Moreover, the low visibility of their contributions often results in their achievements being overlooked and underappreciated, which can lead to a deficiency in acknowledging and rewarding their efforts. This oversight can diminish their dedication and passion for their work. In the absence of external recognition, the intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction of these administrators may gradually decline, exacerbating the onset of professional burnout.

3.2. Overwhelming Workload

The issue of overwhelming workload is another critical factor leading to professional burnout among administrative staff. As the education sector rapidly evolves and the demand for higher education swells, the workload of administrative personnel has surged dramatically. They must handle daily administrative matters while also dealing with an increasing array of complex projects and activities. This sharp increase in workload has placed administrative staff in a constant state of overextension, further intensifying their job-related stress. Specifically, administrative staff are required to manage a large volume of documents, data, and reports to ensure the smooth operation of teaching management. Additionally, they must organize and coordinate various meetings and events to fulfill educational administrative requirements. These tasks typically demand a high level of meticulousness and accuracy, along with the need to maintain efficiency in order to better serve the institution's full-time faculty and students. Faced with such a heavy workload, administrative staff may feel immense pressure and find it difficult to cope. Prolonged exposure to a high-intensity work environment may lead to

physical and mental exhaustion, making it challenging to maintain enthusiasm and focus in their work.

3.3. A Significant Gap Between Expectations and Reality

Administrative staff commonly harbor high professional aspirations, including the desire for personal development, professional fulfillment, and the opportunity to exercise creativity and influence in their roles. However, these aspirations often diverge from the reality of administrative work, which is characterized by its repetitiveness and limited scope for creativity. This disconnect can lead to psychological dissonance and a sense of failure among administrators, ultimately diminishing their engagement and passion for their work. Administrative staff may envision a workplace where they can realize their personal worth, leverage their professional skills and creativity, and contribute positively to the educational environment. In practice, however, they are often tasked with managing a deluge of routine administrative tasks, such as document processing, data entry, and scheduling meetings, which are often devoid of innovation and stimulation, leaving their professional expectations unfulfilled. Moreover, the monotony of administrative work can rob administrative staffs of a sense of freshness and accomplishment. They may find themselves engaged in repetitive tasks for extended periods, which not only drains their energy and enthusiasm but also erodes their interest and motivation in their roles.

3.4. Insufficient Organizational Support

Organizational support is instrumental in mitigating the professional burnout of administrative staff. In normal universities, there is often a lack of adequate support at the organizational level, such as the absence of effective incentive systems, professional training, clearly defined career paths, and equitable evaluation frameworks. This lack of support can lead administrative staffs to feel that their efforts and contributions are not sufficiently recognized and rewarded, potentially leading to burnout. In comparison to technical professionals, administrative staffs have fewer opportunities for training, with basic pre-service and in-service training being the standard. Administrative staffs are often overwhelmed by administrative tasks, resulting in irregular training schedules, training content that lacks specificity, and a monotonous training format, all of which can diminish the effectiveness of training (Zhou Heng, 2020). Effective incentive systems and professional development opportunities are crucial for meeting the intrinsic motivations and career development needs of administrative staff. For instance, a robust performance evaluation and rewards system can make administrators feel that their work is recognized, which can boost their work engagement and loyalty. Professional development training can enhance administrators' professional skills and knowledge, strengthening their career competitiveness and prospects. Regular training and learning opportunities allow administrators to continuously update their knowledge and skills to adapt to the changing educational and administrative landscape. Clear career paths and equitable evaluation systems can help administrative staff understand their career development direction and goals, thereby increasing their investment and commitment to their work.

3.5. Imbalance between Work and Personal Life

The sustained nature of administrative work and the high-stress environment can lead to a significant imbalance between work and personal life for administrative staff. This imbalance can have adverse effects on their personal lives, diminishing their passion and dedication to their jobs, which in turn can lead to professional burnout. Specifically, a lack of balance between work and personal life can result in administrative staff struggling to manage their personal time effectively, often lacking opportunities for quality time with family and friends or to pursue personal hobbies and leisure activities. This imbalance can drain their physical and mental reserves, leading to symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, a sense of depersonalization, and a decrease in personal accomplishment. The exhaustion of both body and mind affects the personal well-being and professional efficiency of administrative staff, and it is even more likely to have a detrimental effect on the entire administrative management system, potentially leading to a decline in work quality, a reduction in innovation, and a diminution of team collaboration.

4. Strategies for Addressing Professional Burnout among Administrative Staff in Normal Universities

4.1. Optimization of Work Characteristics and Support for Career Development

Administrative leaders at normal universities should be fully cognizant of the characteristics of administrative work and take steps to boost the professional satisfaction and engagement of their staff. This involves endeavoring to introduce variety and creativity into administrative tasks, minimizing reliance on monotonous tasks, and instead fostering innovative and individualized approaches to work. Furthermore, by enhancing the visibility of their work outcomes, such as through public recognition of exceptional performance and the establishment of feedback mechanisms, administrative staff can experience a greater sense of achievement and job fulfillment. Additionally, management should offer opportunities for career development and training to help administrative staff enhance their professional skills and knowledge, thereby bolstering their career competitiveness and prospects. This includes regular professional training, opportunities for internal or external learning, and the provision of career counseling and planning services.

4.2. Implementation of Comprehensive Measures and Optimization of the Work Environment

To effectively address professional burnout, normal universities should adopt a range of comprehensive measures. Firstly, tasks should be allocated reasonably to ensure a balanced workload, avoiding excessive concentration on a small number of administrative staff. This will lighten the burden on administrators and reduce work-related stress. Secondly, increasing the number of administrative staff can help achieve a more equitable distribution of workload. Providing more support for administrative staff will ensure

efficient management operations while also offering more room for their professional growth. Additionally, offering psychological support and professional training are crucial in mitigating burnout. Universities should pay attention to the mental health of administrative staff, providing counseling services to help them cope with work-related stress and challenges. Through professional training, administrators can enhance their professional skills and knowledge, boosting their career competitiveness and reducing the risk of burnout. Lastly, establishing a favorable work environment and support system is a key factor in improving the job satisfaction and efficiency of administrative staff. For instance, providing rest areas and encouraging teamwork can help administrators relax and enhance their work efficiency during the work process.

4.3. Career Development and Fostering Work Enthusiasm

Universities should offer a diverse range of career development opportunities and training to support administrative staff in continuously improving their professional skills and professionalism. This encompasses providing internal or external professional development courses, regular skill enhancement workshops, and career planning guidance. By enhancing the diversity and creativity of administrative tasks, universities can foster a sense of excitement and dedication among administrative staff, preventing the monotony and repetition that can lead to boredom. This approach provides more opportunities for challenge and a sense of accomplishment. Flexible and varied task allocation allows administrators to experience the joy and significance of their work, thus reducing the potential for burnout. University education administrators should be attuned to the collective struggles and aspirations of the teaching staff, addressing the root causes to prevent the spread of collective burnout from the top down (Gao Xin, Wei Feng, Zhou Xiaolu, 2023). Universities should establish robust communication channels to promptly understand the expectations and needs of administrative staff. Regular dialogue with administrators to understand their challenges and difficulties at work, their career development aspirations, and needs is crucial. Individual achievements often depend on a harmonious collective, and school organizations should leverage and create opportunities for collective activities and interactions to provide necessary conditions, venues, and material support for administrative staff in learning, communication, and discussion (Yang Fei, 2012).

4.4. Strengthening Incentive Mechanisms and Career Development

Normal universities can implement effective incentive mechanisms, such as rewards and advancement opportunities, to enhance the motivation and job satisfaction of administrative staff. They should also offer career training and development opportunities to boost the professional skills and knowledge of administrators. It is important for universities to place the development of the administrative team at the forefront of their institutional priorities, formulating comprehensive plans for the professionalization of the management team. This includes exploring admission systems for management staff and aligning the team's growth with the strategic needs of the university, thereby fostering a sense of dynamism and engagement among administrators. This approach addresses the issue of professional burnout at

its root (Li Yuandong, Jiang Qin, 2020). Furthermore, the establishment of clear career development paths and equitable evaluation systems helps administrators understand their career trajectory and objectives. Moreover, creating a favorable communication channel and work environment, through regular meetings and teamwork initiatives, is crucial for enhancing job satisfaction among administrative staff and reducing the risk of burnout.

4.5. Promotion of Work-Life Balance and Stress Relief

Schools should implement a series of measures to assist administrative staff in achieving a healthy work-life balance. Firstly, workloads should be allocated judiciously to minimize working hours and prevent burnout. This ensures that administrative staff can allocate sufficient time for personal life such as spending time with family, engaging in leisure pursuits, and ongoing self-improvement. For university teachers facing work stress, engaging in leisure sports can be an effective strategy to reduce the likelihood of burnout. It is also important to provide rest areas and time for administrative staff to relax and unwind after work (Zhang Jia, Bai Donghuan, Song Pengwei, Yuan Rui, Zhang Zhendong, 2022). This can include establishing rest areas within the workplace, encouraging employees to take brief breaks during the workday, and offering flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible hours. Furthermore, providing psychological support and professional training to help administrative staff develop their stress-management skills is crucial for alleviating burnout. This can be achieved through counseling services and stress management training, enabling administrators to adopt effective stress-coping strategies and maintain good mental health.

5. Conclusion

In the current social context, the issue of professional burnout among administrative staff in normal universities is characterized by its multidimensional nature. The complexity of this problem is manifested in various dimensions, including the intrinsic characteristics of the job, the substantial workload, the discrepancy between expectations and reality, the insufficient organizational support, and the imbalance between work and personal life. Consequently,

normal universities must comprehend and respond to this issue comprehensively, aiming to boost the job satisfaction and professional fulfillment of administrative staff by enhancing the administrative work environment, offering diverse career growth opportunities, and establishing fair incentive mechanisms. Moreover, administrative staff should also take an active role in addressing this issue by bolstering their self-efficacy, proactively managing work-related stress, and seeking a harmonious balance between work and personal life. By doing so, they can collectively mitigate the risks associated with burnout. Recognizing that burnout is a phenomenon that ebbs and flows with time and social conditions, its causes and solutions must be adaptively refined. Therefore, both normal universities and administrative staff should possess the capability to dynamically adjust to the evolving social landscape and effectively address the challenges of burnout.

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