

Incentive Mechanisms for Teachers in Private Universities: A Case Study of Jiangxi University of Engineering

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Abstract

Private universities play a significant role in China's national education system and are a crucial component of the education reform process. Their rapid development and progress are supported by favorable national policies, garnering recognition and support from the general public. In the fiercely competitive talent landscape, teachers serve as the backbone of private universities and are essential to their growth. Effective human resource management aims to mobilize faculty and staff enthusiasm, achieved through a systematic salary plan, fair performance evaluations, transparent competition mechanisms, and scientific incentive distribution. This article focuses on studying the incentive mechanism for teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering, using questionnaire surveys and interviews to identify issues such as high teacher mobility and incomplete incentive systems. By combining incentive theory and experiences from foreign universities, the study aims to explore motivational principles and propose solutions to enhance the current incentive mechanisms. The ultimate goal is to offer valuable insights for improving teacher incentives in private universities across China.

Keywords: Incentive Factors, Incentive Mechanism, Hierarchy of Needs, Private University Teachers

Introduction

Private universities represent a substantial proportion of China's national education system and constitute a vital component. As a new force in China's education reform, private universities are continuously advancing and rapidly developing, supported by favorable national policies. Simultaneously, their status and role in Chinese society continue to garner public support and recognition. As of June 15, 2023, China boasts a total of 3072 higher education institutions, comprising 2820 ordinary higher education institutions, 1275 undergraduate colleges, 1545 vocational colleges, and 252 adult higher education institutions. Among these, Jiangxi Province is home to 108 ordinary higher education institutions and 18 private undergraduate colleges. Comparatively, teachers in private universities face multiple disadvantages, encompassing aspects such as social security and social status, leading to limited recognition among high-level knowledge-based talents seeking stability. Teachers have emerged as a crucial internal factor restraining the development of private universities, giving rise to challenges in talent recruitment, internal functional management, and personnel stability. Certain private universities, operating as private enterprises, experience heightened teacher and employee turnover. Additionally, significant age structure disparities among teaching staff, a lack of coordination in the proportion of teaching staff, unclear self-positioning of private universities, low team cohesion, meager teacher salaries, and inadequate welfare further hinder the attraction and retention of exceptional knowledge-based teacher talents.

Due to the large number of universities in China, the competition for teacher positions is rel-

atively fierce. In certain fields or specific disciplines, private universities also face competition for teachers with public universities. Some private universities may not be able to provide the same level of salary and benefits as public universities due to limited financial resources, which may lead to some teachers choosing to move to other units. Private universities may have relatively limited teaching facilities and resources, while some teachers may prefer to work in better environments. Education policies also have a certain impact on teacher mobility. Some policies may encourage or restrict the mobility of teachers between different types of universities.

Jiangxi Engineering College, established in 1984, initially focused on vocational and technical training. As of May 2023, the university enrolls over 15,000 full-time students and employs a faculty and staff of more than 1000. Notably, the teaching staff includes 15 doctoral supervisors and 64 master's supervisors. The faculty also boasts one expert receiving special government subsidies from the State Council and two experts receiving such subsidies from the provincial government. Additionally, the university prides itself on having one provincial-level outstanding teacher, one provincial-level teaching rookie, three provincial-level excellent teaching teams, and five provincial-level young and middle-aged backbone teachers. Jiangxi University of Engineering is one of many private universities, and its organizational incentive management model has a certain universality and representativeness,

The foundation and guarantee of talent stability lie in favorable material conditions and a high-quality work environment. However, the primary funding source for private universities is tuition fees from enrolled students, with minimal state and societal subsidies. Consequently, private universities face challenges in offering competitive teacher salaries and benefits, hindering the generation of effective and outstanding talent competitiveness and a promising developmental outlook for teachers. These circumstances exert significant pressure on private universities to attract top talents. Furthermore, talent cultivation in private universities often falls short in prioritizing practical applicability aligned with talent market needs and educational conditions. In the process of talent selection, private universities tend to heavily invest in external recruitment channels while underemphasizing the role of internal training and the development of their own teachers' abilities. Limited financial resources are allocated to internal staff teacher training to reduce expenses. Although a high teacher turnover rate may foster internal competition and initiative in the short term, its long-term consequences encompass reduced teaching quality, diminished long-term work expectations among teachers, public prejudice against private universities, and hampered long-term development. Addressing talent loss necessitates guaranteeing competitive compensation, fostering a positive academic environment, and prioritizing the intrinsic needs and self-worth enhancement of teachers.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of researching the factors influencing teacher motivation in the paper is to gain an in-depth understanding and analysis of the elements that can inspire teachers to perform at their best in their careers. The establishment of an effective and scientific incentive mechanism for teacher talent management hinges upon addressing teachers' needs, improving the working environment, and bolstering their recognition and sense of belonging to the profession. Employing diverse incentive methods can stimulate internal motivation and potential, fully mobilizing teachers' work enthusiasm.

1. **Improving Teacher Performance:** By identifying the key factors that influence teacher motivation, the research seeks to optimize teacher performance evaluation mechanisms, enabling teachers to continuously enhance their teaching abilities and educational practices.

2. **Increasing Teacher Satisfaction and Job Motivation:** The research aims to identify factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. This information can help education administrators create more attractive working conditions and incentives, ultimately reduc-

ing teacher turnover rates and fostering a committed and enthusiastic teaching workforce.

3. Optimizing Resource Allocation: Through the study of teacher motivation factors, the research can inform the allocation of education resources more effectively, ensuring that resources are distributed in a manner that supports and motivates teachers in their roles.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Motivation is a prominent concept in psychology and a widely employed effective tool in modern enterprise management, constituting an indispensable aspect of human resource management. Its primary objective is to stimulate encouragement, enhance work enthusiasm, ignite individual initiative, and foster creative thinking, ultimately satisfying the motivated individuals.

Japanese scholar Yoshiro Nakamatsu precisely elucidated the meaning of incentives in his work, "The Main Program of Human Relations," proposing a relational expression that intuitively delineates the fundamental link between individual behavior and organizational goals within the context of incentives.

Assuming the following variables: F_{max} represents an individual's potential maximum ability, F represents the individual's actual ability to perform, and θ denotes the consistency of personal goals (included angle). The relationship between these variables, as depicted in Figure 1, can be expressed as follows:

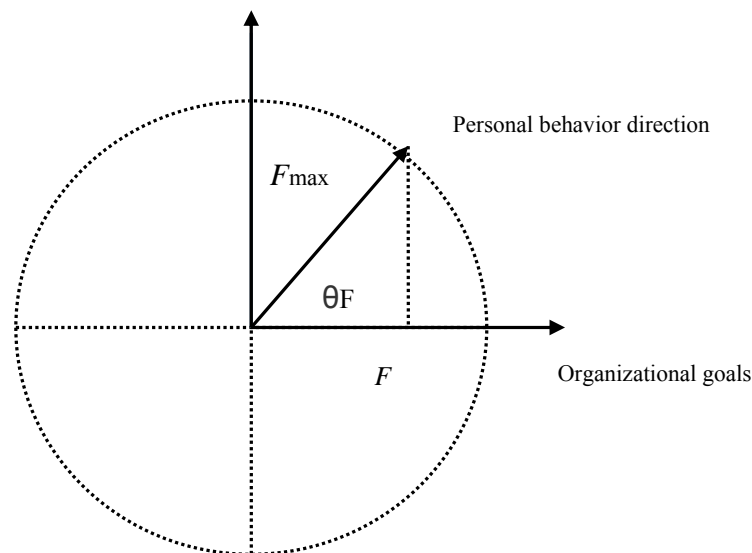


Figure 1. Incentive Relation Equations

$$F = F_{max} \cdot \cos\theta \quad (0^\circ < \theta < 90^\circ) \text{ .}$$

From this analysis, it becomes evident that when an individual's direction of effort perfectly aligns with the organizational goals (i.e., when $\theta=0^\circ$ and $\cos\theta=1$), the individual's actual ability (F) reaches its maximum potential (F_{max}), resulting in the optimal incentive effect.

The motivational process involves the integration of three essential factors: stimulus factors (external environmental goals), body factors (needs and motivations), and reaction factors (behavior). These interconnected and cyclic factors interact to facilitate continuous improvement. The fundamental model is illustrated in Figure 2.

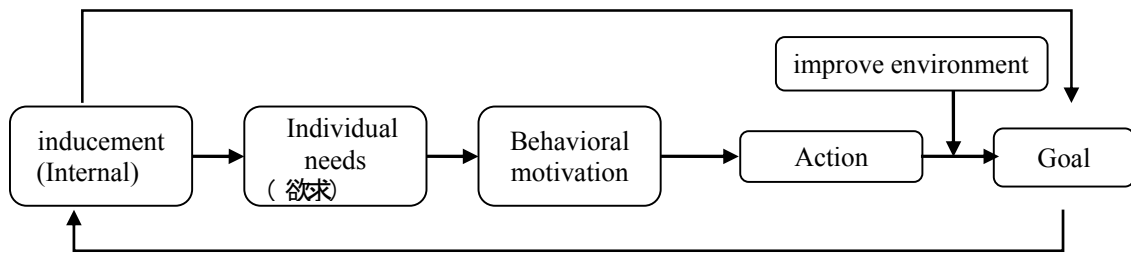


Figure 2. Incentive Process Model

Towards the close of the 19th century, Western behaviorists undertook comprehensive investigations on the dynamics of social management. As a consequence of diverse research perspectives, a myriad of theories were posited, promoting various incentive methods. The renowned and impactful motivation theories can be categorized into two principal domains: psychology and economics. Among these, the three most prominent and extensively cited psychological motivation theories among managers encompass the following:

Content-based incentive theory

The content-based motivation theory delves into the comprehensive examination of diverse factors that drive the motivation process. It places particular emphasis on exploring methods to fulfill individuals' needs while analyzing the underlying reasons for motivation and the factors that generate its effectiveness.

(1) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The hierarchy of needs theory, proposed by American humanistic scientist Maslow, stands as the most renowned and classic foundational motivational theory to date. Maslow expounds upon the hierarchical arrangement of human basic needs, positing that human behavior is instigated by the impetus of needs. When people's needs are met, their behavior becomes motivated, leading to the occurrence of incentive effects. Maslow postulates that there are five distinct types of needs within each individual, and these needs are prioritized at different levels. When any of these needs are satisfied, the subsequent one becomes the dominant requirement. Specifically, physiological needs and safety needs constitute lower-level needs, while social needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs represent higher-level needs.

(2) ERG Theory

The ERG motivation theory, proposed by Alderfer of Yale University in 1969 following empirical research, posits three fundamental human needs: existence, relatedness, and growth. The first need encompasses fulfilling the basic material requirements for human survival. The second need pertains to maintaining significant interpersonal relationships, akin to Maslow's social and esteem needs. The third need encapsulates the inherent urge for personal development. The ERG theory establishes that human needs do not follow a strict hierarchical structure but can coexist and exert influence concurrently.

Process-Based Motivation Theory

The process-based motivation theory primarily concentrates on the psychological process from the inception of motivation to the selection of specific behaviors, exerting behavior change by modifying the consequences of actions. Among the most renowned process-based incentive theories are Expectancy theory, Goal theory, and Equity theory.

(1) Fromm's Expectancy Theory

The Expectancy theory was postulated by the distinguished psychologist and behavioral scientist, Fromm. According to Fromm's conclusions, the potency of the incentive effect is contingent upon the relationship between individual effort, organizational performance, and the fulfillment of individual goals to receive rewards. He asserts that managers should prioritize incentive measures with the highest potency, endeavor to enhance its comprehensive value, and judiciously adjust the probability of expectations and the difficulty in attaining the incentive.

□ The Relationship between Effort and Performance: This relationship relies on the expected probability of the target and should be maintained at an optimal level, avoiding being too high or too low.

□ The Relationship between Performance and Rewards: Performance achievements must be duly rewarded in various forms.

□ The Relationship between Rewards and Fulfilling Personal Needs: Individual needs should be tailored to each person, and a buffet-style reward system should be adopted.

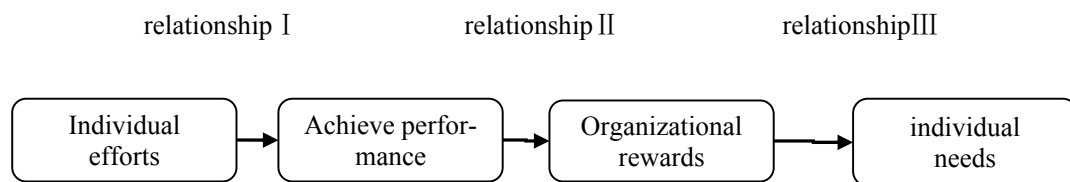


Figure 3. Expectancy Theory Three Aspects

(2) Equity Theory

The Equity theory, proposed by American scientist Adams, is also known as the Social Comparison theory, primarily examining the influence of income fairness on employees' work motivation. According to this theory, when employees invest considerable effort and receive monetary rewards, they not only evaluate the fairness and reasonableness of their actual efforts and rewards but also compare their rewards with those of their peers. This comparison involves assessing whether there exists a gap and the magnitude of that gap. Individuals gauge the equity of their work inputs and outputs by contrasting them with the inputs and outputs of others, seeking to ascertain whether they are being treated fairly. Subsequently, they may adjust their personal efforts and future work direction based on the fairness of the comparison results. The presence of an actual balance gap can significantly impact one's work enthusiasm, ultimately striving to achieve a state of fairness.

Porter and Lawler's Comprehensive Incentive Model

The comprehensive motivation theory conducts a comprehensive analysis of various motivational elements and psychological processes involved in the motivation process. Porter and Lawler's comprehensive incentive model stands as one of the most influential comprehensive incentive theories, serving as a comprehensive synthesis of content-based and process-based incentive theories. To this day, it remains an essential reference for designing incentive mechanisms in both enterprises and institutions.

Porter and Lawler classified incentives into two categories: internal and external. External incentives encompass elements such as labor remuneration, work environment, and unit management systems. Internal motivation includes psychological and social factors, such as leadership recognition and collegial relationships. Drawing from these distinctions, a more holistic comprehensive incentive model was formulated, as illustrated in Figure 4.

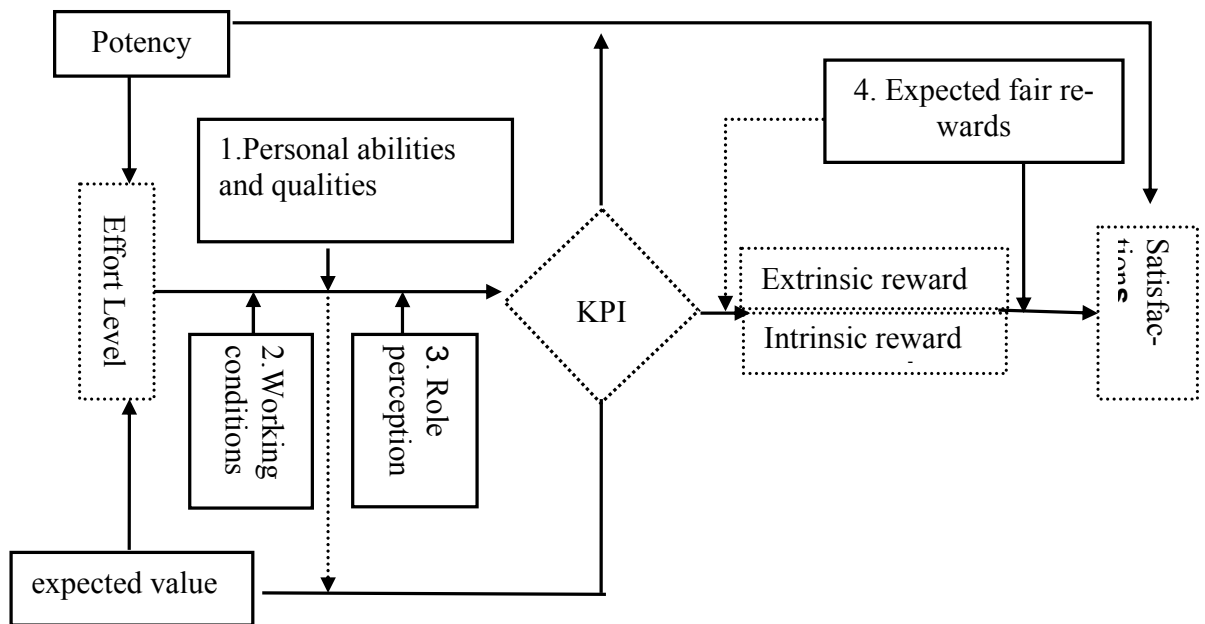


Figure 4. Potter - Lawler Incentive Model Diagram

This model suggests that job performance is influenced by multiple variables. It is not solely determined by the level of effort exerted but also dependent on individual qualities and abilities, such as personal skills, intelligence, physiological and psychological attributes, and the prevailing working conditions and role perception. Personal abilities and qualities are essential prerequisites for individuals to engage in their respective job roles.

Furthermore, job satisfaction is contingent on the alignment between the incentives received and the expected outcomes. When the received incentives surpass the anticipated results, individuals are likely to experience a sense of satisfaction.

Methodology

This article utilizes both domestic and international motivation theories to construct a survey questionnaire aimed at examining incentive factors, primarily drawing from Maslow's needs theory and ERG needs theory, and considering the specific characteristics of teachers in private universities. To gauge teacher satisfaction at Jiangxi Engineering College, the "Jiangxi Engineering College Teacher Satisfaction Survey Form" was designed with the theoretical average value as a reference point. The survey questionnaire comprises three parts. Part one covers the basic information of teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering, including gender, age structure, educational level, and professional title. It analyzes the perception of different teacher levels and types regarding the school's current situation, identifies key motivational factors, and proposes distinct incentive methods and solutions for arising issues. Part two focuses on assessing overall satisfaction levels of Jiangxi University of Engineering teachers with the existing incentive system. Lastly, part three employs the 5-point Likert scale, commonly used by American social psychologist Likert, to rate subject choices. The five levels of satisfaction are "very dissatisfied," "dissatisfied," "neutral," "satisfied," and "very satisfied," assigned scores of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. All questionnaire items are positively rated, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction, and lower scores indicating weaker satisfaction.

Questionnaire survey: Building upon the analysis and theoretical framework of incentive fac-

tors for teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering, a questionnaire was randomly administered to 300 teaching staff members within the institution, focusing on their job satisfaction related to incentive mechanisms. By integrating the responses with relevant research data, specific issues concerning the incentive mechanism at Jiangxi University of Engineering were identified, and targeted and effective solutions were explored.

Interview approach: To gain in-depth insights, 20 teachers were randomly selected from Jiangxi University of Engineering for face-to-face interviews and open-ended communication. This allowed for a thorough understanding and summary of existing problems in the incentive mechanism. Based on these findings, pertinent suggestions were proposed, providing valuable references for the management decision-making processes at Jiangxi University of Engineering.

Results

Research at Jiangxi University of Engineering has identified key factors influencing the incentive mechanism for teachers. The study revealed that teachers express lower satisfaction with the salary system, democratic management, professional growth, working conditions, and professional identity. Personal factors such as age, gender, skills, education, and family beliefs were found to impact work motivation and stability. Additionally, environmental factors like school management status, talent market supply-demand ratio, and regional economic disparities contribute to teacher resignations.

Furthermore, the research indicates that male teachers exhibit higher mobility compared to female teachers, largely due to greater opportunities for career advancement and exploration of alternative career paths. The primary drivers of teacher turnover are attributed to the effectiveness of talent resource management, provision of personal career development opportunities, and adequacy of wages, salaries, and benefits.

The findings underscore the significance of meeting the needs of teachers in private universities to enhance work enthusiasm. It is crucial to comprehend the dynamic nature of demands and tailor incentive policies according to the varying needs of teachers and employees at different stages, thereby implementing effective measures for motivation.

Analysis of Basic Situation

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 292 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in an effective response rate of 97.3%. The distribution of the collected samples is presented in Table 1. The samples were aggregated as follows:

Table 1. Sample Combination of Jiangxi University of Engineering Questionnaire

Sample classification	Classification items	Number	Proportion
Gender	Male	106	36.2%
	Female	186	63.8%
Age	Below 35 years	136	46.6%
	36-49 years	120	41.2%
	Above 50 years	36	12.2%
Qualification	Master's and below	262	89.6%
	Ph.D.	30	10.4%
Title	Junior and below	204	70.2%
	Associate Senior	70	23.8%
	Full Senior	18	6%

After collecting the survey questionnaires, the qualitative data was subjected to initial quantitative analysis. Subsequently, the theoretical average value for each item was calculated separately for different types of teachers, yielding a value of $(1+2+3+4+5)/3 = 3.0$. Each factor consists of 5 items, resulting in a theoretical average value of $3.0 * 5 = 15.0$ for each factor. The specific scoring method involved dividing the total score of each project by the number of teachers of different types, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Showcases the theoretical average values of each project for different types of teachers

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Mean	12.5	12.7	13.5	13.2	13.7	14.2	14.3	13.6	13.7
Theoretical Mean	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
standard deviation	.571	1.112	.986	1.050	0.870	1.023	.075	.509	958

Note: A: Salary system B: Democratic management C: Professional growth E: Organizational relationships F: Working conditions G: Teaching achievements H: Work stability I: Professional identity

Based on the aforementioned analysis, teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering exhibit lower satisfaction levels in five dimensions: salary system, democratic management, professional growth, working conditions, and professional identity. Among these dimensions, material compensation emerges as the area with the lowest satisfaction.

In May 2023, data from a satisfaction survey questionnaire administered to college teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering was collected, statistically analyzed, and organized. The findings revealed numerous incentive factors influencing the development of teachers. These factors can be categorized into material incentives, institutional incentives, environmental incentives, and spiritual and cultural incentives. The presence of incentive factors plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher stability and work enthusiasm.

The questionnaire data highlights that the reason for teacher talent loss at Jiangxi University of Engineering primarily relates to the reasonableness of the talent resource management system, provision of personal career development opportunities, and the adequacy of wages, salaries, and benefits. Recognizing the individual differences among teachers and employees, the establishment of incentive mechanisms should be based on a general incentive framework, gradually tailored to specific needs, and targeted towards diverse incentive methods designed to cater to the distinct needs and characteristics of teachers.

Analysis of Teacher Attrition

By conducting interviews with 20 teachers at Jiangxi University of Engineering and analyzing the school's personnel turnover in recent years, the factors contributing to teacher attrition at Jiangxi University of Engineering have been identified as follows:

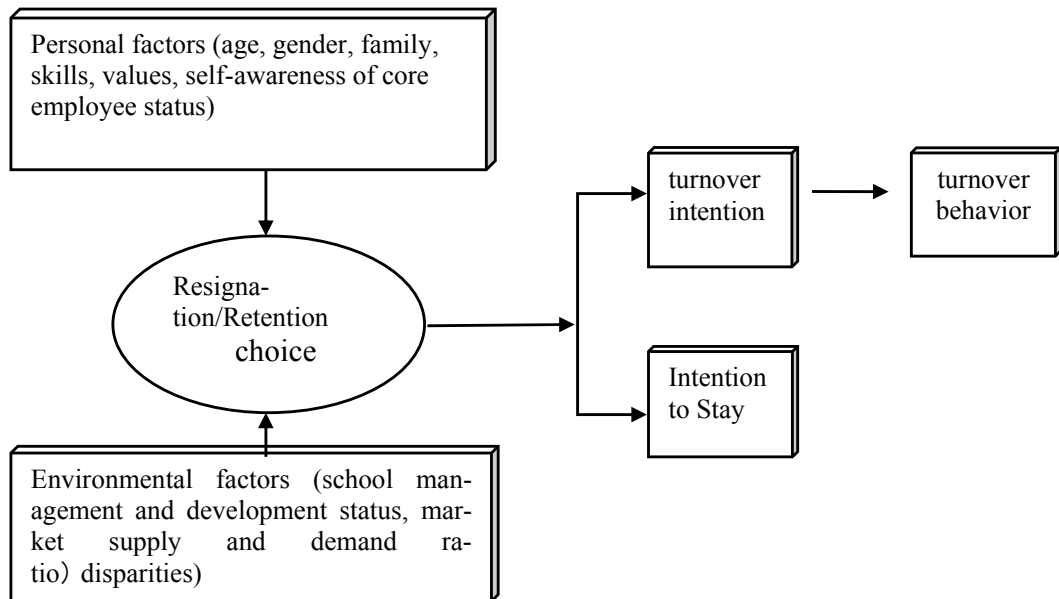


Figure 5. Human Resource Flow Model of Jiangxi University of Engineering

(1) Personal Factors Affecting Teacher Turnover

This study examines the impact of personal factors on teacher turnover, focusing on age, gender, skills, and family beliefs as key determinants. Based on empirical evidence presented in Figure 4, a negative correlation is observed between age and the turnover rate. Specifically, young teachers tend to experience a relatively unstable stage in their careers and personal lives, leading to frequent job changes in pursuit of broadening their work experience and expanding their social networks. The analysis sheds light on the significance of these personal factors in understanding the dynamics of teacher turnover and provides valuable insights for education policymakers and school administrators in developing targeted retention strategies.

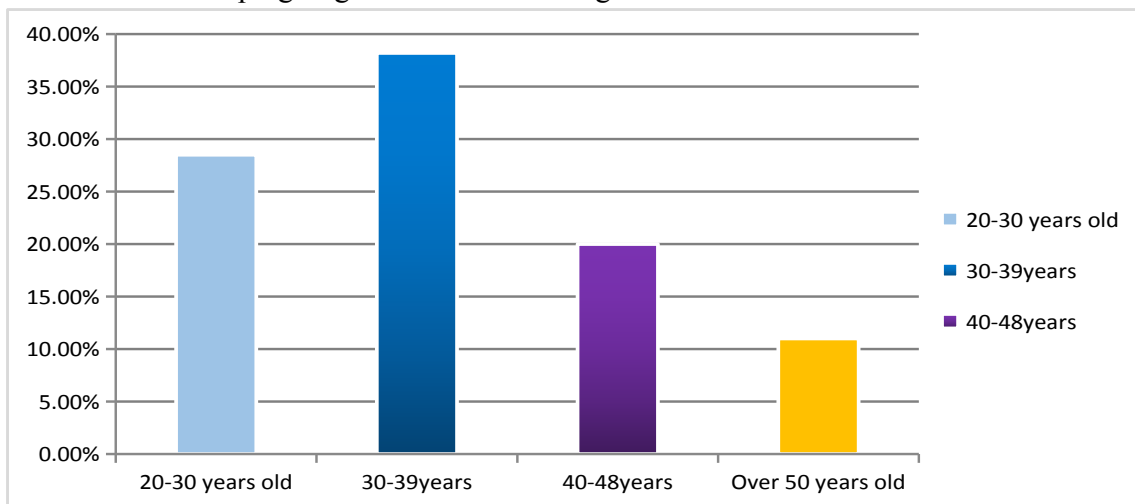


Chart 1. Age structure distribution of teachers in questionnaire surveys

This study examines the gender distribution and career mobility of faculty members at

Jiangxi University of Engineering through random interviews and questionnaire surveys conducted with a sample of 20 teachers. The findings indicate that female teachers outnumber male teachers, constituting 63.8% (n=186) of the total surveyed population, while male teachers comprise 36.2% (n=106). This observed trend aligns with the prevailing pattern in private universities, where female teachers are more prevalent.

Furthermore, within the specialized disciplines of the university, male teachers in the Academy of Sciences are significantly underrepresented, accounting for only 20.8% of the total teaching staff.

The study also reveals that female teachers exhibit higher job stability, while male teachers demonstrate a higher degree of career mobility. The differential emphasis on salary and career over family considerations among male teachers can be explained by the career structural stage theory, which posits three career stages: exploration, establishment, and decline. During the exploration and establishment stages, teachers strive to develop into backbone talents within the institution. As a result, they are more willing to remain in private universities for extended periods, accepting challenging assignments and relatively lower remuneration to gain experience, qualifications, and skills, with the ultimate aim of securing future leadership positions. However, in the middle and later stages of their careers, with their experience and skills becoming more mature and refined, male teachers may become more inclined to explore job opportunities and exhibit higher job mobility.

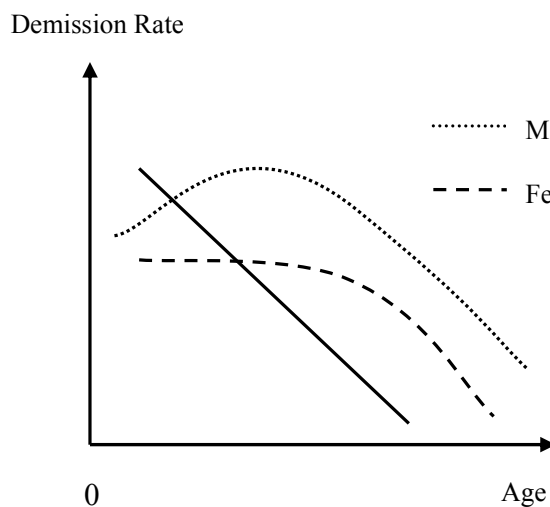


Figure 6. Teachers gender and turnover rate

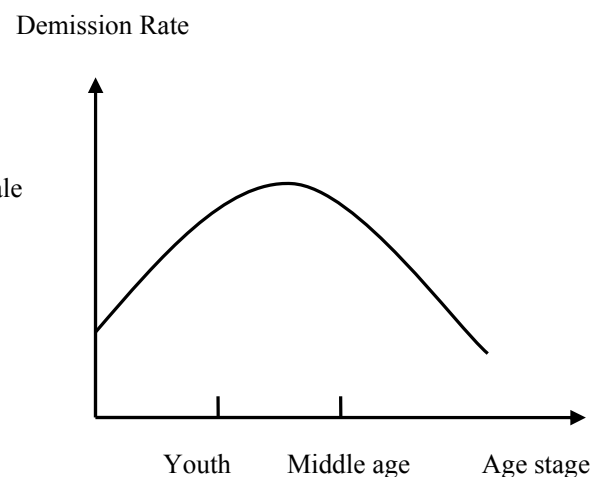


Figure 7. The relationship between age and turnover rate

(2) Environmental Factors Affecting Teacher Resignations

Environmental factors encompass external elements that influence school resignations, primarily consisting of the school's management status, the talent market's supply and demand ratio, regional economic development disparities, and other pertinent factors. Key drivers for motivating teachers lie in aspects such as job position design, salary system, and teacher training, collectively referred to as the decisive "hardware." Conversely, the culture radiated by private schools serves as the essential "software" for retaining teachers. A well-managed school holds considerable appeal for teachers, and heightened teacher loyalty corresponds to enhanced personnel stability.

Conclusions

To establish a teacher incentive mechanism, it is crucial to initially delineate the hierarchy and attributes of teachers' needs, and subsequently investigate the correlation between teachers' satisfaction with their demands and their motivation. These research findings serve as a foundation for devising efficacious incentive policies. Thus, during the establishment of a teacher incentive mechanism at Jiangxi University of Engineering, adherence to the following principles is recommended:

(1) Principle of Personalization

According to Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, wild ducks may be tamed by humans, but once tamed, they lose their wildness and freedom to roam across the sea and sky. Humanized motivation fundamentally aims to enhance motivation by showing respect for employees and understanding their needs and development. When caring for teachers and employees, we should strive to maximize teachers' motivation to work and create a harmonious and cohesive work environment that aligns with the school's social values and caters to teachers' psychological activity patterns. By fostering a sense of belonging and promoting harmonious interpersonal relationships, we can encourage teachers to be proactive and innovative, rather than merely adhering to rigid rules and regulations.

(2) Principle of Fairness

Fairness and impartiality serve as the cornerstone for effective incentives, necessitating that Jiangxi University of Engineering adheres to this principle when designing incentive measures. Creating an equitable and competitive environment requires paying attention to the psychological balance of different incentive recipients, avoiding egalitarianism, and treating all individuals equally. In the incentive process, transparency, democratization, and openness should be upheld. Only through such practices can motivation genuinely become an effective means of mobilizing teachers' work enthusiasm.

(3) Principle of Diversity

Professor John Henry Holland's RIASEC theory, also known as "Personality type," has been developed through years of practical research. Fundamental research reveals that employee satisfaction with work hinges on the alignment of individual personality traits with the work environment. Given the essential differences between individuals and various job types, incentives should be tailored to each person and situation. Coordinating the working environment with individuals' personality types and scientifically aligning professional orientations with talented individuals will facilitate the rational utilization of talent resources, leading to improved incentive outcomes.

The teacher cohort in private universities exhibits significant diversity. As society evolves and undergoes changes over time, the needs, cognition, and ideas of teachers also transform accordingly. Consequently, formulating incentive policies necessitates individualized approaches, considering factors such as age, gender, educational background, professional title, position, personality, and values. Tailoring incentive methods based on people, time, and location is imperative.

(5) Principles of Shared Values:

Peter Holy, a prominent management expert, introduced the concept of "common aspiration," emphasizing the importance of a unified goal that guides all individuals within a company to work collaboratively and pursue a common objective.

Corporate culture seeks to align employees' thoughts and behaviors with shared values, thereby unifying their ideas and actions towards achieving the company's goals. This process fosters a strong sense of belonging and interconnectivity among employees, promoting unity and cooperation. As this shared value system takes root, employees develop clear value orientations and share common ideals and beliefs, leading to an internal incentive mechanism that binds and motivates them.

As a result, employees willingly comply with company rules, channel their efforts in a unified direction, and strive to unleash their full potential.

(6) SMART Assessment Principles:

College administrators must establish a scientific and targeted incentive assessment method, with measurable results and realistic goals within the framework of actual school teacher management. Appropriate rewards and penalties should be applied, following established guidelines. The principle of time limit should govern the implementation of incentive goals, ensuring their execution at different levels and stages, and timely completion. Private universities should maintain stability in setting incentive goals, and a flexible and stable approach should be adopted in developing and executing a range of incentive measures, such as teacher performance evaluation systems, salary policies, reward systems, training plans, and leadership role management. This approach aims to achieve the most effective incentive outcomes.

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