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Pathways to Enhancing Professional Competence of Female Librarians from an Empowerment Perspective: Postprint

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Abstract

In the process of constructing a new-era public cultural service system, enhancing the professional competence of female librarians constitutes a critical link. This represents not only an intrinsic requirement for adapting to the developmental trends of social information technology but also a vital pathway for promoting innovation and optimization of library services. This article introduces empowerment theory, thoroughly explores its compatibility with the enhancement of female librarians' professional competence, analyzes the current dilemmas confronting such enhancement, and constructs corresponding improvement pathways from multiple dimensions—including internal drive, core dynamics, and external thrust—by applying empowerment theory.

Full Text

Preamble

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Title: Research on Pathways to Enhance Professional Competence of Female Librarians from an Empowerment Perspective

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Abstract: In the process of building a modern public cultural service system, enhancing the professional competence of female librarians represents a critical component. This is not only an inherent requirement for adapting to evolving social information technology trends but also an essential pathway for promoting innovation and optimization of library services. This paper introduces empowerment theory to explore its compatibility with female librarians' professional development, analyzes current dilemmas in enhancing their professional competence, and constructs corresponding improvement pathways from multiple

dimensions including intrinsic drive, organizational drivers, and external support.

Keywords: Female librarian; Empowerment theory; Professional competence development

1. Theoretical Foundation and Related Research

1.1 Library Female Librarian Research

Research on female librarians has primarily focused on three dimensions: professional competence, humanistic care, and historical contributions. Studies on professional competence emphasize the importance of information literacy, innovation capacity, and career development planning strategies. Research from a humanistic care perspective highlights the unique challenges female librarians face amid the influence of global feminist movements in the new century, including psychological indicators and occupational stress. Historical contribution research reveals the critical roles female librarians have played across different eras, such as their impact on American children's library services and the shaping of professional female identities during the Republican period in China, demonstrating their significant contributions to modern library development.

1.2 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory, originating in 20th-century Europe and America, is a social work theory that helps individuals, groups, and communities enhance their personal, socio-economic, and political capabilities to improve their circumstances. The theory advocates providing resources and building support systems to stimulate intrinsic motivation, enhance autonomy and participation, and promote broad social welfare and justice. Applied across disciplines including education, business, and rural development, empowerment theory has become a key framework in public management and community services.

1.3 Compatibility Between Empowerment Theory and Female Librarian Professional Development

The application of empowerment theory to female librarian professional development demonstrates consistent value pursuits. From a career equity perspective, empowerment theory emphasizes that all individuals should have access to necessary resources and support for career development. Libraries, as knowledge and information centers, bear the responsibility to provide equal opportunities, professional training, and advancement pathways, eliminating both physical and institutional barriers in female librarians' career progression. From an individual development perspective, empowerment theory focuses on unlocking potential and enhancing self-efficacy. For female librarians, this translates into cultivating autonomous learning capabilities and independent thinking through

professional development seminars, leadership training, and skill enhancement programs, thereby unlocking their career development potential.

2. Current Challenges in Female Librarian Career Development

2.1 Current Career Development Status

According to the China Statistical Yearbook, public libraries employed 60,000 staff members in 2022. While specific gender-disaggregated data remains unpublished, existing research indicates female librarians comprise approximately two-thirds of the workforce. Despite their numerical majority, female librarians face significant structural challenges in career advancement. Title distribution data reveals a marked concentration of female librarians at junior and intermediate levels, with notably lower representation at senior ranks. In university libraries, the gender gap widens with increasing professional rank, with male librarians holding significantly higher proportions of senior titles. Position distribution analysis shows female librarians predominantly occupy foundational roles in collection management and circulation services, while technical and managerial decision-making positions are largely held by male librarians.

2.2 Professional Competence Constraints

Female librarians exhibit notable deficiencies in key competency areas, particularly in professional refinement, leadership development, and adaptation to occupational transformation. In terms of professional refinement capacity, the rapid development of information technology and intelligence has fundamentally transformed library functions from traditional preservation and lending to digital resource construction and educational function expansion. This transformation demands continuous enhancement of competencies in information organization, digital resource integration, and user needs analysis. However, due to uneven time allocation, limited access to learning resources, and low self-efficacy, female librarians encounter numerous obstacles in sustaining professional development, directly affecting their performance in information management, knowledge service innovation, and social education functions.

Regarding leadership development, professional competence forms the foundation for demonstrating leadership potential. However, gender stereotypes and structural workplace barriers often deprive female librarians of adequate platforms and support to exercise and showcase their professional leadership, further limiting their career advancement opportunities.

In adapting to occupational transformation, the digital transformation of the library industry imposes higher professional competence requirements. Female librarians who cannot timely update their skills struggle to respond effectively

to occupational changes, diminishing their competitiveness and adaptability in emerging fields.

2.3 Institutional Barriers

Beyond individual factors, numerous institutional obstacles directly or indirectly hinder female librarians' professional growth. The "glass ceiling" effect significantly impedes advancement to senior management positions. Even with outstanding professional qualifications and rich practical experience, female librarians may be overlooked or marginalized due to societal stereotypes about female leadership, limiting the breadth and depth of their career expansion.

Family responsibilities and workplace demands create conflicts that increase career interruption risks for female librarians. The discrepancy between societal expectations for women to fulfill multiple roles and the limited actual support available exacerbates gender differences in career longevity. Work-family balance challenges not only reduce actual working hours but also adversely affect career continuity and development potential. This situation often triggers career burnout, manifested by weakened professional identity and diminished sense of achievement, which further solidifies passive career attitudes and reduces motivation for participation and development.

3. Pathways for Enhancing Female Librarian Professional Competence from an Empowerment Perspective

3.1 Intrinsic Drive: Individual Empowerment

Individual empowerment aims to strengthen female librarians' confidence and self-efficacy through enhanced self-awareness, psychological adjustment, and personal development promotion, enabling continuous career progression. Key pathways include:

Psychological Empowerment: The core lies in enhancing female librarians' self-confidence, improving their resource acquisition capabilities, helping them build self-awareness, explore their potential, and effectively regulate mental health status. Libraries should strengthen psychological monitoring of female librarians, helping them recognize the profound significance of their work in social culture inheritance and national reading promotion, thereby enhancing their sense of mission.

Cultivating Lifelong Learning Consciousness: Confronting rapidly evolving technology and information environments, female librarians must possess continuous learning capabilities. Libraries should strengthen endogenous learning awareness, enhance professional knowledge accumulation, and maintain synchronization with the times through dedicated training education groups and professional ethics courses.

Legal Awareness Education: Strengthening legal knowledge education enables female librarians to understand their rights and obligations, and how to use legal instruments to protect their interests when necessary. This also helps them properly handle privacy protection and other legal issues in daily work, improving service quality and reducing legal risks.

3.2 Organizational Drivers: Organizational Empowerment

Organizational empowerment constitutes a systematic project encompassing organizational structure, institutional development, and incentive measures, providing comprehensive support and guidance to maximize female librarians' potential.

Leadership Empowerment: Based on leadership theory, this approach eliminates employees' sense of powerlessness, enhances self-efficacy, and establishes inspiring future goals. By encouraging self-management and participation in goal-setting, leadership empowerment significantly improves intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, effectively stimulating positive work attitudes and behaviors. When female librarians feel enhanced control over their work, they demonstrate greater enthusiasm and creativity, improving both individual performance and overall team effectiveness.

Institutional Empowerment: This critical element promotes sustainable organizational development and individual growth through building reasonable and effective regulations. Institutional empowerment should clearly define job responsibilities and expectations, establish comprehensive performance evaluation systems, and ensure equal opportunities for all female librarians to participate in important projects. The system should provide reliable foundations for incentive mechanisms while ensuring objective and fair evaluation of female librarians' efforts.

Space Empowerment: Physical space serves as a carrier for empowerment, playing a key role in building supportive environments. The Shanghai Jiao Tong University Library's "Female Faculty Salon" provides female librarians with comfortable, supportive workspaces, improving work environments and providing relaxation venues that enhance belongingness and job satisfaction.

Incentive Empowerment: Based on motivation theory, this approach establishes positive incentive mechanisms and work environments to stimulate higher work enthusiasm and creativity. Effective incentive measures should incorporate multiple variables including effort level, performance, rewards, fairness, and satisfaction. Libraries should develop comprehensive incentive measures tailored to female librarians' personal development needs, combining internal recognition mechanisms with external professional awards to align individual and social values.

Role Model Empowerment: By providing positive role models and behavioral demonstrations, this approach enhances self-efficacy through observation

and imitation. Libraries should actively establish exemplars, promote outstanding female librarians' achievements through internal recognition and welfare measures, and widely disseminate their stories through new media platforms, video interviews, live interactions, and lectures to demonstrate professional competence and dedication.

3.3 External Push: Environmental Empowerment

Environmental empowerment optimizes and improves work environments and social conditions to create a supportive, dynamic atmosphere that attracts and supports female librarian professional development.

Social Empowerment: Social networks serve as crucial channels for information and resource acquisition, helping female librarians broaden their professional horizons, establish personal brands, and promote long-term career development. Social networks also function as important emotional support systems, enabling female librarians to find like-minded friends when facing challenges, thereby alleviating occupational burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

Exploring female librarians' professional development from an empowerment perspective involves re-examining and optimizing library human resource allocation models by enhancing capabilities and expanding career opportunities. This represents not only a crucial step in library human resource strategy transformation but also an important manifestation of libraries' fulfillment of social responsibility, promotion of gender equality, and demonstration of humanistic care. The empowerment perspective provides important theoretical guidance and practical pathways for building a respectful, inclusive, and supportive professional growth environment for female librarians.

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Abstract (English)

In the context of building a modern public cultural service system, enhancing the professional competence of female librarians constitutes a key component. This is both an inherent requirement for aligning with evolving social information technology trends and a crucial pathway for promoting innovation and optimization of library services. This paper introduces empowerment theory to explore its relevance to female librarians' professional development, analyzes current challenges they face, and applies empowerment theory to propose corresponding enhancement pathways based on intrinsic motivation, organizational drivers, and external support.

Keywords: Female librarian; Empowerment theory; Professional competence development

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