

Incentive Mechanism of Social Work Service Organisations based on Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) Theory

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ABSTRACT

Although China vigorously encourages professional social work, a serious loss of social work talents is observed. This study adopted existence, relatedness and growth (ERG) theory to explore the relationship needs characterised by respect and interpersonal relationships by discussing the meaning, function, particularity and existing problems of social work incentive mechanism of social work service organisations. Due to the importance of incentive for growth needs, this study provides suggestions on the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations from three levels of survival, relationship and growth needs through establishing a complete training mechanism to promote the self-development of social workers. The incentives of social work services are to meet the needs of social workers for self-growth and development, social work service organisations must establish an effective promotion system to effectively prevent the loss of talents while upholding the spirit of fairness, openness and reasonableness. Such a system should use the performance of social workers as the evaluation criterion for promotion.

Keywords: social work service; organisation; incentive mechanism; ERG theory; training mechanism

INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, social work has been written into the ‘Government Work Report’ for five consecutive years and has received support and recognition at the national level, which has helped promote the healthy development of professional social work. The primary task of China’s vigorous development of social work is to cultivate professional social workers. At present, more than 533,000 people have obtained professional level certificates for social workers nationwide, and nearly 30,000 students majoring in social work graduate each year. With the gradual increase in the number of social workers, data show a phenomenon of oversupply, but a shortage of talents engaged in social work is observed. In addition, attracting professional social workers is difficult for some government purchases. According to the data released by Guan (2017), the turnover rate of social work talents across the country has reached 20%. Such a turnover rate is common. For example, the turnover rate of social workers in Beijing has reached 25%, whereas the turnover rate in Shanghai and Shenzhen has reached 20%. Moreover, the vast majority of social work majors will not choose to engage in social work after graduation, and the professional counterpart rate is low.

From a management perspective, the high turnover rate of social work talents has led to a significant increase in the labour costs of social work service organisations. In general, in an enterprise, a social worker turnover rate of less than 3% or above 10% is intended to mean that a problem exists. Tao (2013) indicate that to a certain extent, the high turnover rate of social work talents has an important relationship with the lack of effective incentive mechanisms in the social work industry and the limited industry attractiveness. In this industry, social work professionals mainly serve social work service organisations; therefore, how these organisations can effectively implement management and increase attractiveness is an important way to reduce the turnover rate of social work talents (Yunjung, 2014).

DISCUSSION

MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

MEANING OF THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

In social work management, management functions include planning, organisation, leadership and control. Amongst them, 'motivation' is an important part of the leadership function. 'Encourage' is derived from the ancient Latin 'movere,' which translates as 'to motivate.' At present, scholars have different opinions on the meaning of 'incentive' and put forward the viewpoints of inner strength, satisfying needs and stimulating ability. Robbins (2005) once pointed out that motivation refers to individuals' willingness to make excessive efforts towards organisational goals when trying to meet certain personal needs, emphasising the three elements of effort, needs and organisational goals. George and Jones defined motivation as the psychological force that determines a person's behavioural orientation, effort level and persistence in the face of difficulties in an organisation (Yue, 2008). Mitchell's definition of motivation is individuals and their determination to choose the extent of specific behaviours (Siwei, n.d). Mitchell (1982) believes that the incentives of social work service organisations include the following aspects: Firstly, incentives are purposeful, and its purposes are to achieve organisational goals; enhance social workers' willingness to work; encourage their morale. Secondly, motivation is to meet the needs of social workers as a potential driving force to guide social workers to change behaviour choices and strive to exhibit behaviours; thirdly, motivation is a complex process that is influenced and interacted by internal and external factors. The incentives of social work services are that it is an institution and a social work service organisation whose aim is to achieve the target incentive, the development of family systems and measures and organisational goals. It also aims to increase the enthusiasm and efficiency of social workers.

ROLE OF THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

In the current situation of serious loss of social work talents, the role of social work incentive mechanism is particularly prominent. This article elaborates on the role of social work service organisations, social workers and the social work industry. Firstly, for social work service organisations, on the one hand, incentive mechanisms are conducive to attracting and retaining talents and reducing human resource costs; on the other hand, incentive mechanisms are conducive to stimulating the morale of social workers, achieving organisational goals and allowing organisations to develop and grow; in addition, incentive mechanism are conducive to improving the cohesion of teams and creating a united and positive working atmosphere. Secondly, for social workers, incentive mechanisms are not only conducive to stimulating the potentials of social workers, enabling them to realise their potential advantages and enhancing their self-confidence and work efficiency, but also helping them achieve the value goal of helping others. Thirdly, for the social work industry, incentive mechanisms are not only conducive to the construction of social work talent teams and maintaining the vitality of the industry but also providing a reference for exploring effective industry incentive mechanisms.

PARTICULARITY OF THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

In the incentive mechanism of enterprises, many enterprises use several material incentives, such as increasing wages, bonuses and benefits. By contrast, the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations is inconsistent with the particularity of enterprises.

FOCUS ON THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL WORK VALUES AND INCENTIVE MECHANISMS

The pursuit of maximum profit is the goal of a company. However, in the field of social work, the goal is not to pursue profit but to help others help themselves. Values play a central role in social work, guiding social workers to make decisions and take action. As the carrier of social work services, social work service organisations should emphasise the role of value system and a sense of mission in their incentive mechanism to better meet the needs of the industry and social workers. In the ‘Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers’ adopted in 1996 (Chen, 2010), the core values of the social work profession are summarised as service, social justice, personal dignity and value, the importance of interpersonal relationships, integrity and ability. Dogov et al. (n. d.) In the process of the localisation of social work in China, social work professional values include professionalism, acceptance, self-determination and respect for the person. Therefore, the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations, on the one hand, not only pays attention to personal needs but also considers the realisation of social value; on the other hand, it focuses on cultivating the professional mission, values and professional knowledge and skills of social workers; moreover, given that social work values promote services beyond personal self-interest, the interests of social workers should be fully protected, including material and non-material guarantees, to avoid professional exhaustion.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE PARTICULARITY OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

The establishment of social work service organisations is defined by the state as non-profit organisations, suggesting that the funds they receive can only be used for projects and services to the maximum extent and cannot be embezzled for other purposes. At the same time, the funding sources of social work service organisations are relatively single, and government procurement has become the main source of income. Government integrated the existing service of management costs and social benefits, on the part of poor self-management service to take the bid, sole sourcing to a third-party sourcing. Purchasing services are conducted on a regular basis assessment which was decided based on examination results. Xiaoliang and Wen (2016) claimed that due to the non-profit nature and the way the government purchases social work services, it has led to social believe that incentive mechanism should not be too much emphasis on material incentives but rather it should focus on the value and mission-oriented while ignoring the social worker's basic physiological needs, general it appears salary, benefits poor condition. This article believes that the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations must fully recognise the characteristics of non-profit organisations, control the scale of the ‘redistribution of surplus’ and find other ways to improve the salary and welfare of social workers. This characteristic should not be regarded as low for social workers.

Social work service organisations are human-intensive organisations, and social workers are the main driving force to achieve their goals. Therefore, organisations should not only focus on using performance to maintain the quality of social work services but also pay attention to such services. Social workers must overcome the obstacles they encounter. Meanwhile, the needs of social workers should be met, so that their goals can be aligned with the goals of their organisation.

EMPHASISE THE ALTRUISM OF SOCIAL WORKERS

A social worker is a person who upholds the values of social work and uses professional methods of social work to engage in professional social services. Therefore, social workers

agree and follow the values of social work, have the concept of serving the recipients wholeheartedly and do not seek personal gain through the process of helping others (Sibin, 2016). That is, social workers enter the field of social work, guided by its values, and do not provide services for the purpose of seeking personal gain. In general, social workers have a strong sense of responsibility and mission, hoping to change society through social work, rather than pursuing personal interests. Therefore, social workers are more beneficial to others than those in for-profit organisations. Given that social workers are altruistic in their services, they pursue a certain spiritual satisfaction and the development of their own abilities. For them, material incentives can only be a part of it, but they must also pay attention to their psychological needs and abilities. In this way, we can meet the needs of social workers.

INCENTIVE MECHANISM FOR EXISTENCE, RELATEDNESS AND GROWTH (ERG) THEORY TO INTERVENE IN SOCIAL WORK

OVERVIEW OF ERG THEORY

In 1972, Alderfer conducted an empirical research on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Based on the results of the empirical research, the initial five levels of needs were changed into three types of needs called ERG theory. The theory includes needs of existence (Needs of Existence), needs of relationship (Needs of Relatedness) and needs of growth (Needs of Growth). Zhipeng and Zhaotong (2007) explains the specific content of these three requirements is as follows:

- 1) Needs of Existence: The material conditions required to maintain survival are the minimum physiological needs of humans, which are equivalent to the physiological and safety needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which mainly includes meeting salary, working environment, work safety and physical health.
- 2) Needs of Relatedness: It refers to the needs of establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships with others, which is equivalent to the external part of the social and self-esteem needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, including teamwork relationships, supervisory relationships, social status, job recognition and sense of belonging.
- 3) Needs of Growth: It refers to the pursuit of self-improvement and self-development to realise one's own value, which is equivalent to the internal part of self-esteem needs and self-realisation needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, including work achievement, work need obstacle, sense of responsibility, promotion channels, personal growth, learning and development.

In addition to redefining the hierarchy of needs, Alderfer also proposed three core concepts: demand satisfaction, demand enhancement and demand frustration. Demand satisfaction means that at the same demand level, if the demand is met, then it will strongly hope for further satisfaction. Demand enhancement indicates that when low-level needs are fully met, high-level needs and desires become stronger. Meanwhile, demand frustration means that when high-level needs are not met, they will turn to low-level needs, leading to inflated low-level needs. Moreover, Alderfer put forward the following hypotheses: (1) People may have more than one demand at a certain time; (2) No fixed rising or falling order exists amongst the three kinds of demand, not even a rigid progressive relationship; (3) The idea of 'frustration degeneration' must be proposed, that is, when high-level needs are not met or frustrated, it will lead to degeneration to pursue the satisfaction of low-level needs, rather than being still at an unsatisfied level of needs.

Alderfer believed that managers should understand and meet the real needs of social workers because different needs will cause social workers to exhibit different behaviours, and such behaviours can lead to inconsistent results. Yanboa and Jinmei (2011) also argued that satisfying multiple needs can enhance incentives. Therefore, when social work service organisations formulate incentive mechanisms, they start from meeting social workers' needs of existence (Needs of Existence), relationship needs (Needs of Relatedness) and growth needs (Needs of Growth) to stimulate their needs. Enthusiasm is also necessary to achieve the goals of organisation together.

PROBLEMS IN THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS UNDER ERG THEORY

THE SURVIVAL NEEDS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY CURRENCY AND SECURITY HAVE NOT BEEN MET

LOW SALARY

In ERG theory, survival is the lowest demand, and monetary incentives are always an incentive factor that cannot be ignored. In the social work sector, although the country has been advocating policies to enhance the salaries of social workers, welfare benefits, generally low wages of social workers, have become a major cause of social work brain drain (Xin & Wei, 2007). Across the country, the social worker industry in Guangdong has developed rapidly, and the salaries and benefits of workers in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan are higher than those in cities in other provinces. However, in Guangzhou, the wages of social workers, who have recently entered the industry, are between 3,500 and 4,000 yuan. Social work service agencies are not yet responsible for their meals and accommodation. For a first-tier city, such a salary level may only barely make ends meet. The workload of social workers is heavy, and the salary level is not proportional to work pressure. Given that the government funds for purchasing services are fixed or the appropriations are reduced according to the assessment results, the annual expenditure for the salaries of social workers is fixed or reduced. Even the funds for purchasing services for some projects remain unchanged, but it requires an increase in the number of social workers. In view of these circumstances, increasing the salaries of social workers by a large margin on the basis of the previous year is difficult for organisations. Therefore, if the position is not promoted, then some organisations can only increase the seniority salary each year, and too much room exists for salary increase.

WORK SAFETY IS DIFFICULT TO GUARANTEE.

The service targets of social work are disadvantaged groups, including the elderly, the disabled, women, young people, community corrections personnel and placement help and education personnel. Due to the particularity, diversity and complexity of clients, in the open process of outreach services, social workers are easily placed in a position of weakness and a lack of awareness of prevention and protection, leading to troubles such as intimidation and harassment. Social work service agencies lack further safety protection measures in addition to reminding social workers to raise awareness of protection and arranging personnel to accompany them on visits. Due to the heavy task indicators of the current project, social workers also often work overtime, which makes it difficult to protect their mental and physical health. A sudden death of social workers even happened in Shenzhen in 2013. Therefore, how to ensure the work safety of social workers and meet their safety needs are also issues that must be considered in the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations.

RELATIONSHIP NEEDS CHARACTERISED BY RESPECT AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE NOT BEEN MET

LOW JOB RECOGNITION

In relation to demand, social workers hope that their work will be recognised and respected by society and others. However, as social work is a new industry, many people do not understand its nature and the content of its services. Equating social workers with government personnel or volunteers is easy, and their recognition of them is low. Due to low salary levels and benefits, attracting and retaining outstanding talents is also difficult for the social work industry, resulting in the insufficient influence of the industry in society. Although some purchasers avail the services of social workers, they do not respect and agree with the professionalism of social workers and delegate a large amount of administrative work to them. Moreover, social work agencies lack measures to recognise the work of social workers. These workers are barely praised by institutions and leaders even for their outstanding work.

DISHARMONIOUS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Harmony in interpersonal relationships is an important reason for motivating social workers to work. However, some social work service agencies lack team cooperation, have conflicts in interpersonal relationships, have personal missions that do not match organisational missions and lack a sense of belonging. On the one hand, considering that a project evaluation focuses on indicators, each social worker has their own indicator task, which leads to inconsistent cooperation amongst teams. On the other hand, project teams easily form into small groups and thus are not conducive to unity and institutions. Sometimes, interpersonal conflicts occur amongst jobs due to competition. Furthermore, some organisations do not attach importance to the development of their mission and culture. They even carry out services on the basis of interest, which conflicts with the values and mission of social workers, making it difficult for social workers to find a sense of belonging. Given that social workers have been in situations of low wages and disharmonious interpersonal relationships for a long time, the values and sense of mission of social workers can be easily over-consumed, they likely experience job burnout, and they even leave due to disappointment in the industry.

THE GROWTH NEEDS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY SELF-REALISATION HAVE NOT BEEN MET

LACK OF CHALLENGING WORK

Although the country has always advocated professional social work, many social work service organisations now only provide services to complete task indicators. They seldom consider the needs of service targets and only pay attention to the number of services. They do not pay attention to the quality of services, thereby affecting the ability of social workers. Moreover, professionalism cannot be reflected in the services, making the work less challenging. Given that the current evaluation system focuses on paper materials and uses such materials as the standard for evaluating service quality, social workers must spend a huge amount of time on making materials instead of delving into how to carry out and deepen services to make work more interesting than before. From professionalism to generality to repetitiveness, social workers cannot obtain a sense of accomplishment from their work.

NARROW PROMOTION CHANNELS

In large social work service organisations, the promotion process of social workers is generally ‘social worker-director, deputy social worker director-director, deputy minister-deputy, director-general’ or promotion to supervisor. However, the prerequisite for this kind of position promotion is the vacancy of the position, and a social work service organisation is implemented as a project. The number of positions for project directors and deputy directors is basically

equal to the number of projects. If the deputy director or director of a project does not resign, then social workers will unlikely be promoted in the project and can only resign or serve as deputy directors or directors of other projects of their organisation. In general, positions at the ministerial level and above in social work service agencies are stable. If the above promotion mode is followed, then project directors can only choose to leave if they want to continue to develop. This condition is not only economic for institutions that have been nurtured for many years. Loss also means the loss of talents. In addition, the deputy directors-general and directors-general of many organisations tend to be young, but when they are in such positions, their professional careers have basically reached the highest level, and they have a difficult time to develop in their organisation. Therefore, the narrow promotion channels for social workers are not only reflected in the small room for improvement but also in the stagnation of their careers.

LACK OF GUARANTEE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The funds of social work service organisations mainly come from government purchases of services, which generally have a time limit that does not exceed three years. That is, a project will be re-tendered after three years at most. If the original social work service organisation does not win the bid, then the social workers of the project will face the possibility of unemployment. Even if they are not unemployed, they will be transferred to other posts by the organisation. Therefore, the professional stability of social workers is low. In social work service organisations, the personal career planning and training system are also imperfect, making it difficult for social workers to improve their skills. Although the country has issued a number of policies to develop social work, uncertain policies exist regarding the identification of social workers and promotion mechanisms, resulting in a lack of relevant legal protection for career development.

SUGGESTIONS ON THE INCENTIVE MECHANISM OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ORGANISATIONS UNDER ERG THEORY

Based on the abovementioned problems in the incentive mechanism of social work service organisations, starting from the three needs of ERG, a sound social work service organisation incentive mechanism is established to meet the needs of social workers and stimulate their potentials.

INCENTIVES FOR SURVIVAL NEEDS

IMPROVE THE SALARY LEVEL AND ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE SALARY INCENTIVE MECHANISM

Salary incentives are commonly used in social work service organisations. These organisations provide social workers with competitive remuneration levels by establishing a reasonable and fair remuneration system. Such pay levels can not only guarantee the basic living needs of social workers but also ensure that they pay and create price value. To ensure the fairness and vitality of incentives, establishing a performance mechanism that cooperates with the salary incentive mechanism is also necessary, so that the salaries of social workers are linked to performance factors, such as ability, service quality and service time; moreover, a reasonable salary structure system is established to stimulate their morale and promote work efficiency.

IMPROVE SAFETY AWARENESS AND ESTABLISH A SAFETY GUARANTEE MECHANISM

Through a series of safety awareness training courses, social work service agencies let social workers understand the dangers that may be encountered during the service process and master the skills and methods to respond to these dangers. At the same time, a complete visiting system

is established to ensure safety. We must also pay attention to the physical health of social workers, arrange their work reasonably and allow them to participate in recreational activities or sports as appropriate. Furthermore, psychological adjustment courses are carried out to provide them with stress-reducing skills for reducing the psychological pressure caused by work.

RELATIONSHIP DEMAND INCENTIVES

IMPLEMENT MULTIPLE MEASURES TO IMPROVE JOB RECOGNITION

The current society's low recognition of social workers has led to their low social status. If one wants to change this kind of present, then he/she must change from the external environment to the internal environment. The main purpose of external environment is to increase the recognition of social workers by the society through the power of policies and the government, which will not be elaborated in this article. In the internal environment, on the one hand, social work service agencies have established a fair reward system, implemented a combination of material and spiritual incentives and rewarded social workers with outstanding work. Material incentives mainly implement bonus rewards, whereas spiritual incentives are rewarded through oral and written praise. On the other hand, the leaders of social work service organisations should care about the work of social workers, communicate with the purchaser in a timely manner and establish a professional image of social workers in the mind of the purchaser. In this way, they can be recognised and respected by the purchaser.

DECENTRALISE MANAGEMENT DECISION-MAKING POWER AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION MAKING

Social work services, by allowing social workers to fully participate in the decision-making approach, stimulate the enthusiasm of social workers to improve their work for the satisfaction and sense of belonging to institutions to enhance their ownership. On the one hand, social workers are given the opportunity to participate in decision making, and they are allowed to make suggestions on the welfare and management of their organisation. On the other hand, social workers set up a result-oriented work team responsible for implementing various work plans. This model refers to the fact that team members are led by a specific project and jointly develop service plans through mutual cooperation and communication (Weikang, 2012). This approach provides them with a broad stage, which not only cultivates their spirit of cooperation and autonomy but also satisfies their sense of accomplishment and helps promote work enthusiasm.

CULTIVATE AN ALTRUISTIC AND HUMANISTIC ENVIRONMENT AND CREATE A GOOD ATMOSPHERE

Social work service organisations should focus on their mission and culture, be guided by altruism and meet the requirements of the mission and values of social work. Only in this way can the work goals of social workers match the goals of their organisation and can better stimulate their sense of mission and responsibility. Social work service agencies should also pay attention to team building, improve team cohesion and cooperation capabilities and ensure high efficiency and high quality of work. In general, communication amongst social workers is strengthened through team-building activities, dinners, birthday parties and travels, so that they can establish good interpersonal relationships and create a relaxed working atmosphere.

INCENTIVES FOR GROWTH NEEDS

ARRANGE CHALLENGING WORK TO ENHANCE THE SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Some social workers think that their work is too cumbersome and repetitive, and they cannot obtain the sense of accomplishment they expect from their work. Therefore, they hope that social work service agencies will arrange challenging jobs for them, and these jobs can not only reflect their own value but also have appropriate pressure. In this regard, social work service organisations can do so in three ways: job rotation, job expansion and job enrichment. Job rotation is mainly to transfer social workers to similar but better and challenging positions during the designated period and to evaluate their potentials. Work expansion refers to increasing the workload of social workers, challenging their ability levels and reducing their aversion to work. Job enrichment means that leaders consider redesigning positions, so that they have additional decision-making power to meet their needs.

ASSIST IN THE FORMULATION OF CAREER PLANNING AND ESTABLISH A PERFECT PROMOTION SYSTEM

In the absence of guarantees for professional development, social work service agencies should assist social workers in formulating career plans to let them understand their abilities, potentials and development directions. Doing so can reduce their confusion in the face of personnel changes and enhance their power capacity resilience. At the same time, promotion channels have become narrow. To meet the needs of social workers for self-growth and development, social work service organisations must establish a sound promotion system to effectively prevent the loss of talents. The promotion system must uphold the spirit of fairness, openness and reasonableness. Such a system should also use the performance of social workers as the evaluation criterion for promotion, so that talented people can be reused.

ESTABLISH A COMPLETE TRAINING MECHANISM TO PROMOTE THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORKERS

A sound training mechanism is an important way to promote the self-development of social workers and enhance their professional skills. In the process of formulating training mechanisms, social work service organisations should pay attention to the generalised and individualised needs of social workers. Different pieces of training for different needs must also be provided. Firstly, improve the supervision mechanism. In social work service organisations, the supervision mechanism is the most commonly used training and incentive method. However, hired supervisors not only have rich experiences and abilities but also meet the needs of projects and social workers. Secondly, go out to visit and learn. According to the needs of social workers, outings must be arranged to learn the innovative ideas and methods of others. Thirdly, formulate training plans and carry out training courses. According to the professional career regulations of social workers, training plans must be formulated, and training courses must be carried out to establish a system for the development and ability improvement of social workers, fully explore their potentials, meet their growth needs and promote self-development.

CONCLUSION

At present, the mode of cultivating social work professionals in colleges and universities is mainly to combine theory and practice and attach importance to the internship experience of students. However, due to the insufficient development of the social work industry, some students are prone to be instilled negative emotions by practitioners, which makes it difficult to persist in social work after graduation. Therefore, in the process of educating people, colleges and universities should fully understand the needs of students, guide them in their career planning, match with social work service organisations suitable for their internships and meet the needs of survival, relationship and growth. The goal of the society and industry is to cultivate high-quality and high-skilled personnel.

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