

Resolving the Dilemma of “Employment Apathy” among University Graduates: An Exploration of Paths Based on the Synergy of “Employment-Education”

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Abstract: In recent years, against the backdrop of economic transformation and structural adjustments in the job market, the phenomenon of “employment apathy” among university graduates has become increasingly prominent, emerging as a critical issue affecting employment quality and the efficiency of talent resource allocation. This phenomenon is characterized by low employment willingness, delayed career decision-making, and poor employment matching. Based on the practical experience of university education, this paper systematically analyzes the multi-dimensional causes of the “employment apathy” dilemma, identifies the core problems in the operation of the existing “employment-education” synergy mechanism, and ultimately proposes targeted optimization paths. It aims to provide practical guidance for universities to tackle the problem of “employment apathy” and enhance the adaptability between talent cultivation and employment.

Keywords: Employment apathy; Employment-education synergy; Dilemma resolution; Path exploration; University career guidance

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1. Introduction

“Employment apathy” refers to the behavior of qualified graduates who voluntarily delay employment or lower their employment standards, manifested as a negative or evasive tendency in employment willingness, job-seeking efforts, and career expectations^[1]. This phenomenon not only hinders individual career development but also exacerbates structural market contradictions by suppressing the effective supply of labor. The academic community has reached a multidisciplinary consensus on “employment apathy”: from an economic perspective, the focus is on the imbalance between supply and demand and structural mismatch in the macro market^[2]; psychological research centers on individual psychological factors such as career decision-making anxiety

and self-efficacy^[3]; while the field of education is paying increasing attention to the systemic disconnection between university education systems and the job market, thus proposing the proposition of innovating the “employment-education” synergy mechanism^[4]. However, existing research mostly remains at the level of superficial cause analysis or single-dimensional countermeasure discussion, and has not yet constructed a systematic resolution framework from the perspective of university “employment-education” synergy. In practice, although universities have generally promoted the construction of the “employment-education” synergy mechanism, there are still problems such as insufficient synergy motivation and poor connection between education and employment, which fail to effectively resolve the “employment apathy” dilemma. Based on this, with the core goal of “dilemma resolution” and combined with practical cases of some universities, this paper deeply analyzes the intertwined multi-dimensional causes of “employment apathy,” accurately locates the operational problems of the existing “employment-education” synergy mechanism, and finally constructs a targeted synergy optimization path, providing practical references for the reform of university career guidance and the construction of a long-term education mechanism.

2. A multi-dimensional analysis of the causes of the “employment apathy” dilemma among university graduates

The formation of the “employment apathy” dilemma among university graduates is not the result of a single factor, but a product of the interaction and joint influence of multi-dimensional factors including the macroeconomic environment, social and cultural atmosphere, university education system, and individual psychological state. Each dimension exacerbates the employment dilemma through different paths.

2.1. Economic factors: Structural constraints of the job market in the transformation period

The profound adjustment of the global economic pattern and the wave of digital transformation are reshaping the structure of the labor market at an unprecedented speed. The coexistence of the disappearance of traditional jobs and the emergence of new ones has created a structural contradiction between talent supply and demand, which is the fundamental economic cause of the “employment apathy” dilemma. With the development of information technology, the demand for digital-related emerging jobs has surged. However, there is a lag in university talent cultivation, and the skill structure of graduates is poorly adapted to the needs of emerging jobs, leading to the situation of “jobs available but no qualified candidates.” At the same time, graduates’ employment expectations are concentrated in high-demand industries such as finance and the internet, as well as first-tier developed cities, which deviate significantly from the actual supply of the labor market, resulting in the awkward situation of “qualified candidates but no suitable jobs.” This two-way mismatch between supply and demand has exacerbated the “employment apathy” dilemma.

2.2. Social and cultural factors: Misorientation of diverse concepts and evaluation systems

On the one hand, traditional employment concepts such as “the primacy of stability” and “the elitist mindset” are still deeply rooted. Some graduates and their parents regard institutional positions and core positions in large enterprises as the only high-quality choices, and show obvious rejection of small and medium-sized enterprises, emerging industries, and grassroots positions. When they fail to achieve their expected employment goals, most graduates will not lower their expectations to choose suitable positions, but instead postpone employment to

wait for ideal opportunities, forming passive “employment apathy.” On the other hand, the continuous upsurge of “the postgraduate entrance exam fever” and “the civil service exam fever” has worsened this dilemma. Some graduates regard further education and civil service exams as the main ways to avoid employment pressure, lacking clear career planning, and blindly following the trend to take the exams. After failing the exams, they fall into delayed career decision-making due to inadequate employment preparation, further expanding the scale of the “employment apathy” group. In addition, the increased social tolerance for “slow employment” has weakened graduates’ sense of employment urgency to a certain extent. Some graduates with superior family economic conditions postpone employment with family support, forming active “employment apathy.”

2.3. Educational factors: Lack of a connection mechanism between employment and education

As the core position of talent cultivation, universities’ disconnection between employment education and professional education is a key internal factor inducing the “employment apathy” dilemma. First, the talent cultivation model is divorced from market demand. Most universities still focus on theoretical teaching, with practical teaching sessions reduced to a formality, lacking systematic cultivation of graduates’ job adaptability. The curriculum system of some majors is updated slowly and cannot match the changes in skill demands brought about by industrial upgrading, leading to graduates being unable to quickly adapt to job requirements after graduation, and daring not to seek employment or being forced to postpone employment due to insufficient ability. Second, career education has obvious shortcomings, showing an unbalanced state of “emphasizing last-minute intervention in graduation season while neglecting whole-process immersion.” There is a lack of career enlightenment education in the lower grades, leaving graduates with a vague understanding of the career directions suitable for their majors; career guidance in the upper grades mostly focuses on superficial content such as resume optimization and interview skills, lacking targeted career planning guidance and industry cognition cultivation, which cannot effectively alleviate graduates’ employment confusion. Third, universities have insufficient synergy between employment services and professional education. There is a lack of a linkage mechanism among professional teachers, counselors, and career guidance teachers, making it impossible to form an educational joint force of “professional ability cultivation + career planning guidance + employment service guarantee,” and difficult to accurately meet the personalized employment needs of graduates.

2.4. Individual psychological factors: Dual imbalance of employment anxiety and self-cognition

Graduates’ individual psychological state and self-cognition deviation are the direct triggers of “employment apathy” behavior. On the one hand, employment anxiety and workplace fear are widespread. Faced with a highly competitive job market, some graduates have obvious evasive psychology due to worries about being unable to perform their duties and adapt to workplace interpersonal relationships, and take the initiative to postpone employment to avoid pressure. In particular, some graduates who have long been in the campus environment have weak social adaptability and resistance to the uncertainty of the workplace, further strengthening the tendency of “employment apathy.” On the other hand, there is an imbalance between self-cognition and career positioning. Some graduates have the problem of “having high aspirations but low abilities,” overestimating their own abilities and putting forward expectations for salary, working environment, and development prospects that exceed the actual market situation. They frequently reject suitable positions in the job-seeking process and ultimately fall into the dilemma of “no suitable jobs to choose from.” In addition,

some graduates have low self-efficacy and lack job-seeking confidence, giving up active job-seeking after a few setbacks and falling into passive “employment apathy.” Furthermore, some graduates lack independent decision-making ability, over-rely on the suggestions of parents or others, waver in career choices, find it difficult to make clear employment decisions, and ultimately delay employment.

3. Practical exploration of the university “employment-education” synergy mechanism

3.1. The whole-process career education integration model

Faced with the challenge of “employment apathy,” the core of universities is to deeply integrate the whole process of career education into the main curriculum channel. Supported by the cognitive constructivism theory ^[5], this model focuses on the core cause of “vague career cognition and lack of career planning,” and constructs a full-cycle, progressive career education synergy system, breaking the limitations of traditional fragmented career guidance. Lower grades focus on career enlightenment, laying a foundation for career cognition through the systematic construction of professional cognition and career correlation; middle grades are oriented towards career exploration, strengthening the reserve of professional abilities and the judgment of career directions; upper grades target employment adaptation, carrying out differentiated career counseling to help optimize career decision-making and improve employment ability. Through systematic cognitive construction, this model can improve the clarity of graduates’ career cognition and the autonomy of career planning, effectively reduce the proportion of passive delayed employment caused by cognitive deviation, and provide theoretical and practical support for resolving cognitive confusion-type “employment apathy.”

3.2. The industry-education integration collaborative cultivation model

Based on the human capital development theory ^[6], this model constructs a deeply collaborative education system between universities and industrial entities. Its synergy logic lies in breaking the barriers between universities and industries to achieve accurate docking of educational elements with industrial demands. Through the joint construction of universities and leading enterprises in the industry, it promotes the transformation of industrial demand standards into talent cultivation standards, constructs a competency-based curriculum system and training plan, and realizes the industrial adaptation of knowledge teaching and skill cultivation. Relying on the practical education platform co-built by universities and enterprises, it realizes the two-way flow and optimal integration of university-enterprise teachers, teaching resources, and practical resources, strengthens the systematic cultivation of graduates’ professional skills and workplace competence, and improves the allocation efficiency and utilization effect of educational resources. It can alleviate the employment fear and delayed employment caused by insufficient ability, providing an effective path for resolving ability-deficient “employment apathy.”

3.3. The multi-subject linkage education model

This model breaks the limitation of universities as a single education subject, constructs an education network with the collaborative participation of multiple subjects such as the government, enterprises, alumni, and families, integrates the resource advantages of multiple subjects, and forms a multi-dimensional social support system of policy support, practical support, experience inheritance, and emotional guarantee ^[7]. The participation of multiple subjects realizes the joint efforts of employment concept guidance, professional ability cultivation, psychological state adjustment, and employment resource docking. It not only strengthens

the positive guidance of employment cognition but also improves employment ability and psychological adaptability. Through the construction of synergy platforms and the improvement of interaction mechanisms, it realizes the accurate matching and efficient transmission of multi-dimensional support resources, and builds an all-round, personalized social support network. It can effectively alleviate graduates' employment anxiety and workplace fear, strengthen employment confidence and active employment willingness, providing theoretical support and practical paradigm for alleviating anxiety-avoidance-type "employment apathy."

3.4. The classified and tiered precision empowerment model

This model constructs a precise and differentiated synergy empowerment system, respects the individual differences of graduates, and realizes the precise allocation of educational resources and personalized empowerment. Through systematic research and evaluation, it constructs a precise portrait of graduates' employment intentions, ability structures, psychological states, and career expectations, clarifies the core needs and cognitive deviations of different groups, builds a classified and tiered precision empowerment system, formulates differentiated educational goals, content, and paths, and establishes a personalized empowerment tracking and feedback mechanism. It effectively optimizes graduates' self-cognition and career positioning, improves the rationality of career choices and the scientificity of employment decision-making, providing an effective paradigm for adjusting positioning-imbalanced "employment apathy."

4. Operational problems and optimization paths of the university "employment-education" synergy mechanism

Although universities can explore a variety of practical models in the construction of the "employment-education" synergy mechanism, from the perspective of the actual effect of resolving the "employment apathy" dilemma, the existing synergy mechanism still has many operational problems, such as vague definition of rights and responsibilities of synergy subjects, unbalanced allocation of educational elements, and imperfect synergy guarantee system. These problems restrict the full release of the effect of collaborative education and make it difficult to achieve a systematic resolution of the "employment apathy" dilemma. In response to the operational problems of the existing "employment-education" synergy mechanism and combined with the core requirements of resolving the "employment apathy" dilemma, it is necessary to construct a systematic optimization path from three dimensions: synergy subjects, education system, and guarantee mechanism. With clear rights and responsibilities and interest sharing as the core, clarify the internal synergy rights and responsibilities boundary and reconstruct the relationship between synergy subjects. Guided by the demand of the job market, optimize the allocation of educational system elements to achieve accurate adaptation between talent cultivation and market demand, as well as individual demand. Targeting long-term operation, build an all-round synergy guarantee system to provide a solid support for the stable operation of the "employment-education" synergy mechanism.

5. Conclusion

The "employment apathy" dilemma among university graduates is the result of the interaction of multi-dimensional factors including the macroeconomic environment, social and cultural atmosphere, university education system, and individual psychological state. The core path to resolving this dilemma lies in constructing an efficient "employment-education" synergy mechanism. The existing "employment-education"

synergy mechanism has operational problems such as unbalanced rights and responsibilities of synergy subjects, poor connection of the education system, and an imperfect guarantee system, which restrict the full release of educational effect. Therefore, it is necessary to promote mechanism optimization from three dimensions: reconstructing the relationship between synergy subjects, optimizing the allocation of the education system, and improving the synergy guarantee system. Through activating multi-dimensional synergy motivation, improving the accuracy of supply and demand adaptation, and strengthening long-term operation support, it can accurately resolve different types of “employment apathy” problems. In the future, universities need to continuously deepen the “employment-education” synergy reform, explore differentiated collaborative education models combined with school-running positioning and regional industrial demands, and provide continuous support for improving the quality of talent cultivation and promoting high-quality employment of graduates.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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