

# Professional deformation of teachers: from diagnostic strategies to prevention and correction technologies

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## Abstract

*Background: This article discusses the new diagnostic results and the basic directions of professional deformation prevention and correction in secondary school teachers. Method: The author's theoretical and methodological analysis, has made it possible to assume that professional deformation is an integrated complex of numerous characteristics, namely: the type of profession, the level of emotional burnout severity, indicators of satisfaction with the profession, particular orientation and socio-psychological type of personality, as well as the manifestations of personality traits. Results: The results of the empirical study using qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis of manifestation of latent and frustrational levels of professional deformation, which were based on the analysis of expressions of active and passive types of professional conduct, have shown that the identified characteristics have a significant influence on the manifestation of professional deformation and correspond to the intended level of the teachers' deformations. Conclusions: Based on the empirical data for determining the level of symptoms and conditions of professional deformation, this article presents relevant programs aimed at the*

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*conservation and maintenance of psychological health, at prevention and correction of latent and frustrational level manifestations of professional deformation in education.*

**Keywords:** Professional deformation; Emotional burnout; Professional conduct; Innovational activity development.

## 1. Introduction

The specifics of studying the process of professional destructions in the development of personality under the influence of the professional and organizational environment peculiarities is a promising field in differential psychology of personality. Deformations are typical of most specialists from various professional spheres. The effectiveness of pedagogical activity has always been and remains a highly controversial issue not only in psychological studies but in society in general as our future, our children's characters, largely depend on the effectiveness of teachers' professional activity.

In recent years, much research has been devoted to the psychological study of teachers' professional activity features and of their professional health, but the issue under study still remains relevant because the emotional tensions in society are developing rapidly, working conditions are changing, and new generations of students and teachers are appearing.

A study of the psychological nature of deformation development, the detection of levels and dynamics, the identification of factors affecting the intensity of this process, and the specifics of the destructive impact of independent correction management are issues of paramount importance for practical psychology.

The analysis of the deformation levels, also including the study of the phenomenon manifestations, indicates that this problem has been and keeps being attractive to a number of researchers, both foreign (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1985, 1986; Paine, 1986; Pines, 1996; Shirom, 2004; Dierendonck, Schaufeli & Buunk, 2004) and Russian (Markova, 1996; Zeer, 2000; Oryol, 2005; Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2008; Mitina & Galina, 2011; Polyakova, 2014; Rogov, 2015).

Despite the active research in this direction conducted over the past decade, there are some problems which remain unexplored, such as those of determining individual personal prerequisites involved in the process of professional deformation and the extremely negative connotations of professional deformation interpreted as a psychological phenomenon. The features of the relationship and interaction of professional deformation and burnout haven't yet been defined.

The "burnout" syndrome develops in specialists of socio-communicative occupations, which include a great number of professionals of a very different professional orientation: employees at all levels of education, medical personnel, social workers, psychologists, representatives of law

enforcement, prison systems and members of the armed forces. Professionals working in the sphere of services and human resources management, commercial activities, business structures are also exposed to burnout (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Dierendonck, *et al.* 2001).

There is an obvious need for an empirical environment expansion, therefore, in our study, we have decided to refer to the study of the correlation of burnout manifestations with the level of professional deformation manifestations. The study of the topic is relevant from the point of view of its practical orientation. Updating personal resources and optimizing organizational (environmental) conditions of work, the “burnout process” can be not only halted, but converted into a “productive” burning process causing no destructive effects of professional deformation progression.

## 2. Literature review

The term “deformation” (a Latin word originally) is seen initially as a change (distortion) of physical characteristics of the body when it is exposed to external influences. Professional deformation manifests itself on the physical and psychological levels of human organization that change under the influence of the professional environment. The process of professionalization that accompanies most of human life has an ambiguous and multilateral influence.

In connection with the above mentioned facts resulting from numerous studies done in recent years, professional deformation should be understood as the process when a person’s basic personality features are changed under the influence of the professional environment which appear in the value-motivational sphere, leading to progress in non-constructive forms of activity, contributing to professional stagnation and degradation (Shirom, 2004; Mitina & Galina, 2011; Polyakova, 2014; Rogov, 2015).

Despite the fact that practical educational psychologists systematically work to prevent and correct professional destruction, the state of educators’ mental health is not improving because of the chronic informational and emotional stress generated by the external environment. In addition, there are new generations of young professionals who demonstrate earlier unexplored destructive forms of professional conduct, and this requires the development of other technologies and techniques for prevention and correction.

Scientific and practical interest of modern psychologists in the processes of professional deformations' origin and evolution is explained with the rapid increase in the number of specialists in various professional orientations who feel emotionally depleted, psychologically tired, physically exhausted, i.e. psychologically burnt. This trend will inevitably affect the quality of professional work. Over time, the progressive symptoms of the emotional burnout syndrome leads to the increase in professional deformations.

In psychology, the burnout syndrome was studied as a phenomenon for the first time in the 1970s. One of the first scientists who introduced the term "burnout" was Freudenberger, who wanted to describe the state of excessive fatigue among mental health hospital workers (Freudenberger, 1974). Later, the American researchers Maslach, Jackson and Leiter combined the characteristics of the syndrome to develop one of the first questionnaires, which identify three characteristics: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduction of personal accomplishments (Maslach & Jackson, 1985, 1986; Maslach, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Later studies contained a variety of theoretical and empirical criteria relating to the diagnosis of this condition. Vodopyanova and other authors began to write about professional burnout in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Shteyn, Vodopyanova, Schumm, Hobfoll, & Lilly, 2003; Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2008).

For differential psychology, it is fundamentally important to name phenomena clearly when organizing a more accurate diagnosis and description of symptoms. When diagnosing the occupational destructions we deal with the professional deformation affected by the burnout, so bearing in mind the interrelationship of these phenomena, it's more correct to talk about the psycho-emotional burnout (Orel, 2005).

The most vivid signs of emotional burnout in the professional sphere are: aggressive behavior towards other participants of professional communication, indifference and negligence in one's official duties, superficiality and irresponsibility with regard to professional activity, emotional exhaustion, low self-esteem concerning professional achievements and prospects of personal development, lack of confidence in professional success, hostility and suspicion towards colleagues and the organization as a whole, destabilization of professional orientation and value-motivational scope, lack of vision in the profession.

Ronginskaya and her German colleagues' research revealed that psycho-emotional burnout is manifested in the form of various types of behavior (Ronginskaya, 2002). These claims have emerged on the basis of

implementation of the results of the questionnaire devoted to work-related conduct and feelings (AVEM – Arbeitsbezogenes Verhaltens- und Erlebensmuster) (Saarschmidt & Fischer, 1996; Saarschmidt, 1998). The authors suggested that healthy behavior of an individual in accordance with the requirements of one's professional environment, which promotes professional growth and positive self-realization, could be diagnosed by three main criteria: 1) professional activity, 2) strategy to overcome problematic situations, 3) emotional commitment to professional activity.

Based on the analysis of data obtained by research in foreign countries, four types of professional conduct, characterizing the level of emotional burnout severity were identified:

1. G type (German: gesund) – active (healthy) type of professional conduct when the specialist is ready to deal effectively with problematic situations, appreciates his work highly (but not extremely), controls his own energy costs, demonstrates a constructive way of overcoming professional errors and risks, which are seen not as the sources of negative emotions, but as incentives to find active strategies to overcome them.
2. S type (German: sparsam) – a passive (economical) type of professional conduct, characterized by the average level of motivation, energy costs and professional ambitions; there is a distance expressed in this relation to the professional activity and the reduced satisfaction with the results of one's work. A positive feature of this type is the emotional work-related dissatisfaction. The passive strategy is effective only within a time-bound defined period, because over time, the professional dissatisfaction increases with the background of the successful colleagues' growth.
3. A type – a conflict type (risk type) of professional conduct, characterized by extremely high emotional attitude to the profession and by the low tolerance to frustration and stress. A high level of negative emotions as a result of mental overload, striving for perfection and the consequent dissatisfaction with one's performance. The absence of social support causes this type of behavior to be included in the risk group with the sufficient probability of a rapidly developing emotional burnout, resulting in inefficient individually designed activities and some manifestations of psychosomatic symptoms.
4. B type (English: burnout) – a crisis type of professional conduct, expressed by a low stress resistance and a limited ability for creativity

and constructive solutions to professional situations. There are systematic failures to resolve professional issues in the context of emotional instability of behavioral reactions to a situation with manifestations of constant anxiety. These symptoms reflect emotional exhaustion and correspond to the progressive development of a psycho-emotional burnout.

It must be assumed that each type of professional conduct demonstrates not only the level of burnout severity, but also the stage of professional burnout development, expressed in the form of professional conduct manifestation. Conventionally, the development of professional deformation can be divided into four levels:

1. *the latent level of professional deformation* was, is and will be in any specialist category the norm of occupational health – it is an inevitable fact in the process of reflecting the professional activity; it can be argued that this type of professional deformation is typical of any specialist;
2. *frustration level, a professional deformation* associated with increased emotional agitation in the background of negative emotions' accumulation; it is expressed in manifestations of negative feelings towards the professional activity (anxiety, annoyance, guilt, fear, mistrust, frustration, anger, rivalry, etc.);
3. *the conflict level of professional deformation* is expressed in the demonstration of conflict behavior when the emotional tension obtains a rational basis and is expressed in elective strategies of conflict behavior;
4. *the crisis level of professional deformation* is associated with the manifestations of irrational behavior. The irrationality is evident in the value-motivational sphere of the person, in the inadequately under or over-valued sense of self-esteem, inability to control one's emotions in the process of professional communication, in the absence of prospects for self-realization and professional self-development.

Thus, once identified levels of manifestation of professional deformation, we can assume that at the latent level of professional deformation, the emotional burnout is absent; the specialist demonstrates healthy professional conduct.

The frustration level of professional deformation suggests a primary level of emotional burnout, expressed with negative emotions, which is reflected in the first signs of negative changes in one's professional conduct.

The conflict level of professional deformation demonstrates a variety of conflict behaviors, a progressive process of emotional burnout in the context of increasing professional dissatisfaction with one's activity.

Finally, the crisis level of professional deformation is accompanied by obvious symptoms of emotional burnout, expressed in the absence of stress resistance, chronic psychological, fatigue, irritability, distortion of values-motivational worldview, of professional style of activity and communication.

Key markers in the diagnosing of the professional deformation level and the degree of emotional burnout manifestations is the type of professional conduct and the professional burnout level, professional orientation, value-motivational characteristics (socio-psychological ideas and work satisfaction) and personality traits, specific to a certain type of conduct.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. *Participants*

One hundred and twenty-four people took part in our study. The sample was comprised of teachers from secondary educational institutions in Moscow. The age of those people ranged from 23 to 68 years old (average age 41 years). Participants have a different experience of educational activities from 3 to 46 years (average work experience 16 years). The sample includes 64 teachers of humanities and 60 science teachers.

#### 3.2. *Instruments*

To define the type of professional conduct under analysis, we used the methodology "Survey of behavior and experiences associated with the work" (AVEM). Shaarschmidt and Fischer (1996) at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Potsdam developed this questionnaire. It consists of 66 claims, united in 11 scales, selected by means of the factor analysis and reflecting human reaction to the requirements of professional environment and kinds of behavior that are generated-based on these reactions.

The diagnosis of the burnout level was conducted using the questionnaire "Emotional burnout" by Boyko (2004). The technique allows diagnosis of the main symptoms of "emotional burnout" and to determine in which phase of stress development they are: "tension", "resistance",



“exhaustion”. Each stress phase is diagnosed based on four characteristic symptoms, determined from 84 judgments.

In order to identify the level of work satisfaction we adopted the technique authored by Zamfir, “Integral satisfaction with labor” (1983). This method allows identification of the employee’s satisfaction with specific aspects of the work. The methodology includes 18 closed questions with three suggested answers per each question.

Definition of socio-psychological personal ideas of teachers occurred by means of “Diagnosing methods of socio-psychological personal ideas in motivational sphere” by Potemkina (1988). This technique helps to diagnose the human orientation involved in the process or the result as stable personality features; it includes 40 questions and allows diagnosis of different attitudes in professional activity.

Identifying the peculiarities of individual teachers’ orientation was outlined by “Methodics of diagnosing the personal orientation” by Bass (1967). This method enables you to determine the direction of a teacher’s personality as the basis, “the core” of their identity, which largely defines the individual style of teaching that we showed in our previous works. The questionnaire consists of 27 points of judgments, each of which is accompanied by three variants of answers, corresponding to the three types of personality orientation (focus on oneself (I) focus on communication (C) focus on the work (W)).

Defining teachers’ personal characteristics was conducted using the methodology of the study of characteristic personality traits by Leary (1957). This technique identifies stable personality traits, manifested in interpersonal relationships. The questionnaire includes a list of 128 personal qualities, the subject is asked to choose the qualities that, in their opinion, characterizes their identity.

## 4. Results

While processing the received data we used the mean arithmetic value method, the normality criterion by Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Student’s t-test for independent samples, the correlation analysis (Spearman correlation coefficient) and the two-factor analysis of variance.

Empirical research based on methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis of manifestations of latent and frustration levels of professional deformation, which were based on the analysis of expressions of active and passive types of professional conduct, have shown that the identified

characteristics greatly influence the professional deformations and correspond to the intended level of development.

Most teachers (52%) demonstrate active (healthy) behavior in the professional environment. A smaller proportion of respondents (35%) show the S type of professional conduct – passive (economical). The conflict type of professional conduct has been found in 10% of respondents, that demonstrates this group teachers' propensity to a high level of manifestations of negative emotions because of their mental overload. Only 4 of the teachers (3%) in the sample demonstrate the B type of conduct – crisis behavior in professional sphere, with its usual low subjective value, low stress resistance.

The determination of the relationship between burnout development phases and the types of behavior in the professional environment showed the following: while conducting the correlation analysis of relationships between the burnout development phases and the types of professional conduct we found significant correlations presented in table 1.

Table 1 - *Correlation analysis of the relationship between types of professional conduct and burnout development phases*

Type of conduct	Burnout phase		
	Tension	Resistance	Exhaustion
B – the crisis type	-.229	-.254*	-.009
A – the conflict type	.423***	.227	.159
S – passive (economic) type	.484***	.186	-.095
G – active (healthy) type	.222	.106	-.367**

Note: Critical values of Spearman correlation: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

A positive relationship was found between the degree of type S behavior (passive, economic type) expression and the degree of the tension stage expression ( $r = .484$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that for the majority of subjects, high values of S-type behavior correspond to similarly high values in the tension phase. The more the employee is characterized by saving energy cost and professional ambitions, by expressing a penchant for preserving an emotional detachment in his relation to professional activities and satisfaction with the labor results – the higher the probability is to identify the signs of emerging symptoms in an anxious tension phase. These

very conflicting results can be explained by the fact that even at such an economical type of behavior in the professional sphere, there are chances that the teacher can experience anxiety or depression, dissatisfaction with himself under the influence of other personal or organizational factors.

We confirmed the assumption that educators with lower levels of satisfaction with work have higher indicators of the emotional burnout development phases. When identifying relationships between types of behavior in the professional environment, the level of satisfaction with work and interpersonal relationship types we detected the following trends:

- in teachers with active type of behavior in the professional environment, stress resistance and efficiency are connected with high satisfaction in their work.

- teachers with active type of conduct (G) in the professional environment demonstrate dominance, energy, success, critical attitude, emotional restraint.

- specialists with passive (economic) type of behavior in the professional environment (S) are less satisfied with the substantive and organizational labor conditions, they are characterized by a demanding temper, irritability, egoism, focus on themselves and on communication, lower levels of confidence, sensitivity, criticality and emotional restraint. The results of the ANOVA revealed significant indicators of the impact of personal characteristics on the active type of professional behavior (table 2).

Table 2 - *Statistically significant factors affecting the active type of professional conduct*

Factor	Significance
orientation	.006
confidence	.036
socio-psychological attitudes	.042
dependence	.035
conservatism	.025

Important indicators of the impact of personal characteristics on the passive type of professional conduct are presented in table 3.

Table 3 - *Statistically significant factors affecting the passive type of professional conduct*

Factor	Significance
orientation	.003
sympathy	.026
confidence	.011
pliability	.021
emotional barriers	.042

The empirical research conducted suggests that in certain types of a teachers' professional conduct, we can identify various features and changes in orientation, socio-psychological preferences, satisfaction with work, psycho-emotional characteristics of burning, which showed different levels of professional deformation depending on personal characteristics identified in the study. The data obtained allow for formation of guidelines for the development and implementation of programs for the prevention and correction of teachers' professional deformation.

## 5. Discussion

It should be noted that the research of problems concerning manifestations and dynamics of professional deformation must be under the constant attention of scholars, practitioners and managers interested in preserving potential personnel and in prospects of the educational process development.

Programs of prevention and correction of teachers' professional deformation in an educational institution are based on the creation of the institutional system, which consists of several basic directions: 1) creating an effective motivational environment of the educational institution; 2) simulation of the school corporate culture as a valued space to maintain a favorable psychological climate and teachers' professional self-assessment; 3) work with teachers' psychological barriers when implementing innovations; 4) formation and evolution of positive professional identity of teachers; 5) introduction of a system of continuous professional development and self-realization of innovational capacity in the professional activities (Mikhailova, 2015).

To prevent the development of professional deformation at the latent level, it is important to pay special attention to the development of professional self-realization and innovation of personality. The innovative potential of the personality is defined as the combination of qualities already implemented by the inclusion into the new activities and consisting of interlocking and mutually explaining types of constructive activity (Mikhailova, 2013, 2015).

Innovation represents the synthesis of personal qualities, which ensure the perception, assessment, development, rapid adoption and implementation of original ideas, realized in activity. Innovation is linked to other personal characteristics, but also has fundamental differences from creativity and ingenuity (Mikhailova, 2014; Mikhailova, Kudinov, & Marin Jerez, 2015).

A positive result expressed in new achievements and moral satisfaction when implementing such methods of maintaining and strengthening innovation capacities as follows: systematic participation in scientific professional societies, conducting independent research, publishing activity, development and application of new forms, methods and techniques in educational process, improvement of qualification, obtaining additional education, training in postgraduate study. All of these kinds of professional activity are effective methods of preventing the latent level of professional deformation.

Hence the technologies of teachers' innovational activity development can be considered as remedial educational programs that promote the change in personal professional behavior and prevention of professional deformation on the latent level of its manifestation.

The program of the seminar-training "Development of the teacher's innovative potential" for educators with latent professional burnout level consists of four main modules: 1) "realization" phase is a characteristic of the innovational strategies of a teacher's personality development; 2) "preparation" phase is the diagnostics of professional and personal potential as the basis of the teacher's innovational activity; 3) "reevaluation" phase is the development of technology of professional efficiency and constructive cooperation in the process of innovation; 4) "action" phase is the formation of abilities and management skills barriers and resistance in the process of personal growth and development.

In the absence of constructive overcoming behavior, chronic stress at work causes complex negative feelings and non-adaptive behavior that threaten personal health and the stability of the educational organization in

general. The consequences are as follows: worse results of educational activities, non-stop staff turnover, reduced motivation for effectiveness, conflict in communication with colleagues and students, which both leads to destabilization of the educator's professional health and influences the students' psychological health. Consequently, on the frustration level of professional deformation development, it is advisable to pay attention to the correction and reduction of stress and conflict in the teachers' behavior.

The program of the seminar-training "Psychological correction of emotional state" for educators with frustration level of professional burnout expression is based on the same 4 modules: 1) "realization" phase is an analysis of the causes of emotional tension and conflicts in the educational environment; 2) "preparation" phase is the mastering of conflict analysis and conflict management in the educational environment; 3) "reevaluation" phase is the formation of stress-management skills in the practice of pedagogical activity; 4) "action" phase is the delegation and time management technologies in the practice of teaching.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Professional deformation is a process that develops over time. It is very important to timely diagnose the symptoms on the initial stages of development, as well as to take the rehabilitative measures.

In the absence of constructive overcoming behavior, chronic stress at work causes complex personal negative feelings and non-adaptive behaviors that threaten personal health and professional activity stability as a whole.

Possible consequences of negative forms of teachers' burning out manifestations will inevitably affect the peculiarities of communication with students and their psychological health.

That is why the definition and implementation of strategies of preventing and overcoming burnout should be given more attention by scientists, practitioners and decision makers in the education system, who are interested in preserving personnel potential and prospects of teachers' professionalism development.

Theoretical and empirical results obtained and submitted in the study show that the risk of occurrence of progressive levels of professional deformation may be significantly reduced, provided that the educational organization carries out diagnostic and preventive measures in time.

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