



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DILEMMAS AND INNOVATIVE PATHS OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELOR TEAM BUILDING: A PERSPECTIVE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT THEORY

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission Jul. 21, 2026 Acceptance Jul. 27, 2026 Keywords Organizational Support Theory; Counselor Team; Fostering Virtue Through Education; University Administration; Career Development Ecosystem Corresponding Author 18814147469@163.com	As the key workforce for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, university counselors play an indispensable role. Based on Organizational Support Theory, this study systematically explores the structural dilemmas and systematic approaches to the development of university counselor teams. A four-dimensional analytical framework encompassing instrumental, emotional, institutional and developmental support is constructed, and qualitative analysis is conducted through in-depth interviews with 61 counselors and relevant administrators. The results reveal that counselors suffer excessive administrative workloads and resource shortages in terms of instrumental support; they struggle with ambiguous role identity and insufficient organizational recognition in emotional support; formalized assessment mechanisms and blocked dual-track promotion channels constitute major obstacles to institutional support; mismatched supply and demand in training systems and vague career advancement trajectories plague developmental support. The deficiencies across the four dimensions interact and interlock with one another, giving rise to a structural predicament. This study proposes a shift from fragmented support to the construction of systematic support. Through the coordination of the four dimensions and ecological integration, the professional development and sustainable empowerment of counselor teams can be realized, offering theoretical references and practical models for the development of ideological and political education staff in universities in the new era.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental questions of education concern what kind of talents to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom to cultivate them. As the main front of talent training, universities must take fostering virtue through education as the core link (Xi, 2018). University counselors serve as the backbone of ideological and political education for college students, acting as organizers, implementers, and instructors of daily ideological and political education and student management in institutions of higher education (Ministry of Education of China, 2017). The quality of counselor team construction directly determines the implementation effect of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

Policy documents including the Regulations on the Construction of Counselor Teams in Regular Institutions of Higher Education have repeatedly stipulated that universities should ensure counselors are equipped with working conditions, provided with career platforms, guaranteed with reasonable remuneration, and offered with room for personal development. However, a notable gap remains between policy expectations and practical realities. University counselor teams generally face pervasive dilemmas including ambiguous identity positioning, dual roles as both teachers and administrative cadres, overloaded and fragmented work responsibilities, the predicament of boundless responsibilities with limited authority, high rates of job burnout, and a low career development ceiling (Feng, 2016; Liu, 2024). Such predicaments prevent counselors from concentrating their efforts on in-depth ideological and political education, posing severe challenges to the stability and professionalization of the counselor team.

Existing studies have extensively discussed the dilemmas of counselor team construction, yet most remain confined to phenomenon description and empirical summary (Zhao et al., 2024; Luo & Lu, 2026), with proposed countermeasures characterized by fragmentation. Few studies have thoroughly explored the common organizational formation logic behind multiple practical dilemmas (Feng, 2016). The absence of theoretical frameworks and mechanistic analysis makes existing suggestions ineffective in solving fundamental problems, and fails to provide operable and evaluable systematic reform schemes for universities (Wu et al., 2025; Xie, 2024). To fill this research gap, this study adopts Organizational Support Theory (OST) as the core analytical perspective. The theory defines organizational support for employees as a multi-dimensional construct, closely linked to social exchange and psychological contract mechanisms. It provides a mature paradigm for analyzing how individual-organizational interactions affect employees' work engagement and career development (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

This study aims to achieve two core transformations. First, it creatively translates the policy discourse of equipped working conditions, accessible career platforms, guaranteed remuneration, and sufficient development space (Ministry of Education of China, 2017) into an operable academic analytical framework consisting of instrumental, emotional, institutional, and developmental support. Second, based on in-depth empirical investigations guided by this framework, this study systematically answers the core research question: how do structural deficiencies in the four dimensions of organizational support interact and couple with each other, thereby systematically restricting the professional development and educational effectiveness of university counselor teams? Theoretically, this research expands the application boundary of

Organizational Support Theory in the context of Chinese university governance and constructs an integrated model for interpreting counselors' career development. Practically, it provides systematic and diagnostic references for universities to break through the bottlenecks of counselor team construction and improve the institutional efficiency of fostering virtue through education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Research Status and Reflections on Counselor Team Construction

Domestic research on university counselor teams is abundant, mainly focusing on four dimensions: practical dilemmas, role positioning, professional development, and policy reflection. Most existing studies have indicated that counselors commonly suffer from role overload, high work pressure, and blocked promotion channels (Zhao et al., 2024). In terms of countermeasures, scholars generally propose strengthening professional training, improving the dual-track promotion system, and optimizing salary and welfare benefits (Li, 2025). However, extant studies mostly remain at the level of empirical summary and practical suggestions, lacking in-depth theoretical embedding and mechanistic analysis. The proposed strategies are often fragmented and fail to reveal the internal correlations and functional mechanisms among various influencing factors (Zhang et al., 2022).

In terms of role positioning and identity recognition, existing studies aim to respond to national policy requirements and rationalize the professional status of counselors. Since the issuance of Central Document No. 43 and its supporting policies, researchers have conducted in-depth discussions on counselors' statutory dual identity as both teaching staff and administrative cadres (Wu et al., 2025). These studies effectively reveal the role conflicts, ambiguous power and responsibility boundaries, and identity anxiety derived from dual roles, bringing the structural dilemmas of the counselor group into the academic research horizon (Geng & Ding, 2018). Nevertheless, most of these studies adopt normative and prospective discourse, focusing on philosophical speculation and policy interpretation, while lacking empirical investigation into the organizational root causes behind role dilemmas.

In recent years, cutting-edge research on the professionalization and scientific development of counselor teams has achieved progressive breakthroughs. The research focus has shifted from problem description to problem solving, attempting to construct core competency models for counselors and promote the professionalization of their occupations (Xie, 2024). This shift marks the entry of relevant research into a constructive developmental stage. Even in such studies, there remains a lack of integrated and operable theoretical frameworks to systematize scattered countermeasures regarding the core issue of how to systematically build an organizational environment that supports counselor professionalization. Current literature has pointed out general development directions but failed to form a clear and holistic development roadmap. This deficiency fundamentally stems from the absence of organizational perspective and systematic thinking (He, 2025).

In summary, although existing studies have identified numerous practical dilemmas of university counselors, few have analyzed these problems based on mature organizational

management theories. The lack of holistic analysis of the organizational support system leads to fragmented countermeasures, which fail to regard working conditions, career platforms, welfare guarantees, and development space as an integrated ecological system. Accordingly, it is theoretically necessary and reasonable for this study to introduce Organizational Support Theory to fill the research gap.

2.2. Evolution of Organizational Support Theory and Its Applicability in This Study

To address the above theoretical deficiencies, this study adopts Organizational Support Theory (OST) as the core analytical framework. Proposed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), the core construct of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) refers to employees' overall belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Rooted in social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity, OST suggests that when employees perceive sufficient organizational support, they will generate a sense of obligation to reciprocate, thereby demonstrating higher work engagement, organizational commitment, and job performance.

Organizational Support Theory has undergone continuous theoretical evolution, developing from a single holistic POS concept to a refined multi-dimensional structure. Subsequent studies have distinguished multiple dimensions including instrumental support and emotional support. A meta-analysis conducted by Kurtessis et al. (2017), which synthesized hundreds of empirical studies, fully verified the significant impact of multi-dimensional organizational support on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, laying a solid empirical foundation for OST.

This study argues that the application of OST to the research of university counselor team construction in China possesses three unique fit characteristics, endowing the theory with strong explanatory power:

(1) High compatibility with policy texts. The policy proposition of equipped working conditions, accessible career platforms, guaranteed remuneration, and sufficient development space (Qi & Xu, 2024) precisely corresponds to the four core dimensions of OST, namely instrumental support, emotional support, institutional support, and developmental support. This effective correspondence provides practical basis and measurable pathways for theoretical operationalization.

(2) In-depth compatibility with Chinese cultural contexts. In the domestic organizational cultural context, employees attach great importance to organizational care and emotional recognition. Counselors' sense of belonging to the university, psychological needs of being respected, and value identification constitute the core source of their professional identity and organizational commitment (Yang, 2025; Guo, 2025), which is highly consistent with the emotional support dimension of OST.

(3) Unique compatibility with the educational attributes of universities. As typical public educational institutions, universities feature unique staffing management, professional title evaluation systems, and bureaucratic hierarchical structures. Such characteristics make institutional support in the university context more complex and far-reaching than that in corporate organizations (Sun, 2023). OST provides a conceptual tool for deconstructing and analyzing such unique institutional characteristics.

2.3. Construction of Theoretical Framework: A Four-Dimensional Integrated Analytical Model

Based on the critical integration of existing literature, this study constructs a four-dimensional integrated analytical framework grounded in OST to systematically interpret the dilemmas and innovative development paths of counselor team construction. The core innovation of this framework lies in the creative combination of macroscopic policy requirements and micro-organizational behavior theories, which integrates scattered research topics and fragmented countermeasures into a coherent and systematic theoretical system. This study translates policy-oriented expressions into analyzable and measurable academic concepts (see Figure 1).

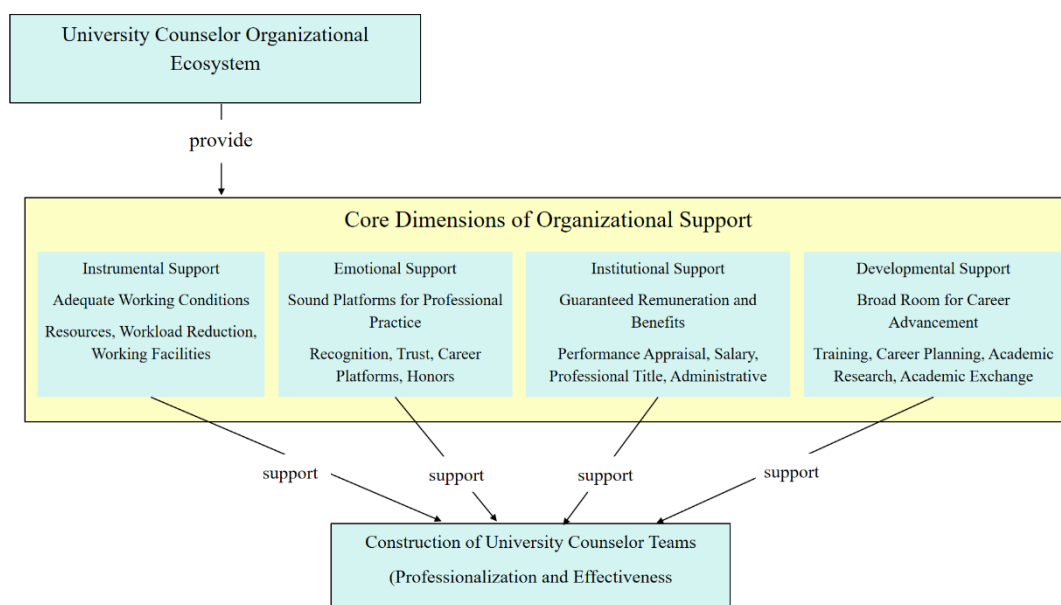


Figure 1: Four-Dimensional Analytical Model Based on Organizational Support Theory (OST)

(1) "Adequate working conditions" is operationalized as instrumental support, which refers to the objective resource guarantees provided by universities for counselors to perform their duties effectively, including sufficient funding, modern facilities, reasonable staffing, and tangible workload reduction measures.

(2) "Sound platforms for career practice" is operationalized as emotional support, meaning the respect, trust and value recognition that universities offer to counselors, as well as substantial platforms granting them work autonomy and opportunities to demonstrate their professional competence.

(3) "Guaranteed remuneration and benefits" is operationalized as institutional support. It denotes the fair, stable and transparent institutional arrangements adopted by universities to safeguard counselors' vital interests, covering externally competitive salary systems, scientific performance appraisal mechanisms and unobstructed dual-track promotion channels.

(4) "Broad room for career advancement" is operationalized as developmental support,

representing universities' investment in the long-term human capital appreciation of counselors, which encompasses systematic and targeted training systems, clear career path planning, and necessary academic and research resource backing.

The four dimensions of support are not isolated from one another, but form an interconnected and interdependent ecosystem. A prominent deficiency in any single dimension may trigger the cask effect and hinder the overall efficiency of the entire system. The empirical analysis of this study is carried out around this four-dimensional framework, aiming to systematically explore the structural deficiencies existing in universities' current support ecosystem, and ultimately provide theoretical guidance and empirical evidence for constructing a synergistic and high-efficiency development path for counselors.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multiple-case study design in qualitative research. Through in-depth analysis and cross-case comparison of research contexts, it aims to reveal the complexity and common underlying mechanisms of organizational support dilemmas in the construction of university counselor teams (Yin, 2018).

3.1. Case Selection

Following the principle of theoretical sampling, this study selects cases that can provide the maximum informative value for theoretical construction, rather than pursuing statistical representativeness (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Participants in this study are serving university counselors. Diversified sampling is adopted to maximize sample heterogeneity and enhance the external validity of the research findings.

To comply with academic ethical norms, all institutional and participant information has been fully anonymized.

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from May to October 2025, mainly consisting of semi-structured interviews and documentary data collection.

A detailed interview protocol was designed to fully cover the four dimensions of Organizational Support Theory while maintaining sufficient openness to capture unanticipated findings.

Interviewees: A total of 61 participants were interviewed. To realize data triangulation, respondents were selected from different administrative levels and perspectives:

Group A (46 frontline counselors): As direct recipients of organizational support, frontline counselors constitute the core information source. The sample covers counselors with different professional titles (teaching assistant, lecturer, associate professor), working years (1–5 years, 6–10 years, and over 10 years), and academic backgrounds to obtain diversified occupational experiences.

Group B (5 middle-level administrators): College deputy Party secretaries in charge of

student affairs. As policy implementers and interpreters, they can reflect institutional administrative pressures as well as the practical dilemmas faced by frontline counselors.

Group C (5 senior administrators and policy makers): The participants include two directors of student affairs departments, one administrator from the human resources department, and two university-level leaders in charge of student education and management. They provide a top-level institutional perspective on policy design and original policy intentions.

To improve the multi-dimensionality and data saturation of the interview materials, five resigned counselors were supplemented for in-depth interviews.

Interview Procedure: Each interview lasted 20 to 30 minutes and was conducted in quiet offices or meeting rooms to ensure interview quality.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study employs the reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which follows standardized qualitative analytical procedures:

Data familiarization: Transcribed interview texts were read repeatedly for comprehensive understanding and preliminary data screening.

Initial coding generation: Meaningful textual units were coded to form abundant free nodes (e.g., administrative work occupying working time, excessive research pressure, outdated training content).

Theme searching: Initial codes were categorized and integrated to form abstract themes and sub-themes. The analysis was closely guided by the four-dimensional framework of instrumental, emotional, institutional, and developmental support, while retaining analytical openness for the natural emergence of new themes.

Theme reviewing and refinement: All extracted themes were examined for consistency with original codes and the overall dataset, based on which a complete thematic map was formed.

Theme definition and naming: Each theme was precisely defined and named to ensure internal homogeneity and external differentiation across all themes.

Report writing: Vivid and representative interview quotations were selected as empirical evidence to construct a coherent and persuasive analytical narrative.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Adopting the abductive qualitative research logic, this study advances data collection, empirical analysis, and theoretical construction simultaneously (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Initial interview texts were obtained through theoretical sampling for open coding, which generated preliminary research propositions. Subsequent samples were continuously incorporated, and negative case analysis was adopted to falsify and revise the preliminary propositions. Through multiple rounds of iteration between empirical data and theoretical hypotheses, theoretical saturation was achieved with no new conceptual attributes emerging. Finally, a four-dimensional organizational support framework covering instrumental, emotional,

institutional, and developmental support was refined, ensuring that all research findings are firmly grounded in empirical evidence. In total, this study identified four core themes corresponding to the four organizational support dimensions and twelve sub-themes reflecting specific practical manifestations, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Coding Analysis Statistical Table Based on the Four Dimensions of Organizational Support

Core Themes (Main Nodes)	Sub-themes (Sub-nodes)	Representative Excerpts
T1: Insufficient Instrumental Support	Excessive clerical workload	“Tasks from all administrative departments ultimately fall on counselors. We are like a single needle threading thousands of threads from above.” (A03)
	Constrained working resources and conditions	“I want to deliver high-quality career planning workshops for students, but there is no budget to invite external experts, and it is also difficult to approve venues.” (A09)
	Blurred work-life boundaries	“We are required to keep our phones on 24/7. It is common to receive student calls in the middle of the night. I feel permanently on duty with no real off-work time.” (A14)
T2: Absent Emotional Support	Low role identity and sense of value	“Academic teachers think we lack academic competence, while administrative staff believe we only organize activities. We face an awkward identity dilemma.” (A02)
	Formalized professional development platforms	“Although platforms for innovation and entrepreneurship as well as social practice are nominally available for counselors, final achievements and honors are usually attributed to academic faculty teams.” (A08)
	Inadequate spiritual recognition and incentives	“The annual honors always go to the same group of people. Most counselors’ long-term efforts are taken for granted.” (B01)
T3: Weak Institutional Support	Dysfunctional assessment mechanism	“Performance assessment merely depends on documentary outputs and overtime hours, while indispensable work such as in-depth student counseling cannot be quantified.” (B11)
	Blocked dual-track promotion channels	““We have no competitive advantages over academic teachers in publishing papers and undertaking research projects. Administrative promotion is extremely competitive with limited vacancies, leaving little room for career growth.” (A05)
	Uncompetitive salary and welfare benefits	“Compared with peer academic teachers and even administrative staff, our salary is significantly lower, which leads to a severe imbalance between effort and reward.” (A13)
T4: Missing	Mismatched training	“Current trainings adopt a one-size-fits-all model with empty

Developmental Support	supply and demand	theoretical preaching. Practical skills training on handling extreme psychological crises and online public opinion emergencies is extremely insufficient.” (A01)
	Ambiguous career development paths	“Other than waiting for seniority-based promotion, there are few alternative development options. Job transfer is difficult, and our professional competencies are hardly applicable to other positions.” (A10)
	Scarcity of academic and research support	“I intend to explore the laws of student affairs, but I cannot obtain research projects or professional supervision. It is extremely difficult to produce influential research outcomes working alone.” (A12)

The textual analysis reveals the core problems as follows:

4.1. Insufficient Instrumental Support: The Vicious Cycle of Transactionalism

Data analysis shows that excessive transactional workload is the most frequently reported dilemma. Almost all counselors described their work state as “a single needle threading thousands of threads from above”, whereby substantial working energy is consumed by non-educational administrative affairs. This narrative repeatedly emerged across interviews, indicating that such workload pressure is a highly prominent and pervasive issue in counselors’ daily work. Heavy administrative burdens not only squeeze time for in-depth ideological and political education but also blur work-life boundaries, resulting in persistent chronic work stress. Furthermore, counselors are often constrained by insufficient resources and inadequate working conditions when attempting to carry out innovative educational practices, making creative educational initiatives difficult to implement. The findings indicate significant organizational deficiency in providing fundamental instrumental support for frontline counselors.

4.2. Absent Emotional Support: The Neglected Sense of Professional Value

Despite the policy emphasis on the crucial role of counselors, frontline occupational experience presents a stark contrast. Counselors generally report low role identity and a weak sense of professional value, being marginalized within the university’s academic ecosystem. Institutional platforms designed for professional practice are often formalized and superficial. Counselors lack genuine work autonomy and substantial opportunities to demonstrate their professional competencies. Their educational contributions rarely receive in-depth spiritual recognition and substantive affirmation. Such invisible organizational neglect severely undermines counselors’ professional honor and internal work motivation.

4.3. Weak Institutional Support: Dysfunctional Assessment and Promotion Mechanisms

The deficiency of institutional support is primarily reflected in flawed assessment and promotion systems. The dysfunctional performance evaluation mechanism forces counselors to prioritize quantifiable workload indicators rather than practical educational effectiveness. The most prominent contradiction lies in the dual-track promotion dilemma. Competing with academic faculty based on research outputs is widely regarded as an unfair institutional rule,

while administrative promotion channels remain extremely narrow and uncertain. Coupled with uncompetitive salary and welfare packages, the insufficient material and spiritual rewards fundamentally undermine the stability of the counselor workforce.

4.4. Lack of Developmental Support: The Broken Career Ladder

Universities show serious inadequacy in investing in counselors' long-term career development. The training system suffers from severe supply-demand mismatch with pervasive one-size-fits-all training content, which fails to improve counselors' practical capabilities in handling complex student affairs. This further blur career development paths and triggers widespread career anxiety and confusion. For counselors committed to transforming practical work experience into theoretical achievements, the scarcity of academic research support blocks their professional upgrading from practical practitioners to expert practitioners, resulting in a prominent career ceiling.

4.5. Coupling Effect of Four-Dimensional Support and Systematic Predicament

While frontline counselors provided first-hand experiential evidence, statements from administrators further verified the above themes from an institutional perspective, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the research findings. Importantly, the four-dimensional dilemmas do not exist independently but interact and interlock with one another to form a systematic predicament.

Specifically, the lack of instrumental support (excessive administrative tasks and resource scarcity) directly leads to the failure of developmental support (insufficient time for academic research and competency improvement), which further hinders institutional support acquisition (blocked professional title evaluation and promotion). The deficiency of institutional support, in turn, aggravates the loss of emotional support (diminished professional accomplishment and identity). These dimensions mutually reinforce each other, forming a rigid and self-reinforcing systematic dilemma that is difficult to break through.

This study further reveals that such coupling is not a simple superposition of individual problems but a nonlinear, reciprocal causal reinforcement loop that constructs a stable structural predicament:

First, insufficient instrumental support serves as the structural origin. Excessive transactional work and resource deprivation erode counselors' basic time and space for professional practice and self-development.

Second, deficient developmental support constitutes a competency bottleneck. Mismatched training systems and ambiguous career paths leave counselors lacking professional skills and clear developmental guidance to cope with complex educational tasks and occupational competition, restricting breakthrough growth.

Third, weak institutional support creates an incentive lock-in effect. Dysfunctional assessment and blocked dual-track promotion distort work orientation, fail to deliver fair organizational returns for long-term dedication, and fundamentally suppress counselors' developmental motivation.

Fourth, absent emotional support acts as a psychological outcome and reproducer. Long-term frustration and marginalization continuously weaken professional identity and deplete internal work drive. In return, counselors become less proactive in acquiring resources and pursuing career progress, further consolidating the deficiencies in the other three support dimensions.

The four dimensions jointly form a self-reinforcing negative cycle that resists isolated partial reform. Any single-point intervention can be offset by constraints from other dimensions and pulled back to the original institutional equilibrium by systemic inertia. Therefore, fundamental breakthroughs can only be achieved through targeted and coordinated intervention on the key coupling nodes of the four-dimensional support system.

Based on the above analysis, the dilemmas of counselor team construction do not stem from the deficiency of a single supportive factor but result from systematic imbalance in multi-dimensional organizational support. Accordingly, institutional optimization should not be limited to partial patching and incremental adjustment. Instead, it requires holistic reconstruction of the organizational support structure to realize systematic empowerment and sustainable professional development of counselor teams.

5. INNOVATIVE PATHS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELOR TEAMS

5.1. Transformation of the Governance Logic of Organizational Support

Current practices of university counselor team construction are dominated by fragmented policy interventions that adopt one-off remedial adjustments targeting isolated problems (Zheng, S., 2026). However, this study reveals that when structural imbalance exists among instrumental, emotional, institutional, and developmental support, improvements in a single dimension can hardly generate sustainable effects.

From the perspective of Organizational Support Theory, counselors' work engagement and developmental expectations depend on their comprehensive perception of the overall organizational support environment. Therefore, universities must transform the governance paradigm of counselor team construction from factor-compensatory governance to systematic supportive governance, and regard counselors as core educational personnel who require long-term institutional investment and professional cultivation (Zheng, S., 2026).

5.2. Collaborative Reconstruction of Four-Dimensional Organizational Support

At the practical level, universities should systematically reconstruct the counselor support system by promoting the coordinated operation of the four types of organizational support elements.

First, in terms of instrumental support, universities shall clarify counselors' job boundaries through institutional arrangements, optimize the division of student affairs, and reduce the occupation of professional educational time by trivial non-educational administrative work. Meanwhile, financial funds, venues, and information resources should be directly allocated to educational programs to enhance the operability of counselors' professional work.

Second, in terms of emotional support, universities shall strengthen institutional recognition of counselors' educational value. Incorporating counselors' educational performance into the university's core evaluation and honor system can effectively improve their professional identity and organizational belonging.

Third, in terms of institutional support, universities shall establish a categorized evaluation system tailored to the occupational characteristics of counselors. Distinguishing the evaluation logic of student affairs from that of teaching and scientific research helps enhance the fairness and accessibility of assessment and promotion mechanisms.

Finally, in terms of developmental support, universities shall design clear career development paths for counselors. Systematic professional training, mentorship support, and scientific research resource allocation can sustainably facilitate the growth of counselors' professional competencies.

5.3. Ecosystem Model of University Counselor Development

Integrated research findings demonstrate that counselors' career development is jointly shaped by multiple organizational support factors. Instrumental support provides operational foundations, emotional support fosters value identification, institutional support guarantees fair institutional order, and developmental support guides long-term career expectations (Zheng, S. X., & Li, M., 2026). The dynamic coupling of the four support dimensions collectively determines counselors' work engagement and educational effectiveness.

This study proposes an ecosystem model of university counselor development to explain the interactive mechanisms among diverse supportive factors in counselor team construction. Drawing on core theories of organizational ecology and system theory, this model analyzes the counselor team within an organic holistic system composed of instrumental, emotional, institutional, and developmental support.

The four dimensions function similarly to abiotic environments (instrumental and institutional support) and biotic factors (emotional and developmental support) in natural ecosystems. They maintain continuous energy flow (e.g., resource allocation and information feedback), material circulation (e.g., career mobility and knowledge transmission), and balanced regulation (e.g., assessment incentives and cultural identification). The deficiency or weakening of any single dimension will be amplified through systemic linkage mechanisms such as the cask effect and vicious cycles, disrupting the overall ecological balance and ultimately undermining the comprehensive quality of ideological and political education.

To intuitively demonstrate the overall logic of innovative paths for counselor team construction, this study develops an integrated path diagram of the organizational support structure for university counselors based on the above analysis (see Figure 3). Grounded in Organizational Support Theory, the diagram illustrates the collaborative operational mechanism of multi-dimensional supportive factors under the holistic reconstruction framework.

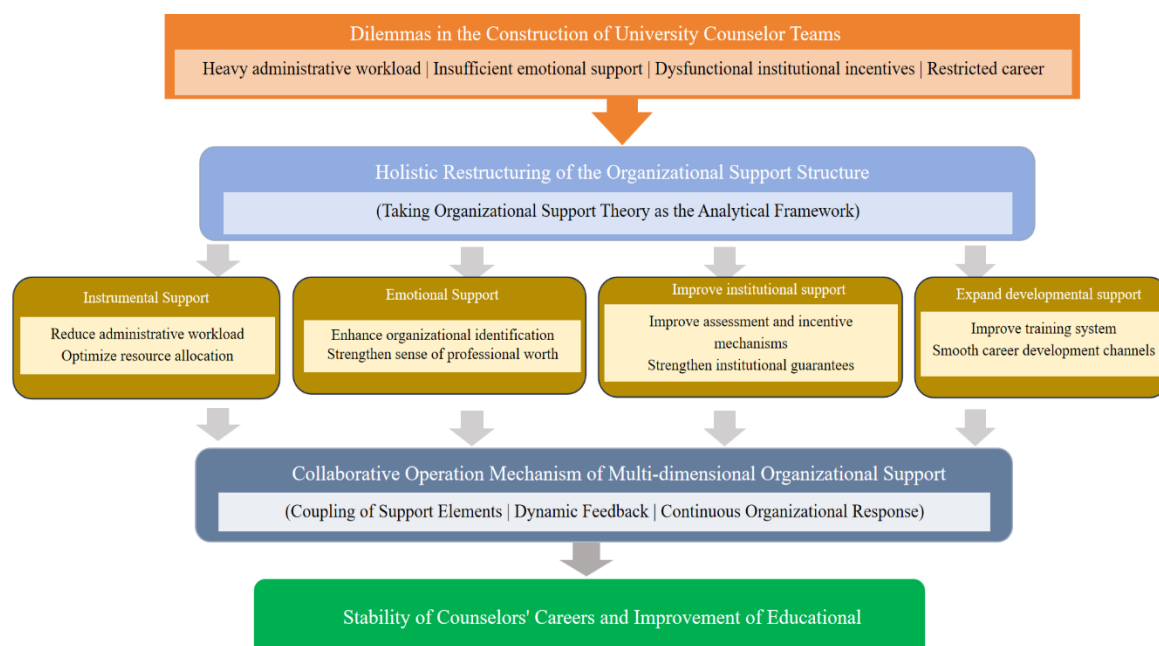


Figure 3: Schematic Diagram of Integrated Pathways for the Organizational Support Structure of University Counselors

6. CONCLUSION

Based on Organizational Support Theory, this study adopts a multiple-case qualitative research design to systematically examine the current construction of university counselor teams. From the four dimensions of instrumental, emotional, institutional, and developmental support, it reveals the structural imbalance within universities' organizational support systems and its impacts on counselors' work engagement and professional development. The findings indicate that the prevailing dilemmas in counselor team construction do not stem from isolated factors, but emerge as systematic outcomes caused by the multidimensional imbalance of organizational support. Increased transactional workload, weakened professional identity, dysfunctional institutional incentives, and constrained career pathways interact and couple with one another, jointly restricting team stability and the improvement of educational effectiveness.

On this basis, this study proposes a counselor development ecosystem model from the perspective of holistic organizational support restructuring, constructing an integrated analytical framework for interpreting the organizational behavioral logic of counselor team governance. This research expands the contextual application boundary of Organizational Support Theory in higher education administration and provides theoretical references for institutional design and policy evaluation in university student affairs management.

This study has several limitations. As a qualitative inquiry focusing on mechanism interpretation, it prioritizes in-depth theoretical elaboration over statistical generalization. Future research can combine quantitative methods or longitudinal designs to systematically validate the causal relationship between organizational support and counselors' sustainable career development.

CONFLICT STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

COOPERATION STATEMENT

All authors contributed equally to this work and approved the final manuscript.

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