

# A Qualitative Study on the Structure of Professional Psychological Capital of College Counselors in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** Through literature analysis, deep semi-structured interviews and other methods, this paper constructs the psychological capital model of college counselors' career. On the basis of the psychological capital of optimism, hope, self-confidence, tenacity and so on, it combines the uniqueness of college counselors' occupation. Considering the special professional psychological capital such as love, enterprising, responsibility and gratitude, it forms the optimal structure dimension of college counselors' professional psychological capital. The results show that college counselors' professional psychological capital includes optimism, hope, self-confidence, love, tenacity, enterprising, responsibility, gratitude and so on.

**Keywords:** College; Assistant; Occupational Psychological Capital

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## 1. Issue raised

The report of the 19th Party Congress in 2018 proposed that building a strong education nation is a fundamental project for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, that education should be given priority, that education modernization should be accelerated, that moral education should be carried out to the end and that the quality of education should be improved, and that in order to fully implement the Party's education policy, the construction of teachers' moral and moral style should be further strengthened and a high-quality teacher team should be cultivated. They are the backbone of the ideological and political education of students and the promotion of campus harmony and stability, and they are the organizers, implementers and instructors of daily ideological and political education and management of students in higher education. Despite a series of national policies, college counselor team still faces difficulties and obstacles in development and growth, such as insufficient social recognition, their own orientation remains confused; lack of knowledge construction and narrow knowledge channels[1]; all these will directly lead to counselor team burnout and poor sense of gaining happiness. With the advent of the information age, students' lifestyles and learning styles have changed, students' access to knowledge is more diversified, and students' ideologies have become diverse, making the work of counselors more challenging[2], and coupled with the heavy workload and high-intensity load of college counselors, their work pressure is also higher. Some studies have shown that there is a significant positive correlation between work stress and burnout among full-time counsellors in universities[3]. Overseas studies have found that burnout occurs more often in the helping professions, with teachers and counsellors being typical representatives of the helping professions[4]. It can be assumed that university counsellors are a group with a high prevalence of burnout [5], and burnout will seriously affect the work ethic and physical and mental health of this group. Therefore, it is important to enhance the positive psychological qualities of university counsellors, improve their psychological health, stimulate their work enthusiasm and enhance their psychological capital.

## 2. The structure of psychological capital

From the perspective of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior theory, psychological capital is a core psychological competency of individuals that meets the requirements of positive organizational behavior and can be developed and utilized in a targeted way to give individuals a competitive advantage over human and social capital[6]. Psychological capital was first proposed by[7] as the third major form of capital after human capital and social capital, and[8] suggested that psychological capital consists of four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. According to[9], the structural dimensions of psychological capital include hope, optimism, subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, resilience, and civic organizational behavior[10] added and modified the structure of psychological capital from the perspective of traditional Chinese culture[11]. also believes that psychological capital should not only include the four dimensions of self-confidence, hope, optimism and resilience, but also structural dimensions such as positive competence, happiness and emotional intelligence. The psychological capital of college counsellors is a sub-category of

psychological capital with some common components. Therefore, based on previous research, this study will use the interview method in qualitative research to define the structure of the professional psychological capital of college counsellors so that it can reflect the psychological state of college counsellors more comprehensively.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Interviewees

Six counselors in higher education, three male and three female, aged between 26 and 40, with teaching experience between 5 and 15 years, all of whom had won the honorary titles of outstanding counselor, counselor of the year and outstanding ideological and political worker at the university or provincial or ministerial level or above.

#### 3.2 Interview outline

A semi-structured interview was conducted, focusing on the positive psychological qualities of university counsellors, and an interview outline was designed from this aspect to provide relevant materials for an in-depth understanding of the psychological capital structure and mental health status of university counsellors.

#### 3.3 Interview process

This study used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to conduct in-depth interviews with six university counsellors. The interview time for each interviewee was around 30-60 minutes.

#### 3.4 Collation of interview data

After all the interviews were completed, the data was initially collated by transcribing the recordings sentence by sentence and word by word, and saving the transcribed documents. Following the principle of confidentiality of the personal information of the interviewees, the textual information will be collated using symbols to represent the different interviewees.

#### 3.5 Coding of interview data

This study will strictly follow the three-level coding procedure of Zagan's theory for coding interview data[7]. The first step, initial coding of the data; relevant statements from psychological capital were converted into simple statement statements and initially coded to form 176 initial codes. The second step was the focus coding of the data; the most frequently occurring initial codes were filtered out to form 19 focus codes. The third step was the axial coding of the data; a large amount of data was categorized, synthesized and organized, arranged after the focus codes, and a core category code was selected, resulting in 8 core codes.

### 4. Research findings

#### 4.1 Example of coding process

Table 1 Sample coding process

| Information Excerpts   | Initial code   | Focused Coding              | Core Code      |
|--|--|-----------------------------|----------------|
| As a counselor, I think the most important trait is to be responsible. You are not only responsible for yourself, but also for your students (B), and it is important for counselors to be bold (D). Although I took over this class halfway through, I will be responsible for my students to the end as long as they are mine (E). | B the most important thing is to be responsible<br>D It is important to be responsible<br>E Insist on being responsible to the end | Dare to take responsibility | Responsibility |

Counselor work is rather tedious and complicated, but the whole process as well as the ultimate goal is to help students grow (A) and enhance their sense of belonging and identity through my words and actions (B). Once, when my student was hospitalized in a car accident, I took good care of him for a week until he recovered (F), and when our classmates had birthdays, I would play the guitar and sing birthday songs for him personally (E).

- A Helping students grow up healthily
- B Have a sense of belonging and identity
- F Taking good care of my students
- E Celebrating students' birthdays

Healthy growth,  
sense of belonging,  
attentive care

Love

I think the most important thing I need to improve at the moment is my education, then my title can be promoted from lecturer to associate professor (B), through self-reflection and self-adjustment, I will do my best to become better (C), and I think the most important thing I need to improve is my research ability (D).

- B Enhancement of education
- C Self-reflection
- Self-reflection and self-tuning
- D Enhancement of research ability

Upgrading academic  
and research  
capabilities and  
self-tuning

Progressive

## 4.2 Structure of career psychological capital of college counselors

According to the interview records, the eight traits of professional psychological capital of college counselors were summarized through the three-level coding of rooting theory: optimism, hope, self-confidence, love, resilience, aggressiveness, responsibility, and gratitude.

### 4.2.1 Optimism

From the conversations of college counselors, we can see that they all treat student work with positive and optimistic attitude and face difficulties and setbacks with full passion. For example, some counselors mentioned that: as a counselor, there are certainly many trivial things in daily work, and even burnout sometimes, but if you face your work with a positive and optimistic mindset, you may be enlightened, and if you look at problems from a positive and optimistic perspective, you may see more comprehensively and in the long run. Other counselors indicate that a counselor should be optimistic, cheerful and positive inside in order to be considered a qualified counselor. Counselors assume the role of teaching and educating people, keep a positive mindset, dare to face setbacks head-on, can look at people and things correctly, and should always be in a happy mood at work, only then can they face students in high spirits.

### 4.2.2 Hope

As a member of teachers, the main responsibility of counselors is to cultivate excellent talents and do a good job in the ideological education of students, and they should emphasize the development and application of students' potential abilities and encourage them to challenge themselves. Through the guidance of the counselors, students are filled with hope and ambition for their future lives. Counselors will encourage students in many ways, for example, I think counselors should pay more attention to students' families of origin, because our students come from a variety of families, a small number of students have a superior family environment, but most students' family conditions are not very good, so their own growth may be limited to a certain extent, and this may produce negative emotions such as sensitivity and low self-esteem, and this time We should care more about them and let them know that they are also a good talent.

### 4.2.3 Self-confidence

From the interview process, the counselors all indicated that self-confidence is an important trait in handling student work well. For

example, I personally feel good and I am able to work with students, and this can prove that my approach is effective. Even when compared to others, I still feel that my approach is effective. Counselors should have a high emotional and intellectual quotient, lend a helping hand when students need help most, have the confidence and ability to help students through difficult times, and even if they are not understood by students at certain times, firmly believe that all their words and actions will influence them implicitly and benefit their future work and study.

#### **4.2.4 Love**

The love and care of counselors is like spring rain that silently nourishes students' hearts, so that students, especially freshmen, can experience the warmth and touch of the campus and start their college life better. From the above interviews, we can see that counselors do not hesitate to lend a helping hand to students when they need care the most, and even take up the responsibility of parents. For example, once a student fell down accidentally while riding his bicycle and his face was cut by the glass fragments on the ground. I often visited him and gave him psychological guidance, teaching him how to relieve his bad mood, hoping he would be optimistic and cheerful. In fact, counselors sometimes play the role of parents in students' lives, doing their best to care for and love their students, as if they were their own children, not wanting to see them suffer any misfortune.

#### **4.2.5 Perseverance**

Any job requires perseverance, tenacity, and an unyielding spirit to break through the layers of obstacles to complete the task. This is a traditional Chinese virtue and a peak of human virtues, and counselors need to deal with all kinds of people and need this fortitude in their work. For example, in these four years of college, my greatest success is to hope that my students continue to move forward and bravely pursue their own hopes, whenever there are difficulties and setbacks, I will always accompany him and help him to solve this difficult problem, although my efforts are not immediately visible, after four years of college experience, I believe that my students will be an excellent person in the future.

#### **4.2.6 Progressiveness**

Many counselors have made it clear that their current selves should not rest on their laurels and focus on the present moment, but must have a positive and aggressive attitude of practical action. To improve oneself in all aspects and to arm oneself with knowledge and skills, one can become stronger. Every respondent clearly stated that they have a lot of areas to improve, but most of them revolve around improving their academic skills and self-emotional adjustment. For example, I need to enhance my ability to prevent and respond to emergencies as well as intervene, to better handle negative student emotions, and also my own emotional regulation is important. Minimize the impact of negative energy on us, otherwise, too much negative emotions will pile up and cause burnout.

#### **4.2.7 Responsibility**

Through the interviews with the counselors, it can be found that the counselors all emphasize the importance of responsibility when facing the work of students and always keep in mind the heavy burden on their shoulders. For example, as long as I work responsibly, students will agree and affirm the results of my work, and responsibility is the top priority of work. The most important feature of a counselor is to have a sense of responsibility and accountability, because I do the ideological and political work of students, only through the ideological guidance, into the hearts of students, into the student body, in order to truly communicate with students and talk, as well as teachers and friends, students will open their hearts to trust you, better and faster to promote the development of students. The responsibility of the counselor is very important, the student's small and large things need to be solved by the counselor, this responsibility can not escape, but do everything possible to help students to solve this matter. But this help does not mean that you straightforwardly help him to solve the problem, but to show him the direction of the problem.

#### **4.2.8 Gratitude**

Only when you are grateful can you really grow from your life and work. Some counselors say that I feel satisfied with my current job because I have longed to be a teacher when I grow up, so when I really become a college counselor, I am simply a lucky person. The last point is to always have a grateful heart. It is possible that counselors work with a variety of students with different personalities and majors, and once the four years of college are over and the old students graduate, then the next class of freshmen will be welcomed. I think not only the counselors let the students grow a lot in these four years, but also the students will let the counselors gain something, and the counselors may be more thoughtful in handling things.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study are similar to those of previous studies, but there are also differences such as two dimensions of responsibility and aggressiveness. The professional content of college counselors consists of two parts, one is the handling of daily administrative work and the other is the ideological and political work of students. As a special group, the professional psychological capital of college counselors should have certain special characteristics compared with other groups. In China, college counselors mainly undertake the education and management of students' ideological and political work, and the work content is multifaceted, which means that counselors should be more cautious and meticulous and more responsible when dealing with students' work; therefore, counselors should make their main body in college ideological and political work responsibilities in the ideological and political work of colleges and universities should be further optimized and clarified to enhance the affinity, relevance and effectiveness of ideological and political work[12]. On the other hand, college counselors nowadays have a larger load in their work but their own research level is limited, so they are hindered in their work promotion, and they all desire more space and time for their upward mobility so that they can be stronger.

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