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Article

# Research on the Motivation for Counselors in Universities: Based on Exploratory Factor Analysis

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**Abstract:** This study explored what motivates university counselors. By analyzing various factors like personal values and work environment, they found counselors experience greater career satisfaction when their work aligns with their own values and societal impact, and when they receive recognition and opportunities for growth. Universities can utilize these findings to create a more supportive environment for counselors by highlighting their impact, offering development opportunities, and fostering a positive work culture. This can ultimately lead to a more motivated and effective counseling team, benefiting both the counselors and the students they serve.

**Keywords:** FIT-Choice; university counselor; motivation

## 1. Introduction

Counselors are the backbone force in carrying out ideological and political education for college students at higher educational institutions. They serve as organizers, implementers, and guides in the daily work of ideological and political education and student management. As life mentors and trusted friends who foster students' healthy growth, higher education institutions should regard the construction of counselor teams as a significant component of both teaching staff and managerial team development. With rapid socioeconomic development and continuous expansion in higher education enrollment, counselors bear a workload far exceeding the 1:200 teacher-student ratio prescribed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Education. They shoulder multiple tasks such as ideological and political education, student affairs management, party and league building, mental health education, career guidance services, and ensuring safety and stability, along with various management, teaching, research, and learning assignments designated by colleges and universities. The job demands high standards, is heavy in workload, and carries great responsibility. Such immense work pressure has led to prevalent issues of professional burnout, psychological fatigue, confusion, bewilderment, and anxiety among college counselors.

Especially since the outbreak of COVID-19, due to the virus's strong transmissibility, rapid spread, and difficulty in control, combined with the practical situation in higher education where there are numerous students and faculty, high density, large mobility, and wide-ranging interpersonal interactions, the COVID-19 prevention and control efforts have posed unprecedented challenges. Under the new normal of epidemic prevention and control, issues regarding students' daily management, safety and health, ideological and political education, psychological well-being, and employment difficulties have become more acute. Moreover, today's students, mostly born after the year 2000, are digitally native, with strong information acquisition abilities, broad knowledge horizons, lively personalities, agile thinking, and a high demand for voice and autonomy, making them more independent, individualistic, and challenging traditional teacher authority. College ideological and political education faces problems such as diversified ideological consciousness, network-concentrated public opinions, clustered social trends, materialistic value pursuits, lax academic atmosphere, and slack discipline. The emerging issues and new situations in students'

study, life, and work all pose severe challenges to counselors. However, many higher education institutions do not adequately address the complexity of counselors' work, lack corresponding incentive mechanisms, suffer from unclear occupational positioning, excessive work pressure, and restricted career development channels, leading to serious attrition, instability in the counselor workforce, and overall lower quality of the team.

Therefore, establishing an effective incentive mechanism for counselors aims to explore and construct, through factor analysis, a viable set of incentive indicators for counselors, providing theoretical references for designing incentive plans and mechanisms. This, in turn, promotes the professionalization and specialization of the counselor team, thereby implementing the fundamental task of "cultivating virtue and talents" and the guiding principles of the Party's education policy. From a practical application perspective, this research endeavors to investigate the counselor team in agricultural and forestry universities in Yunnan Province, aiming to propose optimized incentive mechanism suggestions suitable for current school development. Ultimately, this effort seeks to promote further progress in these institutions.

## 2. Methods

The FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) model is an empirical analytical framework specifically designed to investigate the factors affecting individuals' decisions to enter the teaching profession [1]. Australian scholars Watt and Richardson initiated this research in 2002 in response to the high attrition rate of teachers in Australia, where nearly 30% of educators left the profession within their first five years of teaching. They drew upon the Expectancy-Value Theory proposed by Eccles and Wigfield to develop the FIT-Choice model [2], which includes a comprehensive theoretical structure and an accompanying questionnaire.

In 2006, the FIT-Choice framework and its associated measurement tool were published, followed by technical validation in 2007. Since then, it has gained widespread recognition and adoption globally, with its scope of inquiry expanding over time.

This particular study employs the FIT-Choice theoretical framework and questionnaire to collect data on counselors' motivations for entering the teaching profession, their understanding of the career, and their satisfaction with their career choice. By examining these aspects, the study aims to address gaps in existing research concerning the motivations, perceptions, and job satisfaction related to career selection among counselors. Ultimately, the findings are intended to contribute to the refinement of professionalization and vocational training programs for university counselors in China, thereby providing a basis for enhancing the quality and stability of future counselor teams in higher education institutions. This study surveyed 50 university counselors in two universities in Yunnan Province.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

As shown Table 1, for motivations, factor intrinsic career's mean is the highest,  $M=3.2$ , Standard Deviation= $1.355$ . Standard Deviation =  $1.427$ . Self-efficacy is the lowest,  $M=2.8$ , Standard Deviation = $1.278$ . For perceptions, career pay is the highest,  $M=2.96$ , Standard Deviation= $1.0043$ .

Career satisfaction is the lowest,  $M=2.62$ , Standard Deviation=  $1.427$ .

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
Social utility value	50	1.25	4.75	2.925	0.09748	0.68929	0.475
Social experience	50	1	5	3.1	0.1519	1.0738	1.153
Self-efficacy	50	1	5	2.8	0.181	1.278	1.633
Intrinsic career value	50	1	5	3.2	0.192	1.355	1.837
Personal utility value	50	1.5	4.5	2.91	0.121	0.8553	0.732
Alternative career	50	1	5	2.78	0.181	1.282	1.644
Career pay	50	1	5	2.96	0.142	1.0043	1.009
Career reward	50	1	4.3333333	3.7266667	0.1145592	0.8100558	0.656
Career satisfaction	50	1	5	2.62	0.202	1.427	2.036
Valid N (listwise)	50						

### 3.2. Factor Analysis

This research used PCA to explore the factors of university counselors' career satisfactions. As shown in Table 2, the first four component cumulative is 63.963%. The rotated component matrix is shown in Table 3, the first component is named as career pay and self-efficacy, the second is named as intrinsic value and career reward, the third is named as personal utility value and social experience, and the fourth is named as social utility value and alternative career.

**Table 2.** Total Variance Explained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance
1	1.469	18.362	18.362	1.469	18.362
2	1.317	16.461	34.823	1.317	16.461
3	1.192	14.902	49.726	1.192	14.902
4	1.139	14.238	63.963	1.139	14.238
5	.926	11.577	75.541		
6	.732	9.152	84.693		
7	.690	8.625	93.318		
8	.535	6.682	100.000		

**Table 3.** Rotated Component Matrix.

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Career pay	0.742			
Self-efficacy	0.73			
Intrinsic career value		0.827		
Career reward		0.726		
Personal utility value			0.726	
Social experience			0.563	
Social utility value				-0.819
Alternative career				0.706

## 4. Discussion

Career satisfaction, an individual's positive emotional response to their work, is influenced by various factors, including the requirements associated with their chosen profession [3]. These requirements encompass diverse aspects, ranging from formal educational qualifications and

necessary skills to work environment expectations and financial compensation. Understanding the intricate relationship between career requirements and satisfaction is crucial for both individuals navigating their career paths and organizations aiming to foster employee well-being.

On one hand, successfully fulfilling career requirements, such as acquiring crucial skills or achieving desired career advancements, can contribute to a sense of accomplishment, competence, and career progress, ultimately enhancing satisfaction. Individuals experience a sense of fulfilment when they feel they are meeting the demands of their chosen field and progressing towards their goals. However, the influence of career requirements is not always straightforward. When individuals struggle to meet these requirements due to insufficient skills, lack of resources, or unrealistic expectations, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and ultimately, dissatisfaction with their career choice. This highlights the importance of individuals carefully evaluating their skills, interests, and resources when making career decisions to ensure a good fit between their personal characteristics and the demands of the chosen profession.

Furthermore, the impact of specific requirements on satisfaction can vary significantly between individuals. While some individuals prioritize financial rewards and might be dissatisfied with careers offering low salaries, others might value work-life balance and prioritize careers offering flexible schedules, even if they come with lower pay. This underscores the importance of recognizing individual differences in needs, values, and motivations when considering the relationship between career requirements and satisfaction.

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to perform effectively, acts through various mechanisms to shape an individual's experience of fulfilment in their work [4]. Firstly, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to set ambitious yet achievable career goals. This confidence empowers them to persist through challenges and ultimately achieve those goals, fostering a sense of accomplishment, competence, and mastery. These positive experiences contribute significantly to career satisfaction. Furthermore, self-efficacy fuels intrinsic motivation, driving individuals to fully engage in their work tasks and responsibilities. This heightened engagement fosters a deeper sense of satisfaction with the work itself, as individuals find meaning and purpose in their daily activities. Additionally, self-efficacy equips individuals with better tools to manage work-related stress and setbacks. They perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. This enhanced coping ability leads to reduced stress and ultimately, increased overall satisfaction with their work experience. Finally, high self-efficacy fosters resilience and well-being in the face of difficulties. These positive psychological states contribute to a more positive and fulfilling work experience, further strengthening career satisfaction.

Intrinsic career value refers to the inherent satisfaction individuals derive from the nature of their work, independent of external rewards [5]. By understanding this internal motivator, individuals and organizations can work towards fostering fulfilling work experiences. Intrinsic career value fuels satisfaction through several mechanisms. When work aligns with personal values and beliefs, it fosters a sense of purpose and meaning. This alignment creates a positive emotional connection to the work, contributing significantly to career satisfaction. Additionally, careers with intrinsic value often offer opportunities for autonomy and growth, allowing individuals to exercise control over their work and continuously learn and develop their skills. These opportunities for self-directedness and mastery contribute to a sense of competence and accomplishment, further enhancing satisfaction. Finally, intrinsically valuable careers often involve making a positive contribution to society or others. This sense of making a difference fosters a sense of purpose and altruistic motivation, leading to greater satisfaction with one's work. When the tasks and responsibilities of a job align with an individual's intrinsic values and interests, it fosters a sense of meaning and purpose in the work. This alignment contributes to a positive emotional connection with the work and ultimately, higher satisfaction. Organizations play a vital role in nurturing intrinsic career value by fostering a supportive work environment that allows employees to experience autonomy, growth, and a sense of purpose in their work. This supportive context strengthens the link between intrinsic value and satisfaction. It is important to note that intrinsic value is not static. While some individuals are naturally drawn to intrinsically valuable careers, others

may discover such value through positive work experiences or personal growth. Additionally, while intrinsic value is a powerful motivator, external rewards can still play a complementary role in supplementing and sustaining satisfaction, particularly when they acknowledge and validate the value of the work being done.

Career reward value can influence satisfaction in two distinct ways [6]. Firstly, receiving recognition and rewards can directly enhance feelings of satisfaction by validating one's efforts, competence, and contributions. This validation fosters a sense of accomplishment and self-worth, leading to increased satisfaction with the chosen career path. Secondly, career rewards can indirectly influence satisfaction by impacting other factors within the FIT-Choice framework. For instance, recognition and appreciation can strengthen feelings of intrinsic career value when they acknowledge the meaningful aspects of the work performed. Additionally, rewards can reinforce desired behaviors, potentially leading to improved performance and ultimately, greater satisfaction through a sense of accomplishment. However, the impact of rewards is not straightforward. The FIT-Choice model highlights the importance of considering individual characteristics, task demands, and organizational context. Individuals with a strong desire for recognition might place greater weight on career reward value in their overall satisfaction, while others might be more intrinsically motivated and prioritize factors like autonomy or purpose. The effectiveness of rewards also depends on the nature of the work. In jobs with high task complexity or requiring significant intrinsic motivation, external rewards might have a weaker influence on satisfaction compared to jobs with more routine tasks or a stronger emphasis on extrinsic motivation. The way organizations distribute and communicate rewards plays a crucial role in their impact on satisfaction. Fair and transparent reward systems that acknowledge diverse contributions can foster a sense of trust and organizational justice, further strengthening the positive influence of rewards on satisfaction. In addition, while rewards can be beneficial, an overdependence on them for satisfaction can be detrimental. When individuals solely focus on external validation, intrinsic motivation and the inherent satisfaction derived from the work itself can diminish. Additionally, organizations can explore alternative forms of recognition beyond traditional rewards, such as public praise, growth opportunities, or increased autonomy, to cater to diverse preferences and potentially enhance the overall impact on satisfaction.

Personal utility value fuels career satisfaction through several mechanisms. When a career aligns with an individual's core values, it fosters a sense of authenticity and purpose. This alignment allows individuals to express their values through their work, leading to a deeper sense of meaning and satisfaction [7]. Additionally, careers that align with personal interests naturally spark intrinsic motivation, driving individuals to engage fully and derive enjoyment from their tasks. This inherent satisfaction contributes significantly to overall career satisfaction. Finally, when career paths align with personal goals, individuals experience a greater sense of agency and control over their professional development. This ability to pursue personally meaningful goals through their work contributes to a sense of accomplishment and ultimately, satisfaction. Organizations can play a vital role in nurturing personal utility value by fostering a work environment that allows employees to utilize their skills and talents in meaningful ways and pursue their professional development in alignment with their personal goals. This supportive context strengthens the link between personal utility value and satisfaction. It is important to note that personal values, interests, and goals can evolve over time. Individuals may need to reassess their career paths periodically to ensure continued alignment with their evolving sense of personal utility value. Additionally, while personal utility is crucial, considering the broader societal impact of one's work can further enhance overall satisfaction and purpose.

These experiences encompass the interactions and relationships individuals build within their work environment. Understanding the intricate interplay between these social dynamics and other factors in the FIT-Choice framework is crucial for fostering fulfilling work experiences. Social experiences influence career satisfaction through various mechanisms. Supportive and positive interactions at work foster a sense of belonging and social connection, reducing feelings of isolation and leading to greater satisfaction with the work environment and overall career choice. Social interactions also facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving. This

collaborative environment fosters learning and growth, contributing to a sense of competence and accomplishment, ultimately enhancing satisfaction. Additionally, positive social relationships at work provide social support, buffering individuals from stress and fostering a sense of well-being, which contributes to a more positive and fulfilling work experience. Organizations play a vital role in shaping social experiences by fostering a positive and inclusive work environment that promotes healthy relationships, open communication, and teamwork. These aspects contribute to positive social experiences and ultimately, greater satisfaction for employees. It is important to acknowledge that negative social experiences, such as conflict or lack of support, can have a detrimental impact on satisfaction and well-being. Organizations need to actively address such situations to mitigate their negative effects. Additionally, the increasing prevalence of technology and remote work arrangements necessitates proactive strategies to foster positive social connections and prevent feelings of isolation in these work settings.

Social utility value fuels career satisfaction through several mechanisms. Firstly, it fosters prosocial motivation, an intrinsic drive to benefit others. When individuals believe their work makes a positive difference, they are more likely to engage fully and experience a sense of purpose and meaning, leading to greater satisfaction. Secondly, contributing to society can enhance feelings of self-worth and moral identity. This sense of making a valuable contribution strengthens the connection between the individual and their work, resulting in increased satisfaction. Finally, careers with high social utility value often involve collaboration and shared goals towards social good. This fosters a sense of collective purpose and belonging, further enhancing satisfaction through social connection and shared meaning. The effectiveness of social utility value in enhancing satisfaction can be influenced by factors like the specificity and tangibility of the impact. Individuals may find greater meaning in work where they can directly see the positive outcomes of their contributions. Additionally, while social utility value is significant for many individuals, it is not the sole motivator for everyone. Some individuals may be primarily driven by other factors, such as personal growth or financial security.

Individuals considering alternative careers may experience both positive and negative influences on their satisfaction. On the positive side, alternative careers often offer greater autonomy and control over work processes and schedules, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. Additionally, engaging in a new and less well-defined career path can offer opportunities for ongoing learning and growth, fostering excitement and intellectual stimulation. These factors can contribute to increased satisfaction. However, alternative careers also present challenges. The uncertainties regarding career stability, income potential, and professional recognition can be a source of stress and anxiety, potentially impacting satisfaction negatively. Additionally, pursuing non-traditional career paths may be met with social stigma or lack of understanding from family, friends, or society at large. This lack of support can lead to feelings of isolation and negatively impact satisfaction. Individuals with a strong desire for autonomy, novelty, and continuous learning are likely to find greater satisfaction in alternative careers that offer these opportunities. Conversely, individuals who prioritize stability and security may find the uncertainties associated with alternative careers detrimental to their satisfaction. Organizations within the alternative career space can play a crucial role in fostering satisfaction by providing access to resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive work environment can mitigate the negative effects of social stigma and foster a sense of belonging.

## 5. Conclusions

Motivating university counselors requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both their professional needs and personal well-being. Highlighting the positive impact counselors have on student lives and emphasizing their contribution to broader societal goals through career guidance can foster a sense of purpose and meaning in their work.

Supporting continuous learning and professional development can be achieved by providing counselors opportunities to stay updated on emerging career trends, resources, and assessment tools.

Encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing among counselors through regular meetings, online forums, or mentoring programs can further enhance their knowledge and expertise.

Acknowledging the complexities of the counselor role and fostering a supportive work environment through collaboration and staff support can help mitigate the challenges counselors face. Additionally, promoting well-being by encouraging counselors to prioritize self-care, maintain work-life balance, and engage in activities that bring them personal satisfaction can contribute to their overall motivation.

Finally, utilizing data and evidence-based practices, such as tracking and sharing student career outcomes and highlighting the effectiveness of specific counseling techniques, can empower counselors by showcasing the positive impact of their work and providing them with valuable tools for continued success. By implementing these strategies, universities can create a supportive environment that fosters motivation and empowers counselors to continue making a significant difference in the lives of their students.

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