

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTORS' PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT ON CAREER ADAPTABILITY AT PRIVATE COLLEGES IN KAIFENG CITY, HENAN PROVINCE, CHINA: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the impact of instructors perceived organizational support on the career adaptability at private colleges in Kaifeng, Henan Province, China, using professional identity as a mediating variable. A questionnaire survey was conducted with a sample of 302 instructors from two private colleges in Kaifeng. Through descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, One-way ANOVA analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The results indicated significant differences in instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability with different demographic backgrounds (gender, age, educational background, subject category, and teaching experience). There were positive correlations between perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability. Perceived organizational support significantly predicted career adaptability. Perceived organizational support also significantly predicted professional identity. Professional identity significantly predicted career adaptability. The instructors' professional identity played a mediating role between perceived organizational support and career adaptability. Finally, targeted suggestions are proposed based on the research findings.

Keywords: Private Colleges, Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity, Career Adaptability

Introduction

In recent years, private higher education in China has developed rapidly and become an important part of the higher education system. Instructors are key to educational quality, and with the development of mass higher education, their professional development has received widespread attention. Perceived organizational support (POS), professional identity, and career adaptability have

become key research variables, yet empirical studies on instructors in Chinese private colleges, especially in specific regions like Kaifeng, remain lacking. Theoretical foundations of perceived organizational support trace back to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and perceived organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) confirmed POS's positive correlations with job satisfaction and performance, and negative correlations with turnover intention. Foreign research on instructor professional development has long focused on professional identity, with Beijgaard et al. (2000, 2004) identifying it as a core element, while Kremer & Hofman (1981) and Day et al. (2005) highlighted the roles of organizational environment and POS in shaping it. Career adaptability, originating from Super's (1980) lifespan theory and refined by Savickas (2005), refers to psychological resources for managing career tasks and transitions, with Rudolph et al. (2017) finding it mediates organizational factors and career outcomes, and McCormick & Barnett (2008) noting its relevance to educational reforms. Despite abundant foreign research, studies on private higher education instructors are limited, with Pounder & Merrill (2001) emphasizing their unique challenges compared to public sector peers, creating a gap for this study.

Chinese research on perceived organizational support began in the early 21st century, with Ling et al. (2006) adapting Eisenberger's theory for local contexts. Li & Zhou (2015) found lower perceived organizational support among university instructors than corporate employees, while Wang & Sun (2014) highlighted its stronger predictive power in Chinese culture. Wei (2005, 2008) made pioneering contributions by developing a measurement scale for professional identity suitable for Chinese instructors and systematically examining its influencing factors and mechanisms.

Research Objectives

(1) To identify the differences in instructors perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges with different demographic backgrounds (gender, age, educational background, subject category, teaching experience).

(2) To analyze the relationships between instructors perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges.

(3) To examine the impact of instructors perceived organizational support on career adaptability at private colleges.

(4) To examine the impact of perceived organizational support on instructors' professional identity at private colleges.

(5) To examine the impact of instructors' professional identity on career adaptability at private colleges.

(6) To verify the mediating role of instructors' professional identity between perceived organizational support and career adaptability at private colleges.

Literature Review

Research on Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) was one of the core concepts in organizational behavior and human resource management, first proposed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). Perceived organizational support from the humanistic qualities of the organization as perceived by employees, manifested through the behaviors of organizational agents that reflect the organization's legal, moral, and economic responsibilities. Organizational policies, norms, and culture act on employees through organizational agents, and employees use the treatment they receive from organizational agents as a basis for judging the organization's recognition of their contributions and concern for their welfare (Chen, 2006).

The Perceived Organizational Support Scale (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) included 36 items, with 18 positively scored and 18 negatively scored, achieving a reliability coefficient as high as 0.97. However, the large number of items in the scale poses practical challenges in application, prompting subsequent researchers to derive simplified versions with fewer items, such as 17-item and 8-item versions, by selecting items with higher factor loadings from the SPOS (Kottke, 1988). In terms of dimension construction, Kraimer (2004) and other scholars proposed that perceived organizational support should encompass three dimensions: adaptability, career orientation, and financial support, but no measurement tools were developed to accompany this.

George & Brief (1992) pointed out that POS was more likely to stimulate extra-role behaviors (such as risk warning and knowledge sharing) rather than directly enhancing task performance. This was because organizational citizenship behaviors (such as altruistic behavior) were more autonomous than reciprocal returns, while task efficiency was constrained by objective factors such as ability and work design. Kraimer et al. (2001) confirmed through cross-cultural research that the promoting impact of POS on relational performance was particularly significant in diverse work scenarios.

Research on Professional Identity

Goodson & Cole (1994) proposed that instructors' professional identity was a dynamic balance between the individual and the profession, emphasizing the coordination between personal values and professional roles; Ma (2019) pointed out that it was a co-evolutionary system of cognition, emotion, and behavior. Domestic scholar Wei (2005) regarded it as a composite of instructors' cognition, experience, and behavioral tendencies, as well as a process of role confirmation. Ma (2019) further clarified it as a dynamic psychological change process by Wei (2008), formed and internalized gradually through long-term work and life interactions.

Domestic research places more emphasis on the development of localized scales: the instructors' professional identity scale for primary and secondary school instructors developed by Wei et al. (2013) constructed a measurement framework of 35 items from four dimensions: professional values, role values, professional belonging, and behavioral tendencies, highlighting the emotional-behavioral linkage characteristics of instructors' professional identity in the context of Chinese culture.

In the foreign research field, early studies focused on the constituent dimensions and dynamic evolution of instructors' professional identity. Beijgaard et al. (2000) proposed a three-dimensional model of "subject matter experts, educational background experts, and instructional experts," revealing the phased transformation patterns of instructor role identity, where most instructors transition from an initial focus on subject matter expertise to a balanced identity. The PISQ-5d scale, developed by Mancinini & Tonarel (2013), was by identity status theory, focusing on the interactive process of exploration and commitment, but its sample was limited to psychology students, and its applicability to the instructor population remains to be verified. Additionally, foreign research particularly emphasized the role of the professional environment.

In terms of influencing factors, domestic research emphasized the role of individual experiences, such as professional image (Zhang et al., 2013) and core self-evaluation, having a positive impact on professional identity, with psychological empowerment playing a mediating role (Wei, 2015). Lu (2016) found that male instructors in vocational colleges have lower recognition of role values, and although young instructors have a high overall identity level, the increase was not significant with teaching experience, exposing the inadequacies of professional development support mechanisms.

Research on Career Adaptability

Career adaptability was an important concept in the field of vocational psychology. Career adaptability refers to the comprehensive ability of individuals to actively respond to changes, challenges, and interactions with the environment during their career or life development process. Its theoretical core originates from Savickas's (1997) career construction theory, which emphasized that individuals develop multidimensional adaptability through self-regulation strategies to achieve a dynamic balance between career roles and the environment.

Cai (2011) further refined it into social role adaptability, interpersonal relationship adaptability, and vocational ability adaptability, and divided it into four dimensions: career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. The Career Adaptability Questionnaire (CAQ), developed by Rottinghaus et al. (2005), expanded the assessment scope, systematically incorporating elements such as career exploration, decision-making, planning, and dynamic adjustment, focusing on the adaptation needs of college students and new employees (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). The Career Adaptability Scale (CAAS) launched by Savickas & Porfeli (2012) by career construction theory, has become a milestone tool, centered on a four-dimensional model of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.

From the perspective of individual traits, Zacher (2014) found through diary surveys that openness and conscientiousness among personality traits significantly promote career adaptability, while individuals with high core self-evaluations and self-focused tendencies also exhibit stronger adaptability. This finding aligned with the career construction theory, which emphasized that individuals achieve self-coordination by integrating past experiences, current cognitions, and future. Research on the effects of career adaptability showed that it was significantly related to career outcomes

such as job satisfaction, career engagement, and teamwork ability (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015), and could enhance subjective well-being and alleviate career burnout (Maggiori & Tonarelli, 2013).

Research on the Relationship between Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity and Career Adaptability of Instructors

Bai & Gao (2022) further pointed out that professional identity played a partial mediating role between perceived organizational support and work engagement, indicating that perceived organizational support affected work engagement both indirectly through professional identity and through direct pathways.

Affum-Osei et al. (2019) found that perceived organizational support for customer service representatives (such as resource support and psychological safety) could directly enhance their career adaptability, allowing them to flexibly balance customer needs with organizational goals. Guan et al. (2016) further indicated in their study of human resource managers in China that perceived organizational support significantly enhanced individuals' career adaptability by providing career development resources (such as strategic guidance and training opportunities), thereby strengthening their strategic decision-making abilities.

In terms of international research, the Career Construction Theory proposed by Savickas (1997) provided a core theoretical framework for career adaptability, emphasizing that individuals actively adapt to their professional environment through four dimensions: "attention, control, curiosity, and confidence," while the formation of professional identity was viewed as a result of this adaptation process. Porfeli et al. (2011) further refined professional identity into a dynamic balance of commitment, exploration, and reflection, and validated the positive correlation between career adaptability and professional identity through the CAAS scale. Liu et al. (2023) found that for Chinese engineering students, professional identity promotes career adaptability by enhancing learning engagement (such as participation in research projects), and this pathway was reinforced by family expectations and "practical-oriented" educational background goals in a collectivist culture.

Methodology

With a total of 1,329 full-time instructors at private colleges, including 827 full-time instructors at Henan Kaifeng University of Science and Technology and 502 full-time instructors at Shangqiu College of Applied Technology. By the random sampling criteria of the Morgan table customized by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). A total of 302 questionnaires were distributed in this survey.

The Perceived Organizational Support Questionnaire (SPO), developed by Kottke & Sharafinski (1988), consists of 17 items. Cronbach's α of .953, indicating strong internal consistency of the perceived organizational support scale and a good reliability level. Factor analysis showed that the scale ranged from .401 to .774, indicating high validity.

Instructors' Professional Identity Scale. This study used the "Instructors' professional identity

Scale" developed by Wei (2008), which is divided into four dimensions, consists of 18 items. It showed that the Cronbach's α ranged from .701 to .820, with an overall Cronbach's α of .894, and Factor analysis showed that the scales' loadings of the items in the instructors' professional identity scale ranged from .467 to .789, indicating high reliability and validity.

Career Adaptability Scale. This study used the "Career Adaptability Scale" developed by Savickas & Porfeli (2012), which consists of 24 items and is divided into four dimensions. The overall Cronbach's α of .916, indicating good reliability. Factor analysis showed the career adaptability scale ranged from .412 to .714, indicating a high validity.

Results

Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants

In this questionnaire survey, the first part of the questionnaire concerned the basic personal information of the instructors participating in the survey from Henan Kaifeng University of Science and Technology and Shandong University of Applied Sciences, including gender, age, educational background, subject category, and teaching experience. In terms of gender, there were 163 male instructors, accounting for 53.97% of the total sample, and 139 female instructors, accounting for 46.03%. In terms of age, there were 33 instructors aged 24-30, accounting for 10.93% of the total sample, 63 instructors aged 31-35, accounting for 20.86%, 122 instructors aged 36-40, accounting for 40.40%, and 84 instructors aged 41 and above, accounting for 27.81%. In terms of educational background, there were 39 instructors with a bachelor's degree, accounting for 12.92%, 162 instructors with a master's degree, accounting for 63.64%, and 101 instructors with a doctoral degree, accounting for 33.44%. In terms of subject category, there were 68 instructors in the humanities, accounting for 22.52%, 94 instructors in the sciences, accounting for 31.13%, 90 instructors in engineering, accounting for 29.80%, and 50 instructors in medicine, accounting for 16.55%. In terms of teaching experience, there were 48 instructors with less than 3 years of experience, accounting for 15.89%, 124 instructors with 4-7 years of experience, accounting for 41.06%, and 130 instructors with 8 years or more of experience, accounting for 43.05%.

Descriptive Statistics on the Levels of Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity and Career Adaptability of Instructors

1) Using descriptive statistical analysis, examine the overall level of instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity and career adaptability at private colleges. According to the analysis results in Table 1, it could be seen that the overall perceived organizational support of instructors was 3.81, indicating that the overall perceived organizational support by instructors was at a high level. The overall mean of instructors' professional identity was 4.20, with the means of each dimension ranging from 3.99 to 4.36. Indicated that the overall instructors' professional identity was

high. The overall mean of instructors' career adaptability was 4.15, with the means of each dimension ranging from 3.98 to 4.36. This result reflected that the overall instructors' career adaptability was high.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity and Career Adaptability of Instructor (N=302)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Perceived Organizational Support	3.81	0.61	High
Professional Values	4.22	0.42	High
Role Values	4.36	0.49	High
Professional belonging	3.99	0.52	High
Professional Behavior Tendency	4.21	0.47	High
Professional Identity	4.20	0.38	High
Attention	3.98	0.44	High
Control	4.09	0.45	High
Curiosity	4.16	0.48	High
Confidence	4.36	0.46	High
Career Adaptability	4.15	0.38	High

Differences Analysis on the Levels of Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity and Career Adaptability of Instructors

This study used an independent samples t-test and One-way ANOVA analysis to examine the differences in instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges with different demographic backgrounds.

There was a significant difference in instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges by gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience. There were significant differences in instructors' perceived organizational support at private colleges by subject categories, and there were no significant differences in professional identity and instructors' career adaptability by subject categories.

Correlation Analysis among Three Main Variables

There was a positive correlation between instructors perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges. According to the analysis results in Table 2. The correlation coefficient between perceived organizational support and the overall mean of professional identity was $r=.324$; the correlation coefficient between perceived organizational support and the overall mean of career adaptability was $r=.272$; the correlation coefficient between the overall mean of professional identity and the overall mean of career adaptability is $r=.606$, which was significantly positively correlated at the .001 level.

Table 2: Correlation between Instructors' Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity, and Career Adaptability at Private Colleges

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1.	1										
2.	.314***	1									
3.	.278***	.637***	1								
4.	.244***	.404***	.430***	1							
5.	.199**	.522***	.564***	.492***	1						
6.	.324***	.788***	.826***	.750***	.812***	1					
7.	.180**	.383***	.471***	.301***	.448***	.503***	1				
8.	.243***	.350***	.486***	.380***	.384***	.506***	.537***	1			
9.	.255***	.287***	.452***	.423***	.405***	.499***	.526***	.617***	1		
10.	.234***	.309***	.513***	.385***	.459***	.529***	.517***	.682***	.761***	1	
11.	.272***	.394***	.571***	.444***	.504***	.606***	.762***	.843***	.870***	.883***	1

Note: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

1. Perceived Organizational Support, 2. Professional Values, 3. Role Values, 4. Professional belonging, 5. Career Behavior Tendency, 6. Professional Identity, 7. Attention, 8. Control, 9. Curiosity, 10. Confidence, 11. Career Adaptability

Regression Analysis among Three Main Variables

In the regression model of perceived organizational support on career adaptability, perceived organizational support positively predicts career adaptability ($\beta = .272$, $p < .001$), perceived organizational support on professional identity, perceived organizational support positively predicts professional identity ($\beta = .324$, $p < .001$), to examine the impact of the mediator variable on the dependent variable. In the regression model of professional identity predicting career adaptability, professional identity positively predicts career adaptability ($\beta = .606$, $p < .001$). After controlling for perceived organizational support and professional identity, the impact of perceived organizational support on career adaptability decreased from .272 to .085 with no significant difference, indicating that professional identity is a complete mediator variable between perceived organizational support and career adaptability.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of the Mediating Model of Perceived Organizational Support between Professional Identity and Career Adaptability

Variable	Career Adaptability		Professional Identity		Career Adaptability		Career Adaptability	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Perceived Organizational Support	.272	4.894***	.324	5.933***			.085	1.746
Professional Identity					.606	13.186***	.578	11.951***
R^2	.074		.105		.367		.373	
F	23.955***		35.200***		173.863***		89.051***	

Since the total impact is the sum of the indirect impact and the direct effect, the proportion of the mediation impact is the indirect impact divided by the total effect. It is calculated that the indirect impact of professional identity between perceived organizational support and career adaptability accounts for 68.75% of the total effect.

Table 4: Mediating Impact Analysis of Professional Identity between Perceived Organizational Support and Career Adaptability

Effect Type	Effect Value	BootSE	Bootstrap 95% CL		Relative impact proportion
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit	
Total Effect	0.272				100%
Direct Effect	0.085				31.25%
Indirect Effect	0.196	0.025	0.147	0.245	68.75%

Figure 1 presents the schematic diagram of regression analysis results based on the regression and mediating function among these three main variables.

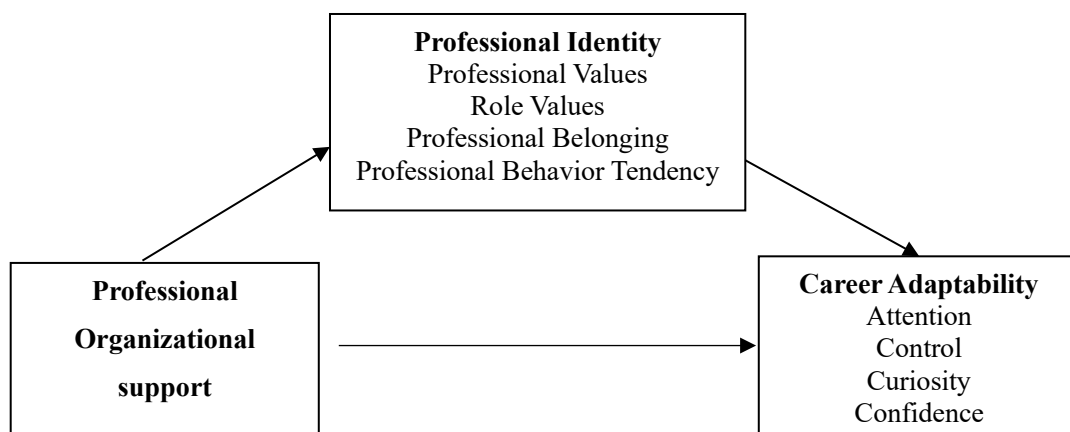


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

Discussion

To Discuss the Current Level of Instructors' Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity, and Career Adaptability at Private Colleges

Private colleges exhibited high perceived organizational support levels, enhanced through salary optimization, streamlined promotions, and teaching innovation platforms, despite having fewer resources than public universities. Their agile decision-making enabled timely feedback on research and equipment needs, indirectly boosting perceived organizational support evaluations (Yang, 2003). High professional identity stemmed from colleges addressing practical needs (e.g., research support) with prompt feedback, linking teaching to self-worth realization (Zeng, 2016). Industry-education integration under applied talent models further reinforced identity through enhanced professional

achievement. Elevated adaptability arose from instructors' proactive experimentation with teaching methods and enterprise collaborations, fostering confidence in tackling challenges (Su, 2019). Colleges' flexible support facilitated skill development and perceived value, strengthening adaptability to workplace changes..

To Discuss the Differences in Instructors' Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity, and Career Adaptability under Different Demographic Backgrounds

There were significant differences in instructors' perceived organizational support and career adaptability by gender. Male instructors often perceive higher organizational support, perceived organizational support due to traditional biases favoring them in resource allocation. They also demonstrate greater career adaptability, preferring practical actions to solve problems. Female instructors, however, have higher professional identity, emphasizing emotional communication with students and meticulous teaching efforts (Yang, 2003; Lu, 2016; Zhang & Nan, 2020).

Age influences perceived organizational support and professional identity significantly. Older instructors accumulate more resources and connections, enhancing their perceived support. They also have stable professional cognitions and participate in school management, elevating their professional identity. Their experience allows them to respond calmly to challenges, forming a virtuous cycle of ability enhancement (Wei, 2008; Su, 2019).

Highly educated instructors perceive more organizational support due to schools prioritizing their introduction and cultivation. They view teaching as an academic continuation, leading to a high professional identity. Their rigorous thinking and critical analysis skills enable efficient problem-solving, enhancing career adaptability (Wei, 2008; Zeng & Wang, 2016; Su, 2019).

Subject category affects perceived organizational support but not professional identity or career adaptability. Private colleges prioritize science and engineering, investing more in these fields. However, regardless of subject, instructors seek academic recognition and face similar pressures, weakening subject differences in identity and adaptability (Wei, 2008; Lu, 2016).

Teaching experience significantly impacts perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability. Experienced instructors accumulate more resources and are valued by schools, enhancing their perceived support. Their involvement in core matters elevates professional identity. Longer teaching experience builds confidence and adaptability through accumulated experience and perceived organizational support feedback (Zhang, 2013; Lu, 2016; Zhang, 2020)..

To Discuss the Relationship between Instructors' Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Identity, and Career Adaptability at Private Colleges

There were significant perceived organizational support correlations among instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges. Perceived organizational support significantly predicts instructors' professional identity, and perceived organizational support significantly predicts instructors' career adaptability, while professional identity

significantly predicts instructors' career adaptability. Professional identity played a mediating role between perceived organizational support and career adaptability.

The perceived organizational support impact of perceived organizational support on professional identity reflected the reciprocal relationship between the school and instructors. When instructors feel supported by the school in terms of salary, career development opportunities, and emotional care, they develop a responsibility to reciprocate to the school by the principle of reciprocity. This strengthening of the psychological contract directly promotes the internalization process of instructors' professional identity (Zhang, 2023). Specifically, perceived organizational support influences professional identity through two pathways: practical support, such as research funding and teaching resources, meets instructors' career development needs, reinforcing professional values; emotional support, such as leadership care and colleague collaboration, enhances professional belonging, elevating overall professional identity (Bai & Gao, 2024).

The perceived organizational support impact of perceived organizational support on career adaptability reflected school resources shaping the professional environment. Resource support enhances adaptability: material/institutional support (e.g., experimental equipment, training) expands resource reserves and confidence; emotional support (e.g., leadership recognition, team support) alleviates anxiety, fostering openness to change (Guo & Li, 2010; Miao, 2019). Professional identity drives adaptability through internal psychological states. High professional identity enhances adaptability via cognitive shifts (viewing challenges as self-actualization opportunities) and behavioral tendencies (Zhou & Huang, 2017; Liu et al., 2023). Professional identity mediates perceived organizational support and career adaptability through psychological resource transitions. Perceived organizational support acts as an external stimulus, satisfying belonging/respect needs and stimulating intrinsic motivation for professional identity, which then transforms school support into adaptive behavior drivers (Bai & Gao, 2024). Insufficient perceived organizational support may weaken professional identity, leading to a "low support-low identity-poor adaptability" cycle.

Conclusion

Conclusion 1: There were significant differences in instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges in Kaifeng, Henan Province, under different demographic backgrounds.

Conclusion 2: There was a positive correlation between instructors' perceived organizational support, professional identity, and career adaptability at private colleges.

Conclusion 3: The instructors perceived organizational support has a significant impact on career adaptability at private colleges in Kaifeng City, Henan Province, China.

Conclusion 4: The instructors perceived organizational support has a significant impact on professional identity in Kaifeng, Henan Province, China.

Conclusion 5: The instructors' professional identity has a significant impact on career adaptability at private colleges in Kaifeng, Henan Province, China.

Conclusion 6: The instructors' professional identity played a mediating role between perceived organizational support and career adaptability at private colleges in Kaifeng, Henan Province, China.

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