

A Survey and Analysis of Factors Influencing Library Organizational Climate from the Librarian's Perspective: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] To understand the library community's cognition of library organizational climate, explore the influencing factors of library organizational climate, and provide a basis and reference for constructing an indigenous library organizational climate assessment system in China. [Method/Process] Through questionnaire surveys based on librarians' cognition and combined with literature research to analyze the influencing factors of organizational climate, a system of factors influencing library organizational climate was formed. [Results/Conclusion] The factors influencing library organizational climate include the internal organizational environment, external social environment, the nature of the library profession, and librarians' own values and behavioral patterns. Among them, characteristic factors emphasized in Chinese traditional culture, such as interpersonal harmony, collectivism, and hierarchical concepts, exert certain positive or negative influences on librarians' cognition and behavior. Additionally, the importance of library organizational climate construction has not yet received widespread attention, and cognition of organizational climate needs to be strengthened.

Full Text

Preamble

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Investigation and Analysis of Factors Influencing Library Organizational Climate from the Perspective of Librarians

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study aims to understand the library community's perception of organizational climate, identify factors influencing library organizational climate, and provide a basis and reference for constructing a localized assessment system for library organizational climate in China. **[Method/Process]** Based on a questionnaire survey of librarians' perceptions and combined with literature research, this article analyzes the factors influencing organizational climate and develops a systematic framework of influencing factors for library organizational climate. **[Result/Conclusion]** The findings indicate that factors influencing library organizational climate include the internal organizational environment, external social environment, the nature of the library profession, and librarians' own values and behavioral patterns. Notably, traditional Chinese cultural characteristics—such as emphasis on interpersonal harmony, collectivism, and hierarchical concepts—exert both positive and negative influences on librarians' cognition and behavior. Moreover, the importance of library organizational climate construction has not yet received widespread attention, and awareness of organizational climate needs to be strengthened.

Keywords: Academic library; Organizational climate; Influencing factors; Traditional culture

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Research on organizational climate can be traced back to the 1930s, when psychology pioneer Kurt Lewin studied the relationship between human behavior and environment [1]. After nearly a century of development, numerous research findings have emerged on the concept, structure, and influencing factors of organizational climate. In studies related to influencing factors, scholars have primarily focused on variable relationships between specific organizational phenomena (such as organizational justice, leadership styles, organizational structure, and performance) and specific member behaviors (such as voice behavior, innovative behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, and silence behavior), as well as theoretical discussions and empirical research on factors like organizational size, structure, and type [2-5]. In the library field, the most representative work comes from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Over the past two decades, ARL has not only produced substantial theoretical exploration but also introduced organizational climate assessment tools such as ClimateQUALTM, accumulating rich experience in library organizational climate construction and management [6]. China has also conducted theoretical discussions and empirical studies on relationships between specific librarian behaviors and library phenomena [7-8], among which Professor Xu Jianhua's team from Nankai University has conducted influential ongoing research on librarians' "happiness index" and job

satisfaction [9].

Our research team introduced ClimateQUAL in 2010 [10] and conducted comparative studies on differential influencing factors based on these indicators [11], providing preliminary analysis of indicator differences between Chinese and foreign library organizational climate assessments. However, comprehensive theoretical discussion and empirical research have not been conducted on deeper issues such as librarians' cognitive understanding of library organizational climate, factors influencing librarians' perception and cognition of organizational climate, and factors affecting the formation of library organizational climate. As a growing organism, a library's librarians are essential components and, from a behavioral science management perspective, are direct participants and builders of library organizational climate. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the current library community's perception and attention to organizational climate from the librarians' perspective, identify factors influencing library organizational climate—particularly exploring the relationship between traditional Chinese cultural factors and librarians' cognition, behavior, and organizational climate—and establish a system of influencing factors to provide a basis for constructing a localized assessment system for library organizational climate in China.

2. Questionnaire Design and Survey

This questionnaire was developed using the Delphi method, combined with literature research and repeated 论证 by project team members, to create the “Survey on Librarians' Perception of Organizational Climate in Chinese Libraries.” Based on a small-scale pilot survey, the final formal questionnaire was established. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part collects basic personal information including gender, employment type, administrative position, and library type; the second part investigates librarians' overall perception of organizational climate and their library's organizational climate construction; the third part examines librarians' perceptions of factors influencing organizational climate formation, with particular emphasis on data regarding the influence of internal library organizational elements and traditional cultural characteristics on librarian cognition and behavior, as well as organizational climate.

The survey was conducted from mid-October 2017 for one and a half months. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed through both paper and electronic formats (via Wenjuanxing platform) to librarians in university libraries in Shanghai, Jiangsu, and other provinces, yielding 295 responses, of which 261 were valid (an 88% valid response rate). Simple statistical analysis of the valid data revealed that the demographic indicators—including library type (“985” universities: 54 respondents, “211” universities: 81, regular universities: 126), position (20 library directors, 63 department heads, 177 regular librarians), and gender (188 female, 73 male)—generally conformed to stratified sampling characteristics and current library demographics, providing certain representativeness.

3. Analysis of Factors Influencing Library Organizational Climate

Survey results indicate that factors influencing library organizational climate primarily include four aspects: (1) internal organizational environment such as management systems, structure, leadership, and facilities; (2) external social environment including culture, economy, and institutions; (3) librarians' own values and behavioral patterns; and (4) the nature of the library profession itself.

3.1 Influence of Internal Organizational Environment on Library Organizational Climate

The internal organizational environment refers to the relatively closed internal setting where librarians live and work, encompassing library management systems and structure, leadership, facilities, organizational size, and human resource development. The survey reveals that within the internal environment, the top five factors influencing organizational climate formation are: leadership (92.7%), librarian job satisfaction (60.5%), management systems and evaluation methods (60.2%), interpersonal relationships (51.3%), and decision-making participation (50%). Additionally, over 40% of respondents acknowledged the importance of library facilities and opportunities for continuing education or training, while factors such as organizational size, existence of informal groups, and job risk were not considered important by librarians—consistent with existing research findings [12] (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]).

3.1.1 Influence of Leadership on Library Organizational Climate Although scholars employ different classification standards in organizational climate dimension research, leadership has consistently been considered an important dimension [13]. Current research hotspots on leadership include emotional intelligence leadership, new leadership types/styles, new leadership skills, leadership effectiveness, leadership development programs, culture and leadership, special groups and leadership, and organizational leadership [14]. The relationship between leadership style and organizational climate has received sustained scholarly attention since the 1950s, when Western behavioral scientists began studying leadership behavior patterns and related theories, arguing that leadership directly influences organizational climate [15]. The logical relationship has been theoretically articulated: organizational leadership can influence the type of organizational climate, with different leadership styles creating different climates that subsequently affect employee motivation, performance, and job satisfaction. Consequently, scholars propose that leadership style is the most important predictor of internal organizational climate [16-17], with some even asserting that “leadership style should be held responsible for organizational climate” [18].

As early as the 1990s, job postings for university library directors in Wisconsin published in *American Libraries* listed the ability to create atmosphere inside

and outside the library as an essential requirement [19]—a qualification that remains crucial for successful leaders today. Library leaders are shapers, managers, and transformers of organizational climate and culture, with leadership being the key force driving library organizational climate and cultural construction [20]. Numerous library empirical studies have substantiated this relationship. For instance, research on a leadership development program at the University of Saskatchewan Library found that it improved organizational climate and culture, making the library more characteristic of a learning organization [21]. Interviews with 24 Danish public library directors exploring the relationship among management tools, organizational culture, and leadership revealed that leadership significantly impacts library organizational climate and culture [22]. A questionnaire survey of Chinese university librarians found that different leadership styles produce different effects on library organizational climate, culture, and performance [23]. The current survey, with 92.7% of respondents viewing leadership as an important factor affecting library organizational climate, provides further confirmation of these findings.

3.1.2 Influence of Job Satisfaction on Library Organizational Climate

Job satisfaction is a crucial psychological indicator in management, representing employees' emotional evaluation of their work and experiences. On one hand, job satisfaction affects work performance at both micro (specific tasks) and macro (organizational operations) levels [24]. Survey results show that librarians generally believe individual job satisfaction significantly influences organizational climate formation. On the other hand, job satisfaction serves as an intermediate factor also influenced by other elements such as personal factors, social environment, and organizational climate. Regarding internal factors affecting job satisfaction, the survey indicates that professional identity, innovative behavior, and employment mode are most significant.

Notably, 95% of non-permanent staff reported that employment mode negatively impacts their job satisfaction. However, because non-permanent staff comprise only 16% of the sample, this factor's overall influence appears weaker (50.6% of all librarians considered employment mode important), failing to accurately reflect the reality of this "marginalized" group. As university personnel reforms allocate more permanent positions to teaching faculty and reduce technical position quotas, libraries must increasingly hire young librarians through agency, leasing, and temporary contracts. Without corresponding policies and benefits, "equal work, unequal pay" has become common, resulting in lower sense of belonging and professional identity among non-permanent staff, directly negatively impacting their job satisfaction and organizational climate, even causing talent loss. While job satisfaction affects organizational climate, the reverse is also true—the two are mutually reinforcing. The survey reveals that over 90% of senior library leaders (directors and party secretaries) and middle-level managers (department heads) recognize that current unstable employment systems cause significant distress for young librarians and concern about job stability. Unable to change university personnel systems, managers generally believe li-

braries should develop effective internal management and support to improve non-permanent staff satisfaction and optimize organizational climate.

3.1.3 Influence of Management Systems, Evaluation Methods, Interpersonal Relationships, and Decision-Making Participation on Library Organizational Climate Beyond leadership and job satisfaction, three additional factors received over 50% librarian endorsement: management systems and evaluation methods, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making participation. Management systems and evaluation methods manifest in whether organizational management is fair, open, and transparent; whether structure is functional or flat; and whether evaluation employs performance incentives or “big pot” egalitarianism. Decision-making participation reflects organizational centralization and information fairness. These internal organizational climate factors are often directly influenced by informal rules rooted in traditional Chinese culture, which will be discussed below in conjunction with cultural factors.

3.2 Influence of External Social Environment Characterized by Traditional Culture on Library Organizational Climate

The external environment includes macro-level social culture, economy, and institutions. As public welfare institutions, libraries’ internal operations and funding are subject to social systems and economic conditions, while social culture subtly influences librarians’ personal values and behavioral norms, affecting library organizational climate through librarians’ organizational behavior and cognition. The survey reveals that traditional cultural characteristics—including the “harmony” concept, collectivism, and hierarchical concepts—were deeply rooted in librarians’ ideology and organizational behavior, significantly impacting library organizational climate (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

3.2.1 Emphasis on Interpersonal “Harmony” “Harmony” is a crucial Chinese cultural characteristic that shapes fundamental values and behavioral styles. Over 80% of surveyed librarians adopt “harmony is precious” as a principle for interpersonal relations and conflict resolution with users or colleagues, demonstrating strong humanistic spirit. In traditional Chinese culture-influenced ethical relationships, interpersonal relations dominate, with coordination replacing explicit legal norms in management [25]. This represents the most significant and distinctive traditional cultural factor.

First, as service institutions, libraries require staff to uphold “user first” principles, providing friendly, enthusiastic, and thoughtful service while avoiding conflicts with users. Internally, as organizational members, librarians use “harmony is precious” to guide internal relationships. To maintain harmony, librarians remain sensitive to colleagues’ and leaders’ opinions, align their behavior with group norms, and follow conventions. This face-saving, others-sensitive charac-

teristic creates harmonious relationships and effective negative emotion control in public settings, reducing unnecessary workplace friction. However, this emphasis on emotional thinking may lack rational cognition—for instance, librarians might refrain from expressing ideas inconsistent with leaders or colleagues due to excessive concern for others’ opinions, tending to swallow dissatisfaction [26], which negatively impacts job satisfaction and innovation motivation over time.

Second, “harmony” thinking emphasizes interpersonal coordination and collective synergy. From librarians’ perspective, this encourages individual behavior to follow majority norms, suppressing uniqueness and individual creativity to some extent. From the organizational perspective, this leads libraries to base systems, regulations, and decisions on satisfying the “80%” majority while “abandoning consideration” of minority interests, making it difficult to create an environment that fully respects everyone’s rights. Third, Confucian ethics emphasize personal moral cultivation, causing members to “value human relations” over systems and “value virtue governance” over rule of law. When violations occur, solutions often adopt a “make big problems small, small problems disappear” approach, weakening institutional enforcement and binding force. Nearly 40% of respondents explicitly stated that strong human relations negatively impact library organizational climate by weakening institutional enforcement, constraints, and organizational justice.

3.2.2 Strong Family and Collective Orientation Nearly 75% of respondents noted that libraries “encourage teamwork,” closely related to traditional Chinese family and collective concepts. Traditional Chinese society uses the family rather than the individual as the basic social unit, forming familism that prioritizes family interests. When family ethics are transplanted into organizations, members become more than simple “economic persons,” and this strong “family concept” manifests as a robust “collective concept.” This aligns with Confucian “harmony” thinking emphasizing collective synergy and reflects the traditional values of “gentlemen understand righteousness, petty persons understand profit.”

Organizations with strong collective orientation adopt group decision-making processes. However, the survey shows that over half of librarians rarely volunteer suggestions or recommendations proactively. When input is needed, even those with ideas seldom volunteer, either waiting to be “called on” or remaining silent. Consequently, useful knowledge goes unshared and innovative perspectives remain unexpressed, causing organizations to miss reform opportunities. In collective-oriented environments, strong human relations and family concepts lead libraries to neglect ability and differences in compensation systems, emphasizing commonality and resulting in egalitarianism and seniority-based ranking that lacks incentives and discourages healthy competitive climates. Sixty-two percent of respondents believe libraries lack measures to motivate young librarians, partly related to strong collective concepts.

3.2.3 Deepened Hierarchical Consciousness As a core element of Chinese value systems, “propriety” (礼) constitutes China’s most important social order rule, reflecting the institutionalization of Confucian thought and culture—coordinating behavior according to hierarchical order. The survey shows that over half of librarians perceive clear management levels in their libraries, with decision-making power concentrated among leaders and low staff participation. As Figure 1 shows, decision-making participation is an important organizational climate factor, making this concentration problematic from an organizational justice perspective.

Under this management model, libraries adopt vertical hierarchical structures resembling “pyramids” [28]. Decision-making bodies are typically management groups rather than all librarians, with rules and decisions formulated by leadership and cascaded downward. On the other hand, librarians practice “paternalism”—half believe they should simply execute assigned tasks without excessive involvement in decision-making, striving to “act without overstepping boundaries” [29]. This creates clear organizational levels, orderly management, efficient decision-making, high member loyalty, and strong execution. However, long-term negative effects include: excessive centralization reducing member participation and satisfaction; too many hierarchical levels impeding effective communication; rigid hierarchies preventing members from “overstepping” or challenging “authority”; and members depending on leadership directives while lacking innovative spirit and motivation. Although management groups try to listen to individual opinions and achieve “consistency from top to bottom” and “unanimity,” individuals must comply with collectively approved decisions even when clearly disadvantageous, negatively impacting organizational change and innovation.

3.3 Influence of Librarians’ Values and Behaviors on Library Organizational Climate

Before entering an organization, individuals develop relatively independent values and behavioral principles through different life and growth experiences. When individuals with similar values and behaviors aggregate into groups, they form similar cognitive schemas and consistent situational identification toward the organization. This shared perception and identification among group members constitutes organizational climate. According to Selection-Attraction-Attrition (SAA) theory [30], organizations select and attract relatively homogeneous personnel—those with similar feelings and meanings toward organizational matters—thus maintaining relatively stable organizational climate. However, organizational climate is also dynamic because the selection-attraction process doesn’t guarantee attracting the “right types,” as both organizations and individuals tend to present themselves in the most favorable light to maximize opportunities. Before non-homogeneous new members are “attritioned” or homogenized by the organization, their original differentiated values and behaviors inevitably exert positive or negative impacts on organizational climate,

causing changes.

3.4 Influence of Industry Nature on Library Organizational Climate

Compared with enterprises, libraries exhibit distinct characteristics: (1) As non-profit institutions, libraries' operational funding is completely allocated and supervised by national government and superior units, creating strong economic dependency. Lack of financial autonomy makes it difficult to implement effective incentive and evaluation systems, hindering the formation of competitive organizational climates. (2) As public institutions, libraries implement administrative management following top-down hierarchical models. For example, as secondary units in universities, the *Ministry of Education University Library Charter* explicitly stipulates: "University libraries implement a director responsibility system under university (college) president leadership. Universities should have one president in charge of library work. Major library matters shall be studied and decided by the president's office meeting." While this hierarchical management facilitates university-wide coordination, libraries lack authority over personnel management, especially dismissal, creating "iron rice bowl" mentalities among some librarians and causing phenomena of being on payroll but absent from post or slacking off, which seriously negatively impacts positive organizational climate construction. Additionally, library management decisions, organizational deployment, and regulations are primarily top-down designs with highly concentrated authority, leaving librarians in passive positions with little decision-making participation rights, making it difficult to form fair and just climates. (3) In the information society, as information access methods change, libraries are gradually losing their position as information centers [31], challenging the profession's image and core value identity. Some librarians exhibit "self-marginalization" tendencies of "preferring self while denigrating work" [32], forming negative social identity, lacking professional identity, and consequently lacking work passion and service consciousness, creating resistance to positive organizational climate construction.

4. Construction of a Library Organizational Climate Influencing Factor System

In summary, libraries are not isolated organizations; their organizational climate forms under the combined influence of multiple factors. Based on this analysis, these factors can be categorized into three levels to construct a library organizational climate influencing factor system: macro-level social culture, institutional management, and economic environment; meso-level library authority management, internal library environment (such as organizational management systems and structure, facilities, size, human resource development), and industry nature; and micro-level leadership behavior and style, employee behavior and values, and job satisfaction (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]). These elements constitute the basic factors in library organizational climate operation and provide fundamental evidence for establishing and improving library man-

agement mechanisms. In operation, organizational climate can function as an antecedent variable affecting other components, as an intermediate variable between management practices and performance, or as an outcome variable under the influence of various factors.

Overall, library organizational climate forms under the combined influence of multiple factors including external social environment, internal organizational environment, industry nature, and librarians' own values and behaviors. In this influencing factor system, while social environment and library nature cannot be changed, effective approaches to organizational climate construction include: management focusing on internal environments such as management structure and system improvement, and working to enhance librarian job satisfaction and improve librarian cognition and behavior.

A healthy organizational climate is fundamental for libraries' 良性 operation and coordinated development. According to empirical results, over 90% of respondents believe organizational climate is an effective predictor of organizational performance, and a good library organizational climate can significantly improve performance. However, data on librarians' perceptions of their own libraries' climate construction shows that only 30% believe their library's climate construction is good; nearly 30% believe it remains at the conceptual level without targeted implementation; another 30% believe it is only occasionally mentioned or ignored; and 15% are unclear or unaware of their library's climate construction efforts. This indicates that the importance of library organizational climate construction has not yet received widespread recognition in China, and much work remains to be done.

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Zhou Li: Responsible for questionnaire survey and paper writing;

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