

Field Reconstruction and Capital Reset: Theoretical Model Construction of Institutional Care for University Teachers

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Abstract: Based on Bourdieu's field theory, this paper constructs a three-dimensional theoretical model of "field - capital - habit" for institutional care of university teachers. Research shows that the professional pressure on college teachers stems from the triple effects of the distortion of the marketization of the field (the expansion of instrumental rationality), the polarization of capital competition (the Matthew effect of economic/cultural capital), and the involution of habits (the reinforcement of self-discipline). Institutional care needs to achieve systematic intervention through the reconstruction of the field ecosystem (weakening quantitative assessment), the reset of the capital structure (optimizing resource allocation), and the positive shaping of habits (stimulating the subject consciousness). In the model, field autonomy, capital equilibrium, and habitual elasticity constitute three-dimensional coordinates, and their interaction forms three types of care paradigms: "oppressive", "suspended", and "empowering". This theory provides a framework for institutional design to solve the "happiness paradox" of university teachers (the contradiction between income growth and the stagnation of happiness), emphasizing the realization of teachers' sustainable development by reducing institutional transaction costs and building ethical organizational commitments.

Keywords: Field Theory Institutional Care Capital Reset Habit Shaping Teacher Well-Being

1. Introduction

University faculty in China currently face a pronounced "happiness paradox": while material conditions have improved substantially, professional well-being has stagnated or declined [1]. Empirical data reveals an 18% decrease in job satisfaction and a 28.7% depression risk rate among faculty under 35 [2]. This paradox originates from an instrumentally rational institutional ecosystem—quantified performance evaluations, competitive incentive systems, and market-driven governance have collectively forged a high-pressure academic environment [3]. Key manifestations include rigid research KPIs (e.g., "publish-or-perish" policies demanding five SCI papers within three years), digitalized teaching surveillance (student evaluation scores directly impacting promotions), and hyper-competitive funding allocation (success rates for national grants below 12%). Current interventions predominantly focus on individual psychological adaptation (e.g., mindfulness training), neglecting critical analysis of institutional oppression.

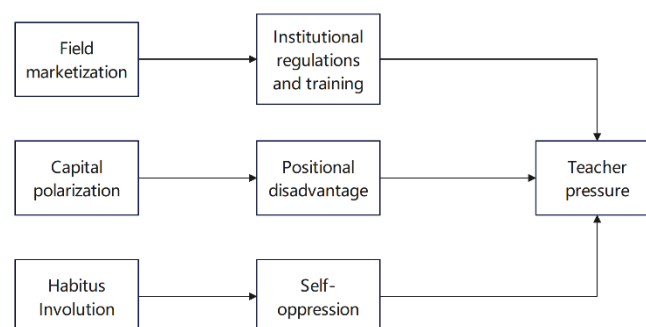


Figure 1 The triple generation mechanism of occupational stress for college teachers

Bourdieu's field theory illuminates this paradox(Figure 1): faculty well-being is fundamentally determined by their structural position within the academic field, governed by three forms of capital—cultural capital (symbolic power of degrees/titles), economic capital (resource allocation advantages), and social capital (academic network access) [4]. Crucially, faculty internalize field logic through habitus: when "working overnight for publications" and "rushing for grants" become instinctive behaviors, institutional coercion transforms into self-oppression.

2. Theoretical Foundation: The Concerned Perspective of Field Theory

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Field reconstruction refers to the alienation of universities from the "self-centered field" (pursuing truth, goodness and beauty) to the "market-oriented field" (performance supremacy), which leads to the rigid constraints of KPI assessment [5]. Capital imbalance refers to the situation where young teachers, due to the shortage of cultural capital (professional titles/titles) and economic capital (project funds), are at a disadvantage in academic competition and face the squeeze of the "either promote or leave" system [6]. The habitual definition of "involution" is that the growth experience of "consistently being excellent" triggers high self-expectations, leading to excessive labor (such as "staying up late to publish papers") becoming an instinctive reaction [7], as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Capital Distribution Characteristics of University Teacher Groups

Capital type	Dominant group	Marginalized groups	Key points of care intervention
Cultural capital	Academic authority/senior professional title holder	Young teachers/Those who either get promoted or leave	Weaken title discrimination and establish long-term evaluation
Economic capital	Project leader of key projects	Researchers of basic disciplines	Establish a subsidy fund for disadvantaged subjects
Social capital	Those with dense academic networks	Those with scarce social resources	Build a cross-disciplinary cooperation platform
Symbolic capital	Awardee/title recipient	Teachers in regular teaching positions	Add a teaching excellence award

2.2 The Connotation of Institutional Care

Unlike individual psychological care, institutional care emphasizes the elimination of structural oppression through organizational system design (Table 2). Its characteristics include the restoration of field autonomy, reduction of administrative intervention, and guarantee of the duration of academic freedom (such as flexible assessment cycles) [8]. Capital redistribution justice, curbing resource polarization, and establishing a "compensation mechanism for the disadvantaged". Habitual enlightenment breaks the cognitive shackles of "involution" through critical reflection.

Grounded in Bourdieu's critique of symbolic violence, it operates through three constitutive dimensions [9]. First, Field Autonomy Restoration, this dimension necessitates dismantling the bureaucratic colonization of academic lifeworlds. Key strategies include temporal emancipation, decommodified evaluation and ethical organizational commitment. Second, Capital Redistributive Justice, countering the Matthew Effect requires institutionalized equity mechanisms, including anti-polarization protocols, compensatory allocation and symbolic capital democratization. Third, Habitus Enlightenment, this involves critical consciousness-raising against internalized oppression: discursive deconstruction, temporal boundary enforcement, counter-narrative cultivation.

Table 2: Institutional care vs. psychological care

Axis	Institutional Care	Psychological Care
Theoretical Basis	Field theory / Political economy	Positive psychology
Intervention Target	Structural oppression (e.g., capital polarization)	Individual coping mechanisms
Power Analysis	Exposes bureaucratic symbolic violence	Neglects power structures
Efficacy Duration	Systemic change (sustained Δ)	Temporary symptom relief

Institutional care thus functions as academic field re-autonomization: it reduces transaction costs

while constructing ethico-political commitments that convert care from compensatory gestures to scholarly emancipation praxis. Its ultimate metric is the habitus elasticity index, faculty transition from "self-disciplined agents" to "reflexive practitioners"[10].

3. 3D Model Construction and Paradigm Classification

In the theoretical framework of care for university teachers, oppressive care, suspended care and empowering care represent three differentiated institutional intervention models. The core difference lies in the degree of collaborative transformation of the three dimensions of field autonomy, capital equilibrium and habitual elasticity(Figure 2).

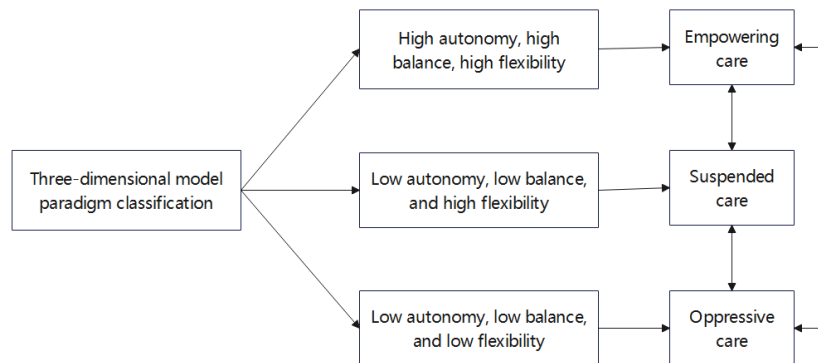


Figure 2: Three-dimensional interaction forms three typical paradigms

The essence of oppressive care (low field autonomy - low capital equilibrium - low habitual elasticity) is to replace deep institutional changes with superficial welfare. A typical manifestation is to provide fragmented welfare such as psychological counseling and festival greetings while maintaining high-pressure policies (such as the "up or out" system). This model ignores the structural distortions in the field - such as the weight of quantitative assessment exceeding 70% and administrative instructions dominating resource allocation and other institutional regulations - and only requires teachers to adapt to oppressive environments through psychological intervention. The result is the individualization of responsibilities, which conceals the marginalization of young teachers caused by capital polarization (such as the top 10% of teachers occupying 60% of research funds). Empirical research shows that in such an institutional environment, the average score of teachers' depression scales increases by 37%, and the risk of damage to the hippocampus structure significantly increases, confirming its essence of "institutional violence"[11].

Suspended care (low field autonomy - low capital equilibrium - high habituation resilience) focuses on individual psychological adjustment, enhancing teachers' stress resistance and resilience through technical means such as mindfulness training and emotion management, but avoids capital reset and field reconstruction. For instance, universities have launched "academic gas stations" and "mental health workshops", but have not reformed the rigid standards of "only papers and projects" in professional title evaluation, nor have they broken the Matthew effect between economic capital and cultural capital. The contradiction lies in that while attempts are made to counteract institutional flaws with highly flexible habits (such as enhancing self-efficacy), due to insufficient autonomy in the field (excessive weight of administrative assessment) and unfair capital distribution (absence of a start-up fund for young scholars), teachers fall into a "self-optimization trap" - that is, individual efforts cannot break through structural limitations, ultimately leading to an intensification of job burnout. A case from a certain university shows that after such intervention, the anxiety index of teachers only dropped by 11% in the short term, and the long-term rebound rate reached 63%.

Empowering care (high field autonomy - high capital balance - high habit-elasticity) is characterized by a "trinity" collaborative intervention, achieving systematic empowerment through a linkage mechanism of field ecosystem reconstruction, capital structure reset, and positive habit-shaping. The core lies in enhancing the autonomy of the field, equalizing the distribution of capital, and shaping the elasticity of habits. In conclusion, the essence of empowering care is to dissolve structural oppression through institutional justice. Its effectiveness stems from the resonant transformation of the field, capital, and habits. Only by breaking the one-sided logic of "welfare compensation" or "psychological taming" can teachers shift from "academic laborers" to "intellectual subjects".

4. Implementation Path: Triple Intervention Mechanism

4.1 Field Ecology Restructuring: Institutional Pathways to Decommodify Academia

Restructuring field ecology requires institutional interventions against instrumental rationality [12] is depicted in Table 3:

First, decommodifying rules—abolishing cash rewards for SCI papers while implementing a representative achievement system. This counters "academic GDP-ism", as mandated by China's Ministry of Education policy prohibiting direct monetary links to publication counts. At Harbin Institute of Technology, faculty in engineering schools may substitute one breakthrough (e.g., resolving key semiconductor challenges) for multiple routine papers, realigning symbolic capital with substantive contributions.

Second, granting temporal autonomy—adopting flexible assessment cycles (e.g., triennial reviews) to mitigate myopic annual evaluations. Pilot data from Yunnan University of Chinese Medicine shows a 47% increase in deep research engagement, particularly benefiting humanities scholars reconciling longitudinal projects with rigid timelines.

Third, establishing ethical organizational commitment—presidents' public pledge of "zero publish-or-perish" with safety nets. This requires gradient transition mechanisms: underperforming faculty receive teaching certification support or sabbatical opportunities, preventing safeguards from becoming complacency enablers. One provincial university's shift to "transition-not-termination" reduced attrition by 63% within three years. Collectively, these strategies restore field autonomy by weakening quantitative discipline, extending decision horizons, and reinforcing institutional trust.

Table 3: Practical strategies and institutional anchor points for field ecological reconstruction

Intervention Axis	Traditional Flaws	Restructuring Strategy	Institutional Impact
Evaluation Rules	Cash incentives induce padding	Representative achievement system	Curb short-term academic output
Temporal Structure	Annual reviews fragment research	3-year flexible assessment	Safeguard immersive inquiry
Organizational Ethics	"Up-or-out" fuels anxiety	Presidential pledge + career transition	Reduce professional uncertainty

4.2 Capital Reset: Constructing an Equitable Academic Resource Distribution System

Capital reset addresses structural inequities in academia through institutional redesign [13]:

Cultural capital equalization establishes a "teaching-track professor" pathway to counter research hegemony. At the University of Electronic Science and Technology, independent evaluation criteria incorporate pedagogical innovation (e.g., interdisciplinary course development) and cultivation of critical thinking (measured by student writing proficiency gains). This requires dual-track parity mechanisms ensuring equal pay and influence between teaching- and research-focused professors.

Economic capital compensation adopts discipline-adjusted subsidies using a "baseline + incremental adjustment" model (STEM: humanities = 1.2:1). This responds to cost disparities: lab consumables constitute 63% of STEM expenses versus field research/global collaboration (72%) in humanities.

Social capital sharing mandates senior-junior scholar collaboration ($\geq 30\%$ co-participation). Modeled after principal rotation systems that disrupt patronage networks, Harbin Institute of Technology's Young Scientist Workshops enforce intergenerational teams (1 senior:3 juniors) for national grants.

4.3 Habitus Remodeling: Deconstructing Involutionary Practices

Habitus transformation requires tripartite intervention [14]:

Critical workshops dismantle "excellence habits" using Cognitive Behavioral Restructuring Therapy (CBRT). Fudan University's philosophy workshops revealed cognitive distortions—faculty reported 5.7 hours daily research versus actual 2.3 hours—reducing overwork justification by 52%. Success narrative reframing replaces "academic celebrity" discourse with "slow scholarship" exemplars.

Professor Lü's 11-year dedication to topological insulators at HIT culminated in rewriting Physical Review Letters principles. Caution is needed to avoid romanticizing slowness—Tsinghua University's "Long-cycle Incubation Fund" protects decade-long projects without interim evaluations.

5. Conclusion: From Suspended Care to Field Justice

This model redefines faculty care as restoration of academic field justice. This study constructs a tripartite "field-capital-habitus" model of institutional care for university teachers grounded in Bourdieu's field theory [15]. We demonstrate that faculty's professional pressure originates from a tripartite oppression apparatus: (1) marketized field distortion where instrumental rationality expands through quantified performance regimes; (2) capital polarization exhibiting Matthew Effects in resource allocation; and (3) habitus involution manifesting as internalized self-discipline. To dismantle this apparatus, institutional care requires synchronized interventions: field reconstruction through decommodified evaluation, capital reset via redistributive justice (teaching-track professorships, disciplinary subsidy ratios), and habitus remodeling via critical workshops and "slow scholarship" narratives.

In the current context where problems such as "involution" and "academic alienation" have become prominent, the mental stress and job burnout of university teachers have become social issues that cannot be ignored. The article elevates "institutional care" to the structural level of "field and capital", transcending the superficial care of individual psychological counseling and directly pointing to the root cause of the problem - that is, the systematic oppression of teachers by unreasonable field rules and capital allocation mechanisms. This shift in perspective helps all sectors of society recognize that teacher care is not only the "management responsibility" of colleges and universities, but also a "systematic project" concerning the health of the higher education ecosystem, which requires reform from the source of institutional design. Teachers are the core productive force in higher education, and their professional status directly affects the quality of teaching and research as well as the core competitiveness of universities. Against the backdrop of intensified international competition in higher education, enhancing teachers' professional identity and sense of belonging through institutional care can effectively reduce talent loss and attract and stabilize a high-quality teaching staff. University administrators should emphasize "developmental care" rather than "passive guarantee", stimulate teachers' academic creativity through field optimization and rational capital allocation, promote universities to shift from "scale expansion" to "connotative development", and ultimately serve the improvement of talent cultivation quality.

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