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Category «Professional Deformation» in Psychology

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Abstract

The phenomenon of professional deformation, manifested in destructive changes of self and one's productivity, and changes in the structure of personality, negatively affects the efficiency of labor and complicates interpersonal interaction in the workplace. Adverse effects of practicing the same profession for a long period of time negatively affect its productivity, resulting in emergence of undesirable professional qualities, and adverse changes in professional conduct, mental structure, personality traits and execution of professional duties.

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Keywords: Burnout; Depersonalization; Professional deformation; Reduction of personal achievement; Emotional and/or physical exhaustion

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1. Introduction

There is no unanimous understanding of professional deformation within Russian or any other school of psychological thought. The term is generally used in connection with situations of destructive changes in one's professional performance, changes in the existing structure of one's personality adversely affecting labor efficiency and co-worker interaction, adverse effects of practicing the same profession for a long period of time such as low productivity, emergence of undesirable professional qualities, changes in professional conduct and behavior, as well as changes in mental structure and personality traits caused by execution of professional duties.

2. Method

The aim of the present study is to perform theoretical analysis, to synthesize and compile definitions of professional deformation used in works of Russian and other psychologists in their studies of professional activities' influence on personality.

3. Results and discussion

In her studies A.K. Markova identified six risk factors that hinder professional development:

- 1) Changes caused by, and associated with, aging;
- 2) Long-term psychological stress caused by poor working conditions.
- 3) Crisis of professional development;
- 4) Monotony of work, resulting in boredom, loss of interest in work, low productivity, getting easily irritated, reduction in mental capacity and cognitive activity, short attention span, and constant fatigue syndrome.
- 5) Professional fatigue - a temporary reduction in one's physical and cognitive productivity as a result of exhaustion of one's internal resources and of the mismatch in the systems guiding activities;
- 6) Professional deformation [1].

Summarizing results of scientific works of Russian and foreign psychologists, E.F. Zeer indicates that the psychology of labor extensively covers problems of labor efficiency and reliability, issues of aging, and stress caused by poor working conditions. However, he writes, "To a lesser degree professional deformation is studied from the standpoint of a person, despite the fact that S.G. Gellershteyn wrote: "... the essence of professional work lies not only in the performance of an employee, in a set of active and reactive actions, but also in the adaptation of the organism to the specific characteristics of a profession, that requires such acts. There is a constant interaction between the working environment and the body of the worker. It often affects not only the body (curvature of the spine, short-sightedness of office workers) but also the mind and behavior (obsequiousness of clerks, flattery of waiters) of people of various professions" Zeer [2 p.197-200].

Professional deformation of the personality is a sum of changes in cognitive structures, personality traits, behavior, methods of communication, stereotypes of perception, one's nature, values, and such caused by the execution of one's professional duties.

Describing changes in personality occurring during professional development, E.F. Zeer emphasizes that:

1) "Professional development is as much losing as acquiring, and becoming a professional in some line of work is not only about improving, but also about losing some qualities" [2, p.200-201]. Professional failure thus can be viewed as complete or partial non-compliance with special requirements for cognitive capacities and personality traits to perform specific professional activities [3]. (There is an understanding of professional degradation as a backward movement – de-adaptation, decline in professional development, loss of required professional qualities and skills);

2) "Throughout their professional careers (as understood by the author (O. P.) – from the choice of a profession to decision to leave it, [4], [5], [6], [7], [8]) people of many occupations are going through stages of

professional destruction (destruction as in *disturbance of the normal structure of something*) [2, p. 197-200]. Therefore, according to the concept of cumulative reasons, researchers study the interactions between a number of different personal qualities, often difficult to diagnose, external influences, including indirect ones, which combined cause a particular mental phenomena, namely the professional deformation. While the mind has the ability to sort and process situations, there is a certain cumulative, or “stockpile” effect when factors, each of which taken separately may not cause certain mental conditions, combined result in a particular outcome (B.F. Lomov). At this, according to the concept of cumulative-factorial causes, the combination of various stimuli and influences can cause certain cognitive phenomena when a main factor (s) interacts (s) cumulatively with (a) minor ones which initiates mental phenomena and affects one’s behavior.

3) Professional deformation – a "destructive personality changes accompanying execution of professional duties" [2, p. 49-51] (may be a so-called *professional disharmony* - a mental state characterized by a mismatch of certain mental functions, personality traits, special features of behavior, both between themselves and in relation to the higher-level system, with respect to professional situations); "changes in the existing structure and activities of an individual, negatively affecting productivity of their labor and interaction with other participants of the working process" [2, p. 197-200]. (and, as a consequence of possible social deprivation, which can lead to the loss of social and psychological orientation); "destruction resulting from practicing the same profession for a long time that adversely affects efficiency of work, produces qualities detrimental to profession, changes professional conduct" [2, p.200-201]; "disruption of habitual ways of life, loss of acquired competencies, the emergence of clichés in professional behavior and difficulties embracing new technologies, professions or occupation, changes in personality structure during the transition from one stage to another in professional development" [2, p.200-201].

The term “mental burnout” was introduced in western psychology in the late 1970’s, and today this problem is widely studied within the context of occupational stress [9].

Burnout, in a broad sense, is a "long lasting stressful reaction occurring as a result of prolonged occupational stress of medium intensity" [10, p.443-463].

Originally the term mental burnout was understood as a state of exhaustion with a feeling of worthlessness. Only in 1974, when the term *burnout* was introduced for the first time by an American psychiatrist H.J. Freudenberger, it got its definition - a “characteristic of the psychological state of healthy people who are in an intense and close contact with customers in an emotionally laden, saturated atmosphere at giving them professional help” [11].

N.E. Vodopiyanova writes: "Researchers are increasingly associating burnout syndrome with psychosomatic well-being, relating it to the state of pre-disease" [10, p.443-463].

In 1981, American psychologists C. Maslach and S. Jackson noted that mental burnout is common only to professions connected with person-to-person communication [12], [13], [14], which partially resolves the dispute about the nature of the phenomenon (for professions involving direct person-to-person interaction [10], [15]).

C. Maslach and W. Schaufeli stressed that syndrome of emotional burnout should be viewed within a larger concept of personal deformation caused by occupational stress [16].

N.E. Vodopiyanova and E.S. Starchenkova note that the burnout syndrome is caused by personal emotional difficulties or tensions one faces in daily interpersonal professional communication, that have negative impact on professional activity, and therefore burnout syndrome could be directly related to the defense mechanism of preservation of mental health and stability, ensuring execution of professional skills in the long run [10], [15]. Analyzing the works of Russian and foreign psychologists, N.E. Vodopiyanova and E.S. Starchenkova also note that the difficulties in studying the syndrome lie in the uncertainty, multiple factors, their descriptive characteristics and the lack of adequate measuring tools. Currently, about 100 researchers identify mental burnout in terms of such symptoms as aggressive behavior, depression, insomnia, alcohol abuse, negative attitude, guilt, various addictions, psychosomatic manifestations, and other [10], [15].

The category of "professional deformation", in our opinion, calls for the use of scientific language, while terms built on metaphors such as "burn" are more suitable in descriptions of emotional and/or physical exhaustion, as defined in works of H. Selye [17], [18].

4. Conclusion

The category of professional deformation includes phenomena of destructive changes in person's performance, cognitive structure and activities that negatively affect productivity of labor and the interpersonal communication in the workplace; adverse effects resulting from practicing the same profession for a very long time that affect efficiency and produce professionally undesirable qualities; changes in professional conduct, one's mental structure, personality traits influenced by execution of professional duties.

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