

WORKING MOTIVATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT NANNING UNIVERSITY*

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were: (1) to study the working motivation level of administrative staff, and (2) to study the guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University. The sample group was 140 administrative staff at Nanning University. The research instruments were questionnaires and structured interviews. The statistics to analyze the data were percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis.

The results were found that: (1) the working motivation level of administrative staff in five aspects was at a high level. And (2) the guidelines for enhancing working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University have multiple approaches as follows: 1) Compensation incentives, establish a market-oriented and internally fair compensation system based on job value, ability, and performance, integrating short- and long-term incentives and enhancing transparency of compensation policies. 2) Work environment, improve intelligent and humanized office systems through information technology reform,

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strengthen mental health support, and cultivate a respectful and inclusive organizational culture. 3) Organizational relationships, enhance team cohesion through service-oriented leadership, effective communication and collaboration mechanisms, and sound mentoring and conflict management systems. 4) Career development, implement a dual-track career development system with clear promotion pathways, fair recruitment mechanisms, and systematic career planning and leadership training. 5) Work achievement, promote goal-oriented participatory management by supporting innovation, recognizing phased achievements, and providing diverse platforms for showcasing work outcomes.

Keywords: Enhancement Guidelines, Working Motivation, Administrative Staff

Introduction

With the rapid expansion of higher education, university administrative staff have become increasingly important in supporting institutional operations, resource optimization, and service delivery. National education policies emphasize improving governance systems and strengthening the professional capacity of administrative personnel in universities. The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) explicitly advocates enhancing educational management and governance efficiency, while China Education Modernization 2035 (2019) further highlights the need to modernize educational governance and stimulate institutional vitality.

In response to national policy directions, local development plans such as Nanning's 14th Five-Year Plan for Educational Development (2021) stress the importance of modernizing university governance and improving administrative service efficiency. Despite these policy supports, administrative staff in universities often face challenges, including heavy workloads, unclear career development pathways, and insufficient motivational mechanisms. Existing studies indicate that compensation incentives, organizational relationships, work

environment, and recognition systems are key factors influencing employees' working motivation and effectiveness.

As a growing institution, Nanning University faces a pressing need to address these challenges to improve administrative performance and service quality. Therefore, this study aims to develop and validate the guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University by examining key motivating factors and proposing structured interventions. The findings are expected to provide actionable strategies for Nanning University and offer a reference for other higher education institutions seeking to strengthen administrative incentive mechanisms and achieve sustainable development.

Objectives

1. To study the working motivation level of administrative staff at Nanning University.
2. To study the guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University.

Literature Review

Theory of working motivation: 1) Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory explains human motivation as a dynamic process in which individuals pursue different categories of needs at various stages of personal development. These needs range from basic physiological requirements and safety concerns to higher-order social needs, esteem, and self-actualization. Rather than existing independently, lower-level needs generally require a certain degree of satisfaction before higher-level needs become salient motivators. As individuals progress and their circumstances change, the relative importance of each level of need may also shift, thereby influencing their motivation patterns in different contexts, including the workplace (Maslow, 1943). And 2) Herzberg's two-factor

theory distinguishes between factors that contribute to job satisfaction and those that primarily prevent dissatisfaction. Motivational factors, such as achievement, recognition, and opportunities for personal growth, are closely related to the nature of the work itself and can actively stimulate employees' enthusiasm and performance when adequately addressed. In contrast, hygiene factors—including salary, organizational policies, and working conditions—do not directly enhance motivation but play a crucial role in maintaining a stable and acceptable work environment. When these hygiene factors are insufficient, employee dissatisfaction may arise, even if motivational factors are present. The theory suggests that effective management should simultaneously ensure reasonable hygiene conditions while strengthening motivational factors to promote sustained job satisfaction and performance (Herzberg, 1959).

Concept of working motivation: 1) Policy of working motivation: The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010 - 2020) clearly states that we should give priority to the development of education, strengthen the construction of college teachers and administrative staff, optimize management mechanisms, and improve the level of education governance. As a guiding document for educational development in the current and future periods, China's Education Modernization 2035 explicitly proposes to "advance the modernization of the education governance system and capacity" and to "deepen reforms in the education sector concerning delegating powers, improving regulation, and optimizing services, while implementing and expanding the autonomy of higher education institutions." local development plans such as Nanning's 14th Five-Year Plan for Educational Development (2021) stress the importance of modernizing university governance and improving administrative service efficiency. And 2) Working motivation refers to the process of stimulating employees' intrinsic drive by satisfying their multi-level needs, thereby guiding them to act according to the organization's set

behavioral patterns and achieving the unity of personal needs and organizational goals. This motivation includes not only the satisfaction of material needs but also higher-level needs such as safety, social interaction, esteem, and self-actualization. Effective incentive mechanisms can significantly enhance employees' enthusiasm and job satisfaction, thereby promoting the overall performance and development of the organization (Zenghui et al., 2023). Definition of working motivation: Working motivation refers to “a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration.” They argued that working motivation not only directly contributes to employees' performance but also indirectly facilitates self-awareness and self-fulfillment, thereby serving as a crucial driver of both individual self-actualization and the achievement of organizational goals (Vo et al., 2022).

In this study, working motivation refers to the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive individuals to excel at work. It encompasses the psychological processes that influence people's choices about specific work-related behaviors, including the effort they put in and the time they persist on a task. Working motivation influences not only individual effort but also the dynamics of teamwork. High levels of working motivation contribute to improved job satisfaction, performance, teamwork, and organizational success. Working motivation consists of five aspects: Compensation incentives, Work environment, Organizational relationships, Career advancement, and Work achievement.

Methodology

Population and Sample Group: The population of this research was 216 administrative staff at Nanning University. Based on Krejcie and Morgan sampling table (1970), the sample group of this research was 140 administrative staff at Nanning University. By using simple random sampling, the randomness and

scientific validity of the sampling process were ensured.

Research Instruments: This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, utilizing questionnaires and interviews as the primary research instruments. All responses are provided freely based on actual circumstances and will be used solely for statistical analysis, with no public disclosure. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire consists of the following two parts: The first section collected basic demographic information of the respondents, classified by gender, age, educational background, and work experience. The second section employed a five-point Likert scale to assess the current situation of working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University. Based on the conceptual framework of this study, the scale consisted of five dimensions: 1) compensation incentives, 2) work environment, 3) organizational relationship, 4) career advancement, and 5) work achievement. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the index of objective congruence (IOC) of the questionnaire was examined by three experts, the IOC of questionnaire was 0.67-1.00, and through the distribution and collection of 30 questionnaires, a test was conducted, resulting in the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire being 0.990.

Interview: The first part is the Introduction of background information. The second part includes a series of open-ended interviews. The interview aimed to collect the respondents' opinions on the guidelines for enhancing working motivation of administrative staff. A total of 5 experts were selected as interviewees and selected based on strict screening criteria as follows: 1) at least 10 years of university experience; 2) university department-level leaders or above, and 3) graduated with master's degree or above.

Data Collection

A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed to the administrative staff in the sample group, and 140 valid questionnaires were returned, yielding a 100% effective response rate. In addition, to further explore strategies for enhancing administrative staff's work motivation, structured interviews were conducted with five experts from Nanning University. The interviews were carried out either face-to-face or online, depending on the availability of the participants, with each session lasting approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The personal information of the respondents was analyzed by frequency and percentage. The current situation of working motivation of administrative staff in five aspects, the data was analyzed by mean and standard deviation. The data interpretation for average value is based on Rensis Likert (1932). The data interpretation is as follows: 4.50-5.00 refers to the highest level, 3.50-4.49 refers to high level, 2.50-3.49 refers to medium level, 1.50-2.49 refers to low level, and 1.00-1.49 refers to the lowest level. The structured interview about the development guidelines for working motivation level of administrative staff at Nanning University was analyzed by content analysis.

Results

Objective 1: To study the working motivation level of administrative staff at Nanning University. A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 140 valid questionnaires were collected, which met the data collection requirements.

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of the working motivation level of administrative staff in five aspects (n = 140)

Working motivation level of administrative staff		\bar{X}	S.D.	Level	Ranking
1	Compensation incentives	3.64	0.88	high	5
2	Work environment	3.81	0.84	high	1
3	Organizational relationships	3.69	0.87	high	2
4	Career advancement	3.67	0.88	high	3
5	Work achievement	3.65	0.86	high	4
Total		3.69	0.87	high	

According to Table 1, it was found that the working motivation level of administrative staff in five aspects was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 3.69$, S.D. = 0.87). Considering the results from the highest to the lowest mean were as follows: the highest mean was work environment ($\bar{X} = 3.81$, S.D. = 0.84), followed by organizational relationships ($\bar{X} = 3.69$, S.D. = 0.87), and career advancement ($\bar{X} = 3.67$, S.D. = 0.88), respectively, and work achievement was the lowest mean ($\bar{X} = 3.64$, S.D. = 0.88).

Objective 2: To study the guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University.

The recommended guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff include: 1) In terms of compensation incentives, establish a market-linked and internally fair compensation system by adopting a salary structure based on job value, ability, and performance, while combining short-term and long-term incentives and improving transparency and communication of compensation policies. 2) In terms of the work environment, promote intelligent and humanized office systems through information technology reform, strengthen mental health support, and create a respectful and inclusive organizational culture with efficient logistical services. 3) In terms of organizational relationships, enhance team cohesion by fostering service-oriented

leadership, strengthening communication and collaboration mechanisms, and establishing mentoring, conflict management, and performance appeal systems. 4) In terms of career development, implement a dual-track career development system with clear promotion pathways, fair recruitment mechanisms, systematic career planning, and multi-level leadership training to support sustainable talent development. 5) In terms of work achievement, strengthen goal-oriented participatory management by providing resource support, recognizing phased achievements, encouraging innovation and process improvement, and offering diverse platforms for showcasing work outcomes.

Discussion

The researcher summarizes the discussion into two parts, details as follows:

Objective 1: To study the working motivation level of administrative staff at Nanning University.

Based on the results of this study, it was found that the working motivation level of administrative staff in five aspects was at a high level. The reason is that Nanning University has established a relatively comprehensive foundational support system in terms of infrastructure, organizational culture, and basic career development mechanisms, which effectively meets the daily operational needs and psychological expectations of administrative staff. However, as the work environment and organizational relationships are the most directly perceivable and immediately influential factors in daily work, they naturally receive higher subjective evaluations. In contrast, the formation of work achievement depends more on systematic feedback, cross-departmental collaboration, and institutionalized recognition mechanisms, which require longer-term accumulation and more refined management support. This also reflects that while the university has achieved preliminary results in routine

support, there is still room for further enhancement in systematic construction and refined management regarding long-term incentive mechanisms such as work achievement and career development. This finding is consistent with previous research focusing on administrative staff, which argues that organizational relationships and the work environment are key factors influencing motivation. Specifically, harmonious organizational relationships and a supportive work environment have been shown to effectively enhance administrative staff's work engagement and job satisfaction. These conclusions align closely with the present study's finding that "organizational relationships" and "work environment" received relatively high scores (Ye, 2021). In addition, this result is supported by prior research indicating that clear promotion pathways and professional growth opportunities not only satisfy individuals' need for achievement but also enhance job satisfaction and overall performance. This perspective is consistent with the present study's finding that motivation related to "career advancement" is at a high level (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021). Furthermore, previous research suggests that the work environment, organizational support, and work achievement jointly constitute an important foundation for employee motivation, as a positive work atmosphere and supportive conditions help maintain high levels of motivation. This integrated perspective provides a theoretical explanation for the overall high motivation observed across the five dimensions in this study, indicating that the synergistic effects of multiple factors can effectively enhance overall working motivation (Marcelo et al., 2023).

Objective 2: To study the guidelines for enhancing the working motivation of administrative staff at Nanning University.

Enhancement guidelines of working motivation for administrative staff at Nanning University, is a multiple approach, the researcher analyzed the content as follows: 1) In terms of compensation incentives, establish a market-oriented and internally fair compensation system based on job value, ability, and

performance, integrating short- and long-term incentives and enhancing transparency of compensation policies. 2) In terms of the work environment, improve intelligent and humanized office systems through information technology reform, strengthen mental health support, and cultivate a respectful and inclusive organizational culture. 3) In terms of organizational relationships, enhance team cohesion through service-oriented leadership, effective communication and collaboration mechanisms, and sound mentoring and conflict management systems. 4) In terms of career development, implement a dual-track career development system with clear promotion pathways, fair recruitment mechanisms, and systematic career planning and leadership training. 5) In terms of work achievement, promote goal-oriented participatory management by supporting innovation, recognizing phased achievements, and providing diverse platforms for showcasing work outcomes. This view is supported by prior research indicating that compensation incentives serve as important extrinsic motivators that directly influence working motivation through tangible rewards such as salary increases and bonuses. In addition, organizational relationships characterized by smooth communication, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging contribute to a positive work environment and enhanced job satisfaction (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021). Moreover, prior research highlights that fair compensation distribution processes and transparent compensation policies are essential components of compensation incentives, as they enhance employees' sense of trust and belonging. In addition, career advancement is closely associated with organizational support and fair promotion mechanisms, which together influence employees' job performance and job satisfaction. These insights are consistent with the findings of the present study (Nguyen, 2023). From the perspective of administrative staff in higher education, prior research indicates that a supportive work environment-characterized by favorable working conditions, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and

effective communication channels-can significantly enhance administrative staff's sense of belonging and work performance. In addition, positive and supportive organizational relationships have been shown to improve their sense of belonging and job satisfaction, with particular emphasis on the role of humanistic care and effective communication mechanisms (Ye, 2021). Finally, from a comprehensive perspective, compensation incentives can be understood as the use of competitive salaries and benefits to motivate employees and enhance their working motivation (Marcelo et al., 2023).

Recommendation

For University: The university should optimize performance evaluation and compensation linkage, invest in smart office support to reduce burdens, strengthen leadership and team culture, enhance personalized career development guidance, and establish a robust achievement recognition and reward system.

For Administrative leaders: Leaders should adopt a proactive leadership style, improve the work environment, strengthen organizational communication and support, and provide clear career development guidance by establishing a fair and transparent performance evaluation system that links performance evaluation with compensation, promotion and recognition, thereby enhancing employees' sense of accomplishment, trust and sustained work motivation.

For Administrative staff: Administrative staff should actively optimize their work environment, foster collaborative relationships, pursue continuous professional development, highlight work achievements, and rationally engage with incentive systems while contributing to team and organizational culture.

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