

## Reflections on the Reform of Special Library Management Systems: The Selection of Management Philosophy

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### Abstract

The key to successful reform of professional library management systems lies in understanding the direction of management system reform from the perspective of global trends in management system restructuring, clearly recognizing the global trend of “enterprise-oriented operation of public institutions,” thereby endowing professional library reform with a firm and clear direction as well as clear and comprehensive guiding ideology and theoretical foundation.

### Full Text

#### **Title: Reflections on the Management System Reform of Special Libraries: A Choice of Management Philosophy**

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### Abstract

[**Chinese Abstract**] The key to successful reform of special library management systems lies in grasping the direction of reform from the perspective of global trends in management system transformation, recognizing the worldwide trend of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations,” thereby endowing special library reform with firm and clear direction as well as comprehensive guiding principles and theoretical foundations.

[**English Abstract**] The limited visible outcomes of special library management system reform in China stem primarily from unclear reform objectives, value orientations, and practical directions, coupled with a lack of mature theoretical guidance. The narrow perspective inherent in public service organization thinking, deficient management theories, imperfect methodologies, and confused

practical directions constitute the key factors limiting the effectiveness of special library management system reform in China.

The authors argue that the key to successful reform of China's special library management systems lies in understanding the direction of reform from the vantage point of global trends in public service organization management transformation, clearly recognizing the worldwide trend of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations,” and embracing it as the “spiritual homeland” for special library management reform. This approach provides special library reform with firm and explicit direction, clear and integrated guiding principles, and robust theoretical foundations.

**Keywords:** special library; management system reform; management philosophy; “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations”

## 1. Situation and Tasks

Among the many non-technical factors influencing special library development, institutional and management elements exert decisive impacts on organizational transformation and performance. A significant phenomenon in the current special library landscape is that technological breakthroughs have outpaced management innovations. While the technological environment represented by digital special libraries has matured, institutional and managerial factors have become a “bottleneck” constraining development—the fundamental cause underlying the suboptimal state of existing information resource development and services in special libraries.

Overall, special library resources and services possess the open attributes of public service institutions, requiring organizational approaches compatible with institutions and management. In contemporary special library development, changes in the technological environment often precede transformations in the institutional management environment, compelling special libraries to alter their institutional and management contexts. The lag in management system reform has become a “bottleneck” restricting special library development and hindering improvements in effectiveness and service quality. Confronted with new realities of the information age and knowledge economy, alongside growing public demand for information and knowledge services and strong calls for improved special library management and service quality, special libraries entering a new stage of digital development face urgent needs and compelling demands to accelerate management system transformation, adapt to social and technological changes, and liberate developmental factors and productive forces.

### 2.1 The Dilemma of Special Library Management System Reform

Many domestic special libraries have attempted management system reforms, yet with limited success, failing to truly escape their predicament. The primary

reasons lie in the lack of mature theoretical guidance, unclear reform objectives and value orientations, and uncertain practical directions. The narrow vision and limited management thinking characteristic of public service organizations, coupled with deficient management theories and methods, have become important factors restricting the effectiveness of special library management system reform.

Although some enterprise management concepts, methods, and tools have been borrowed in special library reforms, these efforts have failed to grasp the direction of reform from the height of global public service organization management transformation trends and to recognize the worldwide trend of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations.” Instead, they have either: (1) narrowly and one-sidedly understood “enterprise management”; (2) regarded it as “industrialization” or merely “application of specific methods”; or (3) neglected its spiritual essence and values. Consequently, the institutional DNA (i.e., genetic code) remained unchanged, with reform measures amounting to mere patchwork on the original system rather than achieving dual breakthroughs in management theory and practical direction.

## 2.2 Deep-seated Causes of the Reform Dilemma

Management scholars have pointed out the managerial maladies of public service institutions: “They tend to cultivate conformists rather than innovators; encourage managers to avoid risks rather than take them, and to waste resources rather than utilize them effectively...They foster inertia, loss of initiative, mediocrity, and inefficiency—ailments considered endemic to the public sector” [4]. Management theorists contend that transforming public service institutions is far more difficult than reforming even the most “bureaucratic” enterprises. Why is change in public service institutions more obstructed? Three main reasons explain this:

First, public service institutions rely on “budget” allocations rather than compensation based on results. Their income depends on their own efforts and external funding. The more aggressively a public service institution seeks budget, the larger its allocation becomes. Consequently, the “success” standard for public service institutions becomes securing more budgetary appropriations and pursuing expansion, rather than achieving results and pursuing optimal development paths.

Second, although both enterprises and public institutions aim for value maximization, enterprises pursue profit maximization based on market orientation, while public institutions pursue public interest maximization based on fairness and justice. Public service institutions steadfastly occupy their moral high ground, seemingly existing solely to “do good,” which often leads them to view their work as a moral obligation rather than an economic task subject to cost/profit calculations. The ambiguity of performance evaluation and the conflict between efficiency standards and moral standards leave public service

institutions “caught between a rock and a hard place.” Over time, inertia prevails, and the moral high ground or public welfare nature becomes an excuse for inefficiency or low effectiveness.

Third, the moral sense and ambiguous performance evaluation of public service institutions make them never admit failure. Regardless of whether goals are achieved, their *modus operandi* remains unchanged. Whether successful or not, they resist demands for change and innovation as an affront to their fundamental commitments, *raison d’ être*, beliefs, and values.

Special libraries represent a typical case of this “public service management disease,” even more so than other public service institutions. Criticisms of the conservative, inefficient management traditions in special libraries abound. Rather than complaining about external misunderstandings, we should heed internal voices.

Herbert S. White, former Dean of Indiana University’s School of Library and Information Science, perceptively noted [5]: “From a management perspective, special libraries are highly mature organizations that have developed their own management style. Defensive management characterized by stability, maintaining the status quo, and risk avoidance has become the consistent management style and feature of special libraries. In the special library world, emphasis on consultation and cooperation, non-aggressive and non-confrontational environments, is greater than in any other institution. Individuals with transformative spirit struggle to survive in special libraries, let alone thrive.

“From a values perspective, as non-profit institutions, special libraries lack the motivation and stimulus of enterprises to obtain greater profits or market share, nor do they have such performance metrics. Consequently, staff motivation to achieve high-level performance is lacking.

“From the perspective of personnel composition, special library managers lack experience in highly competitive positions. Ambitious students pursuing wealth and prestige generally do not choose library science. Innovation, competition, transformation, and performance pursuit are rarely mentioned in special libraries.

“The long-term static environment and the special nature of library work make special libraries, more than any other public service institution, attract individuals lacking entrepreneurial qualities who desire a comfortable life. The conservative management thinking in special libraries leaves little possibility for innovators to survive and operate, as they advocate change while others resist it.

“The absence of creativity and innovative spirit is the root cause of declining competitiveness, emphasis on maintaining the status quo, and ultimately inertia and stagnation in special libraries.”

Addressing the lack of competitiveness and management inefficiency in special libraries, renowned management guru Peter Drucker prescribed the solution:

“Special library managers can only escape their predicament and gain recognition through innovation and market orientation; merely maintaining the status quo wins little acknowledgment” [6].

Due to management traditions and DNA issues, special library reform faces formidable difficulties, with previous reform efforts showing limited results. Experience demonstrates that seeking reform drivers and ideas internally is challenging for special libraries, as they require not patchwork fixes but fundamental changes to institutional DNA and management reinvention. Therefore, seeking transformative spiritual power, driving forces, and ideas from outside the system to reshape institutional DNA becomes the substantive issue for successful special library management system reform.

Facing the 21st century, the special library community confronts the critical task of making profound choices regarding management philosophy and practical direction, urgently needing to find innovative spiritual drivers and guidance from advanced management theories while clarifying primary directions for management practice.

### **3. “Entrepreneurial Management of Public Service Organizations” : An Irreversible Trend**

#### **3.1 Conceptual Definition**

“Entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” represents a new management model proposed in response to traditional public institution management systems. Its core idea involves using “entrepreneurial spirit” to transform and reshape the behavior of public institutions. This approach seeks to introduce enterprise management models into public institution management, enabling public institutions to draw upon advanced enterprise management concepts, mature theories, and rigorous, effective management systems. It leverages market mechanisms and user orientation, encourages innovation, transformation, and risk-taking, utilizes resources effectively, and achieves high performance [7].

“Entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” does not require public institutions to operate exactly like enterprises pursuing profit as their goal. Rather, it holds that enterprise management thinking and methods are applicable to public institutions, introducing innovative and competitive stimulus forces, adhering to user orientation, actively responding to society, and making public institution management more dynamic. This transformation represents not merely general reform of public institutions or simple borrowing of enterprise management methods, but a deep-level reform that changes the entire system’s DNA. Public institution management reinvention refers to “fundamental transformation of public systems and organizations to substantially improve organizational effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability, and innovation capacity, accomplished by transforming organizational goals, incentives, accountability mech-

anisms, power structures, and organizational culture” [8]. Here, institutional goals, incentive mechanisms, accountability mechanisms, power structures, and organizational culture constitute the most basic elements of public management system DNA. These elements operate behind the complex public institution system as fundamental levers shaping how public organizational systems function. These lever effects have long existed and influence the thinking and behavioral patterns of public institution systems. Only by changing these levers (i.e., modifying the genetic code) can systemic transformation be triggered. Therefore, seeking the “basic levers” that can cause organizational change—the key to public institution management reinvention—lies in implementing the strategy of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations.”

### 3.2 Emergence and Application Outcomes

Enterprises and public institutions are vastly different domains. Why can enterprise models enter public management and become a trend? Fundamentally, this is because commonalities exist in management across these different fields. Enterprise management requires innovation and efficiency. Since public institution management is essentially also a form of management, it must similarly target efficiency and innovation as driving forces. Moreover, both enterprise and public institution management involve decision-making, including goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation procedures, as well as internal resource integration and effective utilization issues such as human resources, information resources, financial resources, and organizational resource management. General management laws operate not only in enterprise activities but also within the scope of public institutions. It is precisely because management has universal laws that introducing enterprise models into public institution management becomes possible.

Because public institution management has long exhibited insufficient innovation, low efficiency, and poor management tools compared to enterprise management, while society’s urgent demand for high-efficiency management and public calls for improved service quality have created significant pressure on public institutions, the necessity of introducing enterprise management models into public management has emerged, giving rise to the concept of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations.”

Examining domestic and international public institution reform practices, the introduction of enterprise management has achieved notable results, with numerous followers globally forming a trend of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations.” This trend gradually extended to administrative departments, developing into “entrepreneurial government theory” by the 1990s, which significantly impacted Western government management, particularly during President Clinton’s administration in the United States. President Clinton adopted it as the theoretical basis for government reform, actively implementing it and achieving substantial results.

### 3.3 Discussions in the Special Library Community

The trend of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” has also touched the sensitive nerves of special libraries, attracting widespread attention and vigorous discussion in both academic and professional circles. The *Journal of Library Administration* dedicated its combined October 1989 issue (Volume 10, Issues 2-3) to “Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship in Libraries,” compiling 20 articles by senior American library and information professionals. The issue explored library entrepreneurship and creativity comprehensively, covering virtually all aspects of special libraries, including: sources of creativity, climate for creativity, creativity and leadership; creativity in academic libraries; innovation and entrepreneurship in reader services; creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship in technical services; strategies for developing library supporters; creativity in library and information education and curriculum implications; exploring new frontiers in library network services; librarians as innovators; management of innovative information technology; innovation in state libraries; entrepreneurship in fee-based information services; library cooperation and entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship and the library profession; entrepreneurship in library strategic planning; libraries, entrepreneurship, and risk; and the director’s role in promoting library entrepreneurship.

This heated discussion also attracted attention in China’s special library community, producing some articles on library enterprise management. However, most perspectives remained narrow, focusing on specific enterprise management methods and tools, with some even misunderstanding “enterprise management” as “industrialization.” Few studies offered comprehensive discourse on “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” or systematically and profoundly revealed its connotations and application value from the perspective of spirit, values, management theory, and methodology, especially in combination with special library reform realities.

Overall, researchers, managers, and visionaries concerned with special library development believe that creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship represent fundamental responses to environmental changes. How to accept and apply the concept of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations,” uphold the banner of entrepreneurial spirit, cultivate and enhance librarians’ creativity and innovative spirit, and accelerate special library reform will determine the position of special libraries in the information society [9].

### 3.4 Value as a “Spiritual Home” for Reform

Adopting “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” as the “spiritual home” for special library management system reform can achieve four major objectives for reform and sustainable development:

First, it enables reformers to grasp the direction of special library management system reform from the height of global public service organization management transformation trends, standing on the theoretical high ground of management

science, tracing theoretical origins, and leading reform trends.

Second, it deepens, solidifies, and elevates the reform foundation and spiritual realm of special library management systems, clarifying guiding principles and theoretical foundations; establishing goals and value orientations; specifying practical directions; fostering an innovative and pragmatic management style; and ending costly, blind reform practices that often become self-referential.

Third, “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” not only provides spiritual motivation and an effective institutional foundation for special libraries but also offers systematic, specific methods, tools, and measures for management practice with strong operability.

Fourth, with its powerful spiritual appeal of “entrepreneurial spirit,” the “survival of the fittest” gene of enterprise culture, and mature, classic management systems, combined with the traditional humanistic culture of special libraries, it will reshape institutional DNA, reinvent special library management, and endow it with strong competitiveness.

## 4. Core Values of “Entrepreneurial Management of Public Service Organizations”

### 4.1 Entrepreneurial Spirit

“Entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” is a concept and theory aimed at using entrepreneurial spirit to reshape public institution management. Therefore, its core concept is foremost “entrepreneurial spirit.”

In 1800, French economist Jean Baptiste Say (1767-1832) coined the term “entrepreneur,” first separating “entrepreneur” from ownership. He defined entrepreneurs as those who fully exploit unrecognized profit opportunities to accomplish great undertakings. “Entrepreneurs shift economic resources from areas of lower productivity and output to areas of higher productivity, using new forms to maximize productivity and effectiveness.”

British economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) was the first to propose and study the entrepreneur as an independent factor of production. In his famous *Principles of Economics* (1890), he systematically discussed the entrepreneur’s role. Marshall believed that because buyers and sellers cannot accurately predict market supply and demand, market development becomes unbalanced, and entrepreneurs are the special force that eliminates this imbalance. Entrepreneurs constitute a distinct class different from ordinary occupational strata, characterized by their daring to take risks and bear uncertainties.

Austrian-American economist Joseph A. Schumpeter (1883-1950) developed Marshall’s theory, stating that “the entrepreneur is the leader of economic development” who “achieves new combinations of production factors.” “Entrepreneurial spirit lies in seizing opportunities regardless of available resources to achieve higher productivity.” Schumpeter viewed entrepreneurs as the main

agents of innovation, whose role is to creatively destroy market equilibrium. He believed that dynamic disequilibrium is the “normal state” of a healthy economy, and entrepreneurs are the organizers and initiators of this innovation process. Only by creatively breaking market equilibrium can opportunities for entrepreneurs to obtain excess profits emerge [10].

Renowned American management guru Peter Drucker (1909-2006) more accurately and comprehensively defined the entrepreneur [11]: The entrepreneur — Creatively destroys old market equilibrium, achieves new combinations of production factors, and substantially increases resource output; - Creates something new and different that changes values; - Opens new markets and customer groups; - Views change as normal, always seeks change, responds to it, and treats it as an opportunity.

In his view, the essence of the entrepreneur is purposeful, organized, systematic innovation. Innovation means changing resource output; it means providing new value to customers by changing products and services. Their innovation starts with seizing opportunities—requiring courage to face change and make timely decisions.

Entrepreneurs are “practical dreamers” who transform “ideas into reality.” They possess vision, value action, demonstrate dedication, establish self-defined goals and high standards, overcome mistakes and setbacks, bear risks, and remain faithful to long-term objectives. Entrepreneurs take innovation, transformation, and opportunity capture as their mission. Their tremendous personal charisma, unparalleled courage, and powerful organizational implementation capabilities create incredible performance. Such individuals and their spiritual temperament constitute the spiritual essence and core pillar of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations.”

#### 4.2 User Orientation Mechanism

The basic value orientation of “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” is “user centrism.” It holds that users or customers must be the central focus, and no institution can afford the consequences of neglecting user needs. “User centrism” requires not only that public services closely align with public interests and needs but also specifically demands three aspects: (1) Granting users sovereignty. The public should determine the content and quality requirements of public services and be involved in public service design to ensure services serve public interests. In other words, when providing public services, public needs must come first. (2) Improving user demand expression mechanisms. Understanding user opinions and requirements through user surveys, user tracking, user advisory committees, complaint tracking systems, electronic communications and hotlines, and suggestion boxes enhances public service transparency and motivates public departments to improve service quality. (3) Establishing service commitment systems and service quality standards, determining quantifiable service time and quality requirements, and

implementing them as evaluation and supervision mechanisms.

### 4.3 Performance Evaluation Mechanism

This approach emphasizes that public institutions should value public service quality as enterprises value product quality, attaching importance to cost-benefit analysis. Enterprise performance mechanisms are horizontal—enterprise benefits ultimately manifest through market exchange, with market share and user satisfaction being direct and realistic indicators of enterprise performance. Public service quality evaluation must take users as the main body, with public satisfaction serving as the primary standard for performance assessment. Quantitative evaluation mechanisms with public participation replace traditional trust-based evaluation mechanisms, completely superseding conventional self-evaluation and moral evaluation by public institutions.

### 4.4 Compensation and Personnel Mechanisms

Drawing on enterprise compensation systems, this approach establishes personalized performance-based salary systems grounded in meritocracy, changing the traditional public service evaluation mechanism where performance doesn't affect compensation. Public institutions and their staff undergo quantitative assessment, with work performance as the fundamental evaluation standard, and different compensation awarded for different performance levels. The focus shifts from management processes and inputs to results and outputs, evaluating and rewarding final work outcomes—“achievements” rather than attitudes and “hard work.” Lifetime employment is abolished in favor of enterprise-style employment contracts. All positions are opened to society to attract elite talent, with “competitive victory” and “merit-based selection” becoming the highest principles, forming a healthy personnel mobility mechanism.

### 4.5 Innovation and Risk Management Mechanisms

Innovation and risk are inherent phenomena in enterprise development, coexisting with enterprise growth. From a management perspective, “innovation is not ‘individual creativity’ but ‘collective innovation.’” The most important aspect of innovation is its effective management; otherwise, innovation will wither away. Many innovative enterprises and their founders fail due to management problems. The sustainable development of innovation depends on institutionalized management.

International management authority Peter Drucker categorized innovation into three types [12]: (1) Product innovation—innovation in products or services; (2) Managerial innovation—innovation in the skills and activities required to design, manufacture, and deliver products and services; (3) Social innovation—innovation in markets, consumer behavior, and values.

Product or service innovation depends entirely on managerial innovation—the innovation of skills and activities needed to manufacture and deliver products and

services. Only managerial innovation constitutes institutionalized arrangements and guarantees.

Another important concept in enterprise innovation management is that “innovation is not a flash of inspiration” nor “clever ideas.” Innovation “focuses on opportunities, beginning with conscious searching for opportunities.” “If you know where and how to look for opportunities, you can manage innovation systematically.”

Effective innovation management must be based on opportunity analysis.

#### **4.6 Competition Mechanism**

Introducing competition concepts and mechanisms into public services replaces original monopolies. “Entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” holds that visionary, entrepreneurial leaders within public institutions should view competition not as a last resort but as a means to revitalize public institutions. “The most obvious benefits of competition are improved efficiency and effective resource utilization; competition forces monopolistic organizations to respond to customer needs; competition rewards innovation while monopoly stifles it; competition enhances the self-esteem and morale of public institution employees.”

Injecting competition mechanisms into public services requires abandoning traditional risk-averse thinking and the mentality of monopolizing public services. Encouraging competition and avoiding mediocrity stimulates institutions and staff to improve management methods and service approaches, enhancing service levels and quality. Introducing competition will sweep away the stagnant atmosphere and uniform evaluation standards of public institutions, endowing them with vitality, sharpness, enterprising spirit, passion, and self-esteem.

#### **4.7 Emphasis on Human Resource Development**

An American research report on “Gaining Competitive Advantage Through Leadership” demonstrated that U.S. enterprises with the highest average annual profits between 1972-1992 were those that developed employee potential through excellent people leadership. The same applies to public institutions—the creativity and quality of public services depend on staff quality and can only be realized through high-quality, responsible employees. Leaders at all levels must be developers and promoters of development, playing the role of reform process managers, making their capabilities decisive for successful reform objectives. Guiding, cultivating, and educating people is leaders’ most important task.

#### **4.8 Management Methods and Tools**

After a century of development, enterprise management thinking, theories, and methods have formed a complete, mature, systematic, and classic system. Since

the 1970s, Western countries have begun introducing advanced enterprise management methods and technologies into administrative and public institution management. Management by objectives, total quality management, performance evaluation, cost accounting, strategic planning, business process reengineering, and public relations have been widely applied in public management, forming standards such as ISO9004-2 specifically for service industries, Britain's BS5750, and the EU's EN29000 quality certification or assurance systems. By the 1990s, approximately 70% of American municipal governments had adopted management by objectives for performance target control, and about 60% had implemented total quality management. Strategic planning was also adapted for use by some departments. Mature, rigorous, complete, and classic enterprise management methods provide public institutions with highly operational "ready-to-use" management tools.

## 5. Limitations and Transcendence of "Entrepreneurial Management of Public Service Organizations"

Despite similarities, public institution management and enterprise management have essential differences that inevitably create problems when applying enterprise models to public institutions.

First, public services serve public interest, whereas enterprise management's primary characteristic is self-interest. Enterprise management aims to maximize corporate profits. Although classical economic theory suggests this self-interested behavior will align with public interest under market guidance, its self-interested purpose is undeniable. Public institution management, however, aims to promote public interest. Therefore, while enterprise models based on self-interest can motivate personnel and improve operational efficiency, this self-interest-based motivation and efficiency may not guarantee realization of all public interest objectives in public institution management.

Second, enterprise management emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness, while public institution management must also prioritize social values such as equality, fairness, and democracy. Enterprise models undoubtedly play important roles in improving efficiency, effectiveness, and competitiveness but struggle to achieve values like equality, justice, and democracy. This may cause management misalignment, leading to one-sided pursuit of self-interest while neglecting public interest.

Scholars believe the greatest negative impact of "entrepreneurial management of public service organizations" is the special library community's identification with commercial culture and dilution of public service spirit. This has made fee-based services increasingly common, with even core service content facing pressure to charge fees. Scholars worry that while commercial culture penetration may bring certain advantages (such as improved professional image, increased direct revenue, and enhanced vitality), it may cause special libraries to lose traditional developmental advantages (such as political advantages and

broad social foundation)— “gaining in one area while losing in another” [13].

Despite these concerns, “the flaws cannot obscure the jade.” “Entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” has become the direction of public institution reform, forming a global trend. Particularly under China’ s socialist market economy conditions, the entrepreneurial spirit, user-centered values, innovation and competition concepts, and management thinking, theories, and methods advocated by “entrepreneurial management of public service organizations” possess “universal value” as powerful tools guiding special library management system reform. Visionaries have proposed strategies to transcend limitations [14]:

- Define the scope and degree of enterprise management application;
- Establish systems to constrain enterprise models;
- Diversify management assessment indicators;
- Strengthen personnel ethics awareness.

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